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**BERTHOLD UNFRIED**

**A Cuban Cycle of Developmental Socialism?**

**Cubans and East Germans in the Socialist World System**

*ABSTRACT Based essentially on archive-material from the GDR – and some from Cuba – this contribution demonstrates how the interactions between the German Democratic Republic and Cuba were projected into a multilateral cooperation in Africa in the framework of the socialist world system. The circulation of material and personal resources – advisors, experts, solidarity workers of European socialist countries in Cuba, Cuban workers in Europe, Cuban Internacionalistas in Africa, the thousands of students from Africa at the Isla de la Juventud in Cuba – constituted spheres of international connectivity within the socialist world system in the era of its expansion to the three continents Asia, Africa and Latin America. In this period of alternative ‘globalization’ from the mid-1970s to 1990, Cuba, as a member of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA/COMECON), established itself as a trans-continental hub between the European centre of that system and its African periphery. The contribution concludes by summing up elements of a ‘Cuban cycle’ of ‘anti-imperialist’ developmental socialism as the last of the long reverberations of the October Revolution.*

**KEYWORDS** *Internationalism, International Solidarity, Socialist World System, Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, Cuba, GDR*

From at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, divergent streams of development had produced the “Great Divergence”, an enormous gap in power and wealth between the nations and regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> In the history of trends and policies which aimed at achieving *convergence* between those nations and regions, efforts in the framework of what has been recently

termed “Red Globalization” (Sanchez-Sibony 2014), meaning the extra-European expansion of the socialist world system, have been neglected. Its imperfect organizational expression was the “Council of Mutual Economic Assistance” (CMEA). Whether we consider this ‘globalisation’ as establishing a ‘socialist world system’ of its own – according to its self-definition and to some degree of economic, social and political coherence – or whether we consider the world of the CMEA as a semi-periphery in the capitalist world system, as world system analysts in the tradition of Immanuel Wallerstein and authors like Sanchez-Sibony do, the integration of extra-European members endowed this organisation with the task of achieving economic convergence among its members. The 1962 “Fundamental Principles of the International Socialist Division of Labour” (*Grundprinzipien der internationalen sozialistischen Arbeitsteilung*) feature as an objective “aligning the developmental level of the CMEA countries” (*Angleichung des Entwicklungsniveaus der RGW-Länder*) (Fritsche 1991: 14).

In this contribution, I raise the question as to which means convergence was to be put into practice between the European centre of the CMEA and Cuba, its second (after Mongolia and before Vietnam) extra-European member. Second, I discuss how this cooperation spread into Africa. Of course, a claim to explain, in a contribution like this, how the socialist world system contributed to a ‘Great Convergence’ in the post-colonial period would be rather presumptuous. My ambition is much more modest: this contribution tries to give some thought-provoking insights into interactions between Cuba and the German Democratic Republic in the CMEA era. It shows how these interactions spread to Africa and proposes to apprehend this period of ‘socialist Globalisation as a cycle of developmental socialism - featuring Cuba as advocate of the three continents in the socialist world system 1972-1990 – which was the corollary of a ‘Cuban cycle of anti-imperialist revolution’ in the 1960s and 1970s (from the Cuban to the Nicaraguan revolution).

In this contribution, the GDR stands as an example for the European members of the CMEA. Why the GDR?

First, it has to be underlined that the CMEA did not primarily act as a supra-national entity. Because efforts towards increased economic integration within the CMEA (*Komplexprogramm* 1971) did not succeed in practice, economic relations between member states remained essentially

on a bilateral level. Hence, Cuban bilateral relations with the GDR were not surpassed by its relations with the CMEA as a multilateral organisation. The (by far) largest donor to Cuba was the USSR. The GDR was second among CMEA members in cooperating with Cuba. The pertinent GDR archives are wide open and abundant in material on GDR-Cuban relations. They also contain rich material relating to the CMEA level. It is thus feasible, and makes sense, to choose the GDR as an example for the Cuban-CMEA entanglement. This concentration on the GDR, due to the abundance and accessibility of archival material, should not blur the fact that the Soviet Union was Cuba's most important European partner. In 1985, Fidel Castro stated that Cuba had received 20 billion rubles of Soviet economic assistance (Kosta/Quaisser 1985: 75). This was certainly an essential condition for Cuba's economic development in its CMEA period but not a unique case, with some authors pointing to the comparative example of Puerto Rico which received even more assistance from the USA (Zimbalist/Brundenius 1989: 154).

The provenance of archive material on which this contribution is based is asymmetric. The dominance of material of GDR provenance may convey a GDR perspective and entail a bias which I hope is checked by its strictly internal usage, which allows insights into internal contradictions of the state and Party apparatus, by some archive material of Cuban provenance, additionally by the effort to integrate a Cuban perspective, and by the strictly analytical perspective of this contribution.

### **1. Cuba's projection into the world. A periodisation**

When Cuba in 1972 entered, as its second extra-European member, the *Council of Mutual Economic Assistance*, the economic structure of the socialist community of states, it entered a new phase of its history. A decade of experiments with a genuinely Cuban path of development came to a close. Economic experts from the German Democratic Republic interpreted the Cuban alignment with the socialist world economy as expressing the failure of what they called a 'voluntarist' economic policy of the Cuban revolutionaries. 'Voluntarism' implied subordinating the criteria of economic efficiency and professional knowledge to the political precepts

of revolutionary utopia and an experimental approach: learning by doing “while walking” (*sobre la marcha*). Interviews with economic managers of that epoch (reproduced in Yaffe 2009: quote 38), provide colourful insights into the improvisations in the handling of nationalised enterprises during the period of Che Guevara’s tenure as Minister of Industry and President of the National Bank (1959-1965).

The early revolutionary economic policy lacked an understanding of fundamental economic principles, as Soviet leaders noted. A striking example is a conversation between Castro and Khrushchev in Moscow 1963 concerning Cuban demands for Soviet assistance in the building of iron works, which left the Soviet leader puzzled as to its lack of economic consideration (Sanchez-Sibony 2014: 204). The second half of the 1960s has been called such a period of economic ‘voluntarism’. Then, even according to the official “Historia de Cuba”, essential market relations were neglected and consumption largely exceeded production, thereby creating an unsustainable situation cautiously designated labelled as “a few errors” (*algunos errores*). (Cantón Navarro/León Silva 2013: 136-138; Zeuske 2004: 215-221; for Fidel Castro’s self-criticism concerning this period see Roca 1976: 65-66)

In an in-depth analysis preceding massive GDR (and CMEA) engagement in Cuba, GDR economists stated that “the party of Cuba, as is well-known, had for many years proceeded from the subjective assumption that it has already passed into building communism, thereby ignoring the economic laws of socialism. For example, material incentives were completely rejected; instead, a wage system was created that was independent of performance.” Consequently, “the development of [Cuba’s] industry and agriculture is now being created increasingly by implementing the economic laws of socialism, after an (unfortunately very late) evaluation of the experiences of the other socialist countries.”<sup>22</sup> This economic policy culminated with the highly visible failure of 1970, when a huge ‘voluntaristic’ effort to push the sugar harvest to a record level (*Gran Zafra*) at the expense of all other sectors of the economy ended in economic disaster. The target was not met, and the effort led to a dramatic diminution of production in leading sectors of the economy (Mesa-Lago 1994: 73-83; Gey 1989: 58, estimates a decrease of two thirds in the production of 350 products).

The GDR experts saw “a creation of justified norms and performance-related pay” as the main tasks to be undertaken. The socialist performance principle applied: “Each according to his abilities, each according to his achievements”, “producing the correct proportions between labour productivity and wages”, raising labour productivity, increasing effectiveness, and enhancing the quality of products.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, a new stage of the Cuban political economy was marked by the country’s integration into the CMEA, following its 1972 admission as the second (after Mongolia) extra-European member. This was the CMEA period of the Cuban revolution, which profoundly altered its economic structures. This new economic direction led to the construction of a socialist planned economy and the establishment of a Central Planning Commission and of Five Year Plans in the mid-1970s. Massive assistance from the Soviet Union and the European CMEA countries, above all, the GDR, poured into the country. This assistance took two directions.

The first direction assigned to Cuba a place in the “international socialist division of labour” as provider of sugar, citrus fruit and, to a lesser degree, workers for the socialist planned economies in Europe. In the short run, this position was very advantageous for the island, which profited from massive resource transfers via preferential prices for its sugar exports, well above, and for its imports of Soviet oil, well below, market prices. The degree of the grant element in these transfers was subject to discussions even between two leading GDR bodies administering these transfers, namely the Central Planning Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Whereas the latter calculated a total of ca. 2,9 billion GDR-Mark of grants for the years 1981-1987, of which 2.8 billion were transferred via preferential prices, and additionally soft loans (*Regierungs- und Sonderkredite*) of ca. 1.1 billion Mark, the former contested that figure as being inflated. A calculation of preferential prices against world market prices would neglect the fact that world market prices in that period were dumped by high subsidies, especially by the US government and the EEC, thus covering as little as a mere third of production costs. They would not express market relations, but a different political economy of state subsidies and thus could not serve as a yardstick for calculating GDR subsidies to Cuba contained in preferential sugar prices.<sup>4</sup> At the moment of the end of the GDR and its political-economic relations with Cuba, the liquidating

body, the Ministry of Economic Cooperation, calculated that the preferential prices for Cuban commodities used to pay back loans had been three times world market prices.<sup>5</sup>

The other direction was an industrialisation policy for the island, which went on until the end of the 1980s: this involved the establishment of entire cement, energy, brewery and food processing plants. Cuba's industrialisation was a cumbersome process full of setbacks, delays and mixed results; but, in the end, most of these factories worked – not always as planned, not always at full capacity, thus not meeting output targets, and not always for the expected lifetime – but they worked. Whereas in the 1970s, Cuba had exclusively exported agricultural products and raw materials, in the second half of the 1980s it even managed to produce some agricultural machinery for the CMEA market. Additionally, cooperation in the field of an emergent electronics and biotechnology sector was established.<sup>6</sup> These were fragile beginnings of a diversification of Cuban still primary products centered exports. This came to an abrupt end with the termination of all economic cooperation by the German government after the end of the GDR.

1963 saw the start of a cycle of Cuban military assistance, first to Algeria in a border war with Morocco. The war was over before the Cuban fighters sent to Algeria could actually intervene; yet this was a strong sign of solidarity between two centres of the revolutionary line in the national liberation struggle. In the short period from the FLN-victory in the Algerian war of independence to the overthrow of the internationalist Ben Bella leadership by a military coup in 1965, Algiers was, in close cooperation with Havana, a world centre for revolutionary and guerrilla movements (Byrne 2016). Both revolutions shared a revolutionary optimism, which stemmed from their own success against all odds. This cooperation withered away with the new Algerian course. But Cuban state assistance to African countries or movements assessed as revolutionary and anti-colonial was resumed in Angola a decade later.

## 2. Transfers, circulations, encounters

In its CMEA period, Cuba became a major recipient of resource transfers from the European CMEA countries, above all the Soviet Union and the GDR. These transfers happened at the level of material resources, via the instrument of preferential prices for Cuban sugar and Soviet oil, and by advantageous loans for the setting up of industrial plants. The Cubans managed to negotiate attractive sugar prices, which they considered as ‘just prices’. Those prices were stabilised for a planning period of several years. The Cubans even managed, in negotiations at the highest level, to fix the once-obtained terms of trade for the periods of subsequent Five Years Plans. If the exchange relations of one commodity in the Cuban-East German commodity basket developed unfavourably for the Cuban side, it was to be compensated by another commodity exchange line. Higher prices for GDR machinery were compensated by higher prices for Cuban sugar. This political-economic exchange mechanism allowed for the stabilising of the favourable exchange relations which Cuba had achieved in negotiations at the highest level.<sup>7</sup> Such intra-CMEA prices were thus more determined by political negotiations than by world market volatilities.

There were also transfers at the personal level: the transfer of experts to establish these plants and to train the workforce to run them. Although East German experts generally felt more welcome in Cuba than in other countries such as Ethiopia, the cooperation with their Cuban counterparts did not go without friction. Reports from GDR supervising authorities in Cuba show a mix of correct (*sachlich*) and friendly relations on the one hand, and of rivalry and misunderstandings between East Germans and their Cuban counterparts on the other. Displays of superiority were definitely unwelcome, stressed the German supervisors. From the mid-1970s, the GDR sent various “Friendship Brigades” (*Freundschaftsbrigaden*) consisting of members of the youth organisation FDJ (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) to Cuba to assist in the building of factories and in the training of young Cuban workers for these objectives. Beyond these professional aspects, they were also mandated to establish relations of internationalist friendship with their Cuban counterparts across cultural divergences. This task had to be accomplished on the basis of respecting cultural differences and divergent work performances. FDJ *friends* were admonished, however,

not to measure the work of the Cuban comrades by GDR standards as this apparently happened when they criticised their Cuban *friends* for lack of work discipline.<sup>8</sup>

The Cubans were no submissive partners for the East Germans. A striking example was the talks between Fidel Castro and Erich Honecker in Havana in 1974, during which Honecker got ambushed by an undiplomatic surprise attack by Castro, who accused him of a petty “grocer” approach in their economic relations, a remark which left Honecker deeply offended (related by Lemke 2004: 235). The delicate and prudent manner in which ‘counterpart affairs’ were addressed and handled by the GDR authorities, the frank and assertive language pushing forward the Cuban interest, which Fidel Castro employed towards Erich Honecker, and the material transfers operated via preferential prices, are not expressions of asymmetric relations. If the Cuban example can be generalised, the few extra-European members profited economically from the CMEA (the relative benefits of CMEA members in trade relations with the GDR compared to non-members have been evoked in this journal by Dietrich 2014) - naturally within the limits, especially of efficiency, of that economic system, and without taking into account the dire consequences for Cuba of the subsequent collapse of that system.

The 1970s were, after all, the period of alignment to the systems of the Soviet type. It was also the period of a massive Cuban outreach to Africa, most importantly to Angola after 1975 and to Ethiopia after 1977. In these two countries, Cuban military assistance proved decisive in the civil war which the leftist MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) fought against Western, China and South Africa-supported national liberation movements, and in the war the revolutionary military government of Ethiopia fought against the Somalian invasion in 1977/78. At this time, Cuba also became a provider of assistance to countries of the ‘three continents’, especially to Africa. In the Cuban case, this sort of assistance was termed, besides *Solidaridad*, *Internacionalismo*. The Cubans sent specialists, doctors and nurses, and above all, teachers. They adapted the *Friendship* and *Komsomol* Brigades example by sending brigades of pre-graduate teacher-students, called *Destacamentos Internacionalistas*, to Angola and to Nicaragua in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1980s, Cuba is said to have been the country with the highest percentage of citizens sent on civil foreign missions in the world (Erisman 1991: 140; Feinsilver 2010: 87-88). Around thirty percent of the PCC congress delegates in 1980 and 1986 had accomplished “internationalist missions” (Domínguez 1989: 281).

Cuban training services had a reputation for simplicity, for proceeding without superfluous technical devices, and for adapting to the contingencies of the recipient countries. Likewise, development workers from Cuba lived under much more austere conditions than their colleagues from both Germanies. Cuban assistance workers were generally closer to the African population, they lived in humbler compounds, and they were cheaper than their East German colleagues. The cost for Cuban specialists ranged well below that for East Germans, let alone for Western experts (Acuerdo Especial 1977).

Cuban assistance was, in principle, free of charge. However, from the end of the 1970s, a distinction was introduced between those countries with access to convertible foreign exchange – Angola with its oil and coffee production – and those countries without it – for instance, Mozambique, but also Ethiopia, despite its coffee-exports, fell into this category. Cuba also entertained barter trade relations with African countries, but on such a modest scale that one cannot really discern an economic interest in those relations (Unfried/Martínez 2017). Cuba followed, however, a general CMEA policy that from the mid-1970s emphasised economic relations ‘in the mutual interest’, ‘to the mutual advantage’. Effects of this policy can be observed in the GDR. There, in 1977, the Party’s Central Committee created a commission “for the coordination of the economic, cultural and scientific-technical relations of the GDR with countries of Asia, Africa and the Arab area”. This commission was chaired by the coordinator of the economic sector, Guenter Mittag, and dominated by the foreign trade line with the overall aim of generating foreign exchange for the GDR (Döring 1999: 1015-1023). A closer look demonstrates that the GDR did not succeed in implementing its economic interest as planned. Cuba’s *exportaciones de servicios técnicos* (the export of experts) followed this trend. The ‘mutual interest’ line corresponded with an emphasis on ‘immaterial export’ (export of services) in GDR and CMEA policies towards Africa in the 1980s. A November 1977 treaty between Cuba and Angola stipulated terms

of compensation for the several thousands of Cuban advisors and development workers in that country (Gleijeses 2013: 327). This served, inter alia, as a way to regulate the ever-increasing Angolan demand for *Internacionalistas*, thus limiting their number, which dropped from 7,000 to 4,000 after the new treaty.

The labour migration from Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola and Algeria to European CMEA countries was also part of the trade exchange, inasmuch as a portion of the salaries of the contract workers was used by the sending states to finance these exchanges. Although labour migration – seen as a typical symptom of a capitalist world economy and potentially engendering problems difficult to handle in a socialist state – was quite restricted by the socialist nation-states, in the 1970s and 1980s the CMEA became the framework of a labour migration from Africa, Asia and Latin America to Europe. These workers came on the basis of interstate contracts, usually for a period of four years. This contract labour programme entailed, at least initially, an element of training. The Cuban, Vietnamese, and Mozambican contract workers were to be trained for the work in the industries which were supposed to emerge in their countries of origin. Then there was the pragmatic momentum of labour shortage in Europe and a labour surplus in the partner countries of the three continents. In a historical perspective, it is essential to distinguish different phases of the labour mobility programme displaying a different mix of *solidarity* and mutual economic interest elements (Alamgir 2014, tries to proceed in such a genuinely historical perspective; Schenck 2016: 212, highlights the diversity of the professional experiences of Mozambican and Angolan workers, ranging from high level vocational training to unskilled labour without training perspective). Starting with a convention in 1975, in the first phase from during the 1970s, the dominant aspect of the Cuban contract workers programme in the GDR was the training of the Cuban workforce. In a second phase, against the background of a growing awareness that these industries were not going to be established as quickly and swiftly as planned, the aspect of Cuban workers as substitutes for the shortage of the indigenous work-force came to the foreground; this economic calculus became dominant in the 1980s. The vocational training aspect was never completely lost, but a line for the training of foremen and specialised workers was separated from the contract workers' programme

which thus adopted aspects of a labour migration more comparable to the West German *Gastarbeiter* programmes. This labour migration was to be temporary – the Cubans were to go back to their country after an average of four years – and, in contrast to West German *Gastarbeiter* migration, it effectively remained temporary.<sup>9</sup>

“Proletarian internationalism” was not easy to put into practice at the personal level. Published memoirs, like the memorable ones by the black Cuban Casanova and gifted intercultural mediator Leonel Cala Fuentes, draw a rather relaxed picture of their everyday life in the GDR, with mixed experiences (Cala Fuentes 2007). Reports from German archives are full of memories of tough bar brawls between Cubans and locals, usually arising from a combination of drunkenness and competition over women. The Cuban workers were not the well educated and disciplined socialist *hombres nuevos* which they may have been, at certain Party levels, expected to be. A glimpse into archive materials paints a picture of rough encounters, with quite a few conflicts. There are indications that the Cuban workers sent to the GDR were often young men from the countryside who had previously served in the war in Angola (oral testimony of Cuban university student in the GDR (1985-1988), reproduced in Ritschel 2015: 230-231). Their rough habits created tensions in the very different surroundings of the GDR. The German workers felt that their pubs were invaded by strangers (rather than enlivened by class comrades) who took their women and were quicker and tougher than the Germans in physical attacks. As the contract workers could not transfer home their salary in GDR Marks, they took with them ‘remittances’ in kind, such as motorbikes or refrigerators. Thus, some Germans perceived the Cubans as competitors for rare consumer goods. In the workplace, they complained about low work discipline and the high degree of absenteeism of their Cuban colleagues. In turn, the Cubans felt ignored, repudiated and subjected to exotic habits of living together in the GDR, including isolation and a lack of tolerance for late night music. The bad image that they were conveying led the Cuban government, in 1987, to stop the sending of workers, admitting that there were “undesired appearances” in the behaviour of Cuban citizens in the GDR, ČSSR, Hungary and Bulgaria, leading to a conspicuously “negative balance for our country and the standing of its revolution”. Subsequently, these politico-cultural concerns were overruled by economic considera-

tions, yet the Cuban contract worker programme was the only one which was, still in the GDR's lifetime decided to expire.<sup>10</sup> At the moment the GDR collapsed, about 8,000 contract workers from Cuba (in comparison to 60,000 from Vietnam, out of a total of nearly 100,000 foreign workers in the GDR) were residing in the GDR (van der Heyden 2014: 57). They were, in contrast to the Vietnamese, definitively called back to Cuba at the moment of the GDR's collapse.

Cuba did not only export workers to be trained in Europe, but also sent teachers, doctors and other personnel to train and educate Angolans, Ethiopians, and Mozambicans in Africa. These professionals were called *Internacionalistas*. Internationalism did not mean cosmopolitanism, understood as the capacity to move in different cultural contexts and to adapt to various lifestyles, having an itinerant life, moving between different cultural contexts as a recurrent pattern, and adopting hybrid ways of life. In contrast to that, 'Internationalist' was no permanent profession, and the *Internacionalistas* were to go back to Cuba and re-integrate themselves after one or two missions. They were not supposed to distinguish themselves from 'ordinary' Cubans lacking that internationalist experience (Unfried/Martínez 2017).

In the framework of this programme of *Internationalism*, Cuba also received, given its specialisation in educational services, approximately 40,000 students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>11</sup> In its CMEA period, Cuba became the CMEA's study centre for students from the three continents, second only to Moscow. The *Isla de la Juventud* was turned into an international educational centre where students from Asia, Africa and Latin America were educated within the Cuban educational system. The Cubans integrated educational experiences from the GDR and probably other CMEA countries and transferred them to Angola, where they underwent further adaptation. East Germans came to study the Cuban educational experiment. GDR delegations visited the Cuban international schools at the *Isla de la Juventud* in order to integrate these experiences into their secondary education experiment, entitled *Schule der Freundschaft* (Friendship School), for Mozambican students (Müller 2014: 76). Several thousands of Angolans came to Cuba and the GDR to study. Triangular circulation was completed by Cuban contract workers' and students' mobility to the GDR. This constituted a sphere of intercontinental circu-

lation of people, bringing into intense contact habits and ways of living and interpreting the world. I would describe this as a situation of *entanglement*, of dense and systematic interaction. We could speak of a temporary CMEA migration system constituted by these mobilities.

### 3. Cubans and East Germans in Africa

It is a manifestation of poor economic integration in the socialist world system that the economic umbrella organisation of the European socialist countries, the CMEA, rarely acted on a multi-lateral level in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was no supra-national organisation. European CMEA countries acted on a bilateral basis and the CMEA did not really manage to coordinate them. In Angola however, multilateral cooperation between CMEA countries was established. To a certain degree, the CMEA even operated as an institutional partner in a mixed Angolan-CMEA commission coordinating CMEA countries in their projects and sending experts. In a tremendous effort, Cuba sent around 50,000 Cuban civilian aid workers, mostly teachers, to Angola between 1975 and 1989 (Hatzky 2012). A Cuba-GDR-Angolan triangular cooperation established a certain division of labour: following the exodus of Portuguese farmers, managers and administrators after independence, Cubans helped the Angolan state to militarily and technically secure its coffee harvest and oil fields. The oil fields continued being exploited by US companies. Thanks to these commodities, the Angolans were able to engage in barter trade with the GDR. Angolan oil was commercialised by the *Kommerzielle Koordinierung* (“Koko”)-sector, a foreign trade structure which was to generate foreign exchange for the GDR by informal procedures of commercialisation outside the official planned economy. GDR ‘Friendship Brigades’ assisted in the maintenance of trucks and the transport of the coffee harvest.<sup>12</sup> The GDR ‘solidarity’ sector (consisting of unilateral transfers) was thus linked to the commercial sector (reciprocal transfers in the ‘mutual interest’). This did make sense in the overall perspective of an “integral development of resources” (*allseitige Entwicklung der inneren Ressourcen*), of mobilising and optimising the material and personal resources of the partner country with the aim of empowering economic cooperation with ‘mutual benefits’, as

the overall aim of GDR assistance can be summed up. The GDR's partners in Africa (and Nicaragua in Latin America) were countries lacking qualified personnel after the departure of the colonisers, with their infrastructures devastated by (often on-going) wars fuelled by superpower conflict. Despite socialist ambitions, economically they were highly dependent on relations with the Western world. The first mission of GDR experts in countries like Angola or Mozambique was thus to explore the potential for developing resources in view of economic cooperation where resources were not only to flow one way but also back to the GDR.

Cuba's massive sending of civilian development workers to Africa, most of the time without material compensation, implicitly put the GDR (as well as the other European CMEA states) under pressure to do likewise (in the case of Ethiopia: Unfried 2016: 23). The GDR tried to get compensation for its "immaterial exports" (as it termed the sending of experts). But, contrary to Fidel Castro's qualification of his East German partners, in an outburst before a stunned Erich Honecker, as "mongers" endowed with a "spirit of grocers" (*Händler, Krämergeist*, Lemke 2004: 235)<sup>13</sup>, the CMEA and the GDR in the last resort also put the political above the economic interest. One expression of that priority was the politically motivated resource transfer to Cuba that came with a high economic cost. The Party leadership saw the grand design and cared little for petty considerations about economic costs. However, the GDR was not monolithic. In the field of its policy with Africa, Asia and Latin America, in accordance with general CMEA lines, divergent actors emerged ever more distinctively from the mid-1980s: the foreign trade people, from the Party's economic sector (headed by Mittag) to the Ministry of Foreign Trade representatives and the Koko-sector, interested in hard currency more than socialist fraternity, opposed the general line of a primordial political interest. Even in the case of Cuba, which was the GDR's closest partner in the three continents, discussions emerged between advocates of a continued policy of transfer of resources in a perspective close to the political *solidarity* line, and advocates of the economic interest of the GDR.<sup>14</sup> Political *solidarity* had its limits at the consumption requirements of the GDR citizens who demanded coffee and oranges. Consequently, the provision of these commodities was a top priority for the GDR leadership, lest a failure to maintain consumer socialism and welfare state facilities erupt into political de-legitimation.

#### **4. A Cuban cycle of revolution in the three continents and of developmental socialism?**

The Cuban revolution in 1959, as an example of successful guerrilla warfare, triggered a revolutionary wave. Sending ripples through various Latin American countries, the Cuban example also fuelled decolonisation and inspired anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa. This first, genuinely Cuban wave ebbed with the failure of Cuban-supported guerrilla movements, culminating in the Bolivian disaster of Che Guevara in 1967, and the fall of the first-generation leftist governments among the newly independent African states. In Cuba itself, the first cycle of a 'voluntarism'-driven autochthonous Cuban development visibly came to an end with the economic failure of 1970. The way out was the integration into the CMEA, which marked the beginning of a new cycle. Cuba largely profited from this organisation's policy to achieve economic convergence for its, as Cuba called itself, 'underdeveloped' (*subdesarrollado*) members.

The first shock wave of the revolution was succeeded by a second wave of Cuban engagement in Africa as part of the European socialist world system. With its decisive interventions in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Ethiopia, and some years later in Nicaragua, Cuba became a leading actor of the socialist world system in Africa. While the first wave was certainly not coordinated with the Soviet Union but rather led to considerable divergences with it, the second wave could not have taken place without the general support of the Soviet Union. Yet even these interventions were, at the outset, not coordinated with the main power of that system, which was rather drawn into the African endeavour by a Cuban initiative (this Cuban independence in the Angolan case has convincingly been argued by Gleijeses 2013; before: LeoGrande 1980; Shearman 1987). The magnitude of these operations endangered the Soviet Union's overall policy of avoiding military confrontation and regulating relations with the West (*détente*) and left the leading state of the socialist world system uncomfortable, to say the least. As Piero Gleijeses has shown, based on ample archival evidence, Cuba acted in the frame of the socialist world system with its leading power the USSR, but on its own initiative and had serious strategic differences with the Soviet military mission in Angola (Gleijeses 2013). This Cuban initiative may be seen, from a 'realist' viewpoint of Inter-

national Relations, as another stage of ‘voluntarist’ Cuban *solidarity* and *internationalist* policy. Let us recall that as late as 1988, when Gorbachev’s Soviet Union had already begun to crumble from inside and engaged a policy of withdrawal from African, Asian and Latin American theatres of confrontation, the Cuban military engaged in the battle of Cuito Canavale directly against South African troops, thus achieving a favourable for the Angolan MPLA-government and unfavourable for South Africa outcome of this long-lasting war. In the nearly one and a half decades of Cuban-Angolan entanglement, around 50,000 Cuban civilians worked in Angola to contribute to a socialist path of development for that country. Cuba lobbied among CMEA member countries to subordinate their economic interest under that overall political aim. Cuba pursued the aim of radical transformation of the post-colonial world in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which the European centre of the socialist world system had over time largely abandoned. Yet, it pursued that programme while being integrated into the economic structure of that system, the CMEA, which endowed it with the economic backing for such an ambitious policy.

We may thus call this era of revolutionary anti-colonialism, inspired and supported by the Cuban revolution which, in a Cold War history framing, has been termed part of an era of “hot wars within the Cold War” (Greiner/Müller/Walter 2006, including the contribution Gleijeses; Westad 2005), a *Cuban cycle of revolution in the three continents*. Whereas ‘revolution’ in the first phase of the cycle meant violent upheaval (in the literal sense) fostered by guerrilla warfare, in the second phase it took on the meaning of a range of socialist development activities: the building (in the sense of military protection, institution building and counselling) of a socialist state and economy by massive civilian and military aid.

This second phase coincided with the heyday of CMEA states’, above all Soviet, GDR and Cuban, assistance to states of the “three continents” on a “socialist path of development”. Cuba became the herald of ‘anti-imperialist’ world revolution. In 1966, in a phase of dissociation from the Soviet Union and alignment to Chinese leaning third-worldism, Cuba had been the main founder of its own international of ‘anti-imperialist movements from the ‘three continents’, the *Tricontinental* (‘Solidarity Organisation of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America’). This international can be seen as an effort to organise the ‘Third World’, steering between the

Soviet and Chinese orbits, and, in contrast to the Non-Aligned Movement, in a revolutionary perspective.

The *Tricontinental* did not become the vehicle of the anti-imperialist world revolution it was hoped to become. Many movements languished in third-worldism based on *words* void of action, as changing the *word* replaced changing the *world*, an expression of a retrospectively seen, yawning gap between a grandiose rhetoric and very limited concrete capacities. Key governments of such an international were toppled. Cuba became dependent on (and actually became part of) the socialist world system in the decade after the failure of its own independent development efforts.

The revolutionary expectations of this version of third-worldism were not realised. Nevertheless, it put a new agenda on the table: the aspirations of governments and liberation movements from Africa, Asia and Latin America for a new world order. This cause radiated wide into the world as far as Europe. The Soviet Union adopted the agenda and Cuba became the pivot in the socialist world system and its economic organisation, the CMEA, for these countries and movements. Cuba built a model of developmental socialism and fought for this royal road for escaping 'underdevelopment' in other countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It thwarted Moscow's policy of détente when this policy came at the cost of the 'three continents' aspirations, petrifying the status quo. It pressed for a stronger commitment of the CMEA towards Africa, Asia and Latin America. From the mid-1970s, the cohesive ideology of that world system turned out to be *anti-imperialism*, replacing Europe-based *proletarian internationalism* (Friedman 2015: 212-213). The post-colonial countries and liberation movements were considered the weak flank of imperialism, from where the balance of power in the world could be shifted. The drumbeat of this period was the victory in Vietnam, which showed that asymmetric anti-imperialist conflicts could be won with the backing of the Soviet Union.

What has remained of this cycle of radical 'Third World' aspirations?

In Cuba, there is a legacy of export of services, partly paid via barter trade (oil from Venezuela) or free of charge (humanitarian missions). We can trace its origins back to the 'export of services', technical assistance in part remunerated by those countries with access to convertible foreign exchange, and free of charge for those countries without such foreign exchange reserves.

The socialist world system has been sucked into a dominant capitalist world system, completing a movement of integration that had already become perceptible in the economy in the 1980s. Hence, the material background for a leftist revolutionary path of emancipation for parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America has faded away. China, which had from the 1960s tried to establish a concurrent alternative to the Soviet-led world system for the ‘Third World’ has gone its own path of development and re-established its African activities on a commercial basis.

Today, it seems that Cuba has been the last bearer of the flame of the October Revolution and the Cuban cycle the last cycle in the long waves which that revolution had unleashed. This legacy remains unclaimed. The flame of the aspirations of the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon) has passed on to other movements.

- 1 This article uses results of the historical research project: “Experts in ‘Development’ and ‘Socialist Aid’ in the Era of Global Competition between the Political Systems ‘West’ and ‘East’” (Austrian Science Fund/FWF) and has profited from commentaries by Eric Burton and 2 anonymous reviewers. Publication was supported under the project number Austrian Science Fund: P 25949-G16
- 2 Information über einige Maßnahmen, die in den letzten Wochen in Kuba durchgesetzt wurden, WPA Havanna/Hinkelmann, Havanna 14.9.1972, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA), SAPMO DY 30/27030
- 3 Information über einige Maßnahmen, die in den letzten Wochen in Kuba durchgesetzt wurden, WPA Havanna/Hinkelmann, Havanna 14.9.1972, BA, SAPMO DY 30/27030
- 4 Documentation on this tricky debate in: BA, DL 3/56. The Planning Commission’s calculation of subventions 1981-1985 was ca. 2.2 billion Mark of which 1.5 was via preferential prices: BA, DL 3/67/2
- 5 Rechenschaftsbericht der Länderabteilung (MWZ), Berlin, 2.10.1990, 22, BA, DL 3/104
- 6 Min. f. Maschinenbau, Information über den Stand der Zusammenarbeit mit der Rep. Kuba, 22.9.1986, BA DL 3/49
- 7 Materials concerning these mechanisms of political-economic exchange in BA SAPMO DY 30/27030
- 8 Materials concerning Brigaden der Freundschaft in Cuba in BA SAPMO DY 24
- 9 Cuban contract workers in the GDR remain, in contrast to the more numerous Mozambican and Vietnamese workers, a largely unexplored field of research. I am planning to work on that topic in the near future.
- 10 The basic information on the Cuban contract workers programme in the GDR is from BA SAPMO, DY 3023/1485; quote (da im Verhalten einer Anzahl von kubanischen Bürgern in der DDR, ČSSR, Ungarn und VRB ‘unerwünschte Erschei-

- nungen bestehen und die negative Bilanz für unser Land und das Ansehen seiner Revolution unübersehbar' ist): Schreiben Rafael Rodriguez an Günter Kleiber, 26.1.1987
- 11 The number is mentioned in documents of the Departamento de becas del MINREX, Archives of the Min. of Foreign Affairs (MINREX), Havana.
  - 12 Bericht über den Arbeitsbesuch des Premierministers der Volksrepublik Angola, Lopo do Nascimento, Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär des Zentralkomitees der MPLA-Partei der Arbeit, vom 6. bis 8.2.1978 in der DDR, Vorlage für die Kommission Entwicklungsländer (Werner Krolikowski), Berlin 10.2.1978, BA, DE 1/57596, fol. 2–3
  - 13 The reproaches against Cuban work ethics are illustrated in archive material from the Party Organizations of SED in Cuba concerning joint construction projects and from reports on the cooperation of FDJ-Friendship Brigades with their UJC-comrades in FDJ-archives, both in BA Berlin.
  - 14 This controversial debate between the Central Planning Commission, which took the Cuba-friendly stance, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade, which tried to push forward the GDR's economic interest in 1986, is documented in BA, DL 3/56

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DDR:

DE 1

DL 3

SAPMO:

DY 24

DY 30

DY 3023

## Published archive documents

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*ABSTRACT Dieser Beitrag zeigt auf der Grundlage von Archivmaterial der DDR und ein wenig auch Kubas, wie die Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und Kuba in eine multilaterale Zusammenarbeit in Afrika im Rahmen des sozialistischen Weltsystems mündete. Die Kreisläufe materieller und personeller Ressourcen – BeraterInnen, ExpertInnen, ArbeiterInnen der ‚Solidarität‘ europäischer sozialistischer Länder in Kuba, kubanische ArbeiterInnen und StudentInnen in Europa, kubanische Internacionalistas in Afrika, Tausende von afrikanischen StudentInnen in den internationalen Schulen der Isla de la Juventud in Kuba – brachten Verbindungslinien innerhalb des sozialistischen Weltsystems im Zeitalter seiner Expansion in die drei Kontinente hervor. In der Periode von dessen ‚Globalisierung‘ entwickelte sich Kuba als Mitglied des Rats für Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe (RGW/COMECON) zur Drehscheibe zwischen dem europäischen Zentrum des sozialistischen Weltsystems und dessen afrikanischer Peripherie. Der Beitrag resümiert Elemente, die es erlauben, von einem ‚kubanischen Zyklus‘ eines ‚antiimperialistischen‘ Entwicklungssozialismus in den langen Wellen der Nachwirkung der Oktoberrevolution zu sprechen.*

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