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## ***Cuba: The regime of educated cooperative members is socialism. Interview with Iran Morejón Quintana***

The struggle of the new left has to focus on democratizing the business scene and the political ecosystem to the maximum. I fully identify with the validity of Lenin's message when he said that "the regime of educated cooperative members is socialism."



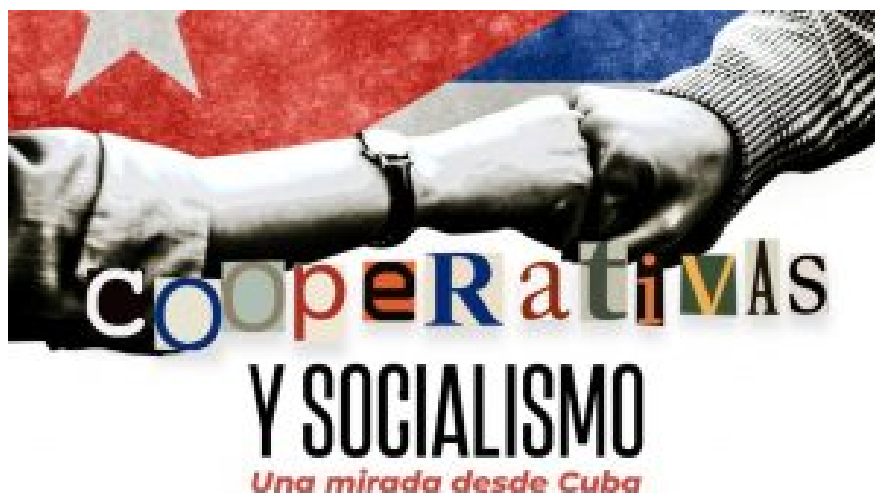
The following work is an excerpt from an interview conducted by [Alexander Hall Lujardo](#), scheduled for publication soon in book format, on the importance of cooperativism and the socioeconomic crisis in Cuba.



Alexander Hall Lujardo: How do you assess the deepening of capitalist social relations of production in the face of an emerging privatization that has led to the emergence of a neo-bourgeoisie, with the respective consequences that such dynamics cause in social matters?



Iran Morejon: The emergence of a thought favorable to the dynamics of capitalist production in Cuba today is the most embodied evidence that the socioeconomic model that bets on the preponderance of the state enterprise has failed in the long term. The ordinary citizen who does not have access to knowledge about cooperatives, [employee-owned enterprises\[1\]](#) and community enterprises, which are the three forms of enterprise truly based on self-management and workers' control, succumbs to the ease of binary thinking: *if the state enterprise does not function well, we must return to the scheme of private enterprise.* . Although the commitment to the growth of the private sector will cause an increase in inequality, it is a necessary evil that Cuban society must metabolize to get out of the economic crisis, given that the pressing reality requires the formation of forms of entrepreneurship more dynamic and productive than state enterprises.



The growth of the private sector will at the same time make it possible to decontaminate the image of the cooperative sector, which has been badly damaged by the creation of false cooperatives that actually operate as private companies. A precarious economy

would only serve as incendiary fuel for a repeat on the Caribbean stage of what has already happened in the former Eastern Bloc, and we know perfectly well that when the right conquers political power it will do everything in its power to privatize as many state-owned enterprises as possible, erasing any slightest possibility of the working class being empowered.

We have to rethink, as people committed to the struggle to bequeath to future generations a better world, what we understand as socialism. It is very important to clarify this category gnoseologically, because it is not enough to assume that socialism constitutes an alternative to capitalism. The universe is full of alternatives and variants. Wouldn't slavery also mean an alternative to capitalism?

Let us remember that during the first half of the nineteenth century in the capitalist states there were factories and plantations whose labor force was composed of slaves and that these economic organizations interacted in the market with other private companies whose employees were free men. What defines the *capitalist character* of capitalism lies not as such in the fact that those who work in private enterprises are free or enslaved citizens, but in the way in which workers intervene in decision-making that compromises the very organization of the process of wealth creation and the distribution of profits.

The decision-making process is and will continue to be the exclusive property of those who own the means of production, because this is stipulated in the legal system in our civilization. When the means of production belong by law to an owner or the state, then the workers have to resign themselves to abiding by the decisions of others and there can be no talk of a true empowerment of the working class. It is not enough to nationalize private companies and put them in the hands of the state, because nation states are unfailingly controlled by political groups whose strategies often do not coincide with the interests of the workers. An example of this is the case of the demands of the Cuban unions for a wage increase. It makes no sense for workers to have to ask political leaders and ministers for permission to distribute profits, when the real owners of companies are supposed to be the ones who work in them.

Left-wing movements have committed the original sin of assuming that the formation of an economy based on the predominance of state-owned enterprises was the expedited path for the consolidation of anti-capitalist relations of production. The cultural damage that this presumption has caused has incalculable dimensions, because it will take many years

to banish that hegemonic bias that still persists in many intellectuals, labor leaders and left-wing revolutionaries. Fighting capitalism means fighting for the empowerment of workers. For the working class to free itself from its chains, it is necessary to promote profound and renewing change.

Lujardo: ¿Cuáles deben ser las prioridades y estrategias en función de lograr un crecimiento económico sustentable que tribute hacia la prosperidad colectiva de acuerdo a las propuestas emancipatorias del socialismo?

Morejón: For Cuba to be socialist, it must defend its sovereignty at all costs, because a weakening of our autonomy as a country will immediately result in a penetration of political figures linked to U.S. interests and, therefore, permeated by a right-wing liberal ideology. The best way to strengthen national sovereignty is to combat poverty. When citizens feel identified with a social pact that proposes a logical and unstoppable path towards horizons of greater prosperity, nationalism is consolidated as stainless steel.



Prosperity can be created in a variety of ways, but making that prosperity available to all equitably is the Achilles' heel of the socio-economic model based on the dominance of private enterprises. The hope of humanity to build an anti-capitalist and prosperous economy consists in encouraging the foundation and development of cooperatives in all their variants, but emphasizing the long-term formation of multi-stakeholder consumer cooperatives that integrate empowered workers, customers who decide on issues of price and quality, to representatives of local governments and suppliers of capital, because this

form of entrepreneurship allows the conjunction of the interests of producers and consumers at the same time.

It is essential that states open space in the legal framework to all forms of cooperative association. The dissemination of the Seven Principles of Cooperativism and the education of citizens from an early age in the understanding and assimilation of Cooperative Values will be the germinal tool to unleash the transition of the current economy towards a socialist model articulated around relations of production, distribution and consumption rational and environmentally sustainable. Left-wing movements will need to overcome the biases of the past and embrace new strategies of change to re-educate civil society. The current generation has the mission of inserting the honeys of true democracy into the business fabric.



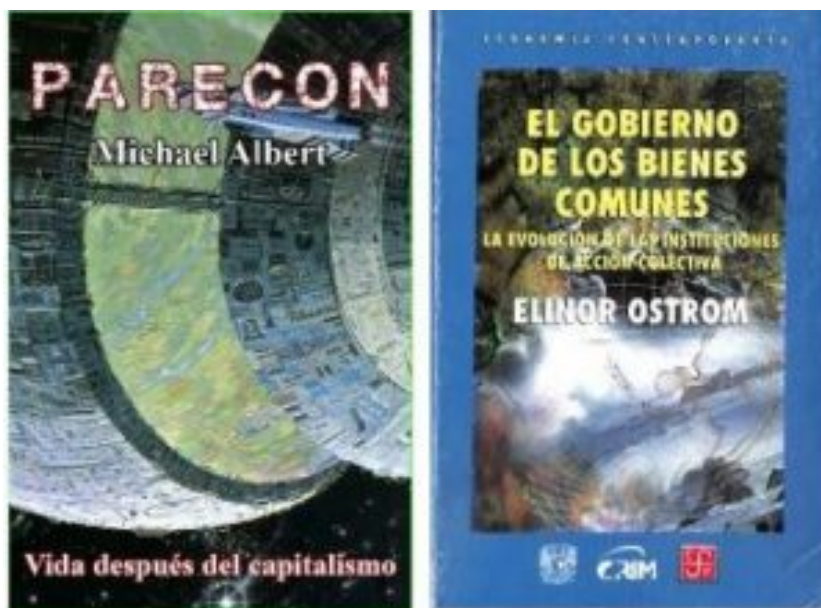
Lujardo: What importance do you attach to strengthening cooperatives in the face of the wear and inefficiency of state ownership in the country's economy?

Morejón: Cuba's path towards the articulation of an anti-capitalist economy based on the empowerment of the working class is to some extent simpler than for other nations. The fact that Cuban state-owned enterprises are the core space where wealth is created and that it guarantees employment to most of the active labor population constitutes a temporary guarantee that these material and human resources may be susceptible to undergoing the transformation towards cooperativism if political leaders decide to get involved in the process.

The Cuban state declares itself openly socialist and the legal framework constitutionally recognizes cooperative property as an independent category well differentiated from forms of state and private property. All of the above lays the foundations for disseminators of the ideas of cooperativism, invested with an aura of legality and prestige, to be fully inserted into academic and community spaces. But we must avoid at all costs that this transition is imposed with coercive strategies as has happened on many occasions, because that is counterproductive.

We need to communicate to ordinary citizens what the Seven Principles that govern the operation of cooperatives mean, the many examples of large successful cooperative corporations and the results of research by prestigious economists such as Johnston Birchall or World Bank advisor Virginie Pérotin.

We must promote the ecumenical work [Parecon](#), by Michael Albert, and the essential book *The Government of the Commons*, by the Nobel Prize in Economics Elinor Ostrom. Civil society deserves to know the anatomy of cooperatives to reverse the very dangerous right-wing bias that is contaminating the political thinking of a nation in which even leftist ideas maintain vitality. The real success of the project of a democratic and sovereign republic with a working class freed from chains will depend to a large extent on the current state enterprises becoming cooperatives because their own workers voluntarily demand it.



Lujardo: What would be the new democratic strategies that should be undertaken in the country in order to achieve an economic model that generates collective well-being with responsible levels of social participation?

Morejón: The right has very well defined its ideological discourse: private property over the means of production and a republican model based on multi-party politics for the election of representatives. Right-wing people tolerate state-owned enterprises, cooperatives, employee-owned enterprises, community enterprises, kibbutzes, mutuels and so on, but they will always defend the pre-eminence of private enterprises. As long as the left does not jeopardize sacrosanct private ownership of the means of production, right-wing organizations accept coexistence with alternative political and social movements.

However, the left is still very divided on the determination of strategies to achieve economic development that in turn allows the empowerment of the working class. The left-wing movements have not yet decided by consensus what is the main economic structure that should sustain the socialist productive model. The consensus that existed in the past was called a state enterprise, but it collapsed resoundingly like a fragment of concrete from the Berlin Wall. This ideological debate weakens the essential cohesion that must exist among the anti-capitalist movements, significantly strengthening a right that knows perfectly well that an economy structured in the omnipresence of the state enterprise is and will be a complete failure. If the trump cards of right-wing liberals are private enterprise and multi-partyism, the reaction of the left will have to be cooperativism in business and direct democracy as a framework of political power.



Cuba in Data: [Where are the new approved MSMEs and cooperatives doing and what do they do?](#)

Direct democracy mechanisms must be activated, such as the legislative initiative procedure to endorse legal norms, participatory budgets to manage public resources and projects, the election and revocation of all public offices through direct universal suffrage, the self-management of municipal governments and the use of new information technologies for the creation of spaces for dialogue and social reflection. The struggle of the new left has to focus on democratizing the business scene and the political ecosystem to the maximum. I fully identify with the validity of Lenin's message when he said that "the regime of educated cooperative members is socialism."

Note:

[1] Employee-owned enterprises are closed public limited companies whose statutes regulate the equitable distribution of shares equitably among the employees themselves.

Iran Morejon

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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