

CRITICA/REVIEW

Antonio Carmona Báez, *State Resistance to Globalization in Cuba*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 264 pp.

Cuba in the Age of Neoliberalism

RAUL FERNANDEZ

University of California—Irvine

State Resistance to Globalization in Cuba is a concise and readable study of the evolution of the Cuban economy in the years following the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the disappearance of Cuba's dependence on the economies of Eastern Europe. The author explains the ways in which the Cuban leadership has been able to successfully resist the pressures of neo-liberal globalization and maintain the island's economic independence. At the same time Carmona Báez identifies the manner in which the global economy shaped the policies and structures put in place by Cuban authorities in the last decade and a half. The book contains a wealth of empirical data and observations.

In chapter one of the work, the author lays out the theoretical foundations for his analysis. These include a clear and elegant presentation of neo-liberal theory and practice and the domination exercised by multinational conglomerates over national economies. Chapter two provides a historical background to the coming of the Cuban revolution of 1959. Carmona Báez emphasizes the home-grown character of the movement, and contrasts it with the experience of Eastern Europe where countries embraced the socialism imposed by the invading armed forces of the Soviet Union.

Chapters 3 and 4 constitute the core of the author's argument. Carmona Báez details the precipitous decline of the Cuban economy in the early 1990s as support from the Soviet bloc evaporated, and notes the actions taken by the Cuban leadership to cope with the sudden change. The economy became no longer centralized, five-year plans went out the window, and eventually dollarization became the norm. Large state enterprises developed in order to deal with foreign multinationals and in particular the Cuban armed forces became, by way of various economic enterprises, part of the foundation of the new economic model.

The book provides a balanced treatment of these transformations. Carmona Báez presents the positive results of resistance based on state capitalism to the threat of neo-liberal globalization while at the same time pointing to the limits of this type of strategy. Thus, according to Carmona Báez, the success of the Cuban government has been tempered by adapting and therefore adopting some of the traits of neo-liberal globalization. The adoption of profit-maximizing techniques of enterprise, and similar neoliberal approaches have resulted in "downsizing" of firms, "flexibilization" of labor, and consequently the appearance, and official recognition of, unemployment. Dollarization of the economy has led to the stratification of the population: those with access to dollars (and access to commodities sold only in dollars) and those without access to dollars. The authorized growth of small businesses, the development of a stratum of managers and so forth also contributes to an increased hierarchical social structure. The focus on tourism as a center-piece of the economic vision has stimulated the growth of prostitution and an informal economy connected with providing services to tourists. In the aggregate all of the new policies have also resulted in an increase in

racism. Yet the new economic measures have allowed the Cuban economy to return to steady yearly growth, while maintaining, if at a somewhat degraded level, the government's commitment to the social goals of education and health for all.

In a world dominated by neoliberal extremism, pundits and politicians long ago predicted the quick and inevitable demise of Fidel Castro's government in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet the survival of Cuba under incredibly adverse circumstances, which include the tightening of the U.S. economic blockade of the island, has been surprising and remarkable. Carmona Báez offers the first comprehensive look at the set of policies put into place by the government of Cuba in order to survive the neoliberal onslaught of the 1990s. While the author supports the ideals and goals of the Cuban revolution he does not offer unqualified, uncritical support of all the measures implemented during the 1990s Special Period in Cuba. His is an intelligent analysis which looks at the positive as well as the negative, and which examines the contradictions that have appeared in Cuban society as the country, with little outside support, engaged its international adversaries after the fall of the Soviet Union.

In sum, the work by Carmona Báez, while it would have benefited from further editing, is a highly intelligent, sympathetic yet critical, original, well-argued and well-documented account of the changes in the Cuban society and polity since 1990, and of the successes and shortcomings of the new economic policies of the Cuban government.