

# Cuba's Unofficial Left in the Face of November 20th: Options and Dilemmas

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Should the unofficial Cuban left march on November 20? Should it demonstrate, but not on November 20? If so, what demands should it bring?

The call for a demonstration on November 20, organized by the Archipelago collective, gave the unofficial Cuban left-wing an urgent option as to whether or not to participate in this march.

The truth is that the Archipelago's call does not make explicit the immediate needs of the broad majorities that make up the Cuban working class. The masses who came out to protest on July 11 were basically moved by the severe lack of food and medicine and against the disproportionate number of stores in freely convertible currency, which has a negative impact on the immediate access of the majority to basic products. Not a few Cuban families are faced with the dilemma of whether to eat lunch or dinner; often this one meal lacks meat, and not because of voluntary vegetarianism.

It is logical that the Archipelago's demands are limited to fighting political violence. The signatories have the basic conditions to eat three meals a day. Something similar happens with most intellectuals in Havana who usually focus their criticism on our first necessity: freedom of speech. Intellectuals need freedom of speech to exist, and often artists and intellectuals don't think the same way as the government.

Therefore, the origin of the demands for the elimination of

ensorship and in general for freedom of speech holds an economic origin. This is not to diminish the noble ideas of those who fight against censorship. We are facing a fact that has been repeated since the origins of capitalism, when the intelligentsia was born as a social sector free from the patronage of royalty and, therefore, in need of at least regular economic income.

The Archipelago's call for the November 20 demonstration could also be interpreted as support for the right of the working class to demonstrate to demand their economic well-being. However, explicitly, these demands are not realized in the Archipelago's call. Nor are we Marxist intellectuals the ones who become aware of the objective shortcomings of the majorities. Immersed in our need for freedom of expression and driven by an abstract ideal of the welfare of the majorities, Cuban Marxist intellectuals tend to demand – at best – the construction of socialism in freedom. However, in this abstract demand, the majorities do not see their immediate needs represented either.

So what steps should the unofficial Cuban left take, as part and representative of the working class, if it too decides to speak out? For where else is the socialist and anarchist movement born, if not to defend and promote the interests of the working class and not of the bourgeoisie, or what some euphemistically call the private sector of the economy?

Workers in the private sector, specifically the service sector, do not enjoy any legal principle that guarantees them a minimum wage. Therefore, in the name of higher profits, the business owner – that is, the bourgeoisie – is also not interested in granting this right to its workers. The bourgeoisie thus enjoys workers that it can exploit without even having the obligation to pay them a minimum wage.

Why doesn't the so-called Council for Democratic Transition, which supports the November 20 demonstration, emphasize the

immediate needs of the working class and the rights of those who work in the private sector of the economy? On the contrary, the Council for Democratic Transition emphasizes the rights of the private sector, in offsetting expropriations, in free enterprise, calling for a "privatization process," the "promotion of private enterprise," the "privatization of public transportation," and, as if that were not enough, the "reduction of state employment."

On which of these points does the working class win? How many of the thousands of workers who took to the streets on July 11 will benefit from the compensation of the bourgeois and landowners harmed by the expropriations of the Revolution? How many millions of Cuban workers will become business owners? Where will the thousands – if not millions – of unemployed go when state employment is reduced? We should thank the Council for Democratic Transition for making public its economic and political program. We know what the Council for Democratic Transition is all about. The thousands of demonstrators on July 11 did not come out to protest demanding privatization and unemployment.

No. The unofficial Cuban left should not participate in the demonstration on November 20, marching with those who want to implement neoliberal capitalism in Cuba. Although the Archipelago does not endorse the economic program of the Council for a Democratic Transition, if the unofficial Cuban left closes ranks with the demonstration on November 20, it will be doing so with those who seek unemployment and privatization. The Council for a Democratic Transition supports and will be present at the demonstration on November 20. It is not with them that the unofficial Cuban left should be, but with the working class, of which it is a part and represents. However, this does not prevent the unofficial Cuban left from supporting the initial and just demand of the Archipelago, as well as its right to demonstrate.

Yes: the unofficial Cuban left must demand and exercise the

right to public demonstration in an orderly and legal manner. Peaceful demonstration is a right according to the Constitution, something that has been explained in many Cuban media. One of the arguments why the July 11 demonstrations were repressed was because, according to the government, these protests were violent. What would happen if the unofficial left demonstrated peacefully with portraits of Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Che Guevara and Fidel, demanding immediate rights for the working class? What demands should the unofficial left present when the letter is delivered to the provincial government, if it decides to demonstrate on another day and not on November 20?

As a revolutionary part and representative of the working class, if the unofficial Cuban left decides to demonstrate – on the assumption that it will not march on November 20 – it should present the following ten demands:

1. Reduce the number of commercial establishments in freely convertible currency.
2. Reduce the amount of basic products offered in stores in freely convertible currency, so that they are sold in stores in national currency.
3. Improve the supply to shops in national currency.
4. Benefit the low-income sectors by reducing the prices of products offered in the supply passbook.
5. Benefit low-income sectors by reducing the price of medicines.
6. Benefit low-income sectors by reducing the price of electricity tariffs.
7. Benefit low-income sectors by reducing the price of gas.
8. Reducing the price of public transportation, especially in places where it has increased considerably, as in Havana where the fare has gone up 500%.
9. The right to a minimum wage for workers in the private sector.
10. Legal and economic guarantees for private sector workers

who lose their jobs.

These are basic, necessary and immediate demands for the welfare of the Cuban working class, not privatization or job cuts. Let the Cuban working class proudly contemplate its unofficial left.