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The Corrupt “País de Cuba”

La República de Cuba, a country backed by the renowned motto, “¡Patria o Muerte, Venceremos!” subsides in the northern Caribbean, just south of the Florida peninsula. Its vast history paved the road to where the country is today. Beautiful, rolling plains and scattered mountains populate the vast 68,138 square mile archipelago of islands. These rich, arable plains that make up over 2/3 of the country are perfect for farming to provide for their economy (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). Caucasians make up around 65% of the country’s population, with the remaining 35% made up of Mulattos and African Americans (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). These people live under the ruling of Miguel Díaz-Canel, the president of Cuba who’s views on government were influenced by the prominent prime minister and president of Cuba, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz (History.com, 2019). Castro, the ruler who converted Cuba into a one-party communist dictatorship, commenced the Cuban Revolution, the armed revolt that is said to be the start of the downfall of the country (History.com, 2019). Throughout the past couple of years, Cuba has been in a massive food shortage, initiating a launch of extensive rationing of certain food items, such as eggs, chicken, and rice. Economists blame President Donald Trump of the United States of America for this food shortage because of the hardening of the U.S. trade embargo. Not only does that have a major impact on the country’s problem, but the plummet in aid from Venezuela does as well. The government of Cuba is very concerned that the halt of international supplies will only lead to starvation and anger (Archuleta, 2019). Nonetheless, in order to manage these supplies for the country and maintain an abundant amount of food for the people, Miguel Díaz-Canel and the commerce minister, Betsy Díaz Velázquez, must open the unused lands for farming instead of relying on other countries to provide their needs.

Family life in Cuba is tremendously comparable to many other foreign countries. In Cuba, a perfectly emblematic family structure is extremely united. Keeping in mind that the population density is around 264 people per square mile, it is comprehensible to say that a typical household is very crowded (Macrotrends.net). Due to the housing deficiency located in the urban areas, which takes up over 75% of the country, extended families remain in the homes of their loved ones (TheGlobalEconomy.com). However, in the past decade, the government has constructed public institutions, such as day care centers, in order to remove the hassle that parents and grandparents go through to take care of the family’s children. The poor living conditions take a toll on the family as well. Caridad Santana de Lao, a Cuban woman that lived in an exquisite four-bedroom apartment with her extended family in the Old Havana district, lived through the devastating Hurricane Lili, a category four hurricane that destroyed the country (Thompson, 2018). Santana de Lao’s house was demolished, forcing her and her family to live in an old classroom in a high school along with 300 other victims for 2 years (Thompson, 2018). Eventually, the family was able to move into a new house with only one room the size of a two-car garage, which became their permanent house (Thompson, 2018). In result of this hurricane and many other natural disasters, housing officials estimate that more than 50% of the living conditions are in average to poor conditions (Thompson, 2018). Surprisingly, around 95% of families have access to clean water (Thompson, 2018). Cuba actually ranks as the second highest country in Latin America and the Caribbean to have adequate sanitation (Thompson, 2018). The locals have access to a sufficient amount electricity as well. The family’s diet revolves around staples like chicken, pork, and fish, usually combined with beans, rice, or

vegetables. Ropa vieja, a delicious stewed shredded beef, is an everyday meal that Cubans eat. However, due to the food shortage, these food items are scarce.

Deadly diseases are very common throughout foreign countries. Most country's stress the importance of localized hospitals to help control these diseases and take over their healthcare system. In contrast, Cuba altered its focus to the community by incorporating a complex healthcare system instead of integrating disengaged local hospitals throughout the neighborhoods. This means that the clinics have become very tightknit with certain families and have created personal relationships between the patient and the doctor. Cuba's education system is extremely distinctive, but it is very similar to the United States' system as well. Cuban children are required to attend a secondary school until the ninth grade (Mandrappa, 2016). The country's schools are also open for twelve hours a day, allowing the children to attend school with multiple breaks (Mandrappa, 2016). However, a common drawback of schooling in Cuba is the school lunches. In the past couple of years, secondary schools are finding it difficult to put enough food on the children's plate during lunchtime, ultimately due to the food shortage (Mandrappa, 2016). Therefore, parents are having to pack extra food for the children to eat at lunch, along with the small portion of free food given by the school. In contrast to many other country's education system, all schooling is free, including university education (Mandrappa, 2018). Due to these exceptional conditions, only a minute number of people, 0.2% of the population, are illiterate (Norris, 2018).

Over the past decade, Cuba has become extremely reliant on other countries to provide for their needs. The country itself imports around two-thirds of the food they supply to the locals, proving that they spend over 2 billion dollars annually on this alone (New York Times, 2019). This system began to work for a short period of time, but not for long. Since 2017, Cuban individuals have become increasingly worried about the supply of food as an effect of the harsh rationing conditions they are under (New York Times, 2019). The government has started supplying families with only staple food items, such as chicken, eggs, and rice, and have limited the number of items that people can buy in stores (Archuleta, 2019). Currently, families are restricted on the amount of chicken, cooking oil, and other necessities for certain meals that they can buy or be given (Archuleta, 2019). The current Commerce Minister states that the government is taking these actions in order to reach their goal of equal distribution (Archuleta, 2017). How did the economy reach this point? Cuba's government believes that it is simply due to the strengthening of the United States trade embargo. However, others believe that it is because of the plummet in aid received by Venezuela, a country that Cuba relies on for various resources.

The method that Cuba's government uses to enforce power is an underlying factor to their food shortage. After serving his first term from 1940-1944, Fulgencio Batista served his second term as Cuba's president in 1952 (History.com, 2009). He implemented many harsh laws and spent his time in office opposing the majorities' views on how the country should be ran. Nevertheless, he slowly morphed himself into a dictator, eventually leading to his total power over the people. After a year under Batista's strict rules, Fidel Castro, a Cuban politician that favored communist's views, began to petition for the overthrow of Fulgencio (History.com, 2009). However, his arguments never passed the Cuban courts. As a result, Castro organized an armed revolution and fought for the downfall of Batista (History.com, 2019). After using brutal tactics and methods, Castro eventually completely overthrew Batista and became president of Cuba, which led to his appointment as Prime Minister (History.com, 2019). Due to this important historical event, the new Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, implemented new dictatorial views (History.com, 2019). One extremely important link that Batista had while serving as President during the revolution was with America. They provided him with supplies and resources to fight back. When Fidel took office in 1959, he made it very clear of his distaste towards Americans (History.com, 2009). In return, President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States of America and his organization fought back. They

immobilized all Cuban assets in America, broke off any diplomatic connections, and most importantly, intensified the embargo act on Cuba (History.com, 2019). Roosevelt even funded an armed counterrevolutionary attack at the Bay of Pigs in attempt to destroy the Cuban government. Since the beginning of this chaos, Cuba's government, economy, and people have not been under the most ideal conditions possible.

The U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, America's longest lasting foreign policy, placed a harsh restriction on commerce and travel against the Cuban government (History.com, 2019). This act has been in place for six decades, but it has not been as strongly implemented throughout those years. Before the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the embargo was in place, but the laws were not as strict. However, after the Missile Crisis, the United States tightened the embargo for good (History.com, 2019). One of Cuba's main contributors to their economy was now entirely stripped from their grasp. As a result, Castro turned to Venezuela, a country south of Cuba across the Caribbean Sea, for supplies to distribute to their citizens. Not only did Venezuela continuously provide Cuba with food, but they also provided them with a large amount of oil to help with their local industries (History.com, 2019). Cuba has faced extreme economic problems and food shortages caused by the controversial past the government has been through. For the past three years, Cuba's economy has continued to plummet as a result of the strengthening of certain trade embargos (History.com, 2019). While international complications seem to contribute to this economic shortage the most, conflictions within the country itself contribute as well.

Cuba has never valued agriculture as a supply for their economy. Yes, you can drive down the country roads of Cuba and view the vast fields of coffee beans, sugarcane, and corn, but looks can be deceiving. Over 50 percent of the land in Cuba is not being farmed on (TradingEconomics.com). In 2010, the country imported around 80 percent of the food that the people consumed, with 35 percent of the supply being imported from the United States of America (United Nations World Food Programme). This simply shows the extent as to how much they rely on other countries for food.

With these connections between Cuba and other countries slowly being broken, the government can't even feed its eleven million inhabitants (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). What looked to be like a redirection towards success in the 2000's after Venezuela and the United States formally agreed on trade was crushed just a couple of years ago after both suppliers had to drop their connections. Just like Cuba, Venezuela has been faced with a food shortage as well, forcing them to stop trade with Cuba. From 2012 to 2017, trade between the two countries dropped from 8.5 billion dollars to 2.2 billion dollars and imports for Cuba dropped a record total of 70 percent (Reuters, 2017). Is there any way Cuba can dig themselves out of this tragedy?

In order to solve this problem, the government of Cuba must be open to reestablishing foreign affairs with thriving countries that can provide necessary supplies. However, they must first start to utilize the land that is unfarmed to grow crops and become self-sufficient. Argentina, for example, is considered to be one of the most self-sufficient countries in the world (Stone, 2018). They produce almost all of the food that they consume. Yes, Argentina is substantially bigger than Cuba, but it serves as the perfect model of a self-sufficient country. Cuba can start by setting aside land exclusively for farming. Since the archipelago of islands is surrounded by water, the soil is very fertile, allowing certain crops to thrive. Even if these crops do not fit the needs of the people, it opens up trade, which will gradually morph the country into a commercial economy. In 1990 when the economy was stable, a record high 8.4 million tons of sugar were produced (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2009). Nearly all of it was exported in return for food that was provided to the people. This system that proved its worth was thrown away because the land was sold to private farmers and was not used. Adopting a method of small scale farming techniques would only be

beneficial. This means that they would have the capability to put farming in the hands of small-scale private and public farms to produce organic crops. The production of locally grown organic crops will provide Cubans with a meal made of fresh ingredients to put on the table. Even though small organic crops will not solve the food shortage completely, it can contribute to it immensely. The use of more land for cultivation will lead to the creation of new employment as well. These small local farms will be in need of people to take care of the harvest and transport crops to town. As seen in the past, this progress could also lead to the development of a new class system in which people can identify and voice their opinions.

Cuba spends 2 billion dollars annually to import goods from the United States and Venezuela (United States International Trade Commission). Instead of devoting money to something that clearly is producing no thorough results, the government should instead use this money to fund the local farms. This money could even fund the development of new land for cultivation. In the past decade, money has been provided to state-owned land, but this land has not been put to good use (Leitgeb, Kummer, Funes-Monzote, & Vogl, 2012). On the other hand, local farmers that currently own land in Cuba have claimed that they do not receive money to help with their farming, leading to some farmers having to sell their land back to the government (Leitgeb, Kummer, Funes-Monzote, & Vogl, 2012). However, the Program for Local Agriculture Innovation (PAIL), an organization created in 2002 to revolt against the Cuban government, is diligently working on moving farmers out of urban areas and buying the state's land that is being unused (Leitgeb, Kummer, Funes-Monzote, & Vogl, 2012). In this step of the process, people must use their voices! Ordinary citizens have just as important of a role in solving this ongoing problem than the government does. These citizens can start petitions to voice their opinions to the government of their drive for change. They can also begin to work their way up Cuba's government system chain and bring their ideas and opinions with them. With the continuation of PAIL and the act of giving state-owned land that is not in use to local farmers, Cuba will unquestionably dig themselves out of the tragedy that they have placed themselves in.

With this resolution comes one major disadvantage. For the past three years, Cuba has been struggling with one of the harshest droughts in the past century (González, 2018). The drought has left the government with a loss of 1.5 billion dollars and the people with a limited amount of water (González, 2018). It has also directly impacted the farmers by not providing the substantial amount of water they need for the land (González, 2018). If this continues to progress, the perfect farming conditions will not be met. However, there are many ways to fix this that have been proven to work in other countries facing the same challenge. They should begin by forming a plan of a complex irrigation system that uses renewable energies to preserve water. In the United States, Israel, Australia, and many other countries, they use a system known as drip irrigation, a porous tubing arrangement below the surface of the soil that directly targets the roots of the crop (Postel, 2017). This system preserves the amount of water given to the crops by releasing a small amount during a certain time interval managed by the farmer (Postel, 2017). This irrigation system would not only be beneficial due to the insignificant amount of water the farmers are receiving, but it also provides a very inexpensive, yet proficient alternative. Farmers would also have the capability to independently run and build these complex systems. A drip irrigation system uses very common materials that can be quickly produced in a short period of time. Additionally, forming organizations or having previously established organizations help build these systems for farmers would be a tremendous help. This project could either be funded by the country itself or the United Nations, who provided many of Southern Asia's countries with the money to build complex irrigation systems, like the drip irrigation, in times of need (Tatalovic, 2009). The funds for this project could also come from tax cuts. However, with the current condition that the people are living in, this could cause much conflict.

Reestablishing foreign affairs with thriving countries will also benefit the process to abandon starvation. Since President Donald Trump has strengthened the U.S. embargo over the past couple of years, it will be extremely difficult to convert the U.S. to open international trade back up with Cuba. Therefore, Cuba must find countries that have not been previously brought into this affair and establish new connections with them. For this to happen, there must be a policy put into place that protects the agreement between the two countries. They must also maintain peaceful connections with this country or it could result in dangerous conflict. If Cuba can tighten the connections and begin networking with other countries, success would be met in the near future. The United States, for example, is “the world’s largest economy and the largest exporter and importer of goods and services” (Office of the United States Trade Representative). Developing an extensive network of trade can fuel economic growth, increase living standards, and propel them over the economic barrier that they are currently facing. If the Cuban government can strengthen their ties and find a country that will provide them with the precise crops, then they can progressively dig themselves out of the hole they are in. However, they cannot rely on this method alone. It is essential that Cuba first continues to open up land for farming, thus leading to an abundance of crops for trade and personal use.

Ultimately, to resolve the food shortage, it all falls back on the use of the land and the connections they form with other countries. Cuba must assure that they use the land that they own or give it to local farmers that will undoubtedly put it to use. They have been in an “economic drought” since the existence of their complex economy that is continuously influenced by dictatorial views. Many of the president’s poor choices have instigated conflictions that seem to be unsolvable. However, with the solutions presented here and smart decisions in the future, anything is possible to overcome. Tackling the tasks will only lead to the “más perfecto” Cuba possible.

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