

CECOS: Tourism in Cuba Has Bolstered the Dictatorship

written by CubaNet | miércoles, 21 de abril, 2021 8:00 am



MIAMI, United States. - The Center for the Study of Contemporary Open Societies (CECOS, by its English acronym) broadcast this Wednesday through several of its platforms the conference “Political Economy of Tourism in Cuba”, an event “that welcomes reflection at a very important and possibly defining moment of the island’s political process.”

With the participation of Pedro Isern, executive director of CECOS and professor at ORT University in Uruguay; Leonardo Martín, director of programs at CECOS and also professor at ORT University, Uruguay; and Mexican jurist René Bolio, president of the Mexican Commission of Human Rights and the Justice Cuba Commission, all members of the Hemispheric Front for Liberty, “The Political Economy of Tourism in Cuba” versed mainly on the consequences that opening up tourism in Cuba in the decade of the 90s had on the Cuban people, and how this

growing industry helped to perpetuate the dictatorship in power.

“After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban economy went through a desperate situation. The massive input of foreign investment in the tourism sector, and the arrival of millions of European, Canadian and Latin American tourists, contributed to the regime’s stability much more than it did to the welfare of Cuban civil society,” stated CESCOS from the start of the program. According to Leonardo Martín, the program aims to support and make visible the growing challenges that liberal democracies face.

For Martín, “the Cuban regime has only to show stories of poverty, exile and death, and the world crisis generated by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic caused Cuba in the last year and a half to experience a dramatic drop in GDP which, when added to the catastrophic decrease of tourism and probably also of international remittances from other parts of the world affected economically by the pandemic, has made the country plummet into a severe economic crisis from which it is possible the Cuban regime will not emerge unscathed.”

In his dissertation, the CESCOS director of Programs stated with certainty that, in spite of a greater access to Internet from Cuba has made possible to denounce daily the dictatorship’s “shameful repression” of its people, from CESCOS “we have been working for a long time, researching, building bridges and trying to articulate spaces for discussion about the challenges of the transition process in Cuba.”

“Today, we present an initial concrete analysis and diagnosis about tourism, about which we must raise consciousness in order to counteract the accommodating discourse by several of our countries that always favors the Cuban regime. Foreign investment in tourism for the last 30 years in Cuba is not morally neutral. It is not, it has never been, and it will not be,” decried Martín.

According to the professor, “tourism contributed to perpetuate the dictatorial regime and it did not benefit in equal measure the very civil society that the regime oppresses. It is important to point out the hypocrisy of the great hotel chains and the indifference of the type of tourism that has been encouraged, with not the slightest concern for the unhappiness and the lack of freedoms that the Cubans that welcome them endure. This phenomenon has been particularly important for the survival of the regime,” he denounced.

For his part, Pedro Isern, executive director of CESCOS, assured his audience in his presentation that, even when tourism in the nineties practically played a humanitarian role because of the dire conditions Cuba faced during the so-called Special Period, it offered no benefits to the people, and instead much advantage to strengthening the Castro regime.

In Isern's opinion, after the demise of the communist bloc, the world's economic boom and flourishing reached the island hand in hand with tourism, which gave the dictatorship "a power base that placed the regime above Cuban civil society, where no one noticed the arrival of said abundance. That sector hurt Cubans instead of benefitting them," he stated.

"In the post 1990 revolution, material shortages and repression increased, the regime appropriated all the income generated and civil society remained ever so weak, humiliated and corrupt. Tourism after the fall of the Berlin Wall became an instrument to strengthen the government and weaken civil society, where everyone expected to be part of a process of transition," said Isern.

"The dynamics surrounding the tourism sector in Cuba, although amply known, has been underestimated, and it's a decisive strategy for the regime's continuity," he noted.

To conclude, Mexican jurist René Bolio indicated that Cuba's opening to international tourism in the 1990s, amidst economic crisis, was Fidel Castro's way of receiving fresh funds that required little investment, "because Cuba has the advantage of being in the Caribbean, it has sun and beaches, a good climate, and the culture, the music and its people make of Cuba an attractive tourist destination, something which the regime has masterfully exploited."

The director of Justice Cuba called attention to the fact that said opening had consequences "on one side, economic consequences, because it provided the dictatorship with resources and hard currency, and on the other it allowed the regime to show the world that Cuba was not North Korea or Iran, countries which allow no access, but as a relatively friendly place." In part, this way of projecting itself to the world has allowed the regime to forge a positive image in the eyes of people who have no information about the daily tragedy Cubans endure, he stated.

However, he explained, the greatest impact has been in the realm of human

rights, in three principal areas in particular: “first and foremost, the emergence of sexual tourism that is promoted by the government itself; second, the exploitation of labor, since the government is profiting from the work of its own citizens; and third, the impact that tourism has had on Cuban society whose citizens, historically, have been denied access to its facilities.”



Recibe la información de CubaNet en tu celular a través de [WhatsApp](#). Envíanos un mensaje con la palabra “CUBA” al teléfono [+1 \(786\) 316-2072](#), también puedes suscribirte a nuestro boletín electrónico dando [click aquí](#).