

transportation landscape shifts — and as public officials hopefully place a higher priority on keeping walkers safe — walking advocates are increasingly encouraging police departments to punish the behavior that is the most harmful to human safety.”

Walking down a neighborhood street would not qualify as a “most harmful” activity.

Geoff Anderson, president of Smart Growth America, points to Hawaii as a state where people still share the streets with cars, and it works fine, mainly because the speed limits there are really low.

Smart Growth America’s annual “Best Complete Streets” reports offer solutions for how cities can “break down the traditional separation between highways, transit, walking, and bicycling, and instead focus on the desired outcome of a

transportation system that supports safe use of the roadway for everyone.”

Which is all to say that Michael Brown did not have to die, because Officer Wilson did not need to stop him.

When viewed in the racial and historical context of vagrancy laws and even present-day stop-and-frisk policies, Wilson’s approach looked less like protecting and serving, and more like abusing and overpowering. The encounter didn’t have to end the way it did, and it didn’t have to begin as it did, either.

Brentin Mock is *Grist*’s justice editor. Follow him on Twitter at @brentinmock.

McDonald’s in Old Havana?

by Marce Cameron

“I want to see Cuba before everything changes,” is how many reacted to Barack Obama’s surprise December 17, 2014, announcement that he would restore diplomatic relations with Cuba—severed by the US in 1961—and urge Congress to lift the US blockade.

Seeing Cuba for oneself can only be encouraged, but those who fear that it will soon be transformed by American tourists, US corporations and commercialism need not rush to book flights.

Hordes of American tourists and a hotel boom to accommodate them may well be inevitable, but a US corporate invasion is not. Fears or hopes that Obama’s new Cuba policy will unleash a US corporate take-over and cultural recolonization are unfounded. These fears and hopes are based on the dubious assumption that what holds back the tide of capitalist restoration on the Cuban archipelago is, ironically, the US blockade.

Were this assumption to hold water, we would have to credit the US blockade with Cuba’s tenacious independence and dogged commitment to socialism. That would be absurd: the blockade is a gross violation of Cuba’s right to self-determination.

It has succeeded in undermining, distorting and stunting Cuba’s socialist project.

This is why Cuba’s socialist government has always demanded the lifting of the blockade.

In reality, what holds back the tide of capitalist restoration that presses in from outside (and wells up from within) is not the US blockade. It is the Cuban Revolution.

Obama’s stance

Obama knows this, which is why he pledged that lifting the blockade—which, he pointed out, has failed to bring US-style “democracy” to Cuba—will be accompanied by US efforts to subjugate Cuba by other, less confrontational means. One such means is co-opting the emerging small business sector.

Whether Obama’s new approach to undermining the Cuban Revolution turns out to be more effective than the policy of siege and isolation

remains to be seen. As Havana University’s Jesus Arboleya argues, it is far from inevitable that the owner of a pizza shop, a flower stand or a beauty salon will abandon their commitment to Cuban independence, social justice and solidarity for the siren song of US imperialism. They are natural allies of the working class and can make a positive contribution to Cuba’s socialist transitional economy.

What is clear is that restoring US-Cuba diplomatic relations and lifting the blockade will not, in and of itself, allow US corporations to dominate Cuba once again. Nor will it trigger a wave of privatizations of Cuba’s socialist state property or an end to Cubans’ constitutional right to health care and education at all levels free of charge.

That would require the demolition or degeneration of two institutional pillars of the revolution: the Cuban

Communist Party and the socialist state it leads. That is precisely what the blockade has failed to achieve.

The failure of the blockade to destroy the revolution—and Obama’s decision to act on the recognition of this failure—should be seen for what it is: a triumph of Cuba’s working people over half a century of brutal siege by the mightiest empire in history. Rather than recognize this inconvenient truth, Obama repeated the myth that the blockade has failed to bring about Iraq-style regime change because it has “provid[ed] the Cuban government with a rationale for restrictions on its people.”

The myth that the revolution is propped up by the blockade is widespread among both liberal

...the blockade...has succeeded in stunting Cuba’s socialist project.



critics and admirers of socialist Cuba. In reality, the blockade has failed to bring about regime change for two fundamental reasons: millions of ordinary Cuban citizens remain deeply committed to the revolution's core principles; and the caliber of Cuba's communist leadership. Obama wasn't going to congratulate his adversaries.

Obama lied about the aims of the blockade: "Proudly, the United States has supported democracy and human rights in Cuba through these five decades ... primarily through policies that aimed to isolate the island," he claimed.

This is demonstrably false. The blockade's real objectives have nothing to do with democracy and human rights. A declassified US State Department memo dated April 6, 1960 explains: "Every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba ... to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of [Cuba's revolutionary] government."

This has always been the blockade's core objective, but admitting it would oblige the US—morally if not legally—to compensate Cuba for the \$117 billion in damages to the Cuban economy

Cuban citizens remain deeply committed to the revolution's core principles...

caused by the blockade in the 54 years to 2014, according to Cuban government estimates.

Elsewhere in his speech, Obama let slip the real objective of the blockade. It serves neither "America's interests, or the Cuban people," he said, "to try to push Cuba toward collapse ... Even if that worked—and it hasn't for 50 years—we know ... that countries are more likely to enjoy lasting

transformation if their people are not subjected to chaos."

In other words, the US will now seek to undermine Cuban sovereignty by other means.

Obama neither acknowledged nor apologized for acts of terrorism and sabotage for which the US state is directly or indirectly responsible, among them more than 600 plots to assassinate Fidel Castro and the blowing up of a Cuban civilian airliner in 1976 with the loss of 73 lives.

He described the Cuban Five anti-terrorism heroes, three of whom were sent home to Cuba as part of a prisoner exchange agreed to with Cuban president Raul Castro, as "spies."

Announcing that he had ordered a review of the State Department's classification of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism—a status that obliges the US to impose financial sanctions—Obama stressed that the review "will be guided by the facts and the law." This was a tacit admission that branding Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism is politicized and baseless.

Obama thanked the Pope for urging the US and Cuba to resolve their differences through dialogue, and the Canadian government for hosting secret high-level talks between the US and Cuban governments. Those talks culminated in a phone

Cuba has made no concessions to US demands for "free" elections and a "free market" economy.

conversation between Obama and Raul Castro on December 16, 2014 in which the details of the prisoner swap were finalized.

No concessions

The fact that the Cuban and US governments engaged in a discreet dialogue prior to Obama's announcement does not mean that Raul Castro's government is caving in to US pressure and negotiating the terms of the revolution's surrender.

In return for Obama's pledge to restore diplomatic relations and urge Congress to end the blockade, Cuba has made no concessions whatsoever to long-standing US demands for "free" elections and a "free market" economy.

Some conservative critics of Obama are incensed at the unilateral nature of the US policy shift. The US should use the blockade as a bargaining chip, they argue. Any steps towards the resumption of diplomatic relations and any easing of the blockade should be tied to Cuban concessions to US demands for changes to Cuba's political system and property regime.

Unlike his conservative critics, Obama recognizes that this approach hasn't worked for more than five decades. Cuba refuses to negotiate on matters of principle and has proved immune to bullying and blackmail. Given this, the only realistic approach is a unilateral one. (The prisoner swap was

not a concession by either side, but a mutually beneficial exchange.)

On the same day that Obama announced his new Cuba policy, Raul Castro reiterated that Cuba has always been open to “respectful dialogue” with the US, but only on the basis of “sovereign equality” and complete respect for Cuban self-determination. He noted that as president, Fidel Castro had conveyed to the US on numerous occasions Cuba’s “willingness to discuss and resolve our differences without renouncing any of our principles.”

“Coexisting”

Cuba would continue to uphold these principles. Meanwhile, the US and Cuba “must learn the art of coexisting with our differences in a civilized manner.” In a speech to Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power on December 20, 2014 Raul Castro noted that Cuba has “strong convictions and many concerns regarding what happens in the US with respect to democracy and human rights”

and would like to discuss these concerns with the US.

Castro stressed that Cuba would not, in order to improve relations with the US, “renounce the ideas for which it has struggled for more than a century, for which its people have shed much blood and run the greatest of risks. In the same way that we have never proposed that the United States change its political system, we will demand respect for ours.”

To thunderous applause, he continued: “It is necessary [for the US] to understand that Cuba is a sovereign state whose people, voting freely in a [1976] referendum to approve the Constitution, decided on its socialist course and political, economic and social system.”

Marce Cameron is president of the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (Sydney) and blogs at *Cuba’s Socialist Renewal*. This article appeared in *Green Left Weekly* on February 2, 2015.

A Primer on Gramsci, Culture, and Climate Change

by Dylan Harris

The slogan “Systems Change Not Climate Change” was popular in the London People’s Climate March. It denotes that people are increasingly aware of the intrinsic relationship between global capitalism and our rapidly changing climate. However, despite growing discontent about this relationship, it seems as though the capitalist wheel—self-aware of its connection to climate change—continues to re-invent itself at the behest of world leaders with vested interest in maintaining its status quo. By the way climate change is spun primarily as an economic threat on the 2014 UN Climate Summit’s website [1], it is no surprise that the conclusions drawn from the Summit encourage more economic growth as the solution to climate change. [2]

In this epochal moment—torn between the advancement of the global capitalist paradigm and the galvanizing effects of a changing climate—cultural politics, though often overlooked, is crucial for building a meaningful climate movement. From our consumption patterns to the way we perceive

...cultural politics...is crucial for building a meaningful climate movement.

nature, our experience of capitalism reverberates on a cultural level. An approach to climate action—one that understands how intimately tied culture, climate change, and capitalism are to one another—is very much needed.

Cultural politics lies at the heart of Antonio Gramsci’s political theory. His work provides the tools for not only understanding the cultural depth of the current climate change crisis but also provides insight into what a more meaningful climate movement may look like.

As it stands, the re-emergence of Gramsci’s work has mostly been contained within the walls of the academia or deep in the wells of leftist political theory.

However, it is imperative that his work be explored within the context of contemporary issues and in relation to the people who are working on these issues on the ground. It is the aim of this article to do just that: to explore how his work is relevant and necessary to address something like climate change.

Gramsci’s political theory runs deep and wide, but three basic ideas—his conceptions of hegemony, absolute historicism, and philosophy of praxis—will help connect readers and activists with his broader work. It is not within the scope of this short article to go into too much depth on these topics. Instead, this article will use these concepts as tools to: (1) help situate and understand the climate crisis in Gramscian terms, and (2) piece together a Gramscian response to climate action.

Despite Gramsci’s name being synonymous with hegemony, the term predates him. Gramsci’s