Good day, buenos días. I want to talk about “The Promise and Peril of the Third Wave: Socialism and Democracy for the 21st century.” The Third Wave, La Tercera Ola, that’s technology. I want to talk about technology from three angles, just like how this presentation was originally titled: “CyberMarxism, Community Technology, and Their Implications for Cuban Development.” There are lots of threes and thirds, to make this easy to outline and summarize for you. There are notes at the end with links to the books and articles I’ll mention here, and notes for things I might not have time to cover.

(1.) I begin with CyberMarxism to help set the context. This approach to Marxism looks closely at emerging technology as something more profound than just a derivative or secondary dimension built on a primary economic superstructure. It’s been a major development in Marxist research and studies, orientations and tendencies since the last quarter of the 20th century. It’s so large, in fact, there are different schools and approaches within it.

There is one tendency that I characterize as being the closest to traditional Marxism in that it looks at how the information age constitutes the latest battleground in the historic conflict between capital and labor and what a transformed Marxism should look like in this regard. It’s usefully represented, I think, by Nick Dyer-Witheford in his book *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism*, a well-regarded perspective that reflects a widespread movement and presence primarily in academic circles around the world, mostly outside the U.S., a realm of theory that has papers and publications, associations and organizations, conferences and gatherings, one having taken place earlier this month in Vienna.¹

At what I’ll call the other end of the spectrum — where technology looms, not just as the latest contested battleground but as the major transformative engine of our times, is Manuel Castells’ The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture trilogy. Castells’ thesis is that the transformation capitalism has undergone with the technological revolution that began in the last third of the twentieth century is so profound that we are in an entirely new era and must
distinguish the old industrial capitalism from the new informational one. His massive trilogy has been likened by both critics and defenders to Marx’s three volumes of Capital. Although this is an extended and detailed work, I can tell you that the first four pages of the Prologue to volume 1, the Rise of the Network Society, provide a concentrated summary and a test for your potential interest. I have included the first paragraph in my end notes in the hopes that it will be translated for those of you who read Spanish and may wish to be tempted.2

However interesting these works, I offer them here primarily as a preface to the major work of CyberMarxism that I want to focus on here today, “The Promise and Peril of the Third Wave: Socialism and Democracy for the 21st Century.” It was Al Campbell who suggested, when I sent him an outline of my presentation, that I use this for my title and I think this was a good idea for a number of reasons. Not only is it much more to the point — it is exactly the title of the Manifesto of a special school of CyberMarxism that provides the informing perspective that is very much associated with the Global Justice Center itself, through shared organizational and movement affiliations including the Radical Philosophy Association and Solidarity Economy, authored by Carl Davidson, one of this seminar’s sponsors, along with Ivan Handler and Jerry Harris of the Chicago Third Wave Study Group and published, appropriately on May 1 in 1993.3

As its authors write:

Its name came from our first task…to rigorously re-examine classic Marxist-Leninist theory and practice from the vantage point of Alvin Toffler’s book, The Third Wave…an all-around study of the impact of technology on society in the past, present and future. …The other sections of this book, and additional work of the authors published elsewhere, all have their roots in this founding document of our cyberMarxist trend.

This trend shares the historical scope of Marxism in its grasp of the breadth of human history. Here are three brief sum-ups the major points of the new Manifesto, involving its scope, its analysis, and its vision.

1. First, we are now in the third age of human history, and we are experiencing a quantum leap in productivity on the order of breakthrough and exponential growth jump that took place as a result of the agricultural revolution launched 6000 years ago and the industrial revolution launched 200 years ago. Along with this promise of the technological revolution, there are grave perils, dislocations, and upheavals — a deepening structural crisis and a more fractured,
shattered, and embattled workforce — including the part-time “precariat” that we’ll be hearing about as well as a new, growing “underclass.” Mere statement and summary does not do justice to this transformation and either its promise or its peril. I’ve appended some quotes from the Manifesto for each of these points. 4

2. Second, in contrast to other socialist explanations about the crisis of socialism that has been generally recognized with the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Manifesto finds the root of the problem in the crisis of industrialism, a crisis shared by socialist and capitalist countries alike.

For industrial mass production, the main dominant patterns of social organization are the forms of presumed rationality: concentration, centralization, standardization, specialization, maximalization and synchronization.

The crisis for socialism lies in its failure to recognize that these features that many of its prime proponents took as positive givens are actually historically bound to industrialism, and otherwise limited and negative. Along with this, they were questionable as approaches to socialism then, and in the Information Age, they increase neither productivity nor democracy nor socialism.

And, to quote the Manifesto, again:

But what is worse than the dangers posed by the third wave is the attempt to ignore or stifle the information technologies fueling it. This was a deep flaw in the structure of the “command economies” of the Soviet bloc, which based their politics on the centralized control and restriction of information.

The politics of this socialism reflected the same problems as its economics: concentration, standardization, and bureaucracy.

3. Third and finally, the authors of the Third Wave Manifesto provide a new vision: a call for decentralization, democracy, multiculturalism, co-operatives, ecologically sustainable technology, those very values we have been talking about since this seminar began.

Third wave production is automated and cybernated, making it possible to revolutionize hierarchy and democratize access to information. It rests on a sustainable technology which diversifies production and accelerates the generation of knowledge. In effect, it is a new economic base which develops its own principles of society and culture making a sustainable and democratic socialism workable. In fact, post-industrial, third wave socialism may be the only socialism truly possible.
Some of the vision is admittedly unorthodox, particularly the role it offers for markets and new alliances. All told, “…the terrain on which class battles are waged has dramatically shifted. We are in a new environment and on the threshold of a new age…”

For more than ten years the Third Wave Study group filled out its analysis and vision through *CyRev*, a Journal of Cybernetic Revolution, Sustainable Socialism, and Radical Democracy. It is now embedded in a broad-based Solidarity Economy movement in the U.S. and across the globe.

**II.** I want to lay all this aside for now and turn to “Community Technology.”

In its most general terms, community technology is the application and use of emerging technology tools for community building, community organizing, community development. Historically these are the last arenas where technology has come to be applied. It began in the 1980’s and 90’s when what’s referred to as “productivity software” — word processing, database programs, and spreadsheets — came into these arenas initially through the volunteer efforts of technically skilled people showing how they were useful for individual projects and nongovernmental organizations, NGOs, in writing funding proposals, producing written material, managing members and any sort of project or organizational material, doing up budgets and for financial management. One of the major initial problems was the disjunction and inability of people from different worlds — the technologically sophisticated and the community activist, development people — to speak anything like the same language, and it took a while for this to get worked out.

Since that began, community technology has grown tremendously and is now part of a family of over-lapping arenas that go by different names — community media, community media and technology — academically, especially in post secondary schools outside the United States, there is the field of Community Informatics, separate from ICT, Information Science, and other less socially- and politically- oriented technical fields. Internationally, the more practical arena is known as ICT for Development, frequently shortened to ICTdev or ICT4dev. Although a number of these fields and arenas touch on matters involving CyberMarxism, it is useful to see they have some distinctiveness and are generally more associated with the arena of practice.
I think it is fair to say that there are three broad areas of community technology and, especially in the United States, there are journals and associations and conferences for them each. These areas are (a) public policy, (b) technology assistance to nonprofits/NGOs, and (c) community technology centers or, as they are called outside the United States: telecentres.

CTCs or telecentres is the arena I am most experienced in, having spent over 30 years working in it; this is where I first met and came to know Carl Davidson; it is the area that gets a lot of attention when technology first begins to be applied to community development, since it deals with a problem that was originally referred to as “the digital divide” and more recently falls under the rubric of the problem or movement for what is called “digital inclusion.”

The problem of technology’s growth and dispersion throughout society was first articulated in the U.S. in the early 1980’s by a women by the name of Antonia Stone, who, at that comparatively early stage, looked into the future and saw the potential not only for amazing growth and rise in importance of the computer but that the problem of inequalities could well be exacerbated and made much worse if special steps were not taken. How can we insure that low literacy, low income, non-English speaking peoples, people with disabilities — pretty much the full range of people disenfranchised from the effective use of new tools being rapidly developed — how can we insure they could get access and support for using technology effectively? In 1983 Toni opened up a “Community Computer Center” in a public housing basement in East Harlem in New York City, home of primarily black and Latino communities in there. Called “Playing to Win,” the center emphasized an informal, community-oriented, participant-centered approach to using computers, with open public access hours especially established for people who had never used computers before to come in and learn and mess around with this technology. These centers were community centers before they were technology centers — one of Toni’s favorite sayings about them “it’s not the technology, it’s the people.” And with government, corporate, and foundation grants she developed a series of techniques and approaches for making that technology relevant for people’s lives.

I had the fortunate opportunity in 1986 to become involved with this nascent and exploding movement at its birth, one that, with grants from the National Science Foundation, saw two centers grow into the Playing to Win Network which in turn became the Community Technology
Centers Network, which grew to have a membership of over 1200 organizations, representing what came to be over 20,000 centers accordingly to the searchable database supported by the Digital Divide Network, one where you could put in your zip code and receive a list of centers close by along with a map and link to their web sites. As the Internet became popular and grew in importance, these CTCs became key places where people who could not afford or otherwise get access to online resources could come and get training and support as well as access, along with a whole host of education and support programs as these centers were able to customize their offerings to their particular community needs and interests and their own mission.

Into the 90’s and the beginning of the new millennium, this same movement took place in countries across the world and with similar results. And not only was it the case that individuals were able to access and use these telecentres, but they were also the centers for organizations to use as well, and especially in the less wired and technically-established areas, many of them came to be transformative social, community, and political institutions, serving in roles as varied as post offices, centers of education and health information, communication, and commerce. Countries varied in policies for supporting them, but in general some attention was and is being given to developing technology education and access programs involving a mixture among telecentres, libraries, and cybercafés. For a number of interesting reasons, leadership in developing these programs passed from the US and western Europe to other areas of the world that are developing their technological capacities and find it important to insure equality and widespread use as well as a concern for their use in community development.

I trust that in this all-too-brief sketch and overview of community technology centers and telecentres and their 20+ year history, I have at least touched on those two other areas of community technology that are much more lively and overshadow this one in the United States now: the technology assistance to nonprofits or NGO arena, a field that overlaps with technology for e-government and e-democracy where a current focus and preoccupation is with using social media tools for enhancing the effectiveness in both those arenas. The public policy arena intersects with these others, too, and I leave it at that for the moment with brief endnote here.⁵
III. Let me finally turn to the third and last area I want to say some things about, the Promise and Peril of the 3rd Wave for 21st century Cuba — I can of course speak with some confidence now about things here that I actually know little about — with some concluding notes for the opportunity this provides to the US and the project I have suggested for us both.

I can say that I have seen references to telecentres in Cuba off and on for the last two decades, but I have not been able to find any active sites recently. I do believe it is generally-agreed upon that Cuba has one of the lowest uses of the Internet per person in the world. Statistics I have seen put Cuba at an effective rate of 5%, with use of Cuba’s proprietary Intranet and email at 25%.

I don’t want to be presumptuous about this technological “backwardness.” To the contrary, if you look and listen you will see three things: first, you will have heard about Cuban expertise and experience in biotechnology, that broad discipline in which biological processes, organisms, cells or cellular components are explored to develop new technologies that are useful in research, agriculture, industry and the clinic. We have seen some good examples of this in our travels here already as well as in references to Cuba’s ecoagricultural achievements.

Second, I want to thank Cliff DuRand for sending along to me information about El Foro de Empresarios y Líderes en Tecnología de la Información, the Forum of Entrepreneurs and Leaders in Information Technology, that’s been going on in Cuba for a while. Check out the web site at www.felti.org for the full program and the list of attendees from last month that provides a good perspective on Cuba’s technology interests and experience.

Third, despite the limited access to the Internet, the Cuban blogosphere is becoming more and more a growing public arena, an extremely active and contested public arena at that. And this is not primarily because of Yoani Sánchez, Voces Cubanas, Havana Times, Bloggers Cuba, and La Joven Cuba — although they are important participants in this arena. It is rather, because of two or three other individuals who help define the public arena in Cuba: Mariela Castro Espín, Miguel Díaz-Canel, and — let me pause for emphasis on the last person who I am suggesting: Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

These people are all prominently known in public and political life in Cuba. Mariela Castro Espín, Raul’s daughter, was already known for her activism on women’s issues when she became an active presence on Twitter and in the Cuban blogosphere and helped publicize Cuba’s
first official gathering of self-described “revolutionary” bloggers in April 2012, calling the Blogazo “an opportunity to socialize with protagonists of the Cuban blogosphere.”

“New technologies can be vehicles of revolutionary methods of social participation,” she wrote. “The blogosphere [provides] spaces of revolutionary debate… The best journalism in Cuba today,” she claimed, “is in the blogosphere, as Cuban as the palm trees.”

Miguel Díaz-Canel, the first vice president of Cuba, and an electronics engineer by training, in a closing speech at the National Preparatory Seminar, just a little over two years ago, announced: “Today, with the development of information technologies, . . . social networks, . . . computers and the Internet, to prohibit something is nearly an impossible chimera. It makes no sense.”

There is a fascinating story about them told by Ted Henken and a co-author in “From Cyberspace to Public Space? The Emergent Blogosphere and Cuban Civil Society” in A Contemporary Cuba Reader: The Revolution under Raúl Castro. I’ve provided a brief summary in a note, the major point to be stressed here being that, despite the limited participation by Cubans in the blogosphere, this is a growing public arena of debate and attention.6

Finally, as I have called up the name of Ernesto “Che” Guevera, let me simply say how and why he is part of this legacy involving technology and social development.

The Che here is hardly known outside of Cuba. The Ernesto “Che” Guevara I refer to is the one who, in the aftermath of the Revolution’s victory, soon became the president of the National Bank of Cuba, head of the Department of Industrialization, and Minister of Industries, and was responsible for overseeing the institutionalization and transition to socialism in these arenas for six years, from 1959-65. This is the Che Guevara whom Helen Yaffe has made a point of uncovering in her book The Economics of Revolution and articles whose titles tell much of the story:

• “Ernesto 'Che' Guevara: A Rebel against Soviet Political Economy”
• “Ché Guevara: Cooperatives and the Political Economy of Socialist Transition”
• “Che Guevara’s Enduring Legacy: Not the Foco But the Theory of Socialist Construction”

The three points to emphasize about Che’s work during this time are: #1- He was a vocal and staunch advocate for the adoption and use of the most advanced technology available, saw that as
coming out of the most advanced stages of capitalism, and was visionary and prophetic in terms of what he saw technology becoming. #2- By themselves, the integration and use of emerging tools would not lead to socialism — this was the mistake the Soviet Union was making. By themselves, technological tools would only reproduce capitalist relations of production and consciousness. #3- Socialist education and socially-conscious technology development programs were integral requirements along with technology’s use. 

I trust there is enough here to suggest that the Promise and Peril of the Third Wave in Cuba is even more intense than it is elsewhere in the rest of the world. If you have not otherwise been exposed to CyberMarxism or Community Technology, may these traditions and fields be of use to you.

In addition to Cuba, I do want to note in passing that the matter of the promise and peril of the technological era here has some special meaning for those of us in the US as well. It does so first, from our perspective on socialism; secondly, from our perspective on Latin America in general and Cuba in particular; and, thirdly, for the opportunity to make amends for much of our past and set a better course. I have appended some additional notes on this for you.

All of this brings me finally to sharing with you the presents and proposal I have brought along on this trip and to this seminar, offered to Dean Carlos Delgado of the Facultad Filosofía e Historia here at the University of Havana. As I wrote in the proposal in April where I was looking to see if there was a project I could join with:

In a sense this project has already been developed, and much of it can be seen in the effort entitled Roots of Hope/Raices de Esperanza, at www.rootsofhope.org, described as “an international network of students and young professionals working to inspire young people across the globe to think about Cuba and proactively support our young counterparts on the island through innovative means. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan movement, we seek only to provide youth in Cuba with the tools and skills they deem necessary to build a better future for themselves.” The organization is supported with big name endorsers, a funding program, travel support, and a “Tech4Cuba” component, gathering and distributing new and used phones, flash drives, laptops, and tablets.

Almost ready to sign up, I was stopped cold when I came to Roots of Hope’s basic stated orientation as a self-proclaimed non-partisan effort:
“Right now, 11 million people in Cuba are systematically denied the ability to exercise their most fundamental rights and actualize their full potential. Living under the Western Hemisphere’s last dictatorship, Cuba’s people are denied their most basic rights of free speech, free association and information freedom.”

I can hardly express the anger, sadness, and disappointment I felt reading this. I recently learned a new expression, Fidel’s response to an earlier egregiously conceived US project, this one involving the base at Guantanamo in 1964. “Cortar el agua y la luz,” he said, “Cut off their water and the lights.” Seems like an appropriate curse in this case, too.

This suspicious and stereotypical anti-Cuban government attitude still characterizes a good portion of the American public, extending well into the reaches of those who can be considered “progressive.” But, especially since December 17, those who have long held the Cuban revolution in high regard and who have otherwise considered its governmental and social shortcomings largely a consequence of US policy and practice are becoming more vocal, and more and more Americans are looking to be open-minded and to extend a helping hand.

I hope to see, with appropriate Cuban encouragement, leadership and collaboration, the development of a demonstration project, if not the beginnings of a more sustained effort, that leads to providing a growing source of equipment, software, and technology support useful in building NGO capacity, in establishing community telecentres, and in general contributing to official Cuban technology development practices and policies.

I offer my experience and contacts as may be helpful. I posted notice of this on a dozen community technology lists and received a good number of responses of support and interest. A small organization, “Semi-New” Computers, has given me this laptop with Microsoft and Open Offices and the Latin American RACHEL program of educational resources from the web (see www.worldpossible.org) as a concrete point of departure to donate to some good organization that might contribute to this effort. I ask your help in finding that group and doing that.

I have tried to present two bodies of theory and practice, one in Marxism and the other in community development, relevant to major technology issues Cuba is facing. I want to say thank you, gracias. I welcome your comments, suggestions, and questions about the presentation, the laptop, and the proposal.

Toward the end of the second millennium of the Christian era several events of historical significance transformed the social landscape of human life. A technological revolution, centered around information technologies, began to reshape, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society. Economies throughout the world have become globally interdependent, introducing a new form of relationship between economy, state, and society, in a system of variable geometry. The collapse of Soviet statism, and the subsequent demise of the international communist movement, has undermined for the time being the historical challenge to capitalism, rescued the political left (and Marxian theory) from the fatal attraction of Marxism-Leninism, brought the Cold War to an end, reduced the risk of nuclear holocaust, and fundamentally altered global geopolitics. Capitalism itself has undergone a process of profound restructuring, characterized by greater flexibility in management; decentralization and networking of firms both internally and in their relationships to other firms; considerable empowering of capital vis-à-vis labor, with the concomitant decline of influence of the labor movement; increasing individualization and diversification of working relationships; massive incorporation of women into the paid labor force, usually under discriminatory conditions; intervention of the state to deregulate markets selectively and to undo the welfare state, with different intensity and orientations depending upon the nature of political forces and institutions in each society; stepped-up global economic competition, in a complex of increasingly geographic and cultural differentiation of settings for capital accumulation and management. As a consequence of this general overhauling of the capitalism system, still under way, we have witnessed the global integration of financial markets, the rise of the Asian Pacific as the new dominant, global manufacturing center, the arduous economic unification of Europe, the emergence of a North American regional economy, the diversification, then disintegration, of the former Third World, the gradual transformation of Russia and the ex-Soviet area of influence in market economies, the incorporation of valuable segments of economies throughout the world into an interdependent system working as a unit in real time. Because of these trends, there has also been an accentuation of uneven development, this time not only between North and South, but between the dynamic segments and territories of societies everywhere, and those others that risk becoming irrelevant from the perspective of the system's logic. Indeed, we observe the parallel unleashing of formidable productive forces...
of the informational revolution, and the consolidation of black holes of human misery in the
global economy, be it in Burkina Faso, South Bronx, Kamagasaki, Chiapas, or La Courneuve.

A draft paper on “Manuel Castells’ Information Age Trilogy and the Epic Tradition of Political
Theory — Marxist and Weberian Transformations” is available at

3 For associations with the Center for Global Justice, www.globaljusticecenter.org, see
www.radicalphilosophyassociation.org and www.solidarityeconomy.net.

“The Promise and Peril of the Third Wave: Socialism and Democracy for the 21st Century” is in
the collection of essays, CyberRadicalism: A New Left for a Global Age — and it’s also freely
available in the archives of the Third World Study Group’s publication, CyRev, A Journal of
Cybernetic Revolution, Sustainable Socialism, and Radical Democracy, published from 1994-
is freely available at www.crossroadscounsellinggroup.com/resources/ebook/Toffler-ThirdWave-
complimentsofCRTI.pdf.

4 From the Manifesto on the technological transformation and its promise:

Less than 100 years ago, a majority of the American labor force worked on farms for a
living. Today U.S. farms are the most productive in the world, supplying not only the
domestic market but the world market as well. But now less than 3% of the labor force
works on farms. Mechanization and relatively large amounts of fertile land are only part of
the reason for this. U.S. farmers are also many times more productive than earlier farmers
because of information—whether in the design of equipment, fertilizers or hybrid seeds, or
in advance knowledge of weather patterns transmitted by modern communications.

For its perils:

The advent of the third wave is by no means a twinkling, painless shift into a utopian
wonderland. It is more like a hurricane, leaving disorder and destruction in its wake. The
third wave guts entire workforces — the technological era creates new divisions in the
workforce, and brings industries to the point of collapse. It sabotages old markets and
renders national borders meaningless. It makes possible a glut of high quality and relatively
inexpensive goods, while also producing a radical and uneven restructuring of the working
class itself.

5 Apart from state and municipal programs, my experience with federal agencies — the CTC
Program in the federal Department of Education, the Technology Opportunity Program (TOP)
and the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (B-TOP) in the Department of Commerce,
and AmeriCorps*VISTA, the domestic Peace Corps, in the Corporation for National and
Community Service — and from the organizing and lobbying to get these programs passed, the
field of public policy is a widely active and overlapping arena. In addition to these Congressional
programs, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the prime administrative
regulatory agency for these matters. The Community Technology Review (1994-2005) covered
developments in all three areas of community technology noted here. For its index, see https://peterbmiller.wordpress.com/comtechreview-org.

6 Ted Henken and Sjamme van de Voort, “From Cyberspace to Public Space? The Emergent Blogosphere and Cuban Civil Society” in A Contemporary Cuba Reader: The Revolution under Raúl Castro, ed. by Philip Brenner et al, a collection that includes another essay that was among our recommended readings by Camila Piñeiro Harnecker. I mention this to give it some credence and authority in what is a highly partisan and suspect arena. It is freely available at www.baruch.cuny.edu/wsas/academics/black_hispanic/documents/Cyberspace2PublicSpaceReader-final.pdf. A brief summary of the account they expand upon is as follows:

To be sure, there was a good amount of controversy attendant on the Blogazo organized at the University of Matanzas by La Joven Cuba — a number of groups were not invited and a number boycotted the event. Three months later, a ten-month blockade, from July 2012 through April 2013, was imposed by the University of Matanzas “on the proudly revolutionary but also staunchly independent blog of La Joven Cuba.” There’s all kinds of speculation about the details and why this happened. The interesting point is that it was the intervention of Miguel Díaz-Canel that was responsible for the blog’s return to activity. It was the follow-up from this the next month when Díaz-Canel made the statement quoted above. As Henken and Voort note:

What is new here, of course, is not that a state institution blocked the independent blog of a group of its students but that the blog being blocked turns out to be the very same one administered by the young people who had convened the prorevolutionary Blogazo not three months earlier.

7 Among Helen Jaffe’s writings on Che are:


Re Che’s advocacy of advanced technology, we know this was a key area of his responsibility and what his orientation was. He oversaw the “businesses transferred to the Department of Industrialisation [that] ranged from modern technology plants to artisan workshops” and “the founding of research and development institutes to apply science and technology to production…” His “emphasis on quality control was linked to other concepts in BFS (the Budgetary Finance System he developed) — the aspiration to use the most advanced technology.” Guevara’s “promotion of science and technology within MININD was part of his theoretical understanding that communism should arise out of the highest stage of capitalism.”

Yaffe has a storehouse of quotes directly from Guevara himself that are not only convincing on this matter but that show his foresight in the development of emerging technologies: “We cannot follow the development process of the countries which initiated capitalist development, 100 or 150 years ago — to begin the slow process of developing a very powerful mechanical industry, before passing on to other superior forms, metallurgy, then chemicals and automation after that.” In Yaffe’s word, “The technical capacity for computer based planning operations did not exist in Cuba in 1959, but confident about its progressive potential, Guevara set out on the first steps in that direction.” Guevara argued that “countries that could master electronics and automation technology would be in the vanguard of international development.” As she quotes him: “For a long time cybernetics was considered a reactionary science or pseudo-science… [but] it is a branch of science that exists and should be used.” Is it not likely that to the degree Cuba is advanced in some key technology arenas at present that Che Guevara played an important role?

As to Che’s position on the need for socialist education along with the use of emerging technology tools, between 1959 and 1965, when Che was president of the National Bank of Cuba, head of the Department of Industrialization, and Minister of Industries, he was involved in major studies of Marxist classics and the USSR Manual of Political Economy. He became a major critic of the Soviet system not only for its use of old technology but for doing so “without recognizing the need to change people’s attitudes and values [that] would reproduce capitalist social relations and consciousness. … the Soviet system failed to foster the collective consciousness in workers that was a precondition for socialism and communism.” As Yaffe notes:

Guevara set up the budgetary finance system of economic management to test his theory that it was possible and necessary to raise consciousness and productivity simultaneously, even in an underdeveloped country in the process of socialist construction. The system was openly articulated as an alternative to the Soviet’s “hybrid” system of market socialism.

8 With regards to socialism, Cuba provides a real, live, pulsating, vital socialist country that is an alternative to the dissolved Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and transformed People’s Republic of China and is also a grounded, historical alternative to a wide range of theoretical and idealistic visions and efforts that have otherwise made socialism ungrounded and untested in real world practice. Cuba gives socialism a concrete reality that it would not otherwise have.

The opportunity to talk and think about Cuba, and about Cuba and Latin America is an opportunity to look at ourselves from a key perspective, to do so from the view of thinking about
our own founding’s vitality 50 years after the Revolution, in the mid-1820’s, the time when we adopted the Monroe Doctrine. Such a perspective cannot help but be humbling and provides us with an opportunity to make amends, something I think President Obama was doing as he sat through Raul Castro’s long speech at the recent OAS Summit of the Americas in Panama City April where heads of state normally talk for ten minutes.

In the US, many of the dark moments of our colonialism and involvement in Latin America seem to be little known or restricted to the special knowledge and province of circumscribed left wing radical perspectives. That is clearly not the situation with our relations and activity in Cuba where our history of perniciousness and criminality is as public and American as the Godfather and its vivid portrayal of the events of New Years Eve 1959 in Havana and as well known as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Our presence and use of the facilities at Guantanamo is another foreboding marker of our lawless and pernicious practices; its return to Cuba would be a cleansing act of penitence.