

Cuba in crisis as electrical grid collapses causing island-wide blackout

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By early Monday afternoon, the Cuban National Electrical Union (UNE) claimed to have restored power to 89.3 percent of the capital, Havana, as it brings the national grid back online after repeated failures over the weekend. The grid collapse, which caused an island-wide blackout for the nation of 10 million people, is the result of fuel shortages and deteriorating infrastructure, caused ultimately by the decades-long United States blockade, and deepened by the bankruptcy of the so-called Cuban road to socialism.

Cuba's power grid suffered a complete collapse beginning on Friday, after the failure of its largest power plant, the Antonio Guiteras power plant near Matanzas, at around 11a.m. This caused a chain reaction of failures around the country. Contributing to the collapse of the grid has been a shortage of fuel for the power plants, including seven ship-based, floating power plants Cuba has leased from Turkish suppliers to make up for its own decrepit facilities.

The UNE unsuccessfully tried to bring the grid back up several times over the weekend, ultimately suffering four grid collapses in 48 hours by Sunday. On Sunday, UNE said it had restored power to 216,000 in Havana before the grid collapsed for the fourth time. Many parts of the country remain without power.

Energy and Mines Minister Vicente de la O Levy has claimed that most people will see their electricity restored Monday night, though he said some might wait a bit longer, stating "the last customer may receive service by Tuesday."

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz said that "the fuel shortage is the biggest factor" in the grid collapse. As a result, the Cuban government instituted emergency measures to cut down electrical usage in order to bring the grid back online. As a result, all school and non-essential activities were canceled through Wednesday. As Marrero put it, "We have been paralyzing economic activity to generate (power) to the population."

During the prolonged blackout, even many hotels ran out of fuel for their generators, and a report on CNN indicated José Martí International Airport in Havana was operating on emergency power only, with much of the airport in the dark.

At least some hospitals were reportedly still functioning through the use of generators, but public transportation and much of the economy were basically shut down.

For ordinary Cuban workers, very few of whom have access to generators, the blackout left food, the cost of which takes up a substantial portion of their meager incomes, rotting in refrigerators. In many homes, running water was also cut off, as it is common for buildings to rely on electric pumps to move water up from underground cisterns.

Following Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel's assertion that the country's situation was the result of US "financial and energy persecution," a spokesman for the White House National Security Council absurdly claimed, "The United States is not to blame for today's blackout on the island, or the overall energy situation in Cuba."

In fact, the blockade has deprived Cuba of needed investment, as well as access to supplies and parts for its aging power plants. The main thermoelectric plants used for electricity generation are close to 50 years old and have a lifetime of only 25-30 years.

Additionally, as these power plants rely on crude oil and refining capacity to function, the US embargo on financial and oil services has hamstrung the ability the Cuban government to supply these plants with enough fuel. This is to say nothing of the ongoing attempts by American imperialism to carry out regime change in Venezuela, which has been Cuba's main supplier of fuel. Economic sanctions against Venezuela have caused a significant contraction in that country's oil production, resulting in smaller shipments to Cuba as Venezuela struggles to meet its own internal demand.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, Venezuela cut its oil shipments to Cuba in half this year, to 25,000-30,000 barrels per day (bpd). This is down from the peak of around 130,000 bpd Venezuela was sending a decade ago. Imports from Mexico and Russia that made up the balance of Cuba's domestic fuel needs have also fallen. Indeed, so precarious is the fuel situation that bad weather last week preventing the docking of a ship carrying fuel

contributed to the lack of power generation.

Even before the grid collapse, Cubans were experiencing blackouts for 10 to 20 hours per day in some cases, especially outside of Havana. The total blackout has raised the specter of the return of social protest to the island. In July 2021 widespread protests emerged against blackouts and electricity shortages, and there were also some smaller protests earlier this year after the slashing of fuel subsidies and the implementation of a “macroeconomic stabilization program.” Later in June, the government announced it would begin implementing austerity under the banner of a “war economy,” as a result of the profound social, economic and political crisis gripping the island.

After the grid collapse began, President Miguel Diaz-Canel appeared on television wearing a military uniform to warn the population against any protests, stating, “We are not going to accept or allow anyone to act with vandalism and much less to alter the tranquility of our people.”

He said violators would be treated “with the severity that revolutionary laws provide,” and claimed protesters were acting “under the direction of the foreign operators of the Cuban counter-revolution.”

Reports indicated there have been scattered protests around the island, including barricaded streets, though the lack of internet access and power have no doubt prevented reports from emerging.

O Levy claimed it was essentially against Cuban culture to criticize the government, saying, “It is Cuban culture to cooperate,” and he added that reports of protests were “incorrect” and “indecent.”

As Cuba suffered with the blackout, Hurricane Oscar made landfall near the eastern city of Baracoa as a category 1 hurricane, bringing 80 mph (130 kph) winds to an area in which a great deal of electrical infrastructure is concentrated, including several larger power plants in Holguín and Renté. Though it is unclear if the storm caused a great deal of damage, the island has been hit repeatedly by hurricanes in recent years. Its prolonged crisis, aside from hampering its ability to remain afloat economically in the context of changes and new demands by capitalist global industries, is also preventing it from withstanding changes brought about by global warming.

Due to the profound crises and widespread shortages of electricity, food and other necessities around the country, Cuba has experienced one of the biggest population losses recorded outside of an open war. Since 2022, more than a million people, or 10 percent of the population, has left the island, according to Juan Carlos Alfonso Fraga, the head of National Statistics and Information Office, who revealed the figure during a July session of the National Assembly.

The official figures made public by the government

revealed the population fell to 10,055,968 in December 2023 from 11,181,595 in December 2021. Fraga noted that the trend in population loss had continued in 2024, meaning the population had fallen below 10 million. At least one estimate, by Juan Carlos Albizu-Campos of the Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue in Cuba, places Cuba’s current population at 8.62 million, noting the government had not carried out a required census, which is currently delayed until at least 2025.

Apparently, 405,512 people also died during the period outlined by Fraga, or 3.6 percent of the population, a high number that is likely the result of an aging population in which one-fourth of Cubans are over 60 years old, and the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to infect Cubans while public health measures to mitigate the spread of the disease are basically nonexistent, as in other countries around the world.

The collapse of Cuban electrical infrastructure, as well as the shredding of nearly all that remains of Cuba’s social safety net and infrastructure, underlines the role of American imperialism, which never accommodated itself to the existence of the Cuban Revolution and any challenge to its untrammelled hegemony in the Caribbean. It also shows the impossibility of the so-called Cuban road to socialism, which truly was only a more radical form of the bourgeois nationalist movements in the post-war period, and which has only ever sought to be recognized as legitimate by the US government.

As the WSWS noted recently in relation to bourgeois nationalist regimes in the Middle East, a key characteristic of bourgeois nationalism is to “endlessly proffer compromises with the imperialist powers in an effort to strike some sort of negotiated settlement that leaves them intact. They are desperate to find an accommodation with Israel and the United States, because they are terrified of the revolutionary implications of any serious struggle against them.”

The only solution for the deep crisis in Cuba is to draw the lessons from the long history of Castroism and all forms of petty-bourgeois nationalism, and work toward the construction of a section of the ICFI in Cuba.



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