

Cuba changes, but not to capitalism



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By Marce Cameron

Cuba is changing, but not back to capitalism, as the Western corporate media and some misinformed leftists would have us believe.

The Cuban Revolution is immersed in a process of critical reflection and debate on the future of Cuba's socialist project. At the same time, Cuba's Communist Party leadership has initiated far-reaching changes to Cuba's socialist model, changes which are needed if the Revolution is to endure in the post-Fidel Castro era that is now approaching.

The nature of these changes is captured well by respected Cuban journalist Luis Sexto: "Cuba, rigid for many years, shakes off the starch that immobilised it to change what is obsolete without compromising the solidity of the Revolution's power". The power that Sexto refers to here is not the power of a privileged bureaucratic elite that rules through totalitarian methods, as happened in the Soviet Union from Stalin to Gorbachev. It is state power in the hands of Cuba's working people: millions of workers, farmers and students.

The Cuban Revolution is a collective project of individual and social liberation that strives to realise certain ethical and political principles and objectives. Among these are international solidarity, national sovereignty, social justice and equality, participatory democracy and the ethic of "being" as opposed to the ethic of "having", meaning that the yardstick by which an individual should be judged is not the size of one's bank balance but one's personal qualities and social contribution.

Radical renovation

These core ethical and political principles have taken deep root in Cuban society, and their validity is not questioned by Cuba's revolutionaries. "The system's principles must be defended", says Rafael Hernandez, editor of Cuba's pro-revolution *Temas* magazine, "but the model itself must be transformed". A radical renovation of Cuba's socialist model — that is, of the Revolution's concepts, structures, methods and mentalities — is needed because much of this model is obsolete, and obsolescence brings with it the danger of stagnation and retreat.

This obsolescence has two sources: idealistic errors that flow from the Revolution's profound humanism and desire for social justice; and the malign influence of Soviet bureaucratic "socialism", which still casts a long shadow. The demise of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main ally and trading partner, plunged the Revolution into a deep and prolonged economic crisis known as the "Special Period", from which it is yet to fully emerge. This crisis brings to mind images of long queues for rationed products, bicycles replacing buses and oxen replacing tractors, as the Revolution drew on its wellspring of political consciousness and social solidarity to sustain the core social achievements flowing from the 1959 revolution.

Today, Raul Castro insists on the need to change "erroneous and unsustainable concepts about socialism that have been deeply rooted in broad sectors of the population over the years, as a result of the excessively paternalistic, idealistic and egalitarian approach instituted by the Revolution in the interests of social justice". Socialism "means social justice and equality, but equality of rights, of opportunities, not of income. Equality is not the same as egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is in itself a form of exploitation; exploitation of the good workers by those who are less productive and lazy".

This implies the elimination of most state subsidies other than free health care and education, which are guaranteed in Cuba's socialist constitution, and the recovery of the role of wages as a means to allocate goods and services according to the individuals' or work collectives' labour contribution. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explained in the 19th century, only in a fully communist society — a remote objective for the Cuban Revolution today and conceivable only long after capitalist rule has been overthrown on a world scale — could distribution conform to the communist principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs".

As Cuban historian Carlos Alzugaray Treto points out, "the honesty, sensitivity and the spirit of sacrifice championed by Che Guevara have been, in general, paradigms of Cuban communist conduct and not the privileges and perks of the *nomenklatura*, as happened under [Soviet bureaucratic 'socialism']". This difference goes to the heart of why Cuba has not succumbed to bureaucratic degeneration and capitalist restoration.

During the Special Period, wages insufficient to cover all basic necessities have given rise to generalised petty corruption, not only among administrators but also among the general population. This, in turn, has contributed to instances of more serious corruption among public officials, creating a social base for pro-capitalist ideas and influences. Yet the PCC has preserved its character as a selective organisation of the most class-conscious and committed revolutionaries.

New generation

The PCC's Sixth Congress in April will be the last presided over by the *historicos*, Fidel's generation of revolutionary leaders. Today, the Revolution looks to new generations of capable leaders to continue the struggle. Many would agree with Rafael Hernandez: the Revolution "must go forward and leave more and more room for the new generations. Those new generations are demanding capability, a degree of decision over their own ideas, their own problems and criteria about the meaning of a socialist society. And I think that the socialism of the future is the socialism of the young."

In preparation for the Congress, millions of Cubans, both PCC members and non-members, are participating in grassroots debates on the Draft Economic and Social Policy Guidelines in PCC base committees, workplaces and neighbourhoods. Raul Castro has repeatedly urged a free and frank debate on the future of socialism in Cuba, breaking from past practices of false unanimity and the suppression of differences.

Two poles have emerged in this debate. What could be called the critical renovationist current, led by the PCC leadership, recognises the need for far-reaching changes to Cuba's socialist model in the direction of more public debate, more socialist democracy via the decentralisation of social planning and an opening to small-scale cooperative and private enterprises to boost the overall efficiency of the economy, and thus the material wellbeing of working people — while maintaining the dominance of socialist state enterprises and of planning over the market.

At the other pole are those who fear such changes, either because they have erroneous or obsolete ideas about the socialist-oriented society or because they defend administrative prerogatives and, in some cases, illicit privileges from criticism and initiative "from below". Some would like to see Chinese-style pro-capitalist policies. They will be disappointed by draft Guideline No. 3, which states: "In the new forms of non-state management [of social property], the concentration of ownership in legal or natural entities shall not be permitted"; and by a payroll tax that effectively limits the size of small private businesses to 10-15 workers.

The PCC leadership strives for consensus on the key elements of its proposals for the way forward, the economic aspects of which are summarised in the 291 paragraphs of the Draft Guidelines. With no alternative proposals on the table at a national level, it's likely that the Guidelines, enriched and amended on the basis of the public debates but retaining their core principles and key elements, will be adopted by the PCC Congress in April. Cuba strives for socialism, not capitalism. ♦

A USB for the UJC!

Can you spare a USB stick?

Cuba's communist youth organisation plays a vital role in the Cuban Revolution.

A youth activist organisation funded largely by member contributions — in a small Third World country subject to a US economic siege — it runs on a shoe-string budget.

If a computer breaks down in the national office in Havana, there's no money to replace it. Even USB sticks are in short supply. So we've launched an appeal for donations of USB drives. Big or small, new or used, one or many.

Help the new generation of Cuban revolutionaries keep the flame alive, for all of us. Their struggle is our struggle.

Contact the Club to make a donation.



Club aims

Cuba-Venezuela



1. To spread awareness of the inspiring achievements of the Cuban and Venezuelan peoples' power revolutions in education, health care, poverty reduction, genuine democracy, ecological sustainability and international aid to the Third World among students and staff on campus, including by initiating or supporting, together with other progressive organisations on campus, peaceful actions which bring students together to speak out around the burning issues of our times.

2. To contribute to the building of a global movement of solidarity with the Cuban and Venezuelan peoples to support their right to decide their own form of government and social system in the face of corporate media lies, interference, destabilization and the threat of US military aggression.

And in case you were wondering...

You don't have to consider yourself left-wing, socialist or revolutionary to be involved. Labels are unimportant. If you're inspired, or open-minded about these revolutions, then check out the club. And no, we don't have any official ties with Cuba or Venezuela and we don't receive any funding from these countries. We are an independent club. Solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela does not mean necessarily agreeing with everything these revolutions and their leaders say and do.

Activities

Films
Tours
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Forums
Posters
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Information stalls
Fund raising
Solidarity projects

