

# Continuity and political change in Cuba

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Spanish original in *Temas*, Havana, October-December, 2009

Translation: Marce Cameron

<http://cubasocialistrenewal.blogspot.com/>

## **Translator's note**

*There is a rich discussion and debate taking place among Cuba's revolutionary intelligentsia about how to "change everything that must be changed". Most of this debate is inaccessible to English-speaking audiences. Temas is a highly respected Cuban journal edited by Cuban political scientist Rafael Hernandez. Launched in 2005 as "a space for critical reflection and debate", it also publishes contributions from progressive intellectuals outside Cuba. The following essay appeared in the October-December 2009 edition.*

*Carlos Alzugaray Treto is a Cuban writer, diplomat and professor, lecturing at Havana University and the Raul Roa Garcia Higher Institute of International Relations. With degrees in history and diplomacy, a master's degree in contemporary history and a doctorate in historical sciences, Alzugaray Treto is considered an expert on US-Cuba relations. He has had a long and impressive diplomatic career, serving as Cuba's ambassador to the European Union from 1994-6.*

*"Cuba fifty years on: continuity and political change" is a superb summary of the political and economic challenges facing the Cuban Revolution today, a panorama that demands nothing less than an integral transformation of Cuba's socialist model. Taking in the broad sweep of the past half-century of revolution, Alzugaray Treto's grounded analysis and sober optimism are an antidote to the shrill catastrophism emanating from some quarters of the international left who fear that the reform process will lead to capitalist restoration.*

*This essay is representative of the best analysis contributed by what could be called the critical renovationist current within the Cuban Revolution, one pole in the national debate initiated by Raul Castro. This current is led by the PCC leadership. At the other pole are those who are wary of debate and fearful of change, some because they cling to erroneous or obsolete ideas about socialism, others because they defend administrative prerogatives and, in some cases, illicit privileges due to corruption. Within the critical renovationist current there is a spectrum of opinion on what must be changed and how these changes should be carried out. The PCC leadership strives for*

*consensus on the most important changes while urging a break with the harmful practice of false unanimity.*

*Published in late 2009, it was written before the announcement of the date for the PCC's 6th Congress in April this year that coincided with the publication of the [Draft Economic and Social Policy Guidelines](#), that are the subject of grassroots debates in the PCC, workplaces and neighbourhoods in preparation for the Congress.*

*One weakness of Alzugaray Treto's analysis, worth drawing attention to, is that more could have been said about the significance of the opening of Venezuela's Bolivarian socialist revolution and the importance of the Cuba-Venezuela alliance for the future of Cuba's socialist project. Another weakness, it seems to me, is his uncritical appraisal of the Chinese leadership's claim that they are building socialism in China, albeit with "Chinese characteristics" (such as the fact that there is no barrier to multi-millionaire Chinese capitalists joining the so-called Communist Party).*

*Such illusions in the Chinese "road to socialism" are widespread in Cuba, largely for the same reason that most Cuban revolutionaries once looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration: given the necessity for the PCC leadership to maintain excellent trade and diplomatic relations with the Chinese regime — which has its own geopolitical reasons for supporting revolutionary Cuba against US imperialism unrelated to fomenting the global proletarian revolution — little real information about the social and ecological costs of China's rampant capitalist development or leftist critiques of this process are readily accessible to most Cubans. What the inner circles of the PCC leadership really think about China's trajectory is unknown and can only be speculated, for obvious reasons.*

*It would be to misread Alzugaray Treto's comments on China as saying that Cuba should copy "the Chinese model". Indeed, he explicitly warns against this and there are other caveats too, such as the need to take into consideration "the criticisms that have been made by the left". What he suggests Cuba can learn from China and apply, specified in five points, would not amount to the restoration of capitalism in Cuba; Cuba's political and social order would remain essentially different from that of China. It should also be noted that Alzugaray Treto's advocacy of a deepening and a decentralisation of Cuba's socialist democracy would help safeguard Cuba against precisely such a drift towards capitalist restoration.*

*In his summary, he reaffirms the noble objective at the heart of the Cuban Revolution: the cultivation of a new human being, less alienated and egoistic, a fuller and freer expression of the human personality in its harmonious interrelation with humanity and the rest of nature on this fragile Earth — an objective that is not remotely shared by Beijing's ruling elite. Finally, the geopolitical realities of Cuba, a small post-capitalist society just 150km from the imperialist monster to the north, leave no room for a "Chinese road". Either the Cuban Revolution renews itself with the help of Venezuela's Bolivarian socialist revolution and the other progressive forces on the planet, or the flame of revolution is extinguished and Cuba returns to its former status of a US neo-colony. Now more than ever, the Cuban Revolution needs our understanding and our solidarity.*

*Please email me if you'd like me to send you a PDF version of the Spanish original. For those who read Spanish and are interested, I've included the author's footnotes in the translation.*

*Marce Cameron  
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January 2011*

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# Cuba fifty years on: Continuity and political change,

## Carlos Alzugaray Treto

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Carlos Alzugaray

*In every moment what must be done is what is necessary.* Jose Marti

*Revolution is having a sense of the historical moment; it is changing everything that must be changed.* Fidel Castro



When Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power to Raul Castro on July 31, 2006, Cuba began a process of political change which has brought it to a decisive crossroads. Almost 19 months later on February 24, 2008, the VII Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power (ANPP) designated a new government, headed by the until then acting President.

An epoch unknown in the recent history of Cuba has opened, in which Fidel Castro has ceased to be the head of state and/or government for the first time since February 1959 — when he assumed the functions of Prime Minister — to become “comrade Fidel”. It cannot be denied that in the historical moment in which Cubans live, new perspectives of inevitable changes have opened, with the consequent uncertainty that accompanies them.

## The crossroads: continuity and change

This essay is an attempt to reflect on continuity and political change and their significance. It does not attempt to take sides in a debate or to indicate inevitable changes. Neither does it aspire to propose finished, comprehensive alternatives; the topic, by itself, requires an openness to dialogue, debate and deliberation. As Julio Carranza has written: "Scientists and scientific institutions have a responsibility of public service, that of direct communication to society of information and specialist analysis; not as a political proposal, but as fundamental interpretations that contribute to elevating the cultural level and the general understanding of different themes." [1]

The starting hypothesis is that a foreseeable process of evolution towards new forms of leadership of Cuban society has begun. This is not what political science calls a "transition" that has given rise to a whole school of "transitionology" [2], although the necessity for adjustments, transformations and changes within continuity could correspond, in the broad sense, to that notion. However, this concept is currently too "loaded", and presupposes a "change of regime" and, above all, the enthronement of political systems that Atilio Boron has called "democratic capitalism" in societies previously governed by regimes characterised as "authoritarian" or "totalitarian" [3]. Cuba is not this kind of society, so in its case there is not the same points of departure, nor of arrival, as those of the most studied "transitions".

For evident reasons, Fidel Castro has led Cuba in a way that cannot be repeated. Some [Cuban] leadership sectors have insisted, on more than once occasion, that his absence will change nothing. In 2002, the Constitution was amended in line with this reasoning to incorporate the idea of the irrevocability of socialism. This reaction is explained by the necessity to emphasise the continuity of the [socialist] project against the efforts to reverse it from without, above all by the U.S. Unfortunately, it can also be used to legitimise immobility and oppose all reform. Nevertheless, as [Argentinean socialist] Atilio Boron has argued recently:

"It's absurd to anathematise any reform as heresy or a betrayal of socialism — understanding this to be an unalterable dogma not only on the plane of principles, which is good, but also with regard to historic projects, which is bad — because this would obviously mean the consecration of a suicidal immobility, the negation of the capacity for self-correction of errors and the renunciation of collective learning, which are indispensable conditions for the permanent perfecting of socialism." [4]

From this forewarning, it is obvious that changes will have to be introduced in the manner of conducting politics, in the method of governing, although these changes will obey an internal dynamic and not the demands from outside. As Raul Castro put it well, "We will never adopt a decision, not even the most minimal, as a result of pressure or blackmail, no matter where it comes from, whether it be a powerful country or even an entire continent." [5]

These changes are taking place in the midst of continuity and in the way in which changes are always made in Cuba, breaking with schemas, which raises questions about what will be the probable evolution of the Cuban nation in the new circumstances. Especially outside the island, there are numerous musings and conjectures based on processes [of capitalist restoration] already known, historically close and superficially similar. Even among the left, all kinds of conjectures arise. But Cubans, once again, will come up with their own solutions to the present challenges.

## **Fidel Castro, the Revolution and his historic role**

The Cuban Revolution, creator of the political regime that currently presides over the destiny of the country, has been both a necessary and original process. Its necessity, in historical terms, arises from what could be defined as the four great national aspirations that were frustrated from the 19th century onwards: national sovereignty, social justice, sustainable economic development and democratic self-government. The triumph of the Revolution in 1959 was the result of specific internal circumstances and not foreign impositions, as happened with Eastern European socialism with the exception of the USSR.

The outstanding political success of Fidel Castro, in his 47 years of government, has been precisely his capacity to lead the Cuban nation towards the achievement of these four historic aspirations, despite deficiencies and setbacks. Not all of these aspirations have been achieved in the necessary form and magnitude, but the situation of Cuba today represents a radical change from the Cuba of 1958, a transformation in the desired direction by the people and their political vanguard despite the obstacles put in their path, in particular the permanent hostility of a powerful neighbour, the US.

To illustrate this point it's worth quoting extensively Professor Jorge I. Domínguez, from Harvard University, hardly a partisan of socialism or of the prevailing model in Cuba:

"To honour honour: that noble phrase of Jose Martí that has taken root in the Cuban cultural vocabulary for more than a century. We honour, then, Fidel Castro as we watch the sun set on his life, not only those who supported him but also those, such as I, who didn't. He was the transformer of a people into a nation, who decisively modernised this society; who clearly understood that Cubans wanted to "be a people", not just appendages of the US. It was he who understood that this hypochondriac people required more doctors per square centimetre than any other on the face of the Earth. He was the architect of a policy of investment in human capital that converted Cuban children into the Olympic champions of education in Latin America and that, therefore, allows us to glimpse a better future for Cuba. He was the architect of a politics that allows Cubans of all races to have access to health care, education, the dignity corresponding to every human being, the right to think that my children and grandchildren, whatever the colour of their complexion, deserve respect and the same opportunities as the rest. It wasn't he who came up with the idea that women should have equal rights in society, but he is a promoter of gender equality in public life."

“He was responsible for a gesture for which humanity is grateful: risking the blood of his soldiers for the noble cause of contributing powerfully to preventing the racist regime of South African apartheid from annexing Angola. It was he, too, who deserves recognition for the contributing to the end of apartheid in South Africa, the independence of Namibia and for defending the independence of Angola. The day that Fidel dies, the flags of these African countries will reflect the national mourning.[6]

"The likelihood that both the people and the Cuban leadership would renounce, willingly and consciously, the achievements of these 50 years is highly improbable, if not implausible. However, the successors of Fidel Castro in the leadership of the nation face serious challenges to achieve the reproduction of the system without his physical presence. The reversibility of the Cuban revolutionary process as a result of internal errors and not external pressure was dramatically exposed by Fidel Castro himself in the University of Havana on November 17, 2005."[7]

Among the strengths of the Cuban political regime in its present structure is, in the first place, its degree of internal and external legitimacy. The external legitimacy derives from the Cuba's well-known international activism and a broad network of foreign relations that has allowed the country to twice lead the Non-Aligned Movement and to weave together a string of successes in the UN General Assembly around a resolution that condemns and demands an end to the US blockade against Cuba. To have neutralised the policy of international and diplomatic isolation of Cuba has been one of the most important triumphs of Cuban diplomacy.

The internal legitimacy — alongside recognition by the majority of what has been called "the conquests of the Revolution" — is supported by an institutional framework that rests on two key pillars: the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). It is a very common error outside Cuba to suppose that the PCC is copied from similar experiences in the old [Eastern] European socialist countries. Despite the fact that the PCC leadership has committed errors that have been recognised and/or rectified, and that methods and styles of work bearing the imprint of their origins in the Soviet political model still persist — such as the excess of centralism, for example — in reality the Cuban leadership has been concerned with two central aspects: the vanguard character of its militants that must be the first in every political social initiative, and the struggle against manifestations of corruption in its ranks. 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 *nomenclatura*, as happened under actually existing socialism [e.g. Soviet bureaucratic "socialism"].

The provincial and municipal leaderships of the PCC constitute the most important link of government at the local and provincial levels, in close coordination with the organs of People's Power (the provincial and municipal assemblies). While in general this system functions satisfactorily, the contradiction in the provinces and municipalities is much greater than at the central level, where the hegemonic role of the PCC is exercised without any discernable difference between the political and the administrative. At these

levels, no citizen has the slightest doubt that the first secretary of the corresponding PCC committee is the highest administrative authority in the territory; even exercising formally the presidency of the Defence Council, the highest organ of government in the case of natural disasters or war. At the level of the country as a whole, however, given the coincidence between the positions of president/vice-president [of the Council of State] with that of the first/second PCC secretaries, it is much clearer.

Nevertheless, and this is a significant challenge, we are still far from having achieved a truly democratic culture. As Aurelio Alonso has pointed out, "The Leninist proposition of 'democratic centralism', as a formula for proletarian power, has ended in the consecration of vertical centralism to decide and democratic centralism to carry out, when its merit would consist in every centralised action being subject to what is democratically decided".[8]

In too many leaders the idea seems to predominate that the only objective of debate is to convince the citizens, whatever they may think, that the course of action drawn up by the higher-ups, at any given moment, is what is truly revolutionary and that any criticism or dissent arises from ideological confusion or worse, from counter-revolutionary attitudes. "Bold attempts at analysis at the margins of official discourse are stigmatised as immature, naive, incautious or simply provocative".[9] According to the political discourse of many leadership cadres, in the majority of instances those who dare to do so "are not sufficiently well informed", but neither is this information available because "divulging it could be useful to the enemy". Also prevalent at times is the paternalistic reproach that he or she that disagrees or dissents is falling into errors of "naivety".

On the other hand, Cuba has lacked a real culture of debate, dialogue and deliberation, and this is felt particularly by the young generations who are better educated and more cultured. Thus Jesus Arencibia Lorenzo, in article published in *Alma Mater*, organ of the University Student Federation (FEU), refers to the "seven bricks" that obstruct the path towards a truly productive deliberation at the service of the Cuban socialist project: fear of risk, the besieged fortress syndrome, the information monopoly, confusing ambiguities, extreme Puritanism, total planning and the language of tasks.[10]

Finally, the need to defend the gains of the Revolution in the face of the growing aggressiveness of imperialism and the practices of the "statisation" of property and the centralisation of the process of decision-making carried out throughout these years, leading to what Mayra Espina has termed the "hyperstatisation" of society. "All this is expressed in the hyperstatisation of social relations, centralisation and verticalism, authoritarian paternalism, distributive homogenisation with insufficient sensitivity to address the diversity of necessities and heterogeneous interests (of groups, territories, localities, etc.) and involves processes of alienation due to the lack of real participation in decision-making".[11]

Sometimes a malformation is perceived in the relationship between the citizens in general and those functionaries, also citizens, that have certain responsibilities in the state apparatus. These bureaucrats conduct themselves better as chiefs handing out



orientations as to what can and cannot be done, and enjoying these prerogatives as persons [supposedly] at the service of the people and subordinated to them. Back in 1963 Raul Roa defined bureaucratism as "one of the worst hindrances of [the building of] socialism".[12]

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## Need for political and economic change



In the absence of Fidel Castro's capacity to bring people together and forge consensus, there will be a greater need for a mentality of respect for dialogue, debate and deliberation, which implies the forging of a real, effective and deliberative participation. It is beyond the scope of this essay to debate the question of alternative democratic models. To the traditional notion of "representative democracy" typical of capitalism and its political institutions,

closely associated with the idea of "procedural democracy", the majority of the left has countered with the concept or notion of "participatory democracy". To this is added the idea that deliberation serves to clarify, still more, the norm that the citizens should not only participate in the taking or execution of political decisions, but also contribute to their elaboration through a rational and informed discussion of the possible options.

This concept of deliberative democracy has been proposed by contemporary political science as a way of resolving the existing [democratic] deficit in developed capitalist societies. The promoters of this idea have emphasised that it means, in essence:

"[T]he need to justify the decisions made by the citizens and their representatives. Both would be expected to justify the laws that would be imposed. In a democracy the leaders would therefore explain the reasons for their decisions, and respond to the arguments put forward by the citizens in reply. But not all questions require deliberation all of the time. Deliberative democracy opens up spaces for other forms of decision-making (including negotiations and agreements between groups, and behind-the-scenes decisions taken by executives), provided that these forms themselves are justified at some point by a deliberative process. Its primary and most important characteristic, therefore, is the requirement that *reasons are given* [for a proposal or decision]."[13]

Regarding the other institutional pillar of the system, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) together with its important sister organisation, the Ministry of the Interior — tracing its origins to the Rebel Army, the antecedent of the FAR — constitute the most

effective and prestigious of the institutions created by the historical leadership of the [Revolution]. Their popular origin, their constant link with the problems of the populace, their historic contribution to the defence of the country and the liberation of other peoples, and their economic pragmatism — demonstrated by the introduction of the "Enterprise Improvement" program in their industries — mean that they enjoy significant confidence in broad sectors of society. The high-ranking officers of the armed services carry on a tradition of heroism, pragmatism, trustworthiness and professionalism that is unusual in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the world.

The cohesion of these two institutions (the PCC and the armed forces), which is necessary to continually nurture, will be mediated by the prevailing tendencies in other significant leaderships in Cuban society. On the one hand, there is the notorious [socialist state] enterprise sector, part of which is run by high officials of the FAR, but also by a new generation of economists and administrators. Presumably there is a willingness to maintain consensus, but among this new generation is observed a desire for a more flexible approach to economic policy, also present among the leadership of the armed forces but for different reasons. Among them, the problem of administrative efficiency; also, the need to maintain social stability. It is not a question of establishing a market economy, but of adopting measures that would give more autonomy to the administrations [of state enterprises], as is established in the Enterprise Improvement program initiated in the military industries sector, whose final aim is to stimulate production and the development of the productive forces. It is also about further opening up the spaces for individual initiative created by the Special Period economic reforms in the mid-1990s. These demands have been expressed in various recent analyses by Cuban economists.[14]

Traditionally, the youth, above all the students, have had a protagonist role in Cuban politics. Almost all of the country's top leaders have passed through the ranks of the University Student Federation (FEU), which was their first school of public participation.[15] This organisation and the Union of Young Communists (UJC) have constituted, in recent years, two of the pillars of the key social programs promoted by Fidel Castro. Despite the growing demands for their protagonist role to be enhanced, their role in the period of ongoing transformations will have to take into account the politics articulated by other leadership elements. The difficulties of this process are not ignored by the various social sectors, as Carlos Large Codorniu, ex-president of the FEU, pointed out in a symposium published by the magazine *Temas*: "It's not a question of a failure to communicate, but there are still many new ideas that need to be expressed".[16]

The organisations based in the working class and the peasantry will tend to seek new positions in the [political] structure. It seems likely that they will be given a more protagonist role under Raul Castro, precisely because of the need to articulate a new national consensus. Such is the case with the process launched recently of granting idle state-owned farmland in usufruct with a view to increasing agricultural production, in which the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) has played an important role. On the other hand, an indication of the growing presence of the Cuban Trade Union

Confederation (CTC) was the national consultation on the new Social Security Law that took place throughout 2008, before being approved by the National Assembly.[17] While there is no doubt that this process gave the opportunity for a broad debate, the unanimous manner in which the Assembly adopted this law was not a real reflection of the different opinions that exist.

Finally, the Cuban intelligentsia, recently stirred into action by the memory of the "grey five year period", in the first half of the 1970s — an epoch in which the cultural policy of the USSR was copied — will strive for greater autonomy and freedom, while defending its commitment to the central objectives of Cuban society. This was demonstrated in the most recent congress of the Union of Artists and Writers (UNEAC), which was a significant process of deliberative democracy and of an opening of spaces for public dialogue and debate.

### **The economic challenges**

The most important internal challenge confronting the leadership headed by Raul Castro will be that of resolving the growing demand that the wages and legal incomes of all Cubans have the value needed to cover their daily necessities — a demand that is often expressed through criticism of the system of monetary duality. Since 1989, two significant equilibria promoted by the government have been broken. One, between the [legal] incomes of the population and the prices of goods of primary necessity, some of them rationed via the ration book system and others subsidised by the state budget. The other equilibrium ruptured during the [post-Soviet] Special Period was [the relative social equality] between different sectors of the population. While Cuba abandoned its egalitarian policies at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a healthy tendency to not allow excessive inequalities persisted. Given the [economic] reforms introduced from 1993-4, inequalities arose that have been more irritating given the schism between wages and purchasing power, and the negative phenomenon that many of these inequalities are the result of illegal and corrupt practices.

Most Cubans aspire to maintaining the current levels of social security, but would like to see Marx's formula [for distribution in the socialist-oriented society] applied: "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their work". This precept does not apply today. Although it is very difficult to diagnose exactly what the national consensus is regarding this theme, it could be affirmed that maintaining an essentially socialist economy, the inhabitants of the island want to see greater possibilities for prosperity, including handing over more [economic] sectors to individual initiative and broadening those that exist. This, certainly, is nothing new. Back in 1973, in his speech marking the 20th anniversary of [the] July 26 [assault on the Moncada military garrison that launched the revolutionary struggle], Fidel Castro, after pointing out the need to "courageously rectify" the "errors of idealism that we have committed in economic management", stressed that communism "can only be the fruit of the communist education of the new generations and the development of the productive forces", and pointedly insisted:

"We are in the socialist stage of the Revolution in which, given the imperative of material realities and the level of culture and consciousness of a society recently emerged from capitalist society, the form of distribution that corresponds to this stage is that proposed by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their work!'"[18]

In his speech of July 26, 2008, President Raul Castro described this quotation of Marx from Fidel's 1973 speech as "fundamental", and affirmed: "This speech, as well as a solid analysis of the past and the present at that time, is an accurate and precise evaluation of the harsh realities that the future would hold, and the ways to confront them."[19]

The situation has compelled many Cubans to supplement their [legal] incomes in the so-called "informal sector", with activities of varying degrees of illegality, often necessitated, it should be said, by irrational prohibitions and bureaucratic decisions. The Cuban leadership has understood, correctly, that this phenomenon is the most harmful for the sustainability of the socialist project, as recognised by Fidel Castro himself in his speech at Havana University, quoted previously. However, despite some salary increases and other measures, there is the perception that the government's responses are insufficient.



This weakness is made more acute by various recent factors. Between 2006 and 2008 GDP growth rates were announced that surpassed 10%, which created higher expectations, still not satisfied, for the personal prosperity of every citizen.[20] The principal strategic allies of Cuba in this epoch — China, Venezuela and Vietnam — continue, in different ways and conditions, to pursue economic policies that allow more space for individual initiative to achieve personal wellbeing. Natural disasters [i.e. the ferocious 2008 hurricanes that caused US\$10 billion in

economic losses, equivalent to about a fifth of GDP] and the global economic crisis at the end of 2008 have aggravated the general dissatisfaction.

In summary, to understand the necessity to successfully confront corruption and illegalities, and in general to preserve the Revolution, it would be apt to recall one of the prescient phrases of Jose Marti: "To be good is the only way to be happy. To be cultured is the only way to be free. But, given human nature, one needs to be prosperous to be good."[21]

What happened in the years of the illness and convalescence of Fidel Castro shows that important changes are taking place in the way of doing politics and in the search for

solutions to the challenges identified. This is not only a question of Raul Castro's preference for emphasising collective leadership, and for avoiding the high level of public intervention and the long speeches of Fidel, but of Raul defining and promoting a series of policies that go to the heart of the problems facing the country.

The form in which the transfer of powers took place, in which Raul Castro has put his own stamp on the political style and priorities of government, indicate that between Fidel Castro and himself there is a complete identity [i.e. a coincidence of programmatic views] within diversity. One could conjecture that there is a recognition and mutual acceptance of their respective roles. While Fidel was the visionary who founded and traced out the general lines of development of an independent and sovereign Cuba, Raul has been the guardian who has loyally carried out his role as "protector of the rearguard", as he himself has said. At the same time, by knowing how to step back from his responsibilities and allow his successor to implement the necessary measures according to his own talent, style and orientations, Fidel Castro has guaranteed two things: the continuity of the [Cuban socialist] project in the new conditions, and the success of his successor in being who he needs to be, the figure that will facilitate the transformation of the way of doing politics and of governing Cuba.

The convening of a PCC conference in the near future, given the impossibility of holding the 6th Party Congress [now scheduled for the second half of April, 2011 — translator's note], should aim to define and consolidate some of the economic and political changes that will guarantee the process of transition within continuity, towards more finished and successful forms of the structuring of society that have been outlined in the principle speeches of Raul Castro since he assumed the top post in the government; but subject to its own process of deliberation which has been convened. The President himself has affirmed the necessity for "collective thinking on the experiences of these years of the Revolution in power", and "to shape, with a view to the future, the policies of the Party in the different areas of our society".[22

In these speeches and interventions by Raul Castro there emerges with great clarity the priority given to the principal economic challenge, which also translates into a political challenge: improving the quality of life of the population through increasing production and services. During 2008, after being elected President of the Council of State and of Ministers, Raul reaffirmed the following concepts in two key speeches, the first on the occasion of his election as President on February 24, the second during the first session of the VII Legislature [of the National Assembly] on July 11:"I reiterate that the priority

for the country will be satisfying the basic necessities of the population, both material and spiritual, through a sustained strengthening of the national economy and the productive base, without which, I repeat, development would be impossible. [...] Today it is a strategic objective to advance in a coherent manner, solid and well thought-through, to achieve the recovery of the role of wages and that everyone's standard of living is directly related to their legal incomes, that is to say, to the [social] importance and the quantity of labour they contribute to society.[23]

"For the worker to feel themselves to be an owner of the means of production does not depend solely on theoretical explanations — we have been doing this for around 48 years — nor on the fact that their opinion is taken into account in their workplace activity. It is very important that their incomes correspond with their personal contribution, and the fulfilment by the workplace of the social object for which it was constituted, in other words, achieving the production or the provision of services that have been established [in the plan]. [...] Socialism means social justice and equality, but equality of rights and opportunities, not of incomes. Equality is not egalitarianism. This, in the final analysis, is also a form of exploitation: of the good worker by the worker who isn't, or what is worse, by the idler." [24]

The achievement of these cardinal objectives implies challenges at the heart of which are debates of great importance for the future of the Cuban socialist model. On December 28, 2007, referring to the necessity to increase agricultural production, the President stressed: "The studies have advanced and we will continue to act on them as rapidly as possible in the circumstances, *so that the land and the resources are in the hands of those who are capable of producing efficiently*, that they feel supported, are socially recognised and *receive the payment they deserve* [emphasis added by author]."[25]

Earlier, in his first keynote speech in 2007, on July 26 in Camaguey, alluding to the indispensable improvement in the economic results of the agricultural sector, he affirmed: "To achieve this objective the necessary structural and conceptual changes have to be introduced." The central theme of these words was that of "working with a critical sense and creatively, without stagnation or schemas", for which it would be necessary "to question everything we do in an effort to do it better every time, to transform concepts and methods that were appropriate in their time but which have been superseded by life itself." [26] These ideas have materialised first in agriculture; but

hopes have been raised that they will be applied to other productive and service sectors.

Finally, like it or not, there is the implication of posing the relevance for the future of the Cuban process the development model adopted by the Chinese Communist Party leadership, taking into account the criticisms that have been made by the left, but also the evident results in terms of economic development and the generalised improvement of the quality of life of the Chinese people. On November 17, 2008, *Granma* published an article titled "China continues demonstrating the validity of socialism", in which it emphasised the economic successes of this country and cited the words of Fidel Castro: "China has become objectively the most promising hope and the best example for all of the countries of the Third World." [27]

Without doubt, in terms of territory, population, economic-social magnitude, historical traditions and cultural identity, the differences between Cuba and China are so great that it would be impossible to copy the development model of the Asian giant. However, in order to achieve the measures proposed, various aspects of the reform process implemented in China are valid for Cuba. In the first place, the priority given to developing the productive forces to achieve socialist ends. Secondly, the adoption of the principle that socialism is constructed on the basis of the specific characteristics of each country. Third, the emphasis on results as a criteria for defining economic policy, as in the famous Confucian phrase of Deng Xiaoping: "It's doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, what's important is that it catches rats." Fourthly, recognition and utilisation of monetary-mercantile relations through the formula of the "socialist market economy". And finally, the permanent revision of the means and forms adopted, so as to make the indispensable adjustments derived from changes in the social context and of unintended consequences that every course of action inevitably brings with it. [28]

Applying these practical principles, the Chinese leadership has been able to lift 300-500 million people out of poverty and create a middle class estimated at around 180-200 million people in a relatively short time, which gives the country a significant social stability. Certainly these achievements have not been free of negative elements, but it must be recognised, firstly, that there is no such thing as a perfect society and, secondly, that the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party are the first to recognise these difficulties. Given that they observe the principle that everything must be revised again and again, as Raul Castro proposes, the leadership of this Asian country is able to introduce, at any moment, the policy rectifications that are needed.

The other important element in defining the economic policy that the Cuban leadership has decided on tentatively through the principal orientations of Raul Castro relates to the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the US against Cuba. Denouncing the objectives and the pernicious and aggressive character of this policy, the President affirmed in July of 2007:

"We need to involve everybody in the daily battle against our own errors which aggravate the objective difficulties derived from external causes, especially those provoked by the US economic blockade, which constitutes in reality an implacable war against our people and the current administration of that country is especially bent on finding the smallest ways of harming us." [29]

In February 2008 he put this idea in the following terms:

"We are aware of the enormous efforts required to strengthen the economy, indispensable premise to advance in any other sphere of society, in the face of the true war waged by the US government against our country. The intention has been the same ever since the triumph of the Revolution: to make our people suffer as much as possible until we renounce our decision to be free. *It is a reality that far from intimidating us should make us grow stronger. Instead of using it as an excuse for our errors, it should spur us to produce more and provide better service, to strive to find the mechanisms and means that would allow us to eliminate any hindrance to the development of the productive forces and the full use of the potential for savings and the correct organisation of work* [emphasis added by author]. [30]

As well as encompassing a central element to achieve the economic development of Cuba, the notion that this can be achieved in conditions of the harshest US economic, commercial and financial blockade contains within itself the germ of what could be called the achievement of economic invulnerability. This is particularly important when we observe the changes taking place in this neighbouring country, weakened by an economic, diplomatic, political and military crisis, and with the installation of the government of President Barack Obama. To be able to affirm that the blockade, although harmful, cannot block the prosperity of the country as a whole, and that its citizens, individually, would snatch away from any administration in Washington that



which it has always considered a basic instrument of pressure [i.e. privations and hardship induced by the blockade].

### The political challenges

On the political plane, what has characterised the principle pronouncements of President Raul Castro is a constant call for the deepening of democracy and dialogue, debate and deliberation as irreplaceable instruments for the creation of consensus.

"There is no need to fear differences in a society such as ours, where due to its essential nature there are no antagonistic [social class] contradictions because there are not the social classes that would give rise to them. From the profound exchange of divergent opinions come the best solutions, if such exchanges are guided by sound purposes and the viewpoints are expressed responsibly." [31]

In his view, not even the fact that the concerns of some citizen could be manipulated by the imperialist propaganda machine should prevent them from being considered:

"We're not going to stop listening to the honest opinion of anyone, so useful and necessary, because of the gibberish that is spouted, so ridiculous sometimes, every time a citizen in our country says something to which these same promoters of spectacle would not pay the slightest attention if it were said anywhere else on the planet." [32]

In this way, [Raul Castro] invited all the citizens to discuss even the question of socialism and the ways and means of building it. In February 2008, he recalled that at the University of Havana [on November 17, 2005] Fidel had made the following self-criticism: "A conclusion I have come to after many years is that among the many errors we have all committed, the most important error was believing that someone knew how to build socialism." [33] Then, in December of that year, Raul returned to this theme in his comments to the National Assembly in the following terms:

"Are we building socialism? Because to be honest, I also say that, as well as these problems that we're analysing regarding the new Social Security Law, we work little, we work less. This is a reality that you can verify for yourselves in any corner of the country.



*Pardon the frankness of my words, you don't have to agree with what I'm saying. I share these ideas first and foremost to provoke us to think, not only yourselves, compañeras and compañeros deputies, but all of our compatriots, the whole country. Some are personal judgements that should not be understood as immutable. They are things that we have a duty to study and debate profoundly in an objective manner, which is the only*

*way of continuing to approach the most convenient formulas to move forward with the Revolution and socialism [emphasis added by author]."*[34]

This invitation to disagree and dissent, including with regard to his own views, reiterated what he had said in relation to controversial ideas raised during debates around the draft Social Security Law:

"The process of studies and consultations with all of the workers that will begin next month in September, prior to the approval of the Law by the National Assembly in December, will serve to clarify all of the doubts and will provide an opportunity to express any opinion. Everyone will be listened to attentively, whether or not their views coincide with those of the majority, as has happened with the opinions coming out of the process of reflection on [my] speech of July 26. *We don't aspire to unanimity, which would be fictitious, on this or any other theme [emphasis added by author]."*[35]

In his reflection on the necessity for [decision-making] processes that are ever more democratic during his acceptance speech on his election as President, he did not exclude the PCC:

"And I added that if the people are firmly united around a single party, this party must be more democratic than any other and with it society in turn, which after all, as with any

human work, can be perfected, but this is undoubtedly a just society, and within it everyone has the opportunity to express their opinion and, more important still, to work to make reality what we agree on in every case."[36]

A little earlier, in December 2007, during his summary of the conclusions of the process of national deliberation around his speech of July 26 of that year, he had stressed the need for all PCC or government leaders to stimulate the broadest debate and deliberation among their subordinates:

"This process ratifies something fundamental: those who hold a leadership position must know how to listen and create a propitious climate for the others to express themselves with absolute freedom. This is something we need to incorporate into the work style of every leader, alongside the orientation, the criticism or the appropriate disciplinary measure. Our people receive information in many ways and we're working to perfect these and eliminate the harmful tendency to triumphalism and complacency, to ensure that every *compañero* with a certain political or administrative responsibility reports in a systematic way on what they are responsible for with realism, transparently, critically and self-critically."[37]

Another theme that is stressed in the speeches and interventions of Raul Castro is that related to institutionalisation. This is a matter of particular importance given the cumulative malaise from the effects of bureaucratism, inefficiency and cases of corruption. As was demonstrated with the dismissals of highest-level leaders [the secretary of the Council of Ministers, Carlos Lage, and the foreign minister, Felipe Perez Roque] in March 2009, excessive secrecy on the part of cadres and leaders in a climate of institutional weakness is a breeding ground for the practices of influence-peddling and moral hypocrisy. Strengthening institutionalism is a priority task in the present circumstances.

Thus, once elected President, Raul Castro asked for and was granted by the National Assembly the authorisation to modify the governmental structure:

"Today a more compact and functional structure is required, with a smaller number of organs of the central state administration and a better distribution of the functions they carry out. In summary, we have to make the work of our government more efficient [...]. Institutionalism, I repeat the term: intuitionism is an important support for this decisive

proposal and one of the pillars of the invulnerability of the Revolution in the political terrain, which we must work to continually perfect." [38]

These proposals around the importance of institutions and their efficiency, which cannot be separated from their legitimacy, run counter to the generalised view that the best way to struggle against the bureaucracy is the subversion of institutions and their substitution by informal mechanisms for decision-making and implementation. The reality is that the undermining of institutions inevitably leads to the loss of legitimacy of the system as a whole. Hence the choice of a policy that obliges those who lead and comprise institutions to conduct themselves within the framework of legality, and to assume an attitude of democratic responsibility subject to the social control of subordinates and citizens. No system of vertical supervision from the top down can be more effective than popular control.

One aspect that has not been dealt with sufficiently and in a public manner, although it has been debated in more private and semi-public forums, is the role of the social sciences in the present conjuncture. In the context of the call to dialogue that has characterised the speeches of the Cuban president, stimulating ever more and better empirical studies of Cuban social reality, and bringing together Cuban social scientists — whose commitment and prestige is recognised — to participate in the popular consultation on the basis of their professions and specialities is a necessity of the moment. Two initiatives would seem decisive: a national conference of the social sciences and giving free reign to the constitution of national associations of sociologists and political scientists, as is now happening in other branches of science and with economists and historians. On the other hand, what is needed is the cultivation of a social science with "committed autonomy" that would facilitate the development of its core work.

The press and the communications media in general should play an important role. The deficiencies of the media have been criticised repeatedly, but there has been very little improvement. For example, Cuba must be one of the few countries that stands out for its scarcity of daily opinion pages [in the press]. We live in a world in which the use of information and digital technology via the internet is increasingly prevalent and useful. It would be impossible to conceive of a prosperous and developing society in which these media do not play their necessary roles as transmitters of information and propitiators of dialogue, debate and deliberation. The right to access the internet is becoming, little by little, commonplace. In Cuba this is insufficiently recognised. While there are technical

difficulties, the reality is that there is no policy of stimulating the use of these computerised information techniques in all social life, as is needed. Beginning with the Youth Computer Clubs [that provide free access to email and Cuba's intranet, a restricted version of the internet, and training] and the University of Information Sciences, even the existing controls on internet usage are outdated and prejudicial.

## In conclusion

Cuba finds itself at a crossroads in which changes within continuity will have to be introduced. These changes are already underway and are reflected in measures and pronouncements of the new government led by Raul Castro. This will mean, inevitably, a transformation of Cuban society, both economically and politically. The Party Conference [now scheduled for sometime in 2011, after the 6th PCC Congress in April that will focus on economic policy] will be obliged to respond to the set of problems discussed here, and others. It is not a question of denying the gains achieved under the leadership of Fidel Castro, but of making the necessary adjustments and transformations. This obliges us to make use of the different spaces [for deliberation and debate] that are available and create others as needed to give a response to the following questions:

1. What are the bases for the construction of a just society in harmony with the ideals of socialism? The contradictions between the distinct forms of property [socialist state, cooperative and private]; between centralisation and decentralisation; between moral and material incentives; between the development of the productive forces and that of revolutionary consciousness will have to be resolved. What Cuban history has demonstrated, and that of other [post-capitalist development] models, is that hyper-centralisation, the underestimation of the laws of the market [i.e. of the need to combine social planning with subordinate market mechanisms], the inadequate handling of the relationship between different kinds of incentives and the undervaluing of efficiency and the development of the productive forces, leads to blind alleys and does not promote the formation of the new human being [a reference to the socialist personality, free of the egotism and alienation of individuals under capitalism, associated with the ideas and example of Che Guevara in the 1960s]. If it is true that there are evident dangers in the unrestricted use of market mechanisms, ignoring the necessity for [economic] progress and prosperity for the citizens, collectively and individually, does not solve this problem.

As Jose Marti said: "But, given human nature, one must be prosperous to be good".

2. How to strengthen and perfect democracy? Cuban society needs a strengthening and development of the democratic forms it has created. The absence of Fidel requires the search for new ways to strive for consensus. Introducing the concept of deliberative democracy, together with a perfected notion of participation, through which leaders and cadres would not only be responsible to their superiors but would be obliged to discuss the reasons for their decisions. This would make more real and effective the citizens' input in decision-making, always in an informed and reasoned manner. This is the path that will make it possible to overcome some of the present deficiencies of the system. But this requires that more and better information is available to the citizenry and the creation and promotion of the necessary public spaces for dialogue, debate and deliberation.\*

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  2. Michel Dobry, «Las vías inciertas de la transitología», *Temas*, n. 50-51, La Habana, abril-septiembre de 2007, p. 23.
  3. Atilio Borón, *Tras el búho de Minerva: mercado contra democracia en el capitalismo de fin de siglo*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, DF, 2000, pp. 135-211.
  4. Atilio Borón, *Socialismo siglo XXI: ¿hay vida después del neoliberalismo?*, Ediciones Luxemburg, Buenos Aires, 2008, p. 117.
  5. Raúl Castro Ruz, «Socialismo significa justicia social e igualdad, pero igualdad no es igualitarismo», Discurso pronunciado en la primera sesión ordinaria de la VII Legislatura de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, La Habana, 11 de julio de 2008, disponible en [www.cuba.cu/gobierno/rauldiscursos/index2.html](http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/rauldiscursos/index2.html).
  6. Jorge I. Domínguez, «El comienzo de un fin», *Foreign Affairs en Español*, v. 6, n. 4, México, DF, octubre-diciembre de 2006, pp. 129-135.
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  8. Aurelio Alonso, «Continuidad y transición: Cuba en el 2007», *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Bogotá, abril de 2007.

9. Debo esta frase a Julio Fernández y está tomada de un documento de reflexión preparado para un debate promovido por Julio César Guancho en el seminario «Por una cultura revolucionaria de la política», La Habana, noviembre de 2007.
10. Jesús Arencibia Lorenzo, «Debates en la beca: el ensueño y los ladrillos», Alma Mater, n. 453, La Habana, agosto de 2007.
11. Mayra Espina, «Mirar a Cuba hoy: cuatro supuestos para la observación y seis problemas-nudos», Temas, n. 56, La Habana, octubre-diciembre de 2008, p. 136.
12. Raúl Roa García, Retorno a la alborada, t. 2, Universidad Central de las Villas, Santa Clara, 1964, p. 590.
13. Amy Gutmann y Dennis Thompson, Why Deliberative Democracy?, Princeton University Press, Princeton y Oxford, 2004, p. 3.
14. Pedro Monreal, «El problema económico de Cuba», Espacio Laical, n. 28, La Habana, abril de 2008; Jorge Mario Sánchez Egozcue y Juan Triana Cordoví, «Un panorama actual de la economía cubana, las transformaciones en curso y sus retos perspectivas», Documento de trabajo n. 31, 26 de junio de 2008, Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Estratégicos e Internacionales, Madrid, 2008; y Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva, «La economía en Cuba: un balance necesario y algunas propuestas de cambio», Nueva Sociedad, n. 216, Caracas, julio-agosto de 2008.
15. Lamentablemente, en muchos casos se han producido promociones aceleradas desde la alta dirección de la FEU a las principales instancias partidistas y gubernamentales del país, en lo que el propio Raúl Castro ha llamado la creación de «dirigentes de probeta».
16. Rafael Hernández y Daybel Pañellas, «Sobre la transición socialista en Cuba: un simposio», Temas, n. 50-51, La Habana, abril-septiembre de 2007, p. 160.
17. Salvador Valdés Mesa, «Las asambleas mostraron, una vez más, el apoyo de la clase obrera a la Revolución y a su dirección»,
18. Fidel Castro Ruz, «Discurso en el acto central por el XX aniversario del asalto al cuartel Moncada», Santiago de Cuba, 26 de julio de 1973, disponible en [www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos](http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos).
19. Raúl Castro Ruz, «Nuestra batalla de hoy es la misma iniciada el 26 de julio de 1953», Discurso en el acto central por el LV aniversario del asalto al cuartel Moncada, Santiago de Cuba, 26 de julio de 2008, disponible en [www.cuba.cu/gobierno/rauldiscursos/index2.html](http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/rauldiscursos/index2.html).
20. A la altura de 2009, la economía cubana ha sido sacudida por huracanes, aumentos de precios de los alimentos, baja en los de los rubros de exportación y crisis económica global, entre otros factores. La situación se hace sumamente difícil, como han explicado, desde distintos ángulos, dos trabajos recientes: Pavel Vidal Alejandro, «El PIB cubano en 2009 y la crisis global», IPS-Economics Press Service, n. 9, La Habana, 15 de mayo de 2009; y Carmelo Mesa-Lago, «La paradoja económica cubana», El País Digital, Madrid, 12 de julio de 2009.
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25. Raúl Castro Ruz, «¡Y a trabajar duro!», Intervención ante la ANPP, 28 de diciembre de 2007, Granma, La Habana, 29 de diciembre de 2007. (El énfasis es mío. C. A.)
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29. Raúl Castro Ruz, «Trabajar con sentido crítico...», ob. cit.
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31. *Ibidem.* (El énfasis es mío. C. A.)
32. Raúl Castro Ruz, «¡Y a trabajar duro!», ob. cit. 33. Citado por Raúl Castro Ruz, «Discurso en la sesión constitutiva...», ob. cit.
34. Raúl Castro Ruz, «¡Y a trabajar duro!», ob. cit. (El énfasis es mío. C. A.)
35. Raúl Castro Ruz, «Trabajar con sentido crítico...», ob. cit. (El énfasis es mío. C. A.)
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