

COMMENT

Cuba in Transition?

Judging from the Cuban media Cubans of various generations, especially among those under 45, yearn for radical changes “within socialism” (since only socialism can conserve the Revolution and its social gains).

Some want to attack problems of alienation and emphasize the ideas and example of Che Guevara. Most want to conquer poverty, reduce class differences, introduce more innovativeness with more direct workers’ or community control and less top-down politics, in brief, a transition to new forms of socialist democracy while oxygenating existing ones.

Several economic reforms are already well underway. Two examples indicate the dynamism of the current transition. The limit on wages a worker can earn has been removed as part of the effort to increase production and reduce worker absenteeism. An agrarian reform has begun, permitting development of public lands by private farmers, usually cooperatives at the request of those participating, with price supports for farmers’ crops to reduce food imports and make productive unused tillable land that is to remain state-owned.

Yet new complications loom on the horizon, including a potentially sizeable influx of money from families visiting from the United States, thus widening the gulf between the “new rich” and the rest of society.

So far Cuba, arguably the world’s only surviving socialist system but one with problems typical of small Caribbean island societies, has managed to escape the tragedies wracking its neighbors and accomplish revolutionary changes of considerable magnitude.

This is a socialism that is always evolving and self-correcting, as in the 1980s rectification campaigns against Soviet-style Stalinist influences; the “Special Period” following the decline in trade with the Soviet bloc in the 1990s; or the successful “Energy Revolution.”

The Cuban Revolution has deep historical roots that permeate Cuban culture. It has always been a complex process based on realities like foreign aggression by the United States. It continues its transition toward an internationalist socialism based on Cuban practices and values developed since the earliest days of slave revolts and the struggle for national independence, social justice, freedom, and equality.

Key to the Revolution’s successes has been its internationalism. Martí, Fidel, Raúl and Che, like Leon Trotsky, always insisted that no revolution could survive if limited to only one country.

The poet-revolutionary soldier José Martí in the 1880s and 1890s proclaimed the struggle against imperialism and called for Latin American unity to confront it. Martí insisted that “Patriotism is Humanity” and “Patriotism is nothing more than love.”

The Martí legacy continues to guide Cuba’s transition today.

During the 1990s economic hard times, instead of turning inward, Cuba expanded its internationalism, sending more doctors, teachers, and other professionals to needy countries, a generous move that—together with the Revolution’s ethical grounding—helped save the island’s socialism. □ *[contributed]*

