

European specialists pointed out that by 1980's civil society in Eastern Europe has been as oppressed and atomised as Cuban society. In many countries, change came from above. It is possible that the Cuban state is not as strong as it appears. The possibility exists of the regime falling down like a house of cards.

The necessity for individual initiative to cope with constant shortages has made some segments of society more independent. Increasingly, people are no longer dependent on the state for employment. It may be that a space for possible opposition is growing in the ranks of the self-employed. Meanwhile, food riots may serve as the necessary catalyst for change. Contrary to Eastern Europe, the role of intellectuals seems to have rapidly diminished since 1996. However, the elites are not monolithic either. Differentiation is required between hard-liners and technocrats (who provide the former with advice and know how). Perhaps, there is a potential for a rift within the leadership ranks. Moreover, before 1996, limited NGO activism was allowed. Spaces exist, although oppressed, for change to occur. Attention should be paid to the role of the U.S.A., particularly the Right-wing lobby, and the presence of foreign journalists in an event of change.

Some asked the question whether there is a role for the Cuban diaspora living in the U.S.A. in transforming Cuba. Others stressed the possible reaction of the U.S.A. to the collapse of Communism in Cuba and the danger of American neocolonialism. Attention was paid to the possibility of a Chinese model for Cuba whereby the economy is liberalised while political freedoms continue to be curtailed. Do economic and political reforms have to be implemented simultaneously? Other questions included whether it is possible to have social justice and political freedom at the same time and whether economic freedom would only open opportunities for a Cuban mafia to flourish. What would be the social consequences of free markets in Cuba, particularly for women and the underprivileged?

4. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, despite the different contexts, Cubans and others can learn from the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the decade of transition. It is unlikely that the regime in Cuba can outlive Castro in the present form. Cuba has the opportunity to avoid some mistakes Eastern Europe is still grappling with. Even neo-liberal economists like Joseph Stiglitz have admitted the flaws of implementing free markets too fast. The social nets build by the Communist regimes do not have to be dismantled along with the "KGB." The involvement of civil society is imperative.

Canadian foreign policy should support these ideas/lessons. Canadians could prepare to build civil society in Cuba. Economic arrangements should reflect this effort. Economic negotiations and agreements should consider local culture and needs. Through the human security lens, issues as drugs, crime, and child exploitation could be addressed.