

3. Challenges of a Potential Transformation: Lessons from Eastern Europe

While many Cubans perceive the regime as unsustainable they do not see a way out. What are the alternatives to the current Cuban stagnation? In theory, there are three prerequisites for a rebellion. First, people perceive they are being mistreated. Second, there exist viable alternatives to their present condition. Third, a catalyst acts as a mobilising factor. In respect to the first prerequisite, the state has been successful in blaming the U.S.A. for economic difficulties. There is no clear alternative or programme of change articulated either inside or outside of the government in Cuba to fulfil the second prerequisite. What would happen a day after a revolution? Without such a plan no catalyst will rally people for change.

The decade of transition in the East presents a mixed picture. While some countries seem to be on their way to success, others, including Russia, remain in an almost permanent crisis. The entire approach to transition is being re-evaluated by the leaders of the reform process themselves from, the relationship between economic reforms and democratisation to the role of civil society in transition.

On the one hand, the collapse of Communism in the East brought immediate political freedoms. Some economic successes include macroeconomic stabilisation and the emergence of small businesses. On the other hand, institutionalising "democracy" proved to be a much more difficult task. While edifices of a democratic regime have been erected (i.e., elections, multi-party systems, parliaments, Constitutions), elements of a non-democratic system persist (i.e., corruption, links between business and political leadership, a weak inactive civil society, an arbitrary legal system, the chasm between state and society and so on). In some cases, the social costs of transformation have been quite staggering (see, the recent United Nations Development Programme report on transition countries).

Another important determinant of the path of transition in Eastern Europe has been the international environment. The global monetary system, trading regimes as well as emerging global production, have all posed opportunities and challenges for the crumbling planned economies.

While the East European experience with the end of Communism and a decade of transition may offer some lessons to the Cubans, there has been no systematic analysis of transition or post-Communism in Cuba. The Cuban leadership has been reluctant to initiate any official analysis of the Communist collapse and what followed. Some roundtable participants argued that a decade is too short a period to determine the long-term path of transition in Eastern Europe. Statistics from the East, in many instances are inadequate guides to long-term phenomena.

Some participants questioned the assumption that Communism would automatically collapse with the departure of Fidel Castro and/or his brother. Others drew attention to the weakness of civil society and expressed their doubts about bottom-up change. However, the East