

language and the importance of discourse and words in communicating with Cubans and formulating policies. Nobina Robinson, FOCAL, reminded us that human rights are not exclusive to a few dissidents but impact the entire Cuban population. Lynn Mancino, Revenue Canada, said that since Cubans are very entrepreneurial people, Canada could help them liberalise and offer its expertise in tax collection systems. "Taxes are necessary to pay for a democratic society," he noted.

3. The Cuban Economy and Canadian Businesses in Cuba

Julia Sagebien, Dalhousie University, pointed out there has not been much economic reform in the past three years. The introduction of incremental market reforms was used as a vaccine against full blown capitalism rather than a step towards liberalisation. Indeed, the hard-line discourse intensified in the recent past and the language of reform was practically banned. Tax reforms have been halted. Presently, new economic reform is very unlikely. Everybody is waiting either for Fidel Castro to die or for the U.S.A. to lift the embargo. Canadian foreign policy should therefore adjust its expectations. While dialogue should be maintained, Canada should keep its own ground, especially on human rights, and find gaps through which real change can be promoted. Young Cubans should be targeted, the Cuban diaspora involved and potential transition challenges considered.

David Allan, joining the roundtable by phone, shared his experiences in doing business in Cuba. His company markets Cuban medical inventions in North America. It submits pre-clinically tested drugs to Health Protection Canada -- a body which approves them for human clinical trials and general use. The company has to raise money to finance the endeavour and find partners capable of manufacturing the inventions. A number of Cuban invented drugs are now in use and generating revenues. In response to a question posed by Anna Nitoslawska, Canadian Labour Congress, about the impact of York Medical on the labour relations in Cuba, Mr. Allan responded that there is no measurable direct effect since the revenues are not redistributed among individual workers. Instead, they finance the operation of those medical institutions involved in the project (through a joint venture).

He pointed out that while the medical research and development system in Cuba is good, there is a pervasive shortage of capital. (Researches are put in charge of manufacturing and are guided by a policy of "if you can not make it do not research it.") Well educated Cubans often live in poverty. Some are being forced to abandon their intellectual work for more lucrative jobs such as driving a taxi. Meanwhile, the most wealthy are often those with access to foreign currency (i.e., prostitutes, hotel workers, and so on).

The challenges of doing business in Cuba are numerous. They include, for instance: red tape or arbitrary use of rules and regulations. Without the help of the Canadian Ambassador and the officials at the Canadian Embassy, business in Cuba would be unimaginable. A friendly stance on the part of the Canadian government also facilitates operations of Canadian businesses. The