

CIDA and Revenue Canada projects were negotiated. Some positive movement on human rights was also detected. Trade has been ongoing but difficult. A reversal of these relatively positive developments occurred in late 1990's. In February 1999 a group of high profile dissidents was arrested and tried even after Prime Minister Jean Chretien personally requested their freedom. Cuban government rhetoric intensified and academic freedom was further restrained. As a result, Canada stopped implementing agreements and considering new initiatives. Efforts to reintegrate Cuba into the Hemisphere also halted. Despite these setbacks, the relationship between Canada and Cuba has been maintained and no change in the relationship is expected.

Critique and Analysis

Yvon Grenier, St. Francis Xavier University, offered a critique of the Canadian approach. He argued that a regime's nature should guide foreign policy. The fact that Cuba is a repressive police state should, therefore, bear on our attitude towards it. A positive outreaching policy may not only appear to sanction such a regime, but may also inadvertently reinforce it.

According to Grenier, the policy of constructive engagement is an end in and of itself. The ultimate objective of Canadian engagement in Cuba is unattainable so long as Cuba remains a police state. Constructive engagement only fulfils the Canadian government's commitment to having a foreign policy independent from that of the U.S.A. Driven by domestic pressure, the Canadian government has thus made a conscious choice between cooperation and human rights in favour of the former. In fact, there is very little constructive engagement with Fidel Castro on human rights. Cooperation with Cuba will not lead to the improvement of human rights on the island, instead, it may legitimise a regime that represses them.

The constructive engagement should be dropped and replaced by an approach similar to the one adopted by the European Union, while maintaining grassroots initiatives and aid assistance. A Code of Ethics for Canadian companies in Cuba could also be beneficial to fostering human rights. Canadian foreign policy should conceptualise our national security as separate from human rights. The Human Security approach can conflate the two policy objectives and may lead to misguided policy.

In response to Grenier's critique, some participants argued that the motivation for constructive engagement has been the anticipation of chaos, should the regime collapse. While the Canadian government should not have underestimated the siege mentality of the Cuban political apparatus, fostering good relations with a potentially reform-minded administration seems prudent.

Laurie Wiseberg, pointed out that some specialists on the region often consider economic and social rights as separate from other human rights. Since the former have been promoted in Cuba, some observers tended to overlook the lack of the civil and political rights. According to Wiseberg, such separation is no longer viable, especially as economic and social rights begin to