

international concerns, as well he might—for the Amnesty International reports on human rights abuses in Mexico are chilling indeed. Some would argue that he has been unsuccessful in both domestic and international arenas, and that he was wildly optimistic to even attempt such reforms. (Others would say that he is to be commended for trying to bring in badly needed change, and that the weight of seven decades of PRI government, and a Congress that is opposed to his reforms, are simply too onerous a burden to overcome). The next presidential elections will allow the vox populi in Mexico to be heard, and the “Cuban question” with its multifaceted repercussions, will undoubtedly be a major talking point.

Be that as it may, it is worth noting that the Fox administration’s hard-nosed approach to seek change in the human rights policy in Cuba backfired disastrously. Pressure on Cuba—by the countries that voted against Cuba in the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva in the spring of 2003—did not lead to an improvement in the human rights situation. In fact just the opposite happened. The rounding-up of some 75 opposition figures in the spring of 2003 (all of whom were accused of being on the Washington payroll) revealed once again that, when the Cubans feel pressured, they react by suppressing dissent.

The domestic political scene in Cuba is worth mentioning in passing, since there has clearly been a hardening of the political arteries in Havana in the last five years. Indeed, in conflict with a number of important partners in recent years, Cuba has amplified the differences rather than downplay them. In many ways this complements the radicalization of the revolutionary process in domestic economic concerns, to a large extent the result of Cuba having survived the worst of the “Special Period.” Indeed, among the revolutionary leadership there is a feeling that, having almost caught up with the economic stability of a decade ago, it is now time to revert to the days of greater equality, of a purer form of socialism. The elusive (and tenacious) search for a level playing field in socio-economic concerns has also been accompanied by a dogged pursuit of a more aggressive South-centred foreign policy, and a decreased interest in making concessions to potential allies (such as Mexico, the European Union, or even Canada).

This ongoing campaign to return to revolutionary socialist roots has been seen in a number of recent economic developments, ranging from limiting the number of professions that self-employed workers can engage in to increasing prices on consumer items not covered by the ration book. In foreign policy terms it is reflected in strong support for the Chávez government in Venezuela, and for fostering ties with a number of Latin American and African countries. As Cuba becomes the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement this year, this trend will be expected to continue. The resultant polarization poses a challenge for Mexico (at least under Fox), which seeks increasingly to move away from the South-South axis, instead promoting ever-closer ties with the North.

It is important to bear in mind when analyzing Mexico-Cuba relations (and in many ways Canada-Cuba relations too) that this relationship does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, to use the catchy title of a recent essay on the subject, it takes “three to tango”—and the bilateral connection simply cannot be conceived without taking into account the massive role of the United States in