

reasons behind the political crisis facing Cuba. During all that time, Cubans have been socialized to believe that the government knew best, and responded en masse with cries of *Comandante en Jefe, ordene!* ("Commander in Chief, tell us what to do"). The time has clearly arrived for the revolutionary government to have more faith in the population at large, and to decentralize its authority.

THE WESTERN MEDIA TRADITIONALLY MISREPRESENTS Cuba, largely because it does not understand the revolutionary ethic which permeates its very essence. The Cuban people are indeed a revolutionary people: they have put the entire "developed" world to shame by their extremely generous civilian and humanitarian aid programmes throughout the developing world, and traditionally have inculcated a spirit of cooperation and sharing in domestic chores. Perhaps just as important, they are fully aware that life for Cuban exiles in the United States is not that easy – with scarce job opportunities, as well as racism and limited access to health care facing exiles there.

At the same time they are distraught at the idea of continued (and apparently endless) belt-tightening that is expected of them. An increasing number also feel that it is time for them to have more say in the direction of the government's policies, and to be given greater access to information. The world has changed irrevocably, they claim, yet the government – Fidel Castro especially – continue with the basic approaches of three decades ago. The economic model is clearly unworkable, the Communist Party largely incapable of resolving the nation's difficulties, and significant political change is needed if Cuba is to weather the international storm roaring all around it. Yet so far the government has given little indication that it means to make any significant changes.

ONE INNOVATIVE IDEA BEING PURSUED BY THE government shows the degree of desperation felt by Fidel Castro. It involves a piece of legislation – Law 50, enacted a decade ago, but only recently pursued with some determination – that eagerly seeks foreign investment. Joint enterprises are sought, combining foreign investment and resources with domestic plant and skilled labour. Generous provisions in the law allow profits to be repatriated in hard currency, with the industry eventually passing to Cuban hands.

At the same time that foreign capital is being wooed, individual Cubans are largely forbidden from seeking to develop their own

talents. This approach to the idea of capitalism as a catalyst for socialist development is of course heresy from the perspective of Marxist theory. The fact that a double standard should be applied to the Cuban people is, moreover, a matter for great concern. In addition, the continued emphasis on foreign tourism to bring in badly-needed hard currency, continues to frustrate Cubans who are increasingly isolated from the best beaches, hotels and restaurants, and excluded from the "dollar stores" where foreigners only can shop.

IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO SAY WHAT WILL evolve in Cuba. A direct military intervention by the United States (as seen in Grenada or



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Panama) is unlikely, as is an internal coup. Yet pressure is building from below with the economic squeeze, and this may embolden extremist elements in the powerful US Cuban community. A combination of siege mentality in Havana and the triumphalist noose-tightening in Miami could aggravate the present crack-down on dissidents in the face of a perceived national security threat. However, the continued popularity of Fidel Castro – despite the awesome economic difficulties facing the nation – should not be underestimated.

The most likely scenario, therefore, is the continuation of the current approach by the government, with Castro again seeking to kickstart an ailing economy while acting as a catalyst for revolutionary unity. It has worked on many occasions before, although never have the storm clouds gathering on the horizon loomed so ominously. The government's strategy will entail an ongoing appeal to nationalist sentiment, while the economy grinds down relentlessly, and the next stage of the official plan (gloomily, but accurately entitled "Operation Zero") is steadily prepared. In the past, Fidel Castro's clear convictions and charisma have been sufficient to rally Cubans

to the revolutionary cause, encouraging them to tighten their belt and wait for better days. Yet this is a process of ever-diminishing returns, and for the first time in thirty-three years the charisma might not be sufficient.

Whether Castro succeeds or not, it is clearly time for a series of dramatic changes – both of the revolutionary leadership and of the economic model – and not just the relative tinkering that resulted from the recent party congress. While the Cuban population is clearly in favour of maintaining the gains of the revolution, they want the same rights being offered foreign investors, and they seek a greater political say over their lives. Perhaps most important, they seek some hope for a stable economic environment in which they can again have sufficient food and medicine.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN CUBA CONFRONTS Canadian policy-makers with the need to evaluate alternative scenarios. It is not impossible to imagine one which would benefit Canadian interests and harmonize with Canada's traditional policy of support for Cuba's right to determine its own destiny. Such an option would involve an evolution of democratic electoral practices and the introduction of sufficient market mechanisms to allow the reintegration of Cuba in the inter-American family. This process of gradual change would

take place within the context of the revolution, building on its foundations in the post-Soviet era under internal Cuban leadership. This option would be heartily endorsed by Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil, Cuba's most significant Latin American neighbours. For Canada this scenario would permit not merely the retention but the expansion of trade, investment and scientific and technological cooperation, building on our well-deserved prestige within Cuba for having maintained relations since the revolution in 1959.

While Canada has a clear interest in Cuba's gradual, peaceful integration into the inter-American system, our ability to influence the course of events is severely constrained. Canada's divergence from US policy towards Cuba from the time of the revolution, and its intermittent criticisms of American actions against Cuba, have become a symbol of our autonomy in inter-American foreign policy. Unfortunately these policy differences have had little impact in Washington. In these circumstances, the reintegration of Cuba in the Americas will be a formidable test for Canadian foreign policy as we seek an active and constructive role with our Latin partners in the newly emerging inter-American system. □