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Cuba Tries to Revive Communism with More Efficient, Less Bureaucratic Leaders

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Cuban leadership expects to train leaders who are more effective in the next five years. President Raúl Castro bitterly acknowledged the lack of "replacements" with the experience and maturity to lead the party, the state, and the government during the recent Communist Party congress in Havana.

Held in mid-April after a nine-year delay, the Sexto Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) put the need to establish a mixed and decentralized economy first on its agenda. At the same time, the generation of Fidel (84 years of age) and Raúl (79) Castro prepares replacements to take power. Raúl will be 80 years old on June 3.

"We are facing the consequences of not having a pool of adequately trained replacements with enough experience and maturity to take on the new and complex leadership tasks in the party, state, and government," admitted Raúl Castro. He made this statement as he assumed the duties of first secretary of the PCC, which until now was held by his brother, although Fidel had become seriously ill in 2006.

The PCC is the only legal political party on the island and the guiding force for society according to the Cuban Constitution. Its most powerful leadership, the Politburo, now consists of 15 members with an average age of 67 years. Six members are active generals (including Raúl) and three others are retired military.

Directors for ten years

Raúl Castro’s new proposal aims "to ensure systematic rejuvenation throughout the chain of administrative and partisan positions" and impose a maximum limit of two consecutive five-year terms for any official in principal political and state positions.

The Cuban government has declared that among the errors in leadership has been the lack of rigor in promoting inexperienced and immature political leaders. These individuals were awarded their positions by "means of deception and opportunism" as well as the "misconception" that, to occupy a leadership position, it was required to be an active member of the Communist Party.

The authorities have reaffirmed their willingness to promote women, blacks, mestizos, and youth to critical positions. "To not have solved this last problem in more than half a century is a real shame that we will carry in our consciousness for many years," said Castro, and he regrets that it has not been accomplished through the innumerable directives or agreements relating to the subject from the four previous conferences.

Of the 15 current members of the PCC Politburo, only three were born after 1959, the date Fidel Castro assumed power. Its membership has only one woman. The vice presidency is occupied by José Ramón Machado Ventura, considered representative of the PCC hard-liners, who will turn 81 in October.
One of the notable absences in the new party leadership is that of 58-year-old writer Abel Prieto, minister of culture for the island since 1997 and part of the Politburo. Prieto is credited with having brought a more critical spirit to the cultural space and has removed obstacles so that Cuban intellectuals and artists can travel outside the island.

Mixed and decentralized economy

Parliament and the government are now working on adjusting existing laws from the 313 points in the economic and social policy guidelines adopted by the congress. Raúl Castro says the phase of updating the economic and social model, changing doctrines and obsolete standards, has been initiated.

The government attributes the severe national economic crisis to the 16 hurricanes that stuck the island between 1998 and 2008, a severe drought, the ravages of global warming, and the US embargo. Domestically, the reasons are low efficiency, the decapitalization of the production sector, infrastructure, and the aging of the population and stagnation of population growth.

Cuba needs to modernize its economy at a time when state coffers are undergoing a dramatic liquidity crisis. Among the reforms announced are the promotion of foreign investment, the reactivation of the production system, subsidy reductions, and the layoffs of 500,000 government employees and their relocation to private jobs.

The US-based and government-funded International Republican Institute (IRI) surveyed 463 people in 12 provinces on the island. The findings were released in April and indicated that 77% of respondents believed that Castro would not solve the short-term economic problems such as low wages and high prices. One-third believed that the situation in Cuba was "bad," 12.1%, "very bad," and 35%, "neutral." Only 16.2% said "good," and 2%, "very good."

In the survey, 60.7% felt that "the biggest problem" on the island was the low wages and the high cost of living, 12.75% said it was food shortages, and 44.8% pointed to insufficient revenues to cover their needs satisfactorily. Forty-four percent of respondents said that their family's financial situation had worsened in the past two years, and 52.7% said that it has remained the same.

China and Venezuela have announced their support for the process of change undertaken by the Castro brothers. Chinese President Hu Jintao praised Cuba's promotion of "socialistic revolution" and said his country is prepared to work with Cuban partners to "expand friendly cooperation in various fields."

The European Union (EU) continues to closely monitor the implementation of economic reforms. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Vice President of the European Commission Catherine Ashton said that these reforms still have "no legal basis" but that the EU is prepared to offer "support and assistance" in their implementation.

In late January 2012, a PCC National Conference will assess the status of the reform process.