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The Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) began 2012 with a closed-door meeting where they sounded the drums of war against corruption, which has drained the local entrepreneurial class as well as PCC members themselves, and took the opportunity to reaffirm the one-party model and set a ten-year term limit to exercise political and administrative power on the island.

During the PCC's Conferencia Nacional, President Raúl Castro ruled out any form of a multiparty system claiming that the island is "besieged" and that the party will continue to be "the highest leading force" of society. The conference was held in Havana Jan. 28-29, with 811 delegates in attendance.

"Renouncing the one-party principle would be equivalent to legalizing a party, or parties, of imperialism on our native soil," reaffirmed the president, who maintains strong pressure against dissidents and opposition forces. He took the reins of power in the nation in July 2006 when his brother Fidel suddenly stepped away from his public labors because of a health crisis (NotiCen, Aug. 3, 2006, and Feb. 21, 2008).

This was the first Conferencia Nacional of the PCC since its inception in 1965. In April 2011, the organization's Sixth Congress focused on the debate of 300 guidelines for updating the depleted national economic system patterned on the Soviet model. However, Castro seeks to separate the PCC's work from the government's duties because, in his opinion, the organization was involved in inappropriate tasks.

Corruption, speeches, and videos

After decades of experience as defense minister, Castro now tries to be pragmatic in his economic management, promoting production and competitiveness of key sectors, criticizing negligence and the lack of discipline, and lightening the heavy framework of bureaucratic prohibitions by replacing them with mechanisms for more effective control of state resources.

One of Raúl Castro's most controversial tasks has been confronting corruption. People began to complain loudly about this phenomenon in the 1990s, after years of growth of local entrepreneurs in contact with foreign investors, when the quality of life for state workers had deteriorated (the average monthly salary is still around US$15).

Last November, Cuba's Attorney General Darío Delgado Cura said, "The corruption that we are facing is administrative and is found in specific levels of various sectors, mainly the business sector."

The business sector comprises 90% state-run enterprises, while the rest consists of companies that are a blend of state and foreign ownership.

In the past two years, some notorious corruption cases have been associated with aviation, construction, and telecommunications, according to foreign media reports. State-run Cuban media have kept silent about arrests and trials in progress.
Castro created the position of comptroller general in 2009, led by Gladys Bejerano, who has authority over the ministries and reports directly to the president. In 2011, Chilean businessmen Max and Marcel Marambio were tried in absentia and convicted of economic crimes and corruption. Senior officials from the food industry and Cubana de Aviación airlines were convicted as well.

The government has also intensified the campaign against theft, a widespread practice in state production centers where employees try to compensate for their meager income through the theft of supplies, tools, fuel, construction materials, food, or anything that may be sold or bartered on the black market.

In the closing speech of the conference, the president said that corruption was one of the main enemies of the political system on the island, to the extent that it is more dangerous than US policy, which has been blamed for promoting internal "subversion" since the early 1960s, when Havana was allied with the communists in Eastern Europe.

In recent weeks, some details on the crusade against corruption have been leaked to the public after the private screening of a video exclusively for PCC members. This is not the first time authorities have used this method to make public problematic incidents of the upper echelon. Details on the dismissal of Carlos Lage, former vice president of the Consejo de Estado and executive secretary of the Consejo de Ministros, and then foreign minister Felipe Pérez Roque were reported in this way in 2009.

**Two terms, period**

One criticism against the party system and the Cuban government has been about the same officials holding their positions in the same institutions and ministries for decades. Several senior officials in the country today are octogenarians or close to that age and trusted friends of Fidel (born in 1926) and Raúl (born in 1931) and who participated in the armed actions of the 1950s prior to the Jan. 1, 1959, takeover of power.

Now, the PCC's Conferencia Nacional considers it necessary to impose a limit of two five-year terms for party and government positions. Castro may continue as first secretary of the party for nine years since he took office in April 2011 during the Sixth Congress.

The party summit also agreed to replace one-fifth of the 114 members of the PCC central committee in the next four years to facilitate the entry of younger people. The party leadership has been blamed for deficiencies in leadership training (NotiCen, May 5, 2011).

Castro complains that "we still cannot count on a pool of experienced and mature replacements with the preparation to assume the complex leadership roles in the party, the state, and the government."

In the last five years, some of those envisioned as successors were thrown out for lack of ethics, acts of corruption, or being guilty of excessive ambition for power.

The PCC has 800,000 members in a country of 11.2 million inhabitants. The decade of the 1990s, when the economic crisis severely hit Cuban homes, meant a loss of followers who dropped their membership or left the country. The organization has tried to attract new members by loosening its stance on religious issues and on sexual orientation.

These days, the person in the street has demonstrated little interest in the recent party conclave. In a country where the state controls more than 90% of the economy, people show more enthusiasm for
any hint of liberalization of the productive forces and continue the wait for changes in the migration policy, a cumbersome system of procedures, prohibitions, and onerous payments to travel abroad.