

## ACADEMIC ARTICLE

# THE CUBAN POLITICAL SYSTEM: CURRENT STATUS AND POSSIBLE REFORMS FOR AN INTEGRAL AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATIVE TRANSFORMATION

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### Abstract

The present article tries to offer a contribution to the integral analysis of the possible reforms in Cuba that surpass the economic sphere, strengthen the widest democratic participation and the national political consensus. This is done through a critical examination of the most recent and main debates and political events in Cuba until the middle of 2018 and the prospects of change. It is argued that the updating of the Cuban model of socialist development must continue to deepen the economic development but must be accompanied more intensely by important reforms of political, cultural, social and ideological development, which guarantee the integrality of the processes of revolutionary transformation of Cuban society. The article makes a broad proposal of possible political reforms in the country, beginning with the already initiated popular consultation for the elaboration of a new socialist Constitution. The conclusion establishes as a key premise of political development the necessity of a popular participation that is increasingly broad, active, direct, systematic, creative, real and effective in making the most important decisions in the country.

**Keywords:** update of the political model, integrality of the reforms, political consensus, popular participation, Political Constitution, popular consultation

## Introduction

The project of socialist transformation in Cuba is still in a transitional stage. Its main characteristics are dictated by an underdeveloped economy, a still persistent internal economic crisis – although in a process of slow recovery – and the hostility of the US government. With the government of Barack Obama, some expectation of changes was initiated. The announced agreement of 17 December 2014 to restore diplomatic relations and the subsequent steps of rapprochement between the two countries not only began a qualitatively new stage in those ties and gave some hope of opportunities, but also signalled great challenges for Cuban socialism. The restoration of diplomatic relations did not mean the normalisation of relations in general. Two major obstacles remain to be negotiated in future talks: the lifting of the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba – known euphemistically in the US as an embargo, while many specialists consider it rather a true economic war against the Cuban nation – and the return of the territory illegally occupied by the US naval base in Guantánamo, which, moreover, was converted into a prison for terrorists or suspected terrorists. There are two other unresolved problems that are very sensitive for Cuban society: the need to suspend the illegal radio and television broadcasts of the US against Cuba and eliminate programmes aimed at destabilising and subverting the Cuban constitutional order, to which the US governments continue to allocate millions of dollars. We have to see, then, the substantial modification of the traditionally interventionist, hegemonic and often aggressive policy of the US government, and the development of those relations based on respect for the independence, sovereignty and self-determination of the Island. The Donald Trump government was charged with confirming what some academics and other colleagues had pointed out since 2014: the need to avoid triumphalism, political naiveté and the belief that it is a policy of the State. It has seemed clear to some since 2014 that in examining the restoration of relations with the US, a fundamental issue is to move from political naiveté to measured analysis, which means overcoming the moments of euphoria and superficial inquiry, and undertaking the necessary political analysis with a realistic approach, methodological rigour and scientific objectivity. The new president of the US not only put a stop to the initiated process, but also suspended some of the decisions that President Obama had taken to improve relations with Cuba.

To the external difficulties of the process of political transition – view this as a set of tendencies of necessary changes within the socialist system<sup>2</sup> – are added the unfulfilled objectives and the errors of different stages of the

Revolution in Cuba,<sup>3</sup> beyond the colossal social work, cultural and political aspects of the Cuban project.

In the continuity of the process of socialist construction, the system has to permanently strengthen its legitimacy and rebuild consensus through the constant improvement of the economic, political, social, cultural and socialist ideological system, for which new transformations must take place.

The economic and political reforms<sup>4</sup> that were implemented in Cuba in the 1990s contributed to this and covered the entire system as a whole. It would be worth highlighting here only two of them: (1) the economic, which made it possible to alleviate the crisis and guarantee the survival of the Revolution, despite the US blockade and internal errors in economic policy, and (2) the structural and functional changes to give more authority to the assemblies of the Popular Power (municipal mayorships, provincial governments and national parliament). Of these political changes, the most important was the establishment of a free, direct and secret vote of the entire population to elect the delegates to the provincial assemblies and the deputies to the National Assembly of People's Power (parliament). From among the latter the President, Vice President and Secretary of the National Assembly are elected, as well as the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, including its own President (*Constitución de la República de Cuba* 2010: articles 69–75); hence the importance of that political reform.

The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century were marked by the application of reforms with their ups and downs. Especially, the years 2006–08 were marked politically by the succession of the power of former President Fidel Castro to a group of leaders of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the Cuban State led by Raúl Castro, a process that has been characterised by changes in the style and methods of conducting the government and, in general, in the way of doing politics. The VII Legislature of the National Assembly – constituted in February 2008 as a result of the general elections – elected the new Council of State<sup>5</sup> and ratified Raúl himself as its President.

The political discourse of the government since that date has been shaped as a search for a new consensus in the country. This had its expression in President Raúl Castro's speeches between 2007 and 2010,<sup>6</sup> which delimited, and undertook the realisation of, the priorities of his government. In practice, at the internal level, modifications were made in the government structure and functioning of the government, and in the promotion of new people to the highest levels of the government, processes that continue today. At the external level, Cuba's recognition is growing: it already has relations with all Latin American countries, has

almost unanimous support in the UN General Assembly for a resolution against the US blockade and is fully reintegrated into hemispheric organisations and events, including its presence at the 2015 Summit of the Americas in Panama, as demanded by the countries of the region.

Within the set of legitimating changes are the possible political reforms that should be implemented in Cuba. To date, since the preparatory process of the Sixth Party Congress (April 2011), the Government and the Party have been talking almost exclusively about updating the economic model. But this must be accompanied by the updating of the political, social, cultural and ideological model, which guarantees the integrality of the processes of revolutionary transformation of society. This has begun with one of the most transcendental processes in the history of the Cuban people: the preparation of a preliminary draft of the new Constitution of the Republic by a parliamentary commission, its analysis by the National Assembly of Popular Power that turned it into a bill, the broad popular consultation for its debate and improvement, and the national referendum for its final approval. This process is already occurring with intensity in the country, from April 2018 until February 2019. It needs to be the beginning of new political, cultural and ideological transformations in Cuba.

The main objective of this article is to offer a brief critical look at the main political events in Cuba between 2010 and the beginning of 2018, and an analysis of the possible reforms for the updating of the Cuban political model – beginning with the new Political Constitution of the State – as a contribution to the comprehensive analysis of the process of strengthening socialist democracy, legitimacy and national political consensus.

### **The Political Change: Some Background and Current Problems up to the Beginning of 2018**

The Cuban political system has not been immovable, or static, as indicated by some publications, political speeches and certain media information. The process of political institutionalisation that took place in the mid-1970s, and the set of political reforms from which the important economic reforms of the 1990s were developed, are clear evidence of the will to change in the Cuban Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

The most important starting point for the beginning of the so-called updating of the economic and social model<sup>8</sup> was the celebration of the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party from 16 April to 19 April 2011. This had its preparatory phase from 2010 and was preceded by a national political debate – the

expression of broad citizen participation – through which the *Draft Guidelines for the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution*<sup>9</sup> were submitted for consideration. This procedure confirms the correctness of one of the anticipated recommendations made by the author of this article in a previous publication about how this transcendent and already delayed event should be outlined:

The Congress – long awaited by the militants and the people [. . .] – should be preceded by a rigorous and broad popular debate, either through a call or through some other way that allows, through the use of novel methods, to [. . .] reach consensus [. . .] on the proposals of the whole people to perfect the economy, politics, culture, ideology and society in general (Duharte Díaz 2008: 121–31).

This idea was not understood and assimilated at the time by some readers – including some party leaders – not accustomed to such a debate or to the prognostic and proactive role of the Social Sciences because, according to them, it was not up to the latter to offer such ‘ordinances’.

Many of the reforms reflected in the *Draft Guidelines* are already being implemented. Others are currently the subject of elaboration and the approval of specific policies and laws and regulations that will legally support and regulate them.

An important decision of the Congress – crucial for the scientific-political analysis of the necessary economic and political changes in Cuba – was the approval of the ‘Resolution on the improvement of the organs of Popular Power, the Electoral System and the Political-Administrative Division’ (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012a: 41–42). Without many specifications – and without even the necessary popular debate – it expresses the political will of the Party to undertake studies, evaluations and concrete practical-political actions to prioritise the authority of the local assemblies of the Popular Power, better define the responsibilities and relations of the assemblies (legislative bodies at each level of government) and their administrative boards (executive power at the same municipal and provincial levels), adjust the political-administrative divisions (partition in municipalities and provinces) of the country, make adjustments in the electoral system, and modify the set of legal rules necessary to adjust them to the current Cuban scenario.

In this regard, the Sixth Congress entrusted the Central Committee of the Party, once the necessary clarifications have been made, to present to the National Assembly recommendations for the implementation of the changes deemed

relevant. However, in the opinion of this author, the materialisation of this decision has been slow. The legitimacy of this Resolution will be greater the greater the level of popular participation that is achieved in its application, involving the design of standards and policies. This is an issue that has begun to take on real strength in 2018, because of what has been published and because of the direct involvement of the people and their organisations up to the time of the writing of this article.

The reforms approved in the Congress break with several dogmas. One of them is related to the theoretical and political approach to property in socialism and in Cuba. The cooperative forms (social, but not state) of production are extended. They authorise the expansion and development of new forms of management and small private property that do not threaten socialism as a system, and that allow the individual initiative of the citizen to begin to solve multiple problems of the population for which the State is not best suited, has been inefficient many times, and it is not expected that it will be able to overcome this situation in the short or medium term. They envision the possibility that medium-sized companies and businesses could also be established under the regime of cooperative property, private, or new forms of management, for a strengthening of the country's economy.

The expansion of the non-state economic sector does not necessarily mean a privatisation of social property. Rather, it implies the real rescue of an idea, still valid, that is in the spirit and in the letter of the classical Marxist conception that the fundamental economic feature of socialism is social ownership over the fundamental means of production. It was never envisaged as a total socialisation, as was done in several socialist experiences. Likewise, the Cuban State could focus today on increasing the efficiency of the fundamental means of production, and making them in reality the property of all the people. It could preserve and increase the quality of the main achievements of the Revolution – health, education, security and social assistance, culture, science, etc. – and simultaneously not spend time and resources in activities that the non-state sector could guarantee.

Internationally, the Sixth Congress, in general, contributed to strengthening the image of the country as a non-static society, which is in transition to higher forms of development, and which is transforming itself to achieve an improved socialism and greater freedom for its citizens. This is an important factor of legitimacy. Of course, the international neoconservative forces do not give any credit to this process, but rather try to discredit it and keep pushing for the dismantling of socialism in Cuba.

Another important political event at this stage was the the First National Conference of the Party on 28 and 29 January 2012.<sup>10</sup> Following the Sixth

Party Congress that spring, the social debate turned to the functioning of the Communist Party of Cuba. The preparatory debate for the Conference by Party activists and the Union of Young Communists (UJC) was opened on 14 October 2011, with the publication of a Draft Base Document. As a result of the Conference, a new political document was endorsed: *Objectives of the Work of the Communist Party of Cuba Approved at the First National Conference* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b). A total of one hundred objectives were indicated, which reflects the result of the consensus reached.<sup>11</sup> The National Conference is a mechanism present in the Party Statutes, with a lower rank than the Party Congress, but it had not been used before in the history of the organisation. Its convocation to discuss issues related to some of the necessary political changes in the country, ways to solve fundamental problems and inadequacies of the system, and to face the new challenges, gave it an added value.<sup>12</sup>

By the time of these two events (Sixth Congress of the Party in 2011 and First National Conference in 2012), there still was not a rigorous conceptualisation (or theoretical foundation) of the so-called updating of the economic model from the Economic Sciences, from Political Economy in particular or the Political Sciences. To this end, two documents were prepared: *Conceptualization of the Cuban Social and Economic Development Model* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2017a) and *Bases of the Economic and Social Development Plan until 2030: Vision of the Nation, Axes and Strategic Sectors* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2017b). These were analysed in the Seventh Congress of the PCC (April 2016), which then called for them to be submitted to popular consultation. They were then approved in the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party (18 May 2017) and endorsed by the National Assembly of People's Power (1 July 2017). The Seventh Congress also conducted an evaluation of the progress of the reforms, promoted the necessary rectifications and updated the *Guidelines for Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution for the Period 2016–21* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2017c), which now totals 274 guidelines, which specific government policies and laws that support them are gradually implementing.

The three major events mentioned: Sixth Congress of the Party, First National Conference and Seventh Congress, together with the sessions of the National Assembly, have fundamentally marked the current political life of Cuba. It is advisable to continue encouraging actions to complete the elaboration and implementation of the specific policies that give effect to the accords from these events. Other phenomena are also having an important influence on Cuban life, such as the setback in relations with the US since the presidency of Donald Trump and the uncertainty that accompanies this process; the

maintenance of the US economic, commercial and financial blockade; and the acts of subversion against the Cuban Revolution oriented and financed from abroad (especially from the US). To these are linked the events that take place in the Arab world, in Europe, and in several countries of Latin America, which are used by the internal and external antisocialist opposition forces to try to provoke social outbreaks in Cuba and promote, by force, a change in the country's political system.

The aforementioned events have come close to proposing solutions to several crucial questions – already traditional in the socialist debate and still unresolved – and have given their own preliminary answers expressed in a strategy of major socioeconomic changes. However, there are still political demands left unanswered and other claims that have not yet been discussed in the Cuban public agenda. In other words, the updating of the economic and social model has not yet been integrated with the necessary updating of the political, cultural and ideological model, which denotes the lack of integrality in this complex process.

It is highly positive that the process of popular debate about the changes in the political system, with the call for a total constitutional reform, has begun in 2018. This means that progress is being made towards the elaboration of a new Constitution of the Republic. In the opinion of this author, this responds to a popular demand and, especially, a demand of Cuban academia, not to postpone any longer the formulation of concrete proposals for integral reforms of the economic, political, social, cultural, ecological, ideological, academic, scientific and technological processes together, including considerations of their interpenetrations and interinfluences. It is not possible to advance efficiently in the process of updating the economic model without specifying, with national accords, the directions of the political development with which it interacts.

Therefore, to know and take into account the feelings of the various sectors of the people – with their direct participation in forming the concrete proposals and the decision-making – on the set of issues related to the political system, which are not only related to the Party, would be very useful to draw up the best strategy of continual improvement and permanent political relegitimation. Therefore, it has been a demand reiterated by the population in different ways, and supported by the work of several academics, that the elaboration and political decision-making in these areas not be limited to the organs and higher bodies of the Party and the State. The proposals should be the result of a broad consultation with as many members as possible of all the political and mass organisations, of intellectuals and representatives of different social

groups, of scholars of these subjects, and of the people in general. This would reinforce the recognition, credibility and acceptance of the process of change, would better prepare the population for the *culture war* that will intensify, and would further reduce the possibilities of turning the country into a breeding ground for the subversive strategy of world imperialism.<sup>13</sup> This means that the level of broad popular participation that was not promoted in the discussion of the Base Document of the First National Conference,<sup>14</sup> but was in the discussion of the Draft Guidelines of the Sixth Congress, should be promoted for the new changes required by the country, including the possibility of the use of a referendum.<sup>15</sup> President Raúl Castro expressed the idea of holding a popular consultation, which was established in the plan of actions approved at the Tenth Plenum of the Party on 23 February 2015.

These ideas are now beginning to materialise.

### **Towards a More Integral Approach to the Updating of the Cuban Model of Socialist Development and the Possible Political Reforms**

The integral nature of the reforms, democratic participation in the process, and the detailed and precise vision of the proposals for possible new reforms that can be undertaken in the current stage of socialist transition in Cuba are all of great importance, for the purpose of this article, and for the deepening of the analysis of the updating of the Cuban model of socialist development.<sup>16</sup>

#### **On the road to a total constitutional reform: the popular consultation**

It has already been stated that in 2018 and the beginning of 2019, the people of Cuba are facing one of the most important processes of their history: the elaboration of a draft of the new Constitution of the Republic by a parliamentary commission, the popular consultation for its debate and improvement, and the national referendum for final approval.<sup>17</sup> The development of these steps, by itself, is already a genuinely democratic process. Achieving high quality in their realisation, especially a significant level of real and effective popular participation in their elaboration, would turn it into one of the events with the greatest impact of Cuban revolutionary history.

The Constitution, as it is regularly understood among academics and politicians knowledgeable about the subject, is not only the Law of Laws or the Supreme Law; it is the Magna Carta or the Political Constitution of the State; it is, according to some criteria, the Political Charter of the country. It is not just a legal document, but political-legal, with interactions, implications and

impacts on the social system as a whole. The Constitution is the main regulatory element of the political system and of the entire social system and is accompanied by budgets, mechanisms of implementation and impacts that far exceed the mere legality. The Political Constitution of the State is an instrument of conflict resolution and constitutes, in fact, a fundamental tool for the achievement of social peace. The Magna Carta is a tool for the search and achievement of social consensus, which is the agreement (not necessarily written) that unites citizens around certain principles, norms, values, feelings, traditions, ideals and projects. It is the mechanism that expresses and guarantees the legitimacy of a system, regime, programme, organisation or social leader, that is, their credibility, acceptance and trust. The Constitution of a republic or any other governmental form is, 'first and foremost, an instrument of government that limits, restricts and allows the control of the exercise of political power . . . reason for being of constitutionalism' (Sartori 2002: 213). For others, in a formal sense, it is 'the political code in which the people, through their representatives, freely elected by them, fix in writing the fundamental principles of their organisation and, especially, those related to the political freedoms of the people' (Ossorio n.d.). Without forgetting that the process of drafting the Constitution should be synthesising, concrete, and precise in the legal-normative order, it is correct to insist that it must be equally so in the economic, political, social, ideological-cultural, ethical, aesthetic and ecological fields, which feed into the law as science and as practice. It is not enough for the Magna Carta to have a rigorous formulation based on what some call the legal technique or technology to establish the norm. Without losing this language, we must also be precise in the formulations that require the integration of the scientific-technological, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, economic, sociological, anthropological and communication approaches that guarantee the highest quality and accuracy of the constitutional text.

Popular consultations and referenda are two mechanisms that have re-emerged in today's Cuba as re-legitimising factors par excellence of the political system. But how can the popular consultation on the new Constitution project become a movement of high democratic quality?

What is sought in Cuba since the call made by comrade Raúl Castro in 2006, when he temporarily assumed the presidency, in the opinion of this author, is precisely a new social consensus in the face of new national and international problems. Solutions must be creative and also novel, in correspondence with the complexity of the world, and of the creation of an alternative society to capitalism in extremely difficult conditions. Will not this

process have the mission of integrating a common political position in support of that new pact or social consensus that the country needs? What would be the main moments of consensus to be reflected in the Constitution? There is the political key that would guarantee social stability in the medium and long terms!

The realisation of the popular consultation must absolutely banish formalisms and restrictions from the debate. It would also be necessary to avoid any behaviour that restricts the freedom of thought and expression, or tries, directly or indirectly, to impose criteria. It is advisable to work to turn the development of a democratic culture, of controversy, of debate, of deliberation, into a tendency to constantly improve the political system in the current stage of socialist transition. That the people feel real 'ownership' of the situation and are active participants in this transcendent decision, and are not simply 'consulted', or 'mobilized', or 'attendees' to a meeting or assembly, is a guarantee of the legitimacy and irreversibility of the processes of change towards more socialism in Cuba.

One of the practical issues to take into account is that the people who direct the discussion of the project are not only students or professionals of the Legal Sciences, but experienced political executives and experts from different scientific disciplines. Could the Parliamentary Commission benefit from the expansion of its advisory team where, in addition to legal professionals, experts are present in other disciplines or on specific topics perhaps not fully represented by the current members? Philosophy, Aesthetics, Sociology, the Political Sciences, Economics and Communication, Philology and other specialties would have much to say. From among the jurists themselves, many other experts, especially those dedicated to the investigation of constitutional issues, could also contribute. It would only enrich that creative work.

New spaces for debate are emerging in the country – many outside the institutions and organisations recognised 'officially'. Digital social networks, websites, magazines and electronic bulletins, presentations at events, letters, recommendations and questions flood minds through multiple channels. The opinions express different political positions, some are opposition ones.<sup>18</sup> Ignoring this is not advisable, but rather we have to use those spaces in the consultation. Almost all are based on new information and communication technologies (ICTs). How should these advances in technoscience be used? Only to reproduce materials, send information, download documents or read on those platforms, the treatment of the subject is limited to in most of the media? Or could science, technology and innovation, especially ICTs, be used as channels and mechanisms of participation, as platforms for popular consultation, debate

and the issuance of proposals? Would greater creativity and efficiency be achieved in the consultation this way? This is directly linked to the aforementioned political technology and to the necessary aestheticisation of politics and of the entire social life of the country.

It is feasible, then, to make this process of the construction of the new Political Constitution of the State until its approval in the referendum, one of the most transcendent experiences of the Cuban political-participative practice of all times. It would compare only, in the opinion of this author, with four similar historical events: the process of discussion and approval in a referendum of the first Socialist Constitution in Cuba between 1975 and 1976; the national political discussion around the Appeal to the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party in 1990, which already contained a preview of the proposals for political and economic reforms for that decade; the development of the workers' parliaments in 1994, a genuine, novel and unprecedented expression of the so-called parliamentarisation of society;<sup>19</sup> and the national political debate through which the Draft Guidelines for the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution were discussed between 2010 and 2011, a manifestation of broad, real and effective citizen participation. If this happens, then this process as a whole will become the most important political and legal reform of the current Cuban society and would mark, from its beginning, the beginning of a new stage of development of the system.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of writing (mid-2018), popular consultation is in progress. The draft Constitution that is proposed contemplates some fundamental ideas and some new ideas, such as the following: reaffirmation of the socialist, democratic, independent and sovereign character of the Cuban State; the leading role of the Communist Party; the traditional principles of foreign policy; and some new principles of foreign policy such as the promotion of respect for international law, global multipolarity, the repudiation of all forms of terrorism (in particular State terrorism), and the rejection of the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons, mass extermination or other similar policies.

In the economic sphere, socialist ownership of the fundamental means of production and planning is reaffirmed. The acceptance of the role of the market and new forms of property, including private ownership, are added, which correspond to the aforementioned documents: *Conceptualization of the Model Economic and Social Cuban Socialist Development* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2017a) and *Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution*, (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2017c), which were submitted to consultation with broad sectors of Cuban society.

The draft Constitution incorporates, among the essential objectives of the State, the promotion of sustainable development, and greater levels of equity and social justice. It reinforces the articles on the rights of people, including the right to equality, incorporating non-discrimination due to gender identity, ethnic origin and disability. Similarly, it offers guarantees against existing prejudices regarding people who perform various forms of non-state economic management, and prejudices against religious beliefs, territorial origin and others, which may cause any form of discrimination or limit the exercise of the rights of individuals. Several of these issues were already traditional among the citizen demands, and some were also addressed in the constitutional reform of the 1990s. But what refers to non-state economic management – a previously taboo subject – is a relatively new issue that is given special attention in the objectives of Party political organisation and which, from a political and ideological point of view, requires intense work by the Party and the State to eliminate these prejudices.

The loss of Cuban citizenship is eliminated in the case of acquiring another. The citizens of this country when in the national territory, however, are governed by their condition of being Cubans and cannot make use of a foreign citizenship.

The draft Constitution proposes modifications to the structure of the State, which will be further elaborated below.

New concepts are incorporated into the draft Constitution, such as the socialist State of law, individual and collective prosperity, protection and conservation of the environment, the fight against climate change, democratisation of cyberspace, and the introduction of provincial governors and municipal mayors (two concepts taken from the Cuban and international political traditions but not included in the current Constitution).<sup>21</sup> The National Defense Council is defined as the high body of the State that directs the country in case of exceptional situations and disasters. The definition of marriage as a ‘voluntarily concerted union between two people’ (*Proyecto de Constitución de la República de Cuba 2018: artículo 68*) is novel for Cuba, without distinguishing whether it is a man or a woman, which obviously makes room for the right to so-called same-sex marriage, even if the term is not used directly. Of course, in a subject with such a prejudiced tradition and so sensitive for the population, that we will have to wait for what consensus can be reached at the national level.

In conclusion, it is a constitution project designed to consolidate and give continuity to an economic, political, cultural and social system of a socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nature, with innovative concepts for its continuity.<sup>22</sup> The main recommendations that are offered here on the

quality of the popular consultation can be taken into account in similar subsequent processes, such as the preparation and approval of the new Electoral Law.

It is not considered prudent to carry out in this article an exhaustive characterisation of the content of the project, since it will be modified as a result of the popular consultation by the time of its publication. Only some basic precepts have been indicated here and, as progress is made in the analysis of possible new reforms, some other elements of this new constitutional project will be specified.

### **Decentralisation, equality and social justice: some controversies**

The economic, social, cultural and political management of Cuban society is now marked by a greater decentralisation, stimulating greater autonomy and creativity of the masses and, especially, of the Cuban municipalities. In this last aspect, the proposal in the new constitutional project of granting greater relevance to the municipalities, recognising their autonomy, without affecting the interests of the nation, is of special interest. In practice, it would mean recognising the municipality's autonomy in terms of its management, to achieve more agile and efficient attention to the problems and demands of its population. Of particular importance are the guarantees to the rights of petition and local participation, among them those that emphasise the possibility of convening popular consultations on matters of interest to the territory, the right of the population to propose specific topics for analysis in the Municipal Assemblies of Popular Power, and the emphasis on a more real and efficient attention to the requests, criticisms, complaints and denunciations of the citizens.

In this difficult path, the strengthening of attention to social and individually differentiated demands of the population, and the consequent and definitive rupture with egalitarianism, which is not synonymous with equality or social justice, is key. Because of its importance and because of the controversies and confusions that this issue causes in political debates in Cuba and other countries, this author considers it appropriate to clarify his opinion about it. Equality is a concept that refers to rules of distribution of scarce social values (a function of the political system), parity in the treatment of people. It does not imply that everyone receives the same allowance, but rather that the same norm of distribution is applied impartially. Egalitarianism, to the contrary, is a mistaken conception of equality that excludes individuality. It is an economic-social, political and cultural tendency that protects, on the perception of the pre-eminence of the social, an apparent equal treatment and assignment of

value for all. But this rules out the differentiated treatment in the distribution of resources to specific sectors and individuals due to the quantity, quality and complexity of their work, and the contributions they make to social wealth. That is, it is the underestimation of and, even, the negation of the Marxist principle of distribution according to work, in correspondence with the results and the quality of the material or spiritual production.

The confrontation with unequal and unjust egalitarianism does not negate, of course, the observation of another principle; the distribution by the social consumer funds created by socialism, that is, the funds for social expenditures. These address the need to take into account the possibility of compensation to different population groups, and, subsidies, not to producers but to specific sectors or groups – what some call social investment. ‘Socialism means social justice and equality, but equal rights, opportunities, not income. Equality is not egalitarianism. This, in the end, is also a form of exploitation . . .’ (Castro Ruz 2008). The relative and the incomplete nature of equality suggest, in the opinion of this author, that its most appropriate definition as an objective of socialism could be the struggle for the greatest possible social justice. And this is above all a task of politics.

In other words, the justified dedication to the social, so that it is also sufficiently legitimised, cannot ignore the need for differentiated attention to different social sectors according to their peculiarities and contributions, nor can it avoid the concrete man and woman with their own problems, needs, characteristics and peculiarities. This would be, in practice, one of the possible ways to avert that egalitarianism, historically recognised in theory and in official discourse as harmful to revolutionary consciousness and activity, does not become in practice a corrosive element for the continual process of legitimisation of the socialist regime.

As part of these criteria of justice, it is essential to implement more stable and durable mechanisms of economic, legal, social and political protection for the population. In the new proposed Constitution of the Republic, citizen rights are strengthened, and some of them are new, as has been indicated. At the same time, mechanisms of defence of individuals before the courts of justice are needed to safeguard their rights in the event of undue actions or omissions in the fulfilment of the functions of managers, officials and other public servants of State organs. Guarantees are needed for the social reintegration of persons deprived of liberty, the protection of and assistance to the elderly, the freedom to profess or not religious beliefs, and others. The corresponding legislation should be more refined in the formulation of the ways, methods and mechanisms of implementation of the constitutional guarantees in these

aspects. The processes of decentralisation of social management will inevitably contribute to its realisation.

### **Political institutional structure, state structure and popular participation**

In this area, the following reforms are considered necessary:

1. The Cuban political system requires a definitive rescue and the continuous strengthening of its institutionality, the rectification of its dysfunctions and the elevation of the efficiency in the operation of the State, especially of the Government. Each component of the political organisation – Communist Party, National Assembly, Government with its ministries and provincial agencies, municipal assemblies, the Young Communist League and other elements – must not confuse their functions and attributions, nor supplant those of others. This confusion was an unfortunate experience of the socialist model of Eastern Europe and the former USSR. There have also been errors in this regard in the Cuban experience at different historical moments. Exceptional situations lead to decisions that are also exceptional, operative and immediate at different levels. This becomes a necessity in certain historical situations, and for which the appropriate legislation is promulgated. But this precept should not be extended to all processes, to all social spheres, to all organisms and organisations or to all historical circumstances.

This would presuppose that the institutionality achieved by the Revolution – an important factor legitimising the political system and one of the most significant achievements of Cuban democracy – should not be supplanted by parallel non-institutionalised mechanisms that act against popular confidence in the institutions. Subverting institutions and replacing them with parallel decision-making devices undermine their legitimacy. This does not refer to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but rather to certain mechanisms that, in practice, have at times duplicated and replaced the functions of the ministries and other bodies and agencies. Since 2007, important steps have been taken to reflect and rectify these issues; errors in this sphere should not be repeated. The present moment, characterised by a real movement towards the improvement of the political system as a whole and by a manifest elevation of the political culture of the people, demands the continuation of a meticulous reflection on these experiences.

Modifications to the structure of the State are proposed, among them: the National Assembly of People's Power and the Council of State are integrated into one,<sup>23</sup> the latter as a permanent organ of the former; the figures of President and Vice President of the Republic are retained, the first as Head of State elected by the National Assembly; create the position of Prime Minister, who will direct the executive and administrative body or Government of the Republic;<sup>24</sup> and give constitutional status to the state organs of the Comptroller General of the Republic and the new National Electoral Council. A significant proposal is to eliminate the provincial assembly of People's Power and its administrative body and to establish, in its place, a Provincial Government composed of a Governor,<sup>25</sup> proposed by the President of the Republic and appointed by the National Assembly, and a Council at that level. The Governor would be the chief of the council, which would be composed of, among other political actors, the presidents of the municipal assemblies of Popular Power and the Mayors, a new figure who would direct the Municipal Administration Council. It is proposed to give the municipality autonomy in terms of its management, and to extend the mandate of the delegates from two and a half years (as it is currently) to five years.<sup>26</sup>

2. The composition and functioning of the assemblies of the Popular Power, in particular of the National Assembly, must be made more rational and efficient, significantly reducing the number of deputies; abolishing completely from its membership the ministers and other leaders of organisms and institutions that today are 'judge and jury' in the decision-making; establishing the professional work of the greater part of the popularly elected positions, especially of the deputies, according to the particularities, needs and complexity of specific regions; integrally perfecting the work of the permanent commissions and the National Assembly, so that the former do not replace the necessary comprehensive analysis that corresponds to the full Assembly, which would guarantee more innovative and creative contributions from all the representatives of the people and better decisions; regulating and implementing adequately, and promoting in practice, the constitutional norm about the public character of the meetings of the Popular Power assemblies up to the national level; and finally – which does not mean that there cannot be other modifications – assessing the implementation of an adequate and functional body of constitutional control.

It is essential to continually elevate the real authority and power – even meagre – of the municipal delegates and the deputies, which must find a broader and clearer reflection in the laws and in the political practice of the country. It is necessary to strengthen especially the authority of the delegate of the district (municipal), in the sense that more professionalism in the work of government is achieved, that a greater level of specialisation and suitability of delegates is developed, and that they receive the adequate preparation, time, and economic and financial means necessary for the fulfilment of their functions. Equally, it would be of great significance to carry out a more active campaign for voter awareness of the need to propose and nominate candidates for delegates with greater experience, levels of education and ethical and political preparation. These are necessary to face the complex tasks of their circumscription and a municipal assembly, of which they will be a part in their own right. All this would result in a strengthening of the municipal assemblies of Popular Power as the maximum local authority of state power, and the only one authorised by the Law to nominate candidates for popular representatives for the provincial and national levels.

3. The strengthening and systematisation of the political practice of periodic renewal – including the gradual rejuvenation of the leadership – should be developed not only for all the organisations of the State, but also for all the components of the political system, and for all posts elected or not, and the extent of the renovation should be greater.<sup>27</sup> This would dynamise the political system at all levels, contribute to systematising the necessary renewal of ideas about the ways of building socialism in the country, favour the profound exchange of experiences and preparation of young cadres through coexistence with the older generations, as well as stimulating the emergence of new and more democratic styles and methods of political leadership and management.

It is essential to promote legislation and regulations that specifically detail how to implement this reform – partially outlined and with some ambiguity in the *Work Objectives approved at the First National Conference of the Party* (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b) – to ensure a real, effective and truly periodic renewal of all administrative, governmental, political and mass organisation posts.<sup>28</sup> It is positive that the draft of the new Constitution proposes limitations regarding the age and the period in which the President of the Republic and other public officers may hold office. The President can be elected only for two consecutive periods after which he cannot serve again, and cannot be over 60 years old when elected to the first. This is also a point of controversy

in the public debate in different ways. This procedure seems appropriate to this author, and he considers that such limits should be established for other public offices such as the Vice President of the Republic, Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, governors and other high-level positions. However, for the President of the Republic, perhaps, it could be possible to stipulate an additional non-consecutive period if he has not yet reached 65 years of age. The implementation of this policy will need to be well designed, because it is not yet clear how to articulate it with another objective foreseen in the document mentioned about ‘selectively rotating the leaders among the administrative, government and political organizations’ (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b 7; Objective No. 80). Here neither the total time to remain in management positions is specified, nor what periods or terms it would apply to, nor the definition of what to consider ‘fundamental positions’. The corresponding legislation and regulations will need to clarify such issues.

4. A core issue for political theory and practice is the relationship between the concepts of accountability and transparency. Judging by the political documents, the press publications and the concrete political actions, it is a question that is little understood in Cuba where they are seen and understood as separate phenomena. Current Political Sciences, to the contrary, understand transparency as part of accountability and, even more, its first phase. These processes, to achieve real integrality and democracy, should not be left in formalism or be limited to the organs of the People’s Power, where they also do not function efficiently, being practically restricted to the work of the grassroots delegates. The extension and improvement of these periodic processes of accountability is unavoidable, not only of delegates and deputies to their constituents but also of all elected representatives, including all leaders (elected or not) of both bodies and agencies, in the State, the Party, the youth and mass organisations, and the corresponding representative bodies of the population.<sup>29</sup> It is already urgent to create appropriate political-legal devices, including a corresponding entity, body or institute that guarantees real transparency and access to information according to socialist objectives.<sup>30</sup> This would facilitate the path to greater popular participation and contribute to the definitive neutralisation of the ‘secrecy’ and formalism that freezes the activity of many Cuban institutions and organisations.
5. It is essential to constantly raise the political role of the labour collectives (groups of workers) as the foundations of the democratic participatory system.<sup>31</sup> These are a kind of ‘microsystem’ within the political system taken as a ‘macrosystem’. In them the main elements of the Cuban

political system are concentrated in the microscale: the Party (represented by a nucleus or committee); the State (by the corresponding administration); the Young Communists (by one or more grassroots committees); the Trades Unions (by a union section or bureau of a determined union); and various socio-professional organisations. Then, developing in these, are the necessary relations for the stability of the collectives, based on the norms and regulations in force, and fighting for the consolidation of a political culture and ideology according to the objectives of the work centre in question, and of the socialist society as a whole. Granting greater power to the workers strengthens the political roles of all these microscale elements, which means consolidating the very basis of the Cuban political system.

From here, it should be clear that it is necessary to complement the territorial principle of representation with that of labour<sup>32</sup> (not achieved in other socialist experiences). To do this today it will be necessary to take into account the economic transformations that have been implemented and those that will continue,<sup>33</sup> which have introduced new economic and social actors since the 1990s. A prime objective would be the strengthening of socialist economic and political actors. Labour representation would mean the election of popular representatives (delegates and deputies) in the most important companies and entities of the different territories or on a national level, which would contribute to granting more authority to the corresponding groups, and would favour greater popular control by the assemblies on the activities of those institutions.

6. As a fundamental criterion and as an excellent indicator of the improvement of democracy and political development in Cuba, we must continuously improve the forms, ways and mechanisms of participation that are increasingly broad, active, direct, systematic, creative, real and effective in all population sectors. This is essential not only in the elections, but in the elaboration and taking of all the most transcendental (strategic) political decisions of the country, on the economy and other spheres, in the proposal and approval of the main laws, without formalities or interference, without excessive tutelage of managers, officials or political organisations.

What would be the criteria to determine the effectiveness of participation? It is an issue not resolved in essence by liberal theories and the capitalist system.

But the Marxist Political Sciences and the various socialist experiences have also not resolved the issue in all its many dimensions, although the latter have offered some theoretical advances and practical examples in the attainment of that political ideal.

As already expressed in the section of this article referring to popular consultation, the author points out the four experiences that he considers most transcendental of all times in the Cuban political-participative practice and, at the same time, highlights that the current consultation, if it achieves the expected quality, will be at the same level.

The Cuban Political Sciences should recommend future forms and moments of application of those experiences as they did in relation to the popular consultation that now (August–November 2018) is taking place in the country. They could be exploited and generalised in the future in the process of continually updating the Cuban political model by the organisms and institutions of the State, and the political and mass organisations. In each case the particularities, and the enormous potential of the intelligence and the capacities of the basic men and women, which are not always sufficiently taken into account, would need to be the foundation of the process. We must continue to promote them in future strategic national debates, in which all sectors and social groups have a lot to say: the worker and the intellectual, the peasant and the scientist, the cooperativist and the leader, the student and the self-employed (private), the retiree and the housewife, in short, all the citizens of the country, to build a national political consensus on these issues and achieve a more conscious, enthusiastic and creative embrace of the issues that are promoted from the leadership of the Party or the Government. Initiatives ‘from above’ (Party or Government leadership) should more strongly integrate proposals ‘from below’, they should promote the decisions from the bases of the political system, from the population itself through their organisations and associations. Such decisions from below could involve, for example, promoting new laws, the repeal or modification of other obsolete ones, proposing solutions to not only local problems but also macrosystemic ones, such as, for example, the updating and conceptualisation of the economic model or the total constitutional reform that is being promoted. A national political debate on the new Electoral Law could be the next demonstration of the growing democratism of the Cuban Revolution.

Other relatively recent participatory manifestations have been of particular interest, such as the national political debate convened by President Raúl Castro himself on the main ideas of his speech on 26 July 2007 about Cuban

society, which involved more than 5 million people. Nearly 50 per cent of the proposals were critical of the country's problems, and all were taken into account first in the formulation of the draft guidelines and then in the preparatory discussions for the Sixth Party Congress which was held in 2011, with resulting extensive changes from the original proposals to the finally accepted guidelines. Equally important were the national discussions by all workers in 2008 of the new Social Security Law projects in 2008, and their discussions in 2013 of the new Labour Code. These discussions were called for by the national parliament.

### **The electoral system and its peculiarities**

The improvement of the electoral system<sup>34</sup> requires the following:

1. Expand the mechanisms of direct elections, that is, voting for an increasing number of public positions is done directly by citizens. The direct election for provincial delegates and deputies since 1992 was a highly positive change, which added to the already traditional direct election of the municipal delegates. This procedure has the potential to be used not only in the organs of Popular Power (the governing bodies), but also in political organisations, including the Party. This author considers it possible to promote the direct election, in addition, of the new provincial governors that are proposed in the current constitutional project, starting from an open candidacy with at least two candidates. Such a proposition of course must also be considered and discussed by the political and mass organisations.
2. Correct the structure of the candidacy commissions and their functions. They are the bodies created by the Electoral Law of 1992 to assist the electoral commissions in proposing candidates for provincial delegates and deputies. Their proposals for nominations are submitted to the corresponding municipal assemblies, and then for direct election by the people.

We must achieve greater flexibility in the selection of the members of these commissions. We must keep the representatives of the mass organisations, but integrate specialists – with solid ethical, professional, scientific and political training – of national or local prestige, as full members or as direct and effective advisers to those bodies, with voice and vote.

The greater democratisation of the procedure for the preparation and modification of candidacies is vital. We must promote, among other aspects, that these be open and, on the other side, restore the decisive role of the municipal

assemblies not only in the nomination of candidates for provincial delegates and deputies but also in proposing them. It is recommended to avoid that the candidacy commissions ‘monopolise’ the power to propose and that the assemblies – maximum organ of power in the territory – lack it. The problem is that the Electoral Law of 1992 granted to the commissions of candidates greater authority than to the local assemblies in the proposing of candidates for provincial delegates and deputies.

3. Certainly, we must guarantee a necessary increase in the possibility of delegates from the base (municipalities) to attain positions in the national legislature. We must establish, in a new electoral law, the growth of the proportion of such delegates from the base to more than 50 per cent, among other proposals.<sup>35</sup>

In these last two aspects, the Electoral Law of 1992 goes backwards, to a certain extent, with respect to the previous one of 1976 (García Brigos 1998), which established at least 50 per cent. The current Electoral Law stipulates, ‘. . . up to 50% . . .’, which has led to levels of about 46 per cent or less. For the strategic political decisions that a parliament must assume in socialism, it is not a negligible percentage reduction. The new Law should favour greater power of the local assemblies and restore as an inviolable rule the figure of more than 50 per cent of the deputies coming from the pool of the delegates of the municipalities, which must also be accompanied by a more rigorous proposal and nomination system to achieve better delegates. This would avoid any tendency to reduce the representativeness of local delegates in the National Assemblies and would hinder elitist positions, whether overt or hidden. With the proposal to raise the mandate of these popular representatives to 5 years – the same time as the deputies – their stability in parliament would be guaranteed.

4. We must explore the possibility of establishing, during the general elections, a longer time between the election of the municipal delegates and the voting on the national deputies. This would guarantee a greater knowledge by the electorate, and accumulation of practical-political experience by the municipal delegates before the national elections. This would support a more conscious and effective nomination and election of the national deputies, by the assemblies and the electoral population, respectively. A complementary variant that appeared as a proposal in previous publications of this author several years ago has already appeared in the draft of the new Constitution,

namely, the extension of the mandate of the municipal delegates to 5 years. This would mean greater preparation of the municipal delegates in political practice, and a better use of their experience in the representative, participatory and deliberative management of the State. This would not cause a problem of entrenchment of inept delegates, since the Constitution and the Law provide for the revocation of mandates in case the elected representatives do not fulfil their duties.

5. A closer link between the deputies and the territories for which they are elected is also necessary. On the one hand this would imply the advisability of not nominating candidates for deputies for localities in which they do not reside, except in exceptional cases established by law. On the other hand this would imply greater control of the representatives at all levels by their constituents.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Communist Party of Cuba: its relations with the State and its democratisation**

The process of perfecting the political system in Cuba requires clarifying the relationship between the Party and the Government – in its broadest sense. This is an extremely complex matter since it refers to issues such as the unity of power, the single-party regime, the independence of the State, the aforementioned constitutional precept regarding the Party's statute, and other problems. Theoretically, the Party, which is structured from the central level (national) to the work centres and residence areas of its members, makes recommendations to government bodies and agencies at all levels of the country for decision-making. That at least has been the traditional conception in the Cuban Revolution, that it is the governmental bodies and agencies who must assume the final decisions on the fundamental issues. But in political practice, neither in Cuba nor in any previous socialist experience, has the Communist Party fully achieved the separation of its functions from those of the State – including the parliament, the executive and the judicial power. It often supplants them and, in fact, assumes real power over state institutions.

Although, for many, the solution lies in the relevance of establishing a multiparty system in Cuba, for many others, the solution lies in strengthening the real power of public institutions and their representatives, in the face of the power that the Party has concentrated in its organisational structures and in particular directors. In other words, it is a question of returning the protagonism – read the real command – to the system of Popular Power. The Party needs to focus on the work of political mobilisation, on the ideological work

with its militants and the entire population, and on political influence through its members on all actors of the political system from the central level to the base, for the achievement of socialist goals.

It is necessary to carry out an exhaustive, careful, but precise, review of what the aforementioned constitutional precept implies for the Party, to undertake an examination of the structures and functions inside the Party, and of the Party's relations with all the other components of the political system. A clear example is the electoral system. The actions to be carried out by the organisation as a non-electoral party are still not regulated by law. Theoretically, it does not nominate candidates, and in fact, it does not do so in certain phases of the process, nor is its function to organise the electoral process. But it is directly involved in the approval of proposals, for example, for members of the Council of State, and other positions. In any political relationship, we must reaffirm the principle that the highest regulators of the political system are the Constitution and the Law, and there can be no organisation or directive on the margin or above them. This is in the tradition of Cuban revolutionary political thought, and has been clearly reaffirmed since the process of elaboration of the first socialist Constitution itself in the 1970s.

It is fundamental to point out that in the *Work Objectives of the Communist Party of Cuba*, it is proposed 'to eliminate in the methods and work style of the Party the interference and supplanting of functions and decisions that correspond to the Government and the administrative institutions' (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b 4; Objective No. 5). This implies respecting the authority of the managers and the management bodies in the adoption of decisions according to their responsibilities. This is a proposal directed at solving an old problem that has not been solved by any socialist experience. It is a great challenge for the Party, the government and Cuban public administration. But, it must be resolved in the short term as part of the strengthening of political institutions and the legitimacy of the Party itself, the State and the entire political organisation of society.

A possible development trend of the Cuban political system, of central importance in this process, together with the aforementioned adjustments in relations with the State, is the improvement of the mechanisms of internal democracy in the Communist Party, its style and methods of work, and in the interrelation of the Party with the other elements of the political system, and among the other elements of the political system themselves. Such an increased democratisation of the Party in its internal life and in its projection towards the whole political system would strengthen its role as a force that binds together all sectors of the population, in a more efficient and creative way.

The Party leaders must more and more attempt to convince with an increasingly well-argued, updated, contextualised and scientific discourse, which will continue to stimulate more direct, participatory and innovative Party electoral processes and to promote broader and more open debate within its ranks. The style and methods of these more participatory and humanised debates will make them more evident and convincing in the eyes of the Party's own militants and of the entire population. This would continue legitimising the Party as a leading force in society. Because it is a single party, it has to be more democratic than any other that could be thought of, as was underlined by the current First Secretary of the organisation, Raúl Castro. It must guarantee constant debate and controversy, and popular control, at least on the part of its rank and file, over the whole Party structure. It must assure the accountability of all its leaders to the Party bases and, why not, to the bases of all the population, taking into account that there should be no organisation or directive outside of the Constitution, of the laws, or beyond popular control.

This important challenge of the Cuban political system implies that, as has been pointed out by the outstanding Cuban social scientist Aurelio Alonso, the Leninist formula of 'democratic centralism' for the exercise of power should not be that of consecrating the centralist inclination to decide, with the democratic aspects only for providing support. Rather, the merit of democratic centralism should be that all centralised action is subject to what is democratically decided (Alonso 2007) through, of course, the necessary deliberative process. An ideology of the Cuban Revolution would present that, and should also be conceived as a system of plural ideas, that advocates unity in diversity. That is, a unity that is not necessarily unanimous, nor one in which everyone thinks the same, or has the same opinion on all matters. Such a position is false in current, complex and contradictory societies. It is necessary to promote, according to Jose Martí, the unity of organisation, thought, and action, but not the 'servility of opinion'; unity in the revolutionary socialist strategic objectives, but not in the tactics, in the forms, and in the concrete ways of their realisation.

A key goal is 'to maintain the periodicity established in the Statutes for the celebration of the Congresses of the Party' (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b 4; Objective No. 17). The decision of non-compliance, as agreed by the Conference, will only be in exceptional situations and under democratic procedures. The matter is of great importance, since it refers to the rescue of a political norm that is the basic principle of Party democracy: respect for the authority of Congress as the highest governing body of the political organisation.

It is also considered feasible that some possible new electoral mechanisms within the State – such as the extension of direct elections – can be applied to the Party, as well as to youth and mass organisations.

There are other actions that the Party leadership must rethink and design very well. Take, for example, the discussion of the Base Document for the first National Conference of the Party that was not carried out by all the people (as was done with the Guidelines), but only by the Party and Youth militants. This issue received minimal explanation. Some people argued the restricted participation was appropriate because the Conference would focus its attention on the internal life of the Party, but this was not completely true and so legitimate only to a certain extent. Given the expectations created in the concrete historical moment, and as a norm that could be rethought in the future, no action should call into question the conception of the Party as that of the Cuban nation, or weaken its legitimacy in the eyes of the different social sectors. If it is a single party, which claims to represent all social interests, the majority of the population feels it is their right – also legitimately – to express their opinions and make proposals about everything that falls to it.

As a conclusion to this section, it is suggested that the strengthening of the leading role of the Party in society, as the Party of the Cuban nation – which should also be a trend of development of the political system – should always be governed not by the fact that the Constitution formally grants it, but rather because the Party legitimises itself with popular support, guaranteeing unity around the broader socialist objectives. The innovations related to the Party – with their most immediate antecedents in the 1990s – would consolidate and legitimise it as a party not of a single class or of an ideology restricted to a certain conception of the world, but rather as a representative of the interests of the broadest popular sectors and of the entire Cuban nation. It will have an ideology of the Revolution common to all those who opt for patriotism, sovereignty, national independence, equality (not egalitarianism), the greatest possible social justice, national unity, anti-imperialism, and authentic and renewed socialism, appropriate to the particularities of the country.

### **Social sciences and politics**

There is a crucial objective, an old demand of Cuban society, which has still not acquired a significant dimension: to develop research in Social Sciences and socio-political and opinion studies<sup>37</sup> – the latter must be part of them – to make greater and more efficient use of their results in the decision-making processes concerning contemplated social changes. This is necessary for the proper

evaluation of the impacts in all sectors of society, and to continue to delve into a more precise conceptualisation of the theoretical foundations of the desirable socialist development model for Cuba, in all its integrality. These essential purposes constitute an idea reflected in the *Work Objectives of the Party*, which has been an unsolved problem and requires systematic attention. Such a guarantee is not possible if the intention is not duly institutionalised, if a public policy is not established that projects it, offers adequate moral, material and financial support, and regulates a closer and harmonious relationship between social and political science, between the results of scientists and the formulation of policy and decision-making.

It is crucial – I insist on this – to consider integrality and multidisciplinary in the analyses of proposals for decision-making. It is not always taken into account that phenomena and processes that refer to specific spheres of society cannot be analysed in isolation, outside of their relationship with other social manifestations. We must demand that, by design, specialists be integrated in decisional transitions. Such specialists should be not only from a specific field of knowledge, but also from other related branches of knowledge, or of people with integral knowledge of several scientific disciplines.

It is also necessary that socio-political and public opinion studies carried out by the Party establish a closer and non-formal link with the academy, with universities and social research centres, and with specialists from those institutions who can support research, and enrich the studies from these links. Modest changes of this nature have been observed, and it is a good indication that a group of recommendations made from Cuban social, economic and political science have been reflected in the speeches of President Raúl Castro and in the agreements of the Party forums referenced in this article.

## Conclusion

The analysis of policy in the sense of ideas, relationships and the decision-making of public authorities in the field of economics is moving, more or less, in time with the reform process, even ahead of its projections and strategies, although we may still be awaiting noticeable results. However, policy is not flowing at the same pace in terms of the structuring and functioning of the state, of political relations, of the regulatory, cultural and ideological elements of the political system, which must continue to be transformed.

The updating of the political model has begun to play a more relevant role in the public debate in 2018, in search of a national consensus that allows the Cuban population to feel involved and a protagonist in the changes, so that it

can accompany them with greater awareness, enthusiasm and honesty. This is all happening unavoidably for Cuba at the same time as the struggle against the strong attempts to push back the process of Latin American integration, and the struggle for a more fruitful insertion of Cuba into the current international system. Through coordinated, effective and legitimised action of all revolutionary political and social actors, the socialist character, the unity of the people, the continuity of their power, national sovereignty and independence can be preserved and strengthened. All this – read the transition to socialism – can only become irreversible if socialist political power is perfected. This, in turn, can become truly irrevocable if it is permanently legitimised through, above all, the promotion of more and more real and effective participation (with the other attributes already mentioned) of the population in the formulation of proposals, and in making the most important political decisions of the country. If, through this process, real collective and individual prosperity is achieved, that would mean developing the satisfaction, including in an ecological sense, of the fundamental rational and material needs of individuals, the greatest possible social justice, and a growing development of true democracy. Only then will the idea of a prosperous, sustainable, democratic, and irreversible socialism in Cuba be viable.

(Translated by Stephen Wilkinson and Al Campbell)

## Notes

1. Emilio Duharte Díaz is Full Professor and Researcher of Political Science, Applied Ethics and Social Studies on Science, Technology and Innovation at the University of Havana, Cuba. He is also Vice President of the Permanent National Court for the defence of Doctorates in Political Sciences.
2. In this context the term political transition is directly inserted into the conception of the transition period from capitalism to socialism posed by classical Marxism. In its perspective in relation to power, the State and the political system, it is the political transition to socialism, a concept in use today by Marxist literature and some non-Marxist.
3. As President Raúl Castro, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), himself indicated: ‘What we approve in this Congress cannot suffer the same fate as the agreements of the previous ones, almost all forgotten without having been fulfilled’ (see: Castro Ruz 2011).
4. The term reform is understood by this author from the classical Marxist theoretical perspective, not as an antithesis of revolution – an understanding to some extent obsolete, at least not very usual in the current moment and traditionalist meaning of the term – but rather as a corrective element, rectifier of the socialist course.

5. The Council of State is the body that represents the National Assembly between sessions, since it does not sit on a permanent basis. It has legislative powers – issuing decrees–laws – which must then be presented to the parliament for approval.
6. Several of these discourses are referred to in the bibliography.
7. A more detailed analysis of these processes can be found in: Duharte Díaz (2016) and also Duharte Díaz (2010a).
8. In strictly academic and scientific terms – even though they contain euphemisms that often accompany political language – the use of the term ‘updating of the economic model’ – which is not excluded by this author – leads to several questions and answers that are not the objective of this article. (More information about them can be read in the aforementioned Duharte Díaz 2016.) Of these, the one that is most interesting right now is the following: Is the updating the antithesis of the reforms, or is it detached from the reforms, as stated in some scenarios? Can a model be updated, whatever it may be, regardless of the reforms to it? The answers seem obvious.
9. *The Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution* constitute a political document approved in the VI Congress of the PCC and then in the National Assembly of the People’s Power (2011) – after a national public debate – that contains more than 300 guidelines for the new economic and social reforms to be developed in Cuba, to overcome the economic crisis and further the economic and social development of the country. The debate took place in all the grassroots organisations of the Party and the Union of Young Communists, the mass organisations (trade unions, peasants, students, women and neighbourhoods), the labour collectives of all the enterprises and institutions of the country, and in the communities. Concrete proposals were made during the national debate that modified 68 per cent of the political document that was originally submitted for discussion. More details about this discussion process can be found in the article already mentioned: Duharte Díaz (2016).
10. It is worth noting here that a legal value is given to events of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), because Article 5 of the Socialist Constitution establishes that the PCC is the ‘highest leading force of society and of the State’ (see *Constitución de la República de Cuba* 2010). In the analysis of the possible reforms at the end of this article, the theme of the Communist Party is taken up again.
11. With the participation of all the grassroots organisations and governing bodies of the Party and the Union of Young Communists (UJC), numerous proposals emerged that modified most of the initial proposals of the Base Document, and included five others.
12. A few issues discussed at the Conference – the most novel for this article – will be taken up again here. For more information on its results, see Duharte Díaz (2016).
13. The concept of a culture war in this context refers to the type of confrontation between the US and Cuba that is already taking place today, and will be reinforced in the future. It is based on the change of methods that has been proposed by the US government to achieve ideological-cultural penetration and support for anti-system groups in Cuba, with the aim of changing its economic and political system. It is an

- intention clearly expressed since 17 December 2014 by President Barack Obama and other representatives of the US government.
14. This subject is discussed later, when the theme of the Party is discussed.
  15. These ideas have been reiterated in different events and publications over the previous decade and were synthesised in Duharte Díaz (2016).
  16. Here we will try to present an updated and expanded version of the set of concrete proposals formulated by the author of this article from 1998 to the present. Consult the books, articles and papers of the author that appear in the bibliography. These proposals have also been socialised in different postgraduate, master's and doctorate courses, specialised conferences in universities and other national institutions, and international scientific courses and events in Cuba and other countries, such as the US, Russia, Mexico, Republic of China and South Korea. Two sources for a number of proposals for changes by Cuban and other economists, sociologists and political scientists are *Socialism and Democracy* (2010) and *Socialism and Democracy* (2016).
  17. The popular constitutional consultation was scheduled to take place from 13 August to 15 November 2018, after which the parliamentary commission appointed by the National Assembly for that purpose was planned to introduce the modifications of national consensus and those considered of greatest importance for the socialist project. The opinions of the higher organs of the Party were then to be taken into account, and, finally, the popular referendum that will be developed for final approval was planned for February 2019.
  18. In the country to the present, the *Guidelines* have been understood in a controversial and contradictory manner. The aforementioned Duharte Díaz (2016) article distinguishes at least four understandings.
  19. The workers' parliaments were workers' assemblies held in 1994, which the National Assembly called in search of consensus on the application of the main economic reforms of the 1990s. This was a novel event. The deputies did not reach consensus on the reforms that had to be approved, as the criteria were so diverse and conflicting that they demanded a deepening of the debate and a better study of the matter. This response showed the political development of the deputies, and it would be advisable that this should happen more frequently in Parliament's work. Instead of using 'shock therapies', very fashionable but not appropriate for a socialist regime, the national parliament delegated part of its functions to assemblies of grassroots labour collectives and, after achieving consensus, convened a session of the Assembly to approve those reforms accepted by the majority of the country's workers. The other three experiences mentioned had similar achievements, about which little is discussed, either abroad or even in Cuba itself.
  20. A classification of the different stages of development of the Cuban political system can be read in Duharte Díaz (2000) and Duharte Díaz (2014).
  21. More on the figures of governor and mayor below.
  22. Consult the document *Proyecto de Constitución de la República de Cuba* (2018).
  23. In Cuba, the National Assembly of People's Power does not function as a permanent organ but holds, regularly, two sessions: in the middle and at the end of each year.

- The new constitutional project keeps it that way. Later, a different proposal is proposed by this author.
24. The formula of the President and Vice President seems appropriate, although this author proposes to further democratise the process of their election: that it be made from an open candidacy (at least two candidates for each position) formed from proposals not only from the Political Bureau of the Party but also from the deputies and from the provincial and municipal governments.
  25. See below for an electoral proposal for provincial governors by this author.
  26. The latter does satisfy the proposal that this and other authors have made previously.
  27. This idea reflects a proposal that has already been presented to readers in previous publications: Duharte Díaz (2010b: 435).
  28. This document proposes to ‘project the gradual renovation of the cadres in the management positions, establishing term limits by time and age according to the functions and complexities of each responsibility. Limit to a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms the performance of the [. . .] fundamental positions’ (Partido Comunista de Cuba 2012b 7; Objective No. 76) in the State and political organisations.
  29. I return to this subject when analysing the role of the Party below.
  30. It could be an Institute of Transparency and Access to Information, directly subordinated to the National Assembly.
  31. In the theoretical order, labour collectives were not considered for a long time as elements of the political system of the society of transition to socialism. This idea began to gain strength in the social-scientific literature of the socialist countries in the first half of the 1980s, due to the increase in the socio-political role of the collectives and the need to scientifically substantiate the ways of perfecting that role. Unfortunately, the idea did not materialise in a meaningful dimension. It has not done so either in Cuba.
  32. An analysis of this issue is made in the work of Dr Miguel Limia David (2000). Other authors have also referred to the topic.
  33. We must zealously take care that the new economic transformations are aimed at accelerating the recovery, raising the level and quality of life of the population in correspondence with the objectives of socialism, stabilising the labour–salary relationship, improving the national situation concerning housing, food and transportation, and meeting other demands of the population. In short, we must work continuously for the material and spiritual prosperity of the people.
  34. This has been the aspect most worked on by this author in the sphere of possible political reforms in Cuba. His proposals appear in publications from 1998 onwards. In addition to his works listed in the bibliography, see Cobo *et al.* (2013a, 2013b) and Peláez *et al.* (2015), of which he was a co-author.
  35. This idea would only refer to the highest body of state power if the proposal contained in the project for a new Constitution to suppress the provincial assemblies of People’s Power is finally approved.
  36. An extension of the criteria on the subject can be found in numerous presentations and publications by this author, and in García Brigos (1998, 100–108).
  37. This refers to opinion polls and analyses of them.

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