

New Cuban constitution strikes references to “communism,” recognizes private property

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On June 22, Cuban state media reported that the government had approved the draft for a new constitution, replacing the current one put in place in 1976. Preliminary reports described the “blueprint” for the constitution as a “total reform,” with the process presided over by former president Raúl Castro with the involvement of a hand-picked group of high level officials, including current president Miguel Díaz-Canel. It is expected that final approval will occur via a referendum to be completed by November 15.

Altogether, the announced changes herald a new stage in the Cuban government’s dismantling of the radical reforms enacted in an earlier period by the petty-bourgeois nationalist regime of Fidel Castro.

Among the most significant of the announced changes are a “recognition of the role of the market and new forms of property, including private,” and a recognition of “the importance of foreign investment for the economic development of the country, with the appropriate guarantees.” While written in the oblique style of the Cuban bureaucracy, the decision to strike references to “communism” from the document makes the meaning clear enough. Not only will there be an expansion of the operation of the market to further sectors of the economy, but also a legal reintroduction of private property in the means of production and protections for foreign investments and property.

These constitutional changes are meant to enshrine and deepen many of the changes already enacted by the Cuban regime under Raúl Castro in recent years. One of these is the creation of the *cuentapropistas*, or “self-employed.” This group, which numbers at least 600,000, or more than 10 percent of the total labor force, was created largely through the elimination of jobs in the state sector. Some reports estimate that as many as four in 10 Cubans of working age are involved

in the private sector in some way, as it is the only way to get access to the currency increasingly needed to make ends meet as austerity initiatives have led to dwindling state subsidies.

Many of the small businesses created by the *cuentapropistas*, including the more successful restaurants, salons and construction companies, have long complained about the unclear legal status of their businesses. By recognizing private property, which already exists in fact, the door is opened for the future sale and purchase of these businesses, as well as a vast expansion of their number and a further shrinking of vast sections of the stagnant and largely unprofitable state sector.

More importantly, the Cuban government is desperate to integrate the Cuban economy more directly into the world market, primarily by attracting foreign investment and offering up Cuban workers to direct exploitation by foreign capital in exchange for a cut of the proceeds, along the model of China. Indeed, the wealth of the Chinese Stalinists, and their ability to pass along property to friends and relatives, has no doubt fueled the Cuban ruling elite’s desire for a legal regime in which that is possible.

In 2014, changes to laws on foreign investment made possible firms with 100 percent foreign ownership, and in the past year Foreign Trade and Investment Minister Rodrigo Malmierca has announced that at least 11 such ventures have been initiated. The recognition of their private property and the addition of protections for foreign investment to the constitution is no doubt intended to allay fears that the government might back out of a partnership, demand a renegotiation of the terms or even expropriate a business were it to become successful.

The Cuban regime is basing itself on the recognition

that it may no longer be able to count on Venezuela to supply the island with enormous oil subsidies. As Cuba only produces enough energy to meet 30 to 40 percent of its domestic needs, any change to this arrangement would necessitate devastating cuts in energy consumption or devastating cuts of other crucial imports, like food, in order to come up with the US dollars necessary to purchase energy on the world market.

The government hopes to avoid at all costs a return to the “Special Period” of the 1990s, when the dissolution of the USSR ended its support of Cuba’s economy. The result was widespread economic collapse and hunger, as well as protests against the government, like the *Maleconazo* of August 1994.

Back in 2016, a deputy editor of *Granma* warned that announced cuts to energy consumption could lead to protests, and this time “there is no Fidel to go to the Malecon,” that is, to personally defuse social tensions. Unlike in 1994, there is also now no safety valve of relatively easy entry into the United States for the Cubans most unhappy with the regime since Barack Obama ended the “wet-foot, dry-foot” policy just before leaving office.

This concern has no doubt accelerated as a result of the seemingly abrupt halt to the rapprochement with Washington following the election of Donald Trump, which resulted in the reimposition of travel restrictions as well as a drastic curtailment of consular services and diplomatic personnel at the US embassy in Cuba following extremely murky claims of brain damage and other neurological symptoms among embassy staff.

It is on this basis that the Cuban regime is willing to risk allowing private property, which would create a basis for long-term wealth and power outside of the petty-bourgeois nationalist bureaucracy, and, through the foreign investment guarantees, a more strongly defensible beachhead for international capital.

The government hopes to shore up its support among these growing petty-bourgeois layers through the creation of a new post of prime minister, thereby diluting the power of the presidency, and also through the legalization of same-sex marriage. No doubt it aims to use the latter to burnish its “progressive” credentials internationally, after decades of harassment and persecution of LGBT individuals.

Despite the claims of the Cuban regime that the

changes “must be incorporated into the constitutional text, by virtue of our experiences constructing socialism,” and that the “irrevocability of socialism and the political system” will remain a clause in the constitution, the truth is that what exists in Cuba is not socialism and never was.

While the petty-bourgeois nationalist Castro regime was able to take the power that fell into its hands, in the absence of a revolutionary workers party, and impose radical measures, even to the point of nationalizing the means of production, the result was never socialism, which can only be established on the basis of a revolution carried out by the working class internationally.

For Cuban workers to defend themselves against the assault by the Cuban government and prepare for such a revolution, it is above all necessary to establish a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Cuba.



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