

New Cuban constitution recognizes private property

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The Cuban government has adopted a new constitution, approved by a referendum on Sunday whose overall outcome was not in doubt, explicitly allowing private property. The constitution enshrines earlier initiatives to more deeply integrate the country into the global economy and dismantle what remains of the radical economic measures taken in an earlier period.

Above all, the new constitution signals the preparation for an all-out assault on the Cuban working class and the social welfare measures that distinguish its standard of living from that of other Latin American and Caribbean nations.

According to the National Electoral Commission, the constitutional referendum passed with 86.9 percent of voters approving the document. According to official news agencies, turnout for the referendum was at least 7.8 million, or 84.4 percent of eligible voters, following an aggressive campaign by the government to get out the vote and encourage approval. This is less than the 97.8 percent who voted for the previous constitution of 1976. The lower turnout is an expression, though distorted, of dissatisfaction with the Cuban government.

The most significant of the changes to the constitution is the explicit recognition of private property in “certain” means of production by “natural or juridical Cubans or foreigners.” In other words, the provision goes beyond the sanctification of the small-time operations of most *cuentapropistas*, or “self-employed” people. This measure is preparing the ground for the future privatization of state companies and property and the expansion of the activity of foreign corporations on the island.

The constitution includes language asserting that socialism is “irrevocable,” that the “socialist economy”

will “regulate and control the market” and that private property will play a “complementary role in the economy.” Aside from the fact that the Cuban Revolution was not a socialist revolution and it never established socialism, similar claims were made by the Stalinist bureaucracies just as they prepared to reintroduce capitalist property and market relations into the Eastern European economies some 30 years ago.

Vadim Medvedev, one of the chief ideologists of *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union, argued that “socialist property has many different forms” which “makes it flexible and capable of responding to different economic conditions in different sectors and regions.” Even today, the Chinese Stalinists insist on referring to Chinese capitalism as “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the working class was devastating, with life expectancy falling and indices of social misery skyrocketing in the years following 1989–91.

Many of the new provisions in the constitution are aimed at winning the support of Cuba’s burgeoning middle class, which has seen its wealth grow in recent years from connections abroad that can supply hard currency or goods for business ventures, and which increasingly sees its interests coinciding with those of foreign capital.

Though the constitution is clear that the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) will remain the “fundamental pillar” and “leading political force” in the country, the government clearly hopes that a mild democratic gloss and legalization of business activities and investment sources will appeal to these layers.

Among these new provisions are the introduction of the post of prime minister and the imposition of term limits on the Cuban president who is now allowed two

five-year terms, a far cry from Fidel Castro's 49 years as head of government. Additionally, provincial assemblies are to be dismantled and replaced by a system of presidentially appointed governors and deputy governors, along with a devolution of responsibilities to municipalities.

Several reforms have also been made to the legal system which now, on paper, recognizes the presumption of innocence and habeas corpus in criminal cases, and allows lawsuits against the state for damages and negligence.

In deference to considerations of the growth of identity politics among the petty-bourgeoisie, the new constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Earlier plans to explicitly allow same-sex marriage were removed from the final draft after pushback from the Catholic Church and a number of evangelical churches.

After having been removed in the draft constitution, the phrase "advancing toward a communist society" was put back in the final version, apparently due to overwhelming popular feedback, no doubt a reflection of the opposition of Cuban workers to several decades of immense growth in inequality.

The government has been sensitive to criticism of the new constitution and has campaigned aggressively for a yes vote, even making support for it tantamount to a blow against Yankee imperialism in Latin America, which is at this moment staging a provocation aimed at regime change against Cuba's principal ally, Venezuela.

Indeed, the Cuban government's new constitution and drive to de-nationalize industry and expand market relations throughout the country are driven by the recognition that it can no longer rely on deep subsidies from Venezuela or survive another "Special Period" without a social upheaval. Basing itself not on the international working class, it seeks support from international capital in the hopes of preserving the privileges of the bureaucracy.

The developments in Cuba have entirely vindicated the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which rejected the claims that the Castro regime had implemented socialism in Cuba, above all by the Pabloite revisionists, who hailed Castro as a "natural Marxist," and abandoned the fight for the building of the Fourth International throughout

Latin America and the colonial world.

The fight against the destruction of what remains of Cuba's social welfare system and the growth of social inequality can only be carried out under the leadership of a revolutionary socialist party basing itself on Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. For that reason, the fight to establish socialism in Cuba requires the building of a section of the ICFI.



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