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Vegard Bye

Cuba, From Fidel to Raúl and Beyond

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To Cuba's youth, wishing them the opportunity to form a future they can believe in.

FOREWORD

A decade has elapsed since Raul Castro took over the helm of Cuba's revolutionary regime, replacing the ailing brother who had personified the island's exceptionalist experiment in radical socialism for the previous half century. Across those decades, most commentators, whether sympathetic or critical, had taken it for granted that 'Castroism' required the personalist direction of Fidel, and that the loss of his charismatic authority would deal a severe (indeed probably irreparable) blow to regime continuity. But Raul (whose authority derived from organizational dexterity rather than personal magnetism) demonstrated the contrary.

Vegard Bye, thorough insightful, and up-to-date, assessment both explains how this was achieved and also documents the accumulated legacy of unresolved problems that confront the post-Castro successor generation that has assumed the reins of government in the extremely challenging conditions of 2019. The timing for such an exercise is just right, and the author is unusually well equipped for the task. He cannot, of course, really answer the question implicit in the title about what lies *beyond* the Castros, but he can and does provide a very balanced and well-founded account of the big issues at stake, and he makes good use of both his remarkable local knowledge and his study of the comparative evidence to ground a convincing set of alternative future scenarios. This is not just about the relatively narrow issue of 'who rules?', and under what constraints and dispensations (important and difficult to grasp as those topics are in Cuban conditions). The fundamental issue is not even whether the existing power structure can adapt sufficiently to retain control over the country in the coming generation, although the book makes clear that that is a hugely problematic challenge.

Ever since 1959, the Cuban Revolution ‘punched far above its weight’ in world affairs and in the collective consciousness of many millions, both at home and abroad. But the imagery of the ‘guerrillero heroico’ is now long past—a fading postcard from a different century—and today’s Cuban people have pressing needs and urgent tasks of catching up with the rest of the world that will determine their future allegiances, and the way they assess their latest cohort of rulers. They will require new avenues of expression, and new solutions to their quite basic problems, and how those needs are met (or not) will determine ‘where Cuba is going’ from here on. International solidarity and ideological support remain important assets for Havana, but grandiose claims can no longer be relied on to mask the material hardships and practical limitations of ‘really existing’ Cuban socialism. This volume provides a powerful diagnosis and a persuasive prospective outlook. Islanders and external well-wishers alike can learn much from Vegard Bye’s evaluation.

Nuffield College
Oxford, UK

Laurence Whitehead

PREFACE

The dissertation on which this book is based was for the degree called *doctor philosophiae*, Dr. philos., the old doctorate degree at Norwegian universities.

Although the University offers no academic or economic support for the work with this degree, I have been fortunate to have several academic colleagues and friends who have supported me throughout this process and thereby also with this book. Professors Olle Törnquist and Bernt Hagtvet, both of the Political Science Department at the University of Oslo, have offered good and important guidance and feedback. The same is the case for Professor Torbjørn L. Knutsen at Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim (NTNU) University (Trondheim), and for Professor Axel Borchgrevink at OsloMet University. I have also enjoyed a close collaboration and exchange of information and interpretations with a fellow doctorate candidate, anthropologist Ståle Wig, working on a highly related subject so crucial to the understanding of the changes taking place in Cuba: self-employment, or as the Cubans call it, *cuentapropismo*. The report by the Adjudication Committee on my dissertation and separate comments from the three members—Professor Terry Lynn Karl (Stanford University), Assistant Professor Marie-Laure Geoffray (Sorbonne Nouvelle), and Professor Emeritus Helge Hveem (University of Oslo)—have also been of great help.

The Dr. philos project has received economic support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Embassy in Havana.

There are so many persons I need to thank for their support. Many of them—but not all—are mentioned in the Appendix (Note on Sources). Most of all I want to thank the generous and hospitable Cuban people and all my Cuban friends and colleagues.

I want to thank Monica Førde Salater, who has helped me with the editing of the book manuscript.

Oslo/Havana
March 2019

Vegard Bye

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Quotations marked with S/E, are translated from Spanish to English by the author of the book.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

17D	The 17 December 2014 announcements on normalization of US-Cuban relations
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Venezuela-initiated Trade Alliance)
Almendrón	Vintage US-produced car from the 1950s, normally used as private taxi offering collective service on pre-determined routes in Havana
ANAP (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños)	National Association of Small Farmers
Anexionismo	The US philosophy favouring annexation of foreign territories—in this case, Cuba
Balseros	Persons who emigrate illegally in self-constructed or precarious vessels from Cuba to neighbouring states, most commonly to the United States
Bloqueo	The Cuban concept for the US-imposed commercial, economic and financial embargo against Cuba
Boteros	Private taxi owners and drivers (normally of <i>almendrones</i>)
Canasta básica	‘Basic basket’ of necessity consumption
Carretileros	Street vendors selling food (particularly vegetables and fruits) from a pushcart
Casas particulares	Private houses offered for bed and breakfast service to tourists
CCSs (Cooperativas de Crédito y Servicio)	Credit and Service Cooperatives

CDR (Comité de Defensa de la Revolución)	Neighbourhood Committees
CEEC	Centre for the Study of the Cuban Economy (research institution under the University of Havana)
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CENESEX (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual de Cuba)	National Centre for Sexual Education
Centro de Acopio	State Purchase Agency
CIMEX	Cuban Import-Export Corporation (military-controlled conglomerate)
CNA (Cooperativas no-agrícolas)	Non-agricultural (or urban) cooperatives
CTC (Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba)	Confederation of Cuban Workers (monopoly trade union confederation)
Cuentapropistas (Trabajadores por cuenta propia, TCP)	Self-employed workers (normally with a license to perform specific professions)
CUPET	Cuba's national oil company
ETECSA	Cuba's state-owned telecommunication company
FDI	Foreign direct investment
Foro de Sao Paulo	Conference of leftist political parties and other organisations from Latin America and the Caribbean
GAESA (Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A.)	Military-controlled business conglomerate
Gini Index	Measurement of inequality
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFIs	International financial institutions
Kulak	A comparatively wealthy peasant who employed hired labour; viewed by the Soviet Communist Party in the 1920s as class enemies and counter-revolutionaries
(De-) Kulakisation	Process of peasants being turned into kulaks (or vice versa)
Latifundistas	Owners of large commercial estates

Lineamientos (de la Política Económica y Social)	Guidelines (for the Economic and Social Policy)
Maleconazo	The August 1994 uprising on the <i>Malecón</i> against government policies in Cuba
MINAG (Ministerio de Agricultura)	Ministry of Agriculture
MINCIN	Ministry of Interior Commerce
MINFAR (Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias)	Ministry of Defence
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OAS	Organization of American States
ONEI (Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información)	Cuba's Bureau of Statistics
Paladares	Private restaurants
PCC	Partido Comunista de Cuba
Perestroika	Economic reforms ('restructuring') introduced by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union in 1987
Plattismo	The US intervention philosophy in Cuba based on the Platt Amendment (1901)
Rendición de cuentas	Spanish synonym for accountability
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SNTHT	Tourism and Hotel Workers Union (affiliated to CTC)
Trabajo por cuenta propia	Work as self-employed
UJC (Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas)	Communist Youth League
UNEAC	National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba
Unión del Niquel	Cuba's state-owned nickel production company
UPEC	Union of Cuban Journalists
UPR	Universal Periodic Review (organised by the UN Human Rights Council, where all UN member countries are routinely questioned for their human rights record)
USSR	Soviet Union
Usufructo	Usufruct (the right to enjoy the use of state property)
Usufructuarios	Those enjoying the right to use state property

Vendepatrias	‘Fatherland sell-outs’ (someone who is accused of selling out their country to a perceived foreign enemy)
WFP	World Food Programme
ZEDM (Zona Especial de Desarrollo Mariel)	Mariel Special Development Zone (or free-trade zone)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vegard Bye has been living in and visiting Cuba regularly since the late 1970s, starting with a two-year period as a Junior Professional with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Havana. Since 2010, in the run-up to the 6th Communist Party Congress when Raúl Castro's reform agenda was approved, the author has been coordinating an academic collaboration project with several Cuban institutions, first on behalf of the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), later on behalf of the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) at the University of Oslo. This has given him a unique opportunity to follow the Cuban economic and political transformations closely over a period of several years, collect empirical data and interpret the changes from a social science perspective, against the backdrop of a 40-year-long experience with the country.

The book is based on a Dr. philos dissertation, submitted to the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo in May 2018: *The End of an Era—or a New Start? Economic Reforms with Potential for Political Transformations on Raúl Castro's Watch (2008–2018)*.¹ The dissertation was successfully defended in January 2019. The book complements the dissertation with updated information on the first year (until April 2019) of the first non-Castro president since the 1959 Revolution.

The author has had most of his professional career outside of academic institutions, working with the UN (representing the High Commissioner for Human Rights in various countries), with Norwegian government

institutions (inter alia, as Head of the Latin America Bureau of Norad, the Norwegian Agency for International Development), as a reporter—including as war correspondent in Central America in the 1980s—and with different NGOs involved in international work. He has published several books, mostly in Norwegian and on Latin American affairs. Two of the books have been translated and published in Spanish:

La Paz Prohibida—El laberinto centroamericano de la década de los ochenta (DEI, San José Costa Rica, 1991).

Esto es Cuba—lo demás es cuento (Ediciones La Otra Cuba, Mexico D.F., 1996) (con Dag Hoel).

NOTE

1. The full dissertation can be downloaded here: <http://hdl.handle.net/10852/66018>.

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