

**CUBA'S RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION
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CERTIFICATE

This Dissertation entitled "Cuba's Relations with Soviet Union Since 1985" by Mr. Dalbir Singh for the Degree of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not previously been submitted for any degree of this or any other University.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.


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PREFACE

Between the time when Mikhail S. Gorbachev made his advent in the political horizon of the Soviet Union in 1985 and made public his new political thinking (novoe myshlenie) and today, far-reaching developments have taken place both within the Soviet Union and the East European countries. Most of these changes are, in a sense, direct consequence of Gorbachev's espousal of perestroika and glasnost leading to transformative changes in the well-entrenched communist regimes of Eastern Europe. Notwithstanding such historic transformations both in the Soviet Union and the East European countries, in distant Cuba the impact of the "new thinking" seems to be minimal. The revolution spearheaded by Fidel Castro in 1959 supported ever since by the Soviet Union appears to be still alive and continues to be led by the charismatic lider maximo.

What is more, the historic meeting between Fidel Castro and Mikhail Gorbachev in Havana in the year 1989, despite predictable public excitement, produced neither any serious rupture nor ushered in any significant changes in Cuba comparable to developments in Eastern Europe. If at all, Cuban socialism under Castro appears to be more militant and defiant to the extent of even challenging Gorbachev's "new thinking".

What then is the impact of Gorbachev's "new thinking" which as it was enunciated was intended to refurbish the communist ideology and institutions of the socialist society including importantly Cuba? Is it that Cuba is outside the scope of Gorbachev's "new thinking"? Is it, unlike Eastern Europe, the geographic remoteness of Cuba that makes it impervious for Cuba to undergo any changes? Is it the Caribbean variant of communism that explains why Cuba is not experiencing the trauma of change? In sum, what accounts for the survival and strength of Cuban socialism against the onslaught that the Soviet Union and East European countries have witnessed in terms of both the communist ideology and institutions? What then is the future of Cuba's socialism?

These and related questions are the major concern of the research project. Not that each of these questions is going to be discussed at length. On the other hand, what is intended in the study is to survey and analyse Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union ever since the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and to the extent possible seek some answers to the questions raised.

Most Cubanologists have taken note of the unfolding of events in respect of Cuba's relations with Soviet Union since the advent of Gorbachev. To most of them the period beginning since 1985 constitutes a departure from the earlier phase of Cuban-Soviet relations. However, they disagree among themselves on the question of the extent of the impact that the "new thinking" has had on Cuba. There are those who emphasise on a more equal relationship, based on the principle of consensus and accommodation, between the two countries as a consequence of the "new thinking". Then, there are others who argue that with Gorbachev's "new thinking", Cuba's options will become increasingly circumscribed and therefore likely to bring about the end of Castro's revolution. They also point out that United States may take this opportunity to undo Castro's socialist experiment in Cuba. Yet another group of Cubanologists is of the view that as a consequence of the changed Soviet global perceptions under Gorbachev's "new thinking", Cuba is likely to lose its strategic importance. Implicit in this analysis is that Cuban socialism and Castro's leadership could continue but the leading international role that Cuba has played in the past is likely to end in the coming years.

It is against these somewhat differing perspectives on the future of Castro's Cuba, what is contemplated in the present monograph is a descriptive survey of Cuba's perceptions, responses and Castro's initiatives regarding Gorbachev's "new thinking". To begin with a brief introduction will attempt a delineation of Cuba-Soviet relations beginning from 1959 to 1985. This will be followed by a careful analysis of Castro's responses to Gorbachev's pronouncements regarding both perestroika and glasnost and its applicability to Cuba. The monograph thereafter will focus on Soviet postures and policies including trade and economic assistance to Cuba and assess its impact on the domestic economy. Into this analysis an attempt will be made to catalogue the initiatives that Fidel Castro has taken to meet the impending crisis. These initiatives relate to reorganising the Cuban communist party both in terms of ideology and institutions as well as policy measures to revise Cuba's priorities--both domestic and international. Against the forgoing analysis a concluding chapter will make some prognoses regarding the future of both Castro's leadership and Cuba's socialism.

The study is based essentially on secondary source material such as books and periodical articles published on Cuba in recent years. Also, in terms of constructing the chronology of events, leading newspapers such as importantly Granma is used. The study is in essence a descriptive analysis of Cuba-Soviet relations since 1985.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The major focus of the monograph is to examine at length and analyse the relations between Cuba and Soviet Union since the assumption of office by Mikhail S. Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985 and his efforts towards implementing his novoe myshlenie. As a background to a study along these lines, in this first chapter a brief sketch of the evolving relations between Cuba and Soviet Union beginning from the time when Fidel Castro assumed power in Cuba in 1959 until 1985 is attempted essentially to emphasise that during those years too there were turns and twists in the relations between the two countries.

Conflict and Accommodation: 1959-1967

At the time when Fidel Castro marched victoriously into Havana in January 1959, Soviet Union neither visibly demonstrated much faith in his revolutionary movement nor was doubtless convinced about its staying in power against the open hostility of the United States. Equally, Castro and his guerilla fighters too were not keen in seeking Soviet Union's support at the time of the formation of Castro's revolutionary government.

It may be recalled the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) was excluded in the formation of the revolutionary government. The reasons were obvious. For one thing, the basic objective and the ideological thrust of the Cuban revolutionaries was different from that of the Soviet Union; it was nationalist in nature and content. In these formative years Castro even declared that he was neither a "Communist" nor a "Capitalist" but a "Cubanist" and supported "humanist democracy". That he was a nationalist and anti-colonialist was borne out by the fact that he sought more the support of the non-aligned group of Afro-Asian countries than any other.

Cuba's deteriorating relations with the US during 1959-1960, however, led Castro to seek outside economic and military support. Compatible interests such as US being acknowledged adversaries and shared interest in Third World national liberation movements contributed to growing warmth in Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union. In addition to it, Cuba's interest in Moscow's economic and military capabilities and Soviet Union's interest in Cuba's geo-strategic location further brought the two countries closer. It is true that the US-backed April 1961 invasion in the Playa

Giron was crushed by Cuban forces alone.¹ But to meet future external threats convinced Castro to strengthen ties with Moscow. To such friendly overtures made by Cuba, Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev reciprocally assured Cuba in positive terms. He said: "We shall lend the Cuban people and their government all the help necessary to repel armed aggression".² The invincibility of Cuba in the Playa Giron episode, followed by Fidel Castro's unilateral declaration that he was a Marxist-Leninist and that he will remain Marxist-Leninist until the last day of his life, eventual inclusion of PSP in the revolutionary government, together with the unrelenting and increasing hostility and open rupture of Cuba's relations with the US further consolidated island's closer relations with the Soviet Union.

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- 1 For details of Playa Giron episode see Lester A. Sobel, Comp., Cuba, the U.S. and Russia, 1960-63 (New York: Facts on File, 1964). Maurice Halperin, The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro: An Essay in Contemporary History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Haynes Johnson, The Bay of Pigs (New York: W.W. Horton and Company, 1964).
 - 2 El Mundo, cit. in Maurice Halperin, The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro: An Essay in Contemporary History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p.47.

Nevertheless there were certain stumbling blocks which constrained complete rapproachment between the two countries. Castro envisioned and committed his energies to the total "liberation" of the whole Latin American subcontinent and, towards such an objective he provided arms, training, money and leadership to the revolutionary movements in the region. For Castro, guerilla warfare was the only solution to the problems of the Third World. At the same time, Castro made no mention of the Soviet-espoused ideological strategies like "peaceful coexistence", national democracy" and "peaceful transition", etc. while Soviet leadership was not in full agreement with guerilla revolutionary activities championed by Castro.

Shared interests of the two countries led Khrushchev in 1962 to place missiles in Cuba ostensibly to protect the island, enhance Soviet prestige in guaranteeing Cuban security, and advance Moscow's strategic competition with the US. But after Khrushchev's decision to unilaterally withdraw missiles from Cuba, Cuban-Soviet ties plummeted and showed signs of cracks. Castro described the decision to withdraw the missiles as a "sell-out" to the US and betrayal of Cuba. Castro also asserted Khrushchev's

deal with the US regarding the on-site inspection as a violation of Cuban sovereignty.³

Following the missile crisis, Moscow made attempts to appease Castro and, for this, Soviet Union extended certain concessions to Cuba which were earlier denied. And these attempts produced the desired results. For, now the two countries expressed satisfaction on the fraternal relations existing between them. By this time, Cuba seemed ready for a few concessions on the ideological front too. In May 1963, Cuba and Soviet Union issued a joint statement which acknowledged the importance of peaceful coexistence for world peace and the national liberation struggle. But it appeared as though that Cuban ideologues were more in line with People's Republic of China (PRC) as the PRC's strategy of national liberation was more or less similar to that of Che Guevara's.

3 For details see Herbert S. Dinerstein, The Making of a Missile Crisis: October 1962 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976). Elie Abel, The Missile Crisis (Philadelphia: McClelland, 1966). Abraham Chayes, The Cuban Missile Crisis (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Ralph D. Crosby, "Cuban Missile Crisis: Soviet View", Military Review (Fort Leavenworth), vol.56, no.9, September 1976, pp.58-70. George H. Quester, "Missiles in Cuba, 1970", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.49, no.3, April 1971, pp.493-506. Arnold L. Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behaviour", World Politics (Princeton), vol.16, no.3, April 1964, pp.363-89.

Castro also refused to sign the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Again Cuba expressed dissatisfaction over Soviet Union's unwillingness to deeply involve itself in Vietnam and admonished its leaders that the policy of "peace in one country and war in the other" could not be vindicated by Cuba.⁴ Cuba emphasised that the conditions in Latin America were far more favourable for a revolutionary change than those that had existed in Cuba and that the Soviet Union should support and spearhead such revolutionary movements in the Western hemisphere.

Soviet Union, in its effort to isolate Cuba and the Communist parties of Latin America from China, reached an agreement with Castro to convene a meeting of the communist parties from the Latin American countries. The pro-Peking and ultra-leftist groups were not invited to this meeting. The conference called for support to freedom fighters in Latin America. After this conference, Moscow accepted that both peaceful and violent paths to power were possible depending upon the circumstances. Thus, Moscow's endorsement of

4 Revolution, cit. in Peter Schenkel, "Cuban Relations with the Communist World", in J. Gregory Oswald and Anthony J. Strover, The Soviet Union and Latin America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p.150.

the armed struggle in the Central American countries "represented an important policy shift that no doubt pleased Castro and made it difficult for him to refuse further co-operation".⁵ Moscow's endorsement of Cuba's line of armed struggle was the biggest success of the Cuban foreign policy. Castro also indicated that Cuba was with the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet dispute. At the same time, Castro clearly stated: "We are not anyone's satellite, and we never shall be".⁶

Soviet Union again to project and represent itself as an ally of Third World and at the same time sideline China, supported and financed the Tri-continental conference in 1966. But this conference did not prove entirely to Moscow's advantage. The conference gave stress on militant, anti-imperialism and justified revolutionary violence. The conference was quite frustrating and annoying for the Soviet Union and strained its diplomatic ties with Cuba. Following his success in receiving support for the armed struggle position at the conference, Castro got himself actively involved in international communism. Thus, this meeting

5 James D. Theberge, The Soviet Presence in Latin America (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, Inc., 1974), p.59.

6 Bohemia, cit. in Stephan Clissold, Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-1968 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.290.

strained Cuban-Soviet relations. But there was not any clear indication that the Soviet Union would deny the economic and military assistance to Cuba.

Consensus and Accommodation: 1968-1974

In 1968, Cuba supported the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia, and with the death of Che Guevara, Cuba changed its stance regarding armed struggle in Latin America. Castro made certain important changes in the economic decision-making apparatus within the Cuban government. These changes were welcomed by the Soviet Union and the trade and economic relations rapidly expanded between the two countries. Both domestic and international factors effected this shift in Cuban-Soviet ties. Domestically, Castro failed to reach the sugar production target. The 1968 sugar harvest was almost a million ton below the 1967. Thus, Castro was forced to bring about certain structural and institutional changes along Soviet lines. In the international sphere due to the failure of Che Guevara's Bolivian missions, Castro favoured close co-operation with Soviet Union.

The improvement in relations between the two countries contributed to a phase of growing economic co-operation. The old trade agreements were renewed,

fresh agreements were signed which benefitted both the countries. Cuba was admitted to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Soviet Premier Alexie Kosygin declared that "all the needs" of the Cuban economy should be co-ordinated with the 1976-1980 plans of COMECON members.⁷ Both the countries also agreed on the postponement in the payment of Soviet credits. By 1976, Cuban-Soviet trade increased by 275 percent as compared to 1970. In the political and ideological spheres also both countries came closer. Castro made no public condemnation of the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia. Cuba was somewhat muted in its criticism of Soviet Union's trade, aid and diplomatic policies towards Latin America. Both the countries favoured the idea of seeking friends in Latin America. After 1968, Cuba, in accord with the Soviet Union, pursued a policy of accommodation rather than conflict. Cuban leaders gave emphasis on strengthening the party and its mass organizations at all levels. This was in contrast to their earlier stress on the fact that Cuban Communism was different from other brands of Marxism-Leninism. Cuban leadership also accepted that it would emulate, in some cases, the Soviet experiences.

7 Granma Weekly Review, 23 July 1972, cit. in Ash Narain Roy, "A Survey of Cuba's Relations with the Soviet Union: 1959-78" (M.Phil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, School of International Studies, New Delhi, 1980), p.65.

During the 4th Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Castro projected himself as the staunch supporter of NAM and at the same time, he rejected the theory of "two imperialisms" namely, US and Soviet Union as enunciated by the "theoreticians from the capitalist world and echoed by leaders of non-aligned countries". He went on praising the "glorious, heroic and extraordinary services rendered to the human race" by the Soviet Union. He even castigated such of those non-aligned countries that Soviet Union "is an enemy to the cause of non-alignment".⁸

In the past, Cuba had serious ideological differences with the Soviet Union. Equally, the Soviet Union was sceptical about revolutionary prospects in Latin America and it argued that whatever be the correct path to power--peaceful or violent--should be decided by the respective country itself whereas Castro asserted that revolutionary violence

8 Roy, n.5, p.87. Castro stated: "How can the Soviet Union be labelled imperialist? Where are its monopoly Corporations? Where is its participation in the multinational companies? What factories, what mines, what oilfields does it own in the underdeveloped world? What worker is exploited in any country of Asia, Africa or Latin America by Soviet capital?" Granma Weekly Review, 16 September 1973, quoted by W. Raymond Duncan, "Cuba", ed. by H.E. Davis and L.C.Wilson, Latin American Foreign Policies (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975).

could help create conditions favourable to the revolution. However, it seems that by 1968 Cuba started supporting the Soviet policy of "peaceful coexistence". At the same time, Cuba aligned itself unequivocally with pro-Soviet policies in Latin America during the June 1975 meeting of the 24 communist parties of Latin America and the Caribbean held in Havana. Cuba's ideological alignment with the Soviet Union was further upheld after Castro's address to the 25th CPSU in February 1976.

From Convergence to Divergence:

With the increased economic and political co-operation between Cuba and Soviet Union, Cuba adopted a pro-Soviet foreign policy in mid-1970s and launched its military in support of Soviet foreign policy objectives. This was the first time when the Cuban and Soviet foreign policy objectives converged in Africa and both lent their whole-hearted support to the African liberation struggles.

Analysis of Cuban-Soviet co-operative intervention in Angola suggests that Cuba led the way into the intervention independently of the Soviet Union, as the Soviets were reluctant to become too

deeply involved lest the situation draw them into a direct confrontation with the United States. Cuba's ground forces were involved in direct combat against Movimento Popular Para a Liberacao de Angola (MPLA) opponents. The Angolan experience indicates more influence flowing from Havana to Moscow, stemming from Cuba's close historic ties with the MPLA. Cuba dispatched ground forces as opposed to Soviet cautions and cold reception to the MPLA's initial request for additional weapons and supplies in mid 1975.⁹

Cuban-Soviet policy postures in Ethiopia during 1977-78 were in contrast with the Angolan case of 1975-76. While Cuban soldiers were under Cuban command in Angola, in Ethiopia overall command remained under Soviet control. The primary factor that was responsible for the more predominant Soviet leadership role in Ethiopia was the Horn of Africa's strategic interest to Moscow, dating back to the days of Peter the Great. Whereas Cuba's involvement in

9 For detailed analysis of Soviet-Cuban activities in Angolan episode see, Jiri Valanta, "The Soviet-Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1975", Studies in Comparative Communism (Los Angeles), vol.2, nos.1 and 2, Spring/Summer 1978; and Peter Vannemann and Martin James, "The Soviet Intervention in Angola: Intentions and Implications", Strategic Review (Washington, D.C.), vol.4, no.3, Summer 1976.

Ethiopia was minimal before 1976.¹⁰ Cuban influence on the Soviets, stemming from Havana's role as an indispensable ally in the Soviet Union's African posture, was by no means non-existent in Ethiopia. Owing to its role in Angola and Ethiopia, Cuba gained the status of a privileged ally, which yielded increased leverage in insisting on increased economic and military aid from the Soviet Union.¹¹

In Grenada and Nicaragua in 1979, Cuba, with its strongest interest and knowledge of the Caribbean Basin, took the initiative which initially led to establishing of relations with Grenada's New Jewel Movement (NJM) and in supporting Nicaragua's Sandinistas before they defeated Somoza in July 1979. Cuba drew the Soviets into Grenada. Because not until a year after the NJM coup did the Soviets initiate formal relations between the CPSU and the NJM. It was during the visit of Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard to Moscow that relations between Grenada

10 For Cuban-Soviet Union joint efforts in Ethiopia see, Nelson P. Valdes, "Cuban Foreign Policy in the Horn of Africa", Cuban Studies (Pittsburgh), vol.10, no.1, January 1980; and "Castro: Russia's Cat's Paw", US News and World Report, 12 June 1978.

11 See, R. Narayanan, "The Role of Cuba in Africa", Foreign Affairs Reports (New Delhi), vol.27, no.5 May 1978, p.91.

and the Soviet Union gathered some significance. Also, not until two years after the coup, in July 1982, during the visit of Prime Minister Bishop to Moscow did the Soviets make formal commitments in support of Grenada.¹²

In the case of Nicaragua, the Cubans were even more open and independent because they directly aided the Sandinistas in their coming to power. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) received little Soviet attention during its struggle against Somoza in 1978. Cuba helped train the FSLN, and the Cuban military advisers were with FSLN columns fighting in the final offensive in mid-1979. Havana's commitment to the victorious Sandinista armed struggle and revolutionary changes in Nicaragua influenced Moscow to revive its position on the efficacy of armed

12 For details regarding Cuba-Soviet role in Grenada see, Gregory Sandford, The New Jewel Movement: Grenada's Revolution, 1979-1983 (Government Printing Office, 1985). Timothy Ashby, Grenada: Soviet Stepping Stone, (Maryland: United States Naval Institute Proceedings), vol.109, no.12, December 1983, pp.30-5. See, Colin Clarke, "Grenada Affair: What Intervention Means", Geographical Magazine (London), vol.55, no.12, December 1983, pp.610-11; Herbert Apthekar, "Lynching of Grenada", Political Affairs (New York, NY), vol.62, no.12, December 1983, pp.33-38; James Berry Motley, "Grenada: Low-Intensity Conflict and the Use of U.S. Military Power", World Affairs (Los Angeles), vol.146, no.3, Winter 1983-84, pp.221-84; R. Narayanan, "Latin America: More Grenadas?", World Focus (New Delhi), vol.6, no.1, January 1985, pp.24-8; Tony Thorudike, "Grenada Crisis", World Today (London), vol.39, no.12, December 1983, pp.468-76.

struggle in Central America.¹³ Further, in the ideological sphere, following Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Havana opposed the United Nation's resolutions condemning the Soviet Union's invasion, and as a result, lost its image in the Third World and undermined its non-aligned credentials. Castro, also blindly supported the Soviet concept of United States "neo-globalism", by which was meant United States anti-communist activities against Moscow's Third World Marxist-Leninist clients in countries like Afghanistan, Angola, Libya and Nicaragua.¹⁴

13 For details regarding Cuba-Soviet role in Nicaragua see, David Nolan, The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution (Coral Gables: Institute of Inter-American Studies, 1984). Thomas W. Walker, ed., Nicaragua in Revolution (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982); Tomas Borge, "East-West Confrontation in Nicaragua", African Communist (London), no.100, 1985, pp.93-102; Abraham Brumberg, "Nicaragua: A Mixture of Shades", Dissent (New York, N.Y.), Summer 1986, pp.294-303; J.C. Edelstein, "Nicaragua's Struggle Seen From Diverse Viewpoints", Latin American Perspectives (California), vol.14, Winter 1987, pp.117-25; D. Gilbert, "Sandinistas in Power", Latin American Research Review (Pittsburg, Pa), vol.19, no.2, 1984, pp.214-19; R. Narayanan, "Nicaragua: Where Reagan Goes Wrong", Main Stream (New Delhi), vol.23, 3 March 1984, pp.8-9; and "Latin America: Hegemonic Perceptions", World Focus, vol.3, no.2, February 1982, pp.14-16.

14 Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Soviet Union, 8 April 1986.

By the first half of 1980s, there emerged differences between Cuba and Soviet Union. Moscow was stressing on East-West issues, while Havana was more concerned with North-South and regional issues. These policy differences came to the fore in Cuban and Soviet approaches to Grenada's NJM. Further, Cuba publicly decried the low level of attention that the Soviet Union was giving to Nicaragua's economic and military needs, and complained specially about Soviet premier Konstantin Chernenko's conciliatory statements in the face of increasingly hostile United States pronouncements about the Sandinistas. Castro's ire was specially piqued in March 1984 when the Soviet leader refused to allow a Soviet naval flotilla to approach Nicaragua's harbour, as a demonstration of Soviet military backing for the Sandinista government. The flotilla was on its way to Nicaragua when a Soviet tanker was severely damaged by a mine at the entrance to Nicaragua's Pacific harbour of Puerto Sandino. Then came Castro's refusal to attend the June 1984 CMEA Summit meeting in Moscow on the excuse that he was occupied with pressing matters at home. Moscow, in a sense, retaliated by sending a low-level Soviet delegation to Cuba's 26 July celebrations in 1984. More telling was Moscow's announcement that aid to Cuba in 1984 would not exceed US \$ 4 billion in loans

and subsidies and half a billion in military assistance. This action, according to some observers, influenced Castro's decision neither to attend Chernenko's funeral in Moscow nor to sign the book of condolences and personally visit the Soviet embassy in Havana to express official condolences.

The foregoing survey beginning 1959 to 1984 is obviously sketchy highlighting in broad outline the turns and twists in the evolving relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union. It is essentially to provide a brief background to Cuba's policy orientation towards the Soviet Union and to bring to fore how both bilateral issues and international events determined and influenced the Cuban policy postures towards the Soviet Union. It is against this background, an attempt is made in the subsequent chapters to describe Cuba's relations since the advent of Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

CHAPTER II

NOVOE MYSHLENIE AND CUBA'S RESPONSES

As Mikhail S. Gorbachev assumed charge as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985, he propounded what came to be known as novoe myshlenie (new thinking) which among others included two important elements viz. perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) of the Soviet society. Dependent upon Soviet Union both economically and militarily Cuba in the wake of Gorbachev's enunciation of his "new thinking" was in a dilemma whether or not to adapt itself to Gorbachev's line. An attempt is made in this chapter to briefly summarise the "new thinking" of Gorbachev and also examine the responses of Castro to these ideas.

Gorbachev enunciated his "new thinking" with a view to overcome economic, political, social, cultural, and ideological lacunas which existed in the Soviet society. As Gorbachev said:

Through perestroika, we want to restore Lenin's image of socialism and lead Soviet society to a drastically new level. We should really bring out the humanist potential of socialism--that is the task for perestroika. But this means that at the second stage of perestroika we should see the overriding goal--an updated society and updated relations among people in line with Lenin's ideas.(1)

1 Mikhail Gorbachev, "Restore Lenin's Image of Socialism", Mainstream(New Delhi), 21 May 1988, p.30.

After Lenin's death the power structure in the Soviet Union became increasingly personalised, however, in the name of the Party. Stalin stifled the logic of democratic-centralism and eliminated the possibility of control either by the rank and file Party members or, by the legitimate constitutional bodies or, by citizens in any shape and form. Party dominated the whole structure by virtue of which it usurped legitimate power of the socialist society and its democratic urges. Elaborating his ideas at the 19th All Union Conference of the CPSU, Gorbachev stated:

We are facing many intricate questions. But which one of them is the crucial one? As the CPSU Central Committee sees it, the crucial one is that of reforming our political system.(2)

A Brief Summary of Novoe Myshlenie

In the political sphere, one of the major decisions of the 27th Congress of the CPSU, was to democratise all aspects of life. Gorbachev emphasised:

If we take a closer look, we will see that the key to everything is through democratisation, through drawing people into all matters. Therefore, the aim of perestroika is man and the means of Perestroika is a mobilisation of the human potential. We will press ahead with perestroika through that and naturally through the cultural field, through strengthening the spirit of the people.(3)

2 Mikhail Gorbachev, Report to the 19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU, Documents and Materials (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1988), p.7.

3 Gorbachev, n.1, p.34.

Reforms of the political system or the reconstruction of the superstructure was an equally important issue. This included organisational structure and functioning of the Communist Party in order to overcome the long-standing alienation of people from government. Changes were made in the institutions and procedures of government, in the relations between the Party and the Soviets, and between the Party and the People. On 15 October 1985, Gorbachev frankly told the plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee:

I wish, Comrades, to stress most emphatically that without a comprehensive broadening and deepening of socialist democracy, i.e. without providing conditions for active and effective day-to-day participation of all working people their collectives and organisations in resolving matters of state and public life, we will not be able to forge ahead. Lenin regarded as a most important source of strength and vitality of socialism the initiative, energy and creative effort of the people, their conscious attitude to and stake in the tasks of building the new system.(4)

In order to arrive at democratic decisions an atmosphere of open democratic debate, discussion and continuous criticism was necessary. And so was the need for glasnost. Perestroika engaged the full

4 Mikhail Gorbachev, Report to the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee on October 15, 1985 Selected Speeches and Articles (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), p.40.

restoration of a socialist state, based on the rule of law and guaranteeing human rights in all spheres. The Party as a political vanguard of the society was to restore inner-party democracy at all levels. In the fields of science and culture, attempt will have to be made to create conditions propitious for the intellectual, moral and creative development of society. It was emphasised with vigour that man as "the measure of all things" should be the basic norm, for building a just and peaceful society.

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In the Soviet Union, there was lack of vigilance, lack of timely action, substandard organisational work, lack of quality control and output, emphasis on departmental interest, over-ruling societal requirements regarding people's interests--all of which according to Gorbachev, were the crucial problems in the management of the Soviet economy. Gorbachev stressed on these problems in the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU in June 1987. He said:

As we entered the 1980s...the rate of economic growth had dropped to the level which virtually signified the onset of economic stagnation... the gap...in production efficiency, output quality and in technology as compared with the most developed countries began to widen.(5)

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- 5 Mikhail Gorbachev, On the Task of the Party in Radical Restructuring of Economic Management, Report at the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU on June 25-26, 1987 (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1987). p.36.

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To overcome these critical problems, Gorbachev emphasised upon radical reform of the management of the economy, in order to bring about qualitative changes in the system of economic mechanism. He emphasised to open up new possibilities for using the advantages of the socialist economy and production system. In terms of priority, he underlined provision of food, housing, consumer goods and services as primary. Gorbachev on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, emphasised on the major reforms i.e. decentralisation and delegation of power down the line, democratisation of approach and method, election of managers at enterprises and offices, multiple candidates for election to local government organisations, self-financed factories and plants, self-financed state and collective farms, the lifting of restrictions on farmers producing food products for enterprises and for those run by themselves, wider cooperative activities in all branches of the economy, encouragement of industrial enterprise in small-scale productions and trade, closure of plants and factories operating at a loss and of research institutes and higher educational establishments working inefficiently, and government equity venture with foreign firms.

Reflecting on the much-needed radical reforms of economic management, Gorbachev pointed out that the existing pattern of management suffered from rigid

centralism, detailed regimentation of work, and directive assignments and budget appropriations. Therefore, there was an obvious need to make the worker the real master in his work place--both in collective and in society, in order to ensure efficiency and higher production.

Perestroika's social and moral dimension emphasised respect for socio-cultural diversity and autonomy of nationalities and ethnic groups. It emphasised upon creative and innovative spirit in educational, scientific and intellectual activities. As Gorbachev said:

We must defeat conservatism on the road of perestroika. conservatism in part of society is nourished not only by dogmatic mentality, the habit of thinking in stereotypes, the fear of everything new, but also by egoistic interests....There are stereotypes of thinking and action and they have a grip on a worker, an intellectual, a politician. This is a serious and profound phenomenon.(6)

Perestroika advocated recognition of the democratic right of trade unions and professional groups, in order to sustain the foundation of a multinationally socialist federation as a moral entity of enlightened and free citizens.

6 Gorbachev, n.1, p.31.

Speaking on the international dimension of perestroika Gorbachev at the 19th Conference stated:

While concentrating funds and attention to the military aspect of countering imperialism, we did not always make use of the political opportunities opened up by the fundamental changes in the world in our efforts to assure the security of our state, to scale down tensions.... As a result, we allowed ourselves to be drawn into an arms race, which could not but affect the country's socio-economic developments and its international standing. As the arms race approached a critical point, our traditional political and public activities for peace and disarmament began...to lose their power of conviction.... Hence, what was needed was not just a refinement of foreign policy but its determined reshaping.(7)

In other words, perestroika involved "new thinking" in the realm of inter-state diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral relations, security and strategic considerations, role of the United Nations and international agencies. It emphasised to shift the focus from the politics of confrontation, bloc solidarities and bloc antagonisms, to politics of coexistence and cooperation of mutual reappraisal and confidence building. Gorbachev stressed:

We have begun to base our contacts in relations between states on dialogue; in the sphere of disarmament, on a readiness to accept far-reaching reciprocal verification.... We thereby discovered a considerable potential of mutual understanding and of acceptance of coexistence and cooperation even in influential quarters far removed from us ideologically.(8)

7 Gorbachev, n.2, p.31.

8 *ibid*, p.30.

Perestroika sought to restructure inter-state and international relations, based on the assumption of an interdependent organic world whose main common concerns should be peaceful coexistence, peaceful political negotiations for settlement of all disputes, disarmament as a prelude for global socio-economic development. Thus it required a nuclear-weapons free and non-violent world based on mutual respect, equal security, and global justice. As Gorbachev made it clear that "humanism of Communist ideology, of its moral value, the struggle against the nuclear threat, against the arms race, for the preservation and strengthening of universal peace remains the fundamental direction of the Party's activities in the international arena".⁹

So, the "new thinking" introduced by Gorbachev emphasised upon the innovative measures to accelerate the decaying process in political, social, moral, economic etc. spheres, but within the Leninist-Stalinist framework. As Gorbachev asserted:

Yes, we have renounced everything that deformed socialism in the 1930s and that led to its stagnation in the 1970s. But we want a socialism that would be cleansed of the sediments and distortions of the past period, and that inherits

....

9 Mikhail Gorbachev, Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress (Moscow: Novost Press, 1986), p.81.

all the best elements born of the creative thinking of the founders of our teaching and put into effect by the labour and effort of the people and reflecting its hopes and aspirations. We want a socialism that absorbs all the progressive experience in world history, that utilises all the achievements of human progress.(10)

Cuba's Initial Responses:

In the years immediately following Gorbachev's initial remarks in which he had indicated the need for basic structural changes in the Soviet society, Cuba's response was rather muted. In fact, Castro and other Cuban leaders, without making any direct references to Gorbachev's Novoe Myshlenie, merely sought a more meaningful bilateral dialogue between Cuba and Soviet Union to further strengthen their relations and at the same time evolve strategies for resolving major international crises which had a direct bearing on Third World countries. Also, in an indirect way, Cuba indicated that it would follow the economic reform efforts initiated by the Soviet Union. To this effect, Castro himself in a statement to the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) held on 5 February 1986 stated that Cuba would follow Soviet economic reform efforts satisfactorily. At the same time Yegor Ligachev, the second-ranking man in the Soviet politburo who was present at 3rd Congress

10 Gorbachev, n.2, p.90.

expressed satisfaction over Cuba's economic reform efforts. He said: "The PCC Congress convincingly shows that you have a realistic economic strategy, and we wish the Cuban Communists success in implementing it".¹¹

Two days following Castro's presentation of the main report to 3rd Party Congress, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Vice President called for a Cuban foreign policy marked by "close collaboration with the Soviet Union", and the "solution of international conflicts through dialogue and constructive negotiations". Reflecting on Moscow's renewed interest in negotiations with the United States, Rodriguez emphasised Cuba's "unchangeable attitude in favor of a solution of the historic differences with the United States".¹²

In May 1986, while attending the 27th Congress of the CPSU in Moscow, Castro praised Gorbachev's "brilliant and valiant main report", which according to the Cuban leader showed "the immense glories...of the ...Soviet people's historic deeds and the mighty surge of the Leninist spirit evident at the Congress".¹³ In another

11 Moscow TASS, 5 February 1986, quoted in W. Raymond Duncan, "Castro and Gorbachev: Politics of Accommodation", Problems of Communism (Washington, D.C.), vol.35, March-April 1986, p.52.

12 Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Latin America, 7 February 1986.

13 Facts on File (New York, N.Y.), 28 February 1986.

statement, Castro said that Third World issues also demanded attention, and that national liberation struggles in "Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Western Sahara, Palestine, Afganistan and Kampuchea" were not fought without great costs. He argued that "the fruit of the blood and lives of many of the best sons of our peoples" should not be reduced in world affairs to "so called low-level conflicts". As if to urge Gorbachev to meet Soviet obligations abroad despite his preoccupation with economic reform at home, Castro noted that "all progressive forces face the challenge of hunger, poverty, unemployment... and underdevelopment in Third World nations.... The Third World countries expect and are sure they will receive maximum solidarity from the socialist community in their struggle for just economic gains".¹⁴

Whereas Havana in the 3rd Congress emphasised upon North-South, Moscow in 27th Congress emphasised upon East-West relationship. Thus there emerged differences in priorities between the two countries. Despite assurances, Castro doubted that Soviet-United States dialogue had any relevance for easing Cuba's tense relations with the

14 Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Latin America, 27 February 1986.

United States, or for his strong affinity with national liberation movements throughout the Third World. Castro while declaring the "rectification" process for Cuba, criticized capitalism. He said:

Do those who think only of economic mechanisms and economic accounting really believe socialism can be built on that alone. This was an ideological mistake...even if they do know Karl Marx's capital off by heart.(15)

With that emerged differences between Moscow and Havana over Gorbachev's "new thinking". As Peter Shearman says "so the new Soviet Union reforms do not yet go that far, Castro does appear to be unwilling to copy Gorbachev's economic strategy in Cuba".¹⁶ It was later reaffirmed by Ex-Deputy Commander of Cuban air defences Del Pino who defected to the United States when he said "tensions had arisen between Cuba and Soviet Union after Castro resisted the reform program of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev".¹⁷

It was thought that Soviet Union would exert pressure on Cuba to accept Gorbachev's new line of thinking. But what is however clear is that Castro was unwilling to

15 Granma Weekly Review, 12 December 1986.

16 Peter Shearman, The Soviet Union and Cuba(London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1987), p.85.

17 Facts on File, n.13.

toe the Soviet leader's policy initiatives. In fact, he refuted the concept of perestroika when he said early in December: "If perestroika were to use pressure, it would not be perestroika".¹⁸ To be fair, Castro had not suggested that the new Soviet policy of perestroika and glasnost was wrong. He merely indicated that both perestroika and glasnost were inappropriate to Cuba. "We have to keep in mind our location. We are not in the Black Sea, but in the Caribbean. We are not 90 miles from Odessa but 90 miles from Miami".¹⁹ Castro defended his rejection of Gorbachev-style reforms in a speech on 26 July marking the 35th anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. He unleashed a fury of epithets against the "two-bit immitators" in Cuba "who do not trust themselves, who do not trust their country, who do not trust their people, who do not trust their Revolution", and who apparently had been privately suggesting to him that Cuba takes a look at the social, economic and political changes underway in the Soviet Union.²⁰ "The outstanding characteristics of this Revolution", Castro asserted "is that it was not copied, it was created".²¹

18 Granma, 5 December 1988.

19 Times of the Americas, 30 November 1988.

20 New York Times, 31 July 1988.

21 ibid.

So, according to Castro, Cuba attempted to solve its problems in its own way and would not copy the Soviet Union and other Soviet bloc countries as they are experimenting with free enterprise and other aspects of capitalism. "There are no two identical revolutionary processes", Castro said, "no two identical national characteristics".²² No wonder therefore, under these circumstances, it was speculated that the scheduled formal meeting between the Cuban leader and Gorbachev to be held in Havana in December 1988 would be quite tense because of major policy differences between the two especially with regard to the restructuring of the Cuban economy. For, Castro had by now expressed misgivings regarding the kind of economic and social reforms being undertaken by Gorbachev, calling them dangerous and a threat to fundamental socialist principles. However, the proposed visit of Gorbachev was cancelled on account of the devastating earthquake in Soviet Armenia.

Castro, however, accused Western nations and the capitalist press for highlighting and exaggerating the differences between Cuba and the Soviet Union. He said the differences between the two countries "might exist, and they do exist but the differences in no way constitute

22 *ibid*, 27 July.

an issue of friction".²³ Castro said "there should be no doubt, whatsoever, that we fully support the Soviet Union's peace policy", apparently referring to the Soviet Union's decision to try to reduce its involvement in regional conflicts.²⁴

Castro on 1 January 1989, while celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Revolution delivered a speech to the nation from Santiago de Cuba reaffirming his commitment to the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, said that the only choice for Cuba was "socialism or death".²⁵ For the first time, Castro frontally denounced the Soviet policies of perestroika and glasnost as "capitalist" and "counterrevolutionary". Castro's remarks, in that sense, was a departure from past pronouncements on Gorbachev's novoe myshlenie in which he had emphasised that the differences in circumstances between the Soviet Union and Cuba were such that each country had to find solution most appropriate to its own needs. As such, Castro's speech was interpreted as an open challenge to Gorbachev, whose official visit to Havana was now rescheduled for 2-5 April 1989.

23 *ibid*, 5 January 1989.

24 *ibid*.

25 *ibid*, 11 January.

Admitting that some mistakes had been committed as a consequence of which Cuba is faced with a troubled economy, Castro argued that it "resulted from imitating the experiences of other countries", which were "now saying those experiences are no good".²⁶

Before Gorbachev's visit to Cuba there were rumours that some Party workers and leaders will support the "new thinking". But Castro while addressing the Cuban Party leaders said: "Those inside the Communist Party who show themselves in favor of perestroika and glasnost are of the same clique as those dissidents out there and of counterrevolutionaries. We are not going to tolerate this deviationism".²⁷ Elaborating further his criticisms on Gorbachev's perestroika, Castro during his visit to Caracas, to participate in the ceremony for installing the new Venezuelan president in February stated:

Like Che Guevara, I am against the use of capitalist mechanisms to build socialism. I do not believe in convergence, fusion or hybrids. What can result is a retreat from socialism, because nowhere is it written that socialism is irreversible.(28)

26 ibid.

27 ibid, 7 September.

28 ibid, 2 April.

Then on 3 April, the long awaited meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Fidel Castro took place and predictably aroused considerable public excitement all the world over. However, the meeting between the aging Cuban revolutionary and the dynamic young radical Soviet leader apparently produced neither any serious rupture nor ushered any significant changes in Castro's understanding of Gorbachev's "new thinking".

While addressing a special session of Cuban National Assembly, Gorbachev at length elaborated the imperative need for the Soviet Union to usher in far-reaching changes in the Soviet society because the path in which his country was moving was "old, rutted track" which had contributed towards "greater stagnation and an economic, social and even political dead-end, with the ensuring risk of being pushed to the sidelines of progress".²⁹ Furthermore, the Soviet leader pointed out that presently "the development of individual countries (including) the Soviet Union and Cuba...hinges on the international situation to an incomparably greater extent than before".³⁰ And since both Cuba and Soviet Union are

29 Visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to Cuba: Documents and Materials (Moscow, 1989), p.12.

30 ibid, p.15.

"actively involved in international developments" there is a need even more than before for Soviet Union and Cuba to explore "solutions to international problems on the basis of shared fundamental human values".³¹

Upto this point except for subtle suggestions that Cuba too should consider seriously some basic reforms, there was nothing in Gorbachev's speech that could be construed as any effort to pressurise Fidel Castro. However, there were other statements in Gorbachev's speech which clearly indicated Soviet leader's displeasure over Cuba's policies and overtures. For instance, by stating "that we are resolutely opposed to any theories and doctrines that attempt to justify the export of Revolution or counterrevolution and all forms of foreign interference in the affairs of sovereign states", Gorbachev unambiguously expressed his misgivings about Cuba's policy of "exporting revolution" in Latin America and Africa. However, he added perhaps with a view to assuage the hurt feelings of the Cuban people that although his "approach is different" he would nevertheless "let every nation follow the course it has chosen of its own sovereign will".³²

31 *ibid*, p.18.

32 *ibid*.

Following the Soviet leader's address to the National Assembly, a press conference was held in which Gorbachev stated that his meeting with the Cuban leader was very satisfactory. However, while answering a pointed question as to whether the Soviet leader had made some specific "recommendations" to Fidel Castro, Gorbachev in an indirect way hinted by stating:

The world on the whole and the socialist world are now at a crucial stage. I would say that we are going through a special period now. That is what I would call it. It is now very important to adopt a correct decision, and not to make an error in choosing the way. The world is at a crossroads now.(33)

The import of the message however, was very clear. Nevertheless, Castro in the course of the same press conference intervened to say that Gorbachev having come to Cuba has not tried "to dictate what that country should do. I greatly admire this".³⁴ Moreover, Castro wondered why the Soviet leader chose Havana as the place to declare: "We are against doctrines that endorse the export of Revolution or counterrevolution".³⁵ In a similar vein, Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Raul Roa Kouri said that Cuba would not change its policy of supporting "revolutionary movements and countries".³⁶ Fidel Castro went even further

33 ibid, p.29.

34 ibid, p.31.

35 New York Times, 6 April 1989.

36 Facts on File, 7 April 1989.

to say that Cuba would not be intimidated by anyone or deflected from the course of its revolution. He said: "perestroika is another man's wife. I do not want to get involved".³⁷

The year 1989 also witnessed far-reaching changes in the East European regimes, moving from Marxism-Leninism to capitalism. These developments created a critical situation for Cuba, as Cuba was becoming increasingly isolated. Castro described these political changes in Eastern Europe as "very sad" and held that Gorbachev's reforms alone were responsible. But Castro was not against the manner in which changes were taking place in the East bloc. He even defended the transformations taking place in Eastern Europe by saying:

If a socialist country wants to build capitalism we must respect its right to build capitalism, ... the principles of unrestricted respect for the sovereign will of each people and country is a golden rule of Marxist-Leninist principles.(38)

Castro was not against the changes that were taking place in the socialist bloc. What he wanted was that these changes should take place within the framework of

37 New York Times, 2 April 1989.

38 Granma Weekly Review, 16 April 1989.

Marxism-Leninism. On 7 December 1989, celebrating the 31st year of the revolution he stated:

Socialism must be improved. No one can deny this principle, which is inherent and permanently applicable to every human endeavor. But can socialism be improved by forsaking Marxism-Leninism's most basic principles? Why must the so called reforms be along capitalist lines? If those ideas are truly revolutionary, as some claim, why do they receive the imperialist leader's unanimous, enthusiastic support?(39)

Having stated that he was not opposed to transformations taking place in Eastern Europe except that such transformations have to be within the framework of Marxist-Leninist principles, Castro nevertheless lamented on the increasing difficulties in building a communist state specially in Cuba. One major difficulty according to him was the attempt made by some "slandering socialism, destroying its values, discrediting the Party and liquidating its leading role, doing away with social discipline and sowing chaos and anarchy everywhere."⁴⁰ To be fair, Castro however did not mention by name of those who were engaged in the "slander" campaign. Aware of the difficulties faced by Cuba, both ideological and economic, Castro emphatically stated that as far as his island country was concerned the alternative was nothing else than "socialism or death".

39 Fidel Castro, Socialism or Death (Havana, 1989), p.9.

40 New York Times, 9 December 1989.

Differences Deepens: 1990-91

If Cuba's response to Gorbachev's "new thinking" so far was mild and somewhat muted, beginning from 1990, Castro pitched high his attack on perestroika. To some extent, the logic of the events themselves was responsible for Castro mounting an ideological debate with Gorbachev in the year 1990. For one thing, by now the prospects of continued economic assistance from East bloc countries became dim. There were indications that the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was likely to be dismantled and as a consequence the preferential treatment that Cuba received from the COMECON also was likely to come to an end. Critical supplies of oil and wheat from the Soviet Union was also likely to be either terminated or, atleast the volume to be further reduced. The likelihood of these things happening no doubt placed Cuba in a serious crisis.

It is for these considerations Castro declared in March 1990 that for Cuba it is going to be "a special period in the time of peace" and exhorted to his islanders that they should commit themselves even more than before to the cause of socialism. Because, as he put it "the end of socialism, the end of Revolution, would be the end of the Cuban nation".⁴¹

41 Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Cuba's Cloudy Future", Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.), vol.69, no.3, Summer 1990, p.122.

Having stated that Cuba cannot relent on its commitment to the cause of socialism, he thereby launched his tirade on perestroika itself. Revising his earlier views on perestroika in which he had gone to the extent of saying that perestroika may be necessary for the countries in the Eastern bloc, he now authoritatively asserted that perestroika will not bring prosperity even to the Soviet Union. Therefore, he described Gorbachev's recent moves away from communism through a process of restructuring as "repugnant". Along these lines, he went further by saying that although "the Soviet Union has not disintegrated [and] no civil war has emerged yet [still] the dangers exist, and [they] are real".⁴²

With the prospects of its traditional trade partners in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union beginning to adopt market economies and capitalist systems, Castro realised that the consequent isolation of Cuba would also become a reality. Either to reassure himself or, give reassurance to his people he said: "If you ask, are we going to adopt a capitalist system, we will say no". And to those who were making speculations on the possible demise of his government, his reply was: "I am sure they are wrong".⁴³ His reasoning that Cuba was not likely to

42 Facts on File, 23 March 1990.

43 New York Times, 5 April 1990.

revert back to socialism, as he put it, was that "Cuba is the symbol of resistance, the symbol of the defence of the revolutionary ideals.... The road of concessions is the road of submission".⁴⁴

The occasion of the 38th anniversary of the assault on the Moncada Barracks offered Castro yet another opportunity to further elaborate on his serious reservations about Eastern European countries along with the Soviet Union going capitalist. In his speech on that day (i.e. 26 July 1991) his attack was more virulent on capitalism. While praising the Cuban people for their "heroism and courage" in the face of external pressure to return the country to the path of capitalism, he likened the process of capitalism to "prostitution, to the sack of the public treasury and racial discrimination".⁴⁵ In contrast to Cuba, he said that the countries of Eastern Europe and Soviet Union moving away from socialism are likely to make, in the process more and more concessions. He said:

When those countries made concessions, there were soon demands for more and more concessions. In our case, we would recommend that they make fewer and fewer concessions, because they are not going to get any. And we are not dogmatic, no, we are realistic. We never take a dogmatic approach to those things which in actual practice can turn out to be useful.(46)

44 ibid.

45 Granma International, 11 August 1991.

46 ibid, 5 May.

The 4th PCC was held in Havana in October 1991. In his plenary address to the Congress, Fidel Castro revealed that he had warned the Soviet Union and the East European countries on their decision to move away from the path of socialism even as early as 1987. Recalling the meeting of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) held in that year, Fidel Castro said that he fulfilled his historic duty to warn the Soviet Union of the path that it has chosen which according to him was "the wrong track". Proceeding further, he said:

Simply, when I saw the trends that were developing, when I saw the authority of the Party was being destroyed, when I saw that the authority of the Government was being destroyed and when I saw that the history of the USSR was being reduced to dust. (47)

Again recalling his message to the Soviet Union on the 70th anniversary of the triumph of the October Revolution, he said that he had cautioned the Soviet Union about the emerging communication gap between the leadership and the masses and if the gap is not closed, it would create grim consequences to the Soviet Union. Recalling his own words, Castro said that he suggested to the Soviet leaders that they should "try to stop going along that path, or you will keep on alienating people

and reaping a negative harvest".⁴⁸

From these revelations that Castro made at the 4th PCC, it appears that the Cuban leader not only had his misgivings about perestroika even as early as 1987, but he had also made bold his reservations in unmistakable terms to the Soviet authorities.

Speaking on the present state of political turmoil in the Soviet Union, Castro attributed it to Gorbachev's perestroika. He said that although Gorbachev's ideas for improving socialism were "perfectly possible, perfectly applicable", now since "the authority of the Party and Government and the history of a country has been destroyed", it is "absolutely impossible" for Soviet Union to sustain. Even more blatantly he stated that having destroyed the Party it is "the sure way to spread disorder and chaos".⁴⁹

Castro emphasised that in Cuba, contrary to Soviet Union, the Party, the Government and the masses were working in close coöperation with each other. "The hard facts", Castro said "are that in the USSR no one talks of socialism anymore, but only of a market economy".⁵⁰

48 ibid.

49 ibid.

50 ibid, 20 October.

He described that as "extremely sad". Castro said that in his opinion one of the problems that the revolutionary movement and the communist parties in other countries face was the lack of "sufficient turnover". He stated that what made him feel most confident about the Cuban Communist Party and its quality was that it was able to unite different generations and thereby has guaranteed a historical continuation. According to him, in Cuba the Communist Party was not built on personalities and therefore, it will last. To him, what lasts is what is built on institutions and on the Party. Castro stated that it was inconceivable that one man should have the power to dissolve the Party, the vanguard, the army of the Revolution. "It is impossible to imagine the Revolution without its Party", he affirmed "it is impossible to imagine socialism without the Party".⁵¹

Castro while emphasising on the role of the PCC said that the Party, Revolution and Nation were synonymous. "It should be made very clear", Castro said "that there is not even the most remote intention of decreasing the authority of the Party. If we did that, we would begin to regress, it would be the start of a grave mistake.

51 *ibid.*

What we have to do is to strengthen the authority of the Party, increase its prestige and its influence through its role of developing all the other institutions".⁵²

Having underlined the role of the Party and the Revolution, both of which according to Castro are the two basic pillars, Castro now moved a step further. His dictum now became socialism only. As Castro said: "I will not say 'socialism or death!' because there will be socialism no matter the price. I will not say 'Patrio o muerte!' because we will be able to wrench the life out of those who try to snatch away our country".⁵³

From the foregoing sketch highlighting the significant elements of Gorbachev's "new thinking" and Cuba's response, it is possible to glean that in the initial years of Gorbachev's enunciation of novoe myshlenie, it appears that Fidel Castro had expressed no disagreement with Gorbachev specially between the years 1985 to almost 1989. In the process, the impact of Gorbachev's perestroika seem to have been not felt in Cuba. Bilateral relations between Cuba and Soviet Union continued to remain warm and cordial as much as Soviet economic assistance to Cuba continued without any

52 *ibid.*

53 *ibid.*

disruption. While this could be the reason for Havana not raising any serious objections to Gorbachev's new ideas, yet as has been shown in this chapter, Fidel Castro, by his own claims, seemed to have performed what he calls "the historic duty" to warn the Soviet Union of its decision to move away from the path of socialism as early as 1987. What is however significant, is that Castro chose not to make his admonition public until 1991. In fact most of his public utterances between 1985 to 1990 which had a bearing on perestroika were critical but at the same time rather circumspect.

Beginning with the decade of 1990, the tone and tenor of Castro's reaction to Gorbachev's perestroika became more loud and outspoken. He described it as "repugnant" and even forewarned that Gorbachev's reforms will bring about the disintegration of the Soviet Union. While being forthright, Fidel Castro very clearly stated that under no circumstances, he would relent and revise his commitment to socialistic principles based on Marxism-Leninism. In that sense, in recent months, Castro seem to be openly defying Gorbachev's new reforms. What implications the changing Cuban response to Gorbachev's novoe myshlenie will have on Cuban-Soviet relations is being discussed in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER III

SOVIET POLICY AND POSTURES TOWARDS CUBA SINCE GORBACHEV

Mikhail Gorbachev's novoe myshlenie ("new thinking") and the attendant policy changes in the Soviet Union towards the "First" and the "Third" World countries and regions admittedly had implications for the evolving Soviet-Cuban relations. Having resolved major differences with the First World, Soviet Union had come closer to it. While in the case of Third World countries, Soviet Union had maintained some distance and had encouraged the countries of the region to resolve their problems amicably without external intervention. Be that as it may, policy towards Cuba apparently demonstrated a concern to preserve some continuity, a trend that was conspicuously absent in Soviet postures towards other developing countries of the Third World. An attempt is made in this chapter to discuss the specific issue of Soviet policy towards Cuba in the framework of the "new thinking" and survey the evolving Soviet postures towards Cuba between 1985 and 1991.

Soviet Postures Towards Cuba, 1985-1989

As Gorbachev came to power, efforts continued to improve relations between Cuba and Soviet Union without compromising on important priorities. In October 1985, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edward A. Shevardnadze came to Cuba and brought warm wishes from Gorbachev.

In return, Castro praised "the world's first socialist state".¹ Again, Moscow sent its second-ranking man in the politbureau, Yegor Ligachev, to the Havana 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), and he assured Castro that Cuba could rely upon the Soviet Union for continued support. Commenting upon Castro's desire to improve economy in Cuba, during the 3rd Congress, Gorbachev notified positively to Castro: "Our Cuban brothers can be sure of the unfailing solidarity of the Soviet Union with the Island of Freedom. Soviet-Cuban friendship is indestructible".²

After the 3rd Congress of the PCC and the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), there emerged differences between Havana and Moscow over their new policy initiatives evidencing serious setback to their bilateral relations. But there was no real pressure from the Soviet Union on Cuba, as the Soviet leader had repeatedly stated at the 27th Congress of the CPSU that the international communist movement does not require uniformity. Castro visited Moscow twice in 1986 and dealt directly with Gorbachev. But Castro failed to

1 Tass International Service (Moscow), 30 October 1985, quoted in W. Raymond Duncan, "Castro and Gorbachev: Politics of Accommodation", Problems of Communism (Washington, D.C.), vol.35, March-April 1986, p.50.

2 Pravda (Moscow), 9 February 1986.

persuade Moscow to increase its economic aid to Cuba. According to Western analysts, it was tough time for Cuba and in the future Cuba would be swallowed by the "new thinking" of Soviet Union. "They [Cubans] are frightened", Jacobo Timerman said, "because they know that, if Gorbachev's ideas gain acceptance in Cuba, the ideology that they created--meaning that as those who maintain the flame of the revolution, they are entitled to be sustained--would come to an end".³ But it was refuted by those observers who were in close touch with the ongoing dialogue between the leaders of the two countries. "The Soviet Union will never exert gross pressure on Fidel", said Gustavo Perez Cott, "there are ideological and political bonds and Cuba means socialism in America, and the Soviets will pay a price for that".⁴ Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, a close Castro aide also said that the two countries were working in close harmony and Cuba's rectification programme was "not the antithesis of, nor a reaction to, the Soviet process" of reforms.⁵ There was, however, a mutually agreed reduction in the Soviet price paid for Cuban sugar in 1987.

3 New York Times, 14 November 1987.

4 ibid, 12 May 1988; [who as third highest ranking official in State Committees for Technology and Supplies, often travelled to the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries; but in January 1988 he defected to United States].

5 Facts on File (New York, N.Y.), 2 September 1988.

Given the profound economic difficulties in which Cuba is placed, yet it is quite remarkable how little evidence was there of Soviet economic pressure on Cuba. On several occasions, pro-perestroika elements in Soviet Union have openly criticized Soviet largesse to Cuba. Supreme Soviet member Nikolai Shmelev pointed that it "accounts for at least a quarter of the total volume of economic assistance" and that "alone would be enough to keep the [Soviet] consumer market in equilibrium for those few years we need to somehow get by and to truly embark upon the road to reform".⁶ To such critics, Shevardnadze's blunt response was: "Cuba supported us at the most difficult times.... If we wish to change something...then talks must be held with the other side regarding the new conditions.... Unilateral measures cannot fail to affect the country's reputation and faith in its words".⁷ However, comforting to Cuba, the Foreign Minister's defence was far from satisfactory because in some sense it betrayed Soviet Union's real intentions in terms of its professed obligations and commitments to less developed Third World countries.

6 R. Narayanan, "Soviet 'new thinking' and Dilemma of Cuba", Link(New Delhi), 18 August 1991, p.51.

7 Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Soviet Union, 24 October 1989.

Herein lies the hidden or, not too much hidden meaning of the "new thinking" and its overarching commitment to the "primacy of humanitarian values over those of classes".⁸ It only reflects that under the "new thinking" there are to be distinctions made within the Third World. Cuba is not Afganistan or Angola-- client states whose domestic instability required Soviet support for open-ended military engagements costly to the Soviets in terms of money and military. Cuba is also not Nicaragua or El Salvador or Grenada. Soviet Union cannot be indefinitely committed to these countries because of United States encouragement and military support for the contras in Nicaragua, emergency programme in El Salvador and the naked military intervention in Grenada.

Cuba is Cuba only! To borrow Castro's expression, Cuba is "not in the Black Sea but in the Caribbean...not ninety miles from Odessa but ninety miles from Miami".⁹ It is therefore an irreplaceable strategic asset to the Soviet Union furnishing a huge sophisticated base (the Lourdes installation) for gathering electronic surveillance, providing facilities for Soviet (Bear D) long-range reconnaissance aircraft along the United States eastern

8 Narayanan, n.6, p.53.

9 Times of the Americas, 30 November 1988.

seaboard, allowing Soviet navy facilities to maintain a strategic presence in the Caribbean.¹⁰

Conflicts over strategic priorities in the realm of foreign policy pre-date Gorbachev. Cuba's espousal of revolutionary causes especially in the Caribbean and Central America has always been a source of friction in Soviet-Cuban relations. In July 1988, Shevardnadze declared that "class struggle" must be subordinated in the nuclear age to principles of non-aggression and respect for national sovereignty. Another politbureau member, Boris Ligachev vigorously dissented from this view, and affirmed the continuing relevance of class criteria for Soviet foreign policy. However, in October 1988 leadership shake-up Ligachev was downgraded. The new politbureau member responsible for ideology, Vadim A. Medvedev, told a gathering of political scientists from communist countries that "universal issues" such as peace should outweigh class struggle in the formulation of foreign policy.¹¹ In such a situation Cuba's option for championing revolutionary causes in Latin America and elsewhere was greatly abridged unless it chose to go it alone.

10 Cuba's location has led Moscow to establish the Lourdes intelligence gathering facility near Havana. It was the most sophisticated intelligence complex outside the Soviet Union. From this facility the Soviets monitored United States commercial satellites, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) space programme activities at Cape Canaveral, and United States military and merchant shipping Communications. Approximately 2100 Soviet technicians staffed the Lourdes operations.

Developments under which Cuba and Angola agreed to a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops in December 1988 in exchange for Namibian independence is illustrative of the policy divergence between Havana and Moscow. Against Cuban advice, Soviets in the summer of 1987 supported a massive anti-Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) offensive in southern Angola.¹² In retaliation when South Africa

11 New York Times, 6 October 1988.

12 In Angola, a struggle for power and supremacy began between the three main freedom groups--Movimento Popular para a Liberacao de Angola (MPLA) the Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA); and the Frente Nacional de Liberacao de Angola (FNLA). The MPLA was a Marxist group which received support from the Soviet Union and Cuba. Two developments in 1974 contributed to Soviet-Cuban coordination of policies in Angola : increased Chinese support for the rival FNLA and the United States decision to commence arms shipments to FNLA through Zaire. Analysis of Cuban-Soviet intervention in Angola suggests that Cuba led the way into the intervention, making the decision to increase its intervention independent of the Soviet Union--at a time when the Soviets were reluctant to become too deeply involved lest the situation draw them into a direct confrontation with the United States. The Cubans and the MPLA commanders planned the campaign, and Cuba's ground forces were committed in direct combat against MPLA opponents. The Angolan experience indicates more influence from Havana to Moscow than the reverse, stemming from Cuba's close historic ties with the MPLA, uninterrupted consistency in supporting this movement compared to the Soviets, and readiness to dispatch ground forces as opposed to Soviet cautions and cold response to the MPLA's initial request for additional weapons and supplies in mid-1975. Soviets had replaced the war material from Angola. But in the 1985 offensive against South African and the United States backed guerrilla forces, the communist government army lost the battle. In such a situation, Cuban military strength in Angola, which fell to about 17,000 after the MPLA victory, began to rise

forced the Angolans back, Cuban emergency reinforcements of an all-time high of 15,000 troops stemmed the South African assault, pushing the latter close to the Namibian border. The aggressive deployment of Cuban troops contributed subsequently to South African flexibility in Cuba-South Africa-Angola negotiations under United States mediation on Namibia. "And this last effort we made" as Fidel Castro stated was "exclusively with our own means, just like when our internationalist mission in Angola first started; it is our ships that carried the men and material over there; and on this last occasion, we did it alone".¹³

In contrast, neither the Cubans could do it alone in Central America nor the Soviets did anything beyond reinforcing and intensifying the diplomatic initiatives spearheaded by the contadora countries which, by design or otherwise, provided for the United States to retain Contra forces in Honduras. Again, when Castro following the United States intervention in Panama in December 1989, indignantly retorted that it was a "slap in the face and a humiliation for the Soviet peace policy", the Soviets were merely preoccupied watching the rubble settling down in

...
steadily in the face of Savimbi's successes,
reaching 25,000 to 35,000 troops by late 1984.

13 Granma Weekly Review, 23 July 1989.

the post-revolution Romania.¹⁴ Both instances are pointers to the possible dilemmas that Cuba may have to live with in the coming years. And that is what explains Castro's misgivings about the Gorbachev era. His quarrel with Gorbachev is not as much on the theoretical formulation of the "new thinking" as for the manner of its implementation.

Since 1985, under pressure from their own chronic farm problems and from hard currency shortages in the years of soft energy prices, the Soviet leadership had become more demanding, voicing its reluctance to underwrite the Cuban economy. So much so, Cuba had to buy sugar with its scarce hard currency resources from the world market to fulfil its contractual obligations with the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. The Soviet Union had had little response publicly. But in an unusual interview, a Russian with long experience in Cuba provided some insights into the Soviet Union's strategy for dealing with its often difficult Caribbean ally. "We don't think it is appropriate to force

14 *ibid*, 16 April 1989. Gorbachev had ruled out external intervention in the affairs of sovereign countries and the export of revolution at different occasions. But Castro criticized Gorbachev's policies for not showing sufficient firmness against United States' military involvement in the Third World. During Gorbachev's visit to Cuba, Castro publicly questioned whether Gorbachev's diplomacy had evoked reciprocating concessions from the United States. Further Castro said that there was no indication that the imperialists have accepted Gorbachev's policies. As United States had supplied arms to UNITA in Angola, supported anti-Sandinista rebel forces in Honduras and intervened in Panama. And Soviet Union was only a mute spectator.

them [Cubans] to make changes" said the Russian.¹⁵ A Soviet official prior to Gorbachev's visit to Cuba in April 1989, made it clear that any reduction in aid was out of the question. Further he said that his government, while irritated, does not now plan to cut aid or insist that Castro drop his adherence to traditional communist dogma.

Cuban National Bank data showed that Soviet Union cut its trade with Cuba by 12 percent in 1988 first quarter. Commenting upon it, Manuel Sanchez Perez, a former Cuban Deputy Minister who defected to United States said that the Central Bank trade figures suggested "the Soviets are now saying to Cuba we are not willing to give the same amount of money as in prior years--there are limits".¹⁶ Soviet Union gave Cuba upto \$5 billion a year in military and economic aid. Gorbachev wanted to ease this burden by urging domestic changes in Cuba by encouraging Castro to seek regional peace rather than continue to export revolution.

15 New York Times, 11 January 1989.

16 ibid.

During his visit to Cuba G. Gorbachev expressed:

From the rostrum of the National Assembly I would like to declare that the Soviet Union cherishes its friendship with socialist Cuba. Our solidarity with you, dear comrades, is not subject to short-term fluctuations. We are prepared to continue developing Soviet-Cuban relations, we believe that we both have the most ample opportunities for doing so.(17)

At the same time, Gorbachev elaborated on the need for his "new thinking" in Soviet Union, he said:

We are confronted with a stark choice: either we continue along the old, rutted track-- towards even greater stagnation and an economic, social and even political dead-end, with the ensuing risk of being pushed to the sidelines of progress, or we embark on the arduous but vitally important path of our society's revolutionary renewal, imparting to socialism a new qualitative dimension that will meet the highest standards of humanism and progress. That is the aim and the essence of the policy of perestroika that our Party and people have chosen.(18)

Gorbachev walked careful line during his visit to Cuba, reaffirming his case for glasnost and perestroika but at the same time he said:

We do not view our [Soviet] approaches and solutions as some sort of universal remedy. On the contrary, problems may be similar, but each Party tackles them independently, proceeding from its own ideas and the distinctive features of its particular country. These diverse and unorthodox approaches together form the international experience of socialism, which helps all of us to move forward faster. I would like to stress that I fully agree with what Fidel said from this rostrum on this issue.(19)

17 Visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to Cuba: Documents and Materials (Moscow, 1989), p.10.

18 ibid, p.12.

19 ibid, p.14.

Gorbachev called for an end to all outside military aid to Latin America and condemned use of force as instrument of foreign policy. Castro in response refused to import Soviet reforms and also Castro was still in favour of espousing the doctrine of export of revolution. In the end of his speech, Gorbachev said: "We wish you [Cubans] success in carrying out your rectification policy and the plans for economic and social development and for improving working people's lives".²⁰

During the same visit, Soviet spokesman Gennadi I Gerasimov said that Moscow wanted a "gradual balance of [Soviet-Cuban] economic ties", with an increase in Cuban exports to the Soviet Union.²¹ The Soviets currently paid inflated prices for Cuban sugar and nickel as part of its aid programme. Gorbachev and Castro signed a 25 year treaty of friendship that committed the two countries, in broad terms, to coordinate economic and foreign policies.

Soviet Media Reactions:

By the end of year 1989, while the Soviet leadership was circumspect in its criticism of the Castro government being corrupt or incompetent, the Soviet media however, was quite vocal. In the summer of 1987, two

20 ibid, p.25.

21 Facts on File, 7 April 1989.

articles in the Soviet press criticized Cuban economic management, particularly Cuba's use of economic aid received from the Soviet Union and the East European countries--the first instances of such open criticism of Cuba in the socialist media. An article published in Pravada in August noted:

Quite considerable aid is also being given to Cuba, where programs to develop comprehensively the mining and sugar industries and citrus cultivation are being carried out in close collaboration with CMEA states. The island of freedom receives Soviet and Bulgarian machine tools, power units from Czechoslovakia, Polish production lines, and Romanian ships. But not everything runs smoothly and problem-free. The construction of a nickel plant in Moa municipality is now into its tenth year. Shortcomings in the drawing up of plans by our specialists, defects in some of the equipment delivered there, and time lost in installation have meant that the enterprise's commissioning date has already been extended twice.(22)

Writing in New Times, journalist V. Chirkov wrote:

The Cuban press has repeatedly drawn attention to the country's failure to make full use of the plant, equipment, and other material resources received from the USSR and other countries of the socialist community; to delays in installing imported equipment, lack of technological discipline on the part of Cuban personnel, and the inadequate use of specialists trained in the USSR and other fraternal countries.(23)

22 Pravada, August 1987, p.4.

23 New Times(Moscow), September 1987, pp.16-18.

By 1989, the Soviet press became highly critical of Cuba. The Moscow News stated:

The administrative and economic model Cuba copied was ours, the Soviet model, initiated at a time when European socialism was drowning in a bog of stagnation.... The ideological dogmas studied by the budding Cuban Party and state elite was ours. (24)

It was a direct attack on the Cuban ideology. Other articles published reflected on the depressing economic situation in Cuba. ~~These~~ publications were banned in Cuba and Castro justified the prohibition of these Soviet publications in Cuba, Sputnik and Moscow News. He said that the measure was necessary because such publications were "filled with venom against the Soviet Union itself and against socialism and have demanded the cessation of just and equitable commercial relations between the Soviet Union and Cuba".²⁵ These publications created tense relations between the two countries. Soviet press continued its critical approach towards Cuba, as again Moscow News on 7 December 1990 published an article on Cuba that depicted the island nation as an impoverished police state that continued to espouse the communism of the era of discredited Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev. Vladimir

24 Quoted in New York Times, 8 March 1989.

25 ibid.

A. Orlov, who worked for the Soviet Institute of International Relations, criticized Cuba's economy, saying the system of rationing was "a barrier to poverty but gives no stimulus to work".²⁶ In response to Soviet press, Granma in an editorial charged the Soviet press with "...justifying bourgeois democracy as the highest form of popular participation and with a fascination for American way of life".²⁷ Moscow News also quoted a Moscow deputy as saying: "We can't tolerate that sort of situation when our own people have to get ration cards for soap and sugar and can't find a decent cut of meat in the stores".²⁸

Even by 1990 there was no significant reduction in Soviet aid to Cuba. Instead, a new one-year Soviet-Cuban trade agreement was signed in April 1990, under which the trade and technical assistance was increased by 8.7 percent over 1989. Moscow also delivered six new MIG-29S to Havana in 1989 to replace Cuba's aging MIG-23S. Cuba's Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Cuba's representative to January 1990 meeting of Council of

26 Facts on File, 23 March 1990.

27 Granma Weekly Review, 16 August 1989.

28 Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Cuba's Cloudy Future", Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.), vol.69, no.3, Summer 1990, p.116.

Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), pronounced the results of the discussions of the meeting as "satisfactory".²⁹

A Soviet diplomat in Cuba denied that there was any intention to curtail Soviet trade with Cuba, but said that Cubans would need to adapt to dealing with newly independent enterprises.

The government newspaper, Izvestia published for the first time a table showing debts owed to the Soviet Union by foreign borrowers, and Cuba stood out as by far the biggest debtor with debts of more than 15 billion rubles. Opposition members of the Soviet parliament had been critical of foreign aid to client states such as Cuba, which received an estimated US \$ 5 billion a year. It was expected that perestroika elements were in favour of change in Cuba because Soviet press became more critical of Cuba, an article was published in the Moscow News which expressed that "...a shift is under way [in Cuba] from social apathy to a passive, so far well hidden, discontent. About 15 dissident groups have emerged with programs ranging from support of perestroika in the Soviet Union to the freedom of religious worship in Cuba".³⁰ A Soviet official while

29 Granma, 11 January 1990.

30 New York Times, 8 March 1990.

commenting upon the problems in Cuba, said: "The Cubans are trying their best to get hard currency. This is their No.1 problem. I think the Cubans in the future must develop deeper economic relations with the West, but the only way I see is by improving relations with the United States". Asked whether the Soviet Union, with serious economic difficulties of its own, would maintain its huge aid programme to Cuba, the Soviet official said: "I don't think it is possible for us to cut off our aid abruptly". Even though he said that the current levels of Soviet aid would likely to last at least five more years, the official said the Cuban government must "take into consideration the situation" and "look for higher efficiency in our cooperation".³¹

On 17 April 1990, Leonid Abalkin, the Soviet Union's leading economic reformer, signed a \$ 14.7 billion bilateral trade protocol for 1990, the final year of a 5-year economic cooperation pact. It was 8.7 percent more than the previous year. According to Soviet officials, a future trade agreement would be for two years rather than five and would take into account the economic reforms that had recently been implemented in the Soviet Union. Abalkin said: "Soviet Union and

31 *ibid*, 5 April 1990.

Cuba are trying to improve their economic relations and can expand them further despite the diverging economic and political paths taken by their governments".³²

Radical Shifts in Soviet Policy Since 1990:

Beginning in the year 1990, perceptible shift in Soviet postures towards Cuba became evident. Number of factors could be attributed to the policy shift. For one thing, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe was nearly complete with the fall of communist government in Romania. Additionally, there was growing pressure from the United States seeking the Soviet Union to terminate all economic assistance to Cuba. The question of Soviet military deployment in Cuba was also raised by the US government on a number of occasions. Above all, the flagging Soviet economy also constrained the ability of Gorbachev to continue extending economic assistance to Cuba.

At the Houston Summit of Group of Seven industrially advanced countries (US, Britain, France, West Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada) in July 1990, the question of Soviet economic assistance to Cuba was discussed at some length. In this meeting, the Group-7 countries openly stressed that their economic assistance

32 *ibid*, 24 April 1990.

to the Soviet Union will largely depend on further reforms that the latter will bring about in its defence and foreign policies which among others, included reduction and suspension of economic assistance to Cuba. In particular, the United States said that it opposed ongoing Soviet subsidy to Cuba--which according to the United States amounted to roughly US \$5 billion annually. Upon which there appears to have been some initiatives that the Soviets have made in their talks with Cuban leaders. Ramon Gonzalez Vergara, Vice Secretary of the Soviet-Cuban CMEA in Moscow until he defected to the United States in July 1990, stated that

in tense discussions in Moscow and Havana early this year the Soviet Union informed Cuba of its intention to reduce its support drastically almost in every area of economic aid, from barter trade to subsidized prices for Cuban products and low-interest debt financing.(33)

He further added that the difference took on special importance because of a warning by Abalkin, during his visit to Havana in April 1990 that Cuba's debt to the Soviet Union would be payable in US dollars beginning in 1995 at an exchange rate to be determined this year.

That apart, as the Soviet bloc industries became more independent and profit-oriented, delivery of supplies to Cuba which were heavily subsidized, received lower priorities and also arrived in smaller quantities. The impact of economic liberalization processes in the Soviet Union was clearly visible even by January 1990, when the Cuban government announced that the Soviet Union had not delivered expected shipments of grain and flour which caused a shortage of bread and animal feed. Moscow's excuses for the shortfall and delay in deliveries were unavoidable administrative bungling and lack of shipping facilities. But, perhaps, there were more compelling circumstances that explained these delays. For instance, on several occasions, pro-perestroika elements in the Soviet Union often openly criticized Soviet largesse to Cuba pointing that it

accounts for at least a quarter of the total volume of economic assistance and alone would be enough to keep the [Soviet] consumer market in equilibrium for those few years we need to somehow get by and truly embark upon the road to reform. (34)

Admittedly the economic situation in Soviet Union considerably had deteriorated making it impossible for Soviet Union to continue to fulfil its trade obligations

34 Quoted in Narayanan, n.6, p.51.

under the different agreements with Cuba. By September 1990, Moscow announced the termination of one important source of Cuban income i.e. oil supplies. Under this arrangement, Cuba in the past was permitted to sell any residue of Soviet oil after meeting its domestic needs to outside market and earn hard currency. "The honeymoon has ended and now Cuba has no opportunity for reexporting oil" Gonzalez said, "even if they wanted to, the Soviets have no capability to maintain the kind of financial aid they have maintained during the last thirty years".³⁵ Soviet Union told the Castro government that in 1991 it will restructure its bilateral trade to reflect the real market values of the goods. This meant that Cuba had to pay in hard currency for the oil and machinery it has been importing at discounted price. Rodriguez was silent on whether the sugar prices mentioned would be effective only in 1991, or beyond (i.e. 1991-96). Concerning supply of oil, he said: "The Soviets have told us that they are not going to negotiate a new five-year program in 1991...and in 1992 we will discuss the next four years".³⁶ A commentary published on 2 October

35 New York Times, 13 September 1990.

36 Jorge F. Perez-Lopez, "Swimming Against the Tide: Implications for Cuba of Soviet and Eastern European Reforms in Foreign Economic Relations", Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs (University of Miami), vol.33, no.2, Summer 1991, p.116.

1990 in the official Soviet Communist Party newspaper, Pravda justified the special status Cuba had enjoyed with the Soviet Union in the past but said it was time for a "radical change" in the relationship from "philanthropy to collaboration".³⁷

The decisions by the Soviet Union to slash aid to Cuba--particularly the huge shipments of oil and to work with the United States to solve regional conflicts have left the Cubans as one of the last standard-bearers in the ideological war against United States. In addition to the internal developments in Soviet Union that contributed to these shifts in Soviet postures towards Cuba, there were other factors too. With the end of cold war, Havana's importance to Moscow has declined politically. Technological advances had reduced Cuba's importance for intelligence gathering and even as a military base. Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy jeopardized the growing rapprochement between Soviet Union and United States. United States Secretary of State James A. Baker made this clear during his appearance before the new Soviet Parliament. "We don't see Cuba as a threat to the United States", Baker told the Parliament. He

37 Facts on File, 19 October 1990.

further added: "For that matter, we don't see Nicaragua as a major threat. But both are major threats to the democratically elected leaders around them. They are still committed to the "old thinking".³⁸

Soviet Union, as in the past, sent a Soviet delegation to participate in the 38th anniversary on the assault on the Moncada Barracks. Negale Kisiliov, a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet as head of delegation, carried a message from Gorbachev promising the renewal and development of bilateral links and collaboration in areas of mutual interest. However, on 11 September 1991, Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of 11,000 Soviet troops from Cuba. Cuba's reaction to the Soviet withdrawal of its troops was very critical. An editorial in Granma declared that the decision was "unilateral" that had broken the historical and legitimate bilateral accords and was therefore equivalent to giving a "green light" to the United States to carry out its "aggressive plans against Cuba".³⁹ The Soviet decision, delivered during a visit by James A. Baker to Moscow, was welcomed by the United States government. United States nevertheless ruled out Soviet plea and the Cuban

38 ibid, 16 February 1990.

39 Granma International, 22 September 1991.

demand that the United States base at Guantanamo of Cuba should now be evacuated to lower the political tensions in the region. While Castro was against this decision in toto Gorbachev was, however, flexible on the question of the US evacuating the base. These developments nearly brought Soviet-Cuban relations to open rupture.

A Soviet Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Valeri Nikolaenko who visited Havana on 21-22 September 1991, stated that agreement had been reached on the practical aspects of a staged withdrawal of a 3000 strong Soviet training brigade and within a specific time frame for talks on further withdrawals. He emphasised, however, that the reductions in Soviet military personnel, currently estimated by Western experts to total no more than 7800 should not be utilized to compromise Cuba's security.

In the year 1991, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Soviet policy towards Cuba underwent a radical shift. So much so, on 5 September 1991 when Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin stated that Soviet-Cuban relation had to be "de-ideologized",

Soviet President Gorbachev fully endorsed the statement. This "de-ideologized" Soviet policy towards Cuba meant the termination of both economic and military assistance which Soviet Union had provided ever since 1959 Cuban revolution, making it imperative for Cuba to reorient its political-economic relations with the rest of the world--an aspect which is dealt at length in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CUBA'S POLICY INITIATIVES: DOMESTIC

Having discussed in the preceding chapters on Cuba's response to Gorbachev's "new thinking" as well as the Soviet policy initiatives towards Cuba since the advent of Gorbachev, in this fourth chapter an attempt is made to examine at some length the initiatives undertaken by Fidel Castro to meet the new challenges faced by the island. Since the Soviet Union's reform policy demanded far-reaching changes in Cuba both in respect of its domestic and international orientations, this and the following chapter will examine at length the various reforms highlighting a few of the policy initiatives at the domestic and global levels.

Ever since the year 1985, in the domestic sphere an array of reforms were introduced which can broadly be classified as economic, political and ideological. In this chapter, an attempt is made to catalogue these various reforms, the major objective of which was to overcome the lapses and errors that had crept into the functioning of the revolutionary regime.

Economic Initiatives:

Cuba in early 1980s had introduced its own economic liberalization programme--Economic Planning and Management System (SDPE). SDPE was designed to provide greater

monetary incentives to increase efficiency and improve the distribution of the labour force between regions, economic sectors and enterprises. Material incentives were enhanced further with the introduction of a system of bonuses (primas) and awards (premios). In 1980 procurement (acopio) prices paid to producers were raised and in 1981 consumer prices followed suit. Reforms were introduced to bring prices more in line with opportunity costs and with the market forces. These price changes were designed to encourage profitability of enterprises and some degree of self-finance as well as to bring supply and demand more in line with each other. In 1980, the parallel market (mercado paralelo) and the free peasant market (mercado libre campesino) were established. There was minimal state control upon the peasant's markets. Producers interacted directly with consumers and prices were determined purely by supply and demand. Thus SDPE advocated decentralisation and managerial discretion, allowed greater play of market forces, introduced methods to increase efficiency of enterprises, elaborated a series of material incentives, proposed self-financing and encouraged worker's participation. The purpose of SDPE was clearly to improve the flexibility, running and efficiency of the economy.

By mid 1980s, a wave of corruption and scandals followed which was Castro blamed on those newly enriched under SDPE. Castro in his main report to the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) stressed the need to improve Cuba's inefficient, undisciplined and mediocre economy. Castro, therefore, emphasised upon accelerating economic development, building discipline, ending corruption, stimulating efficiency and promoting competent managers.

In May 1986, Castro introduced his own reform programme which he called "rectification". Castro's rectification programme presented the appearance of an initiative to revitalize socialism. The programme called for increasing the role of the state apparatus in setting economic priorities, closing down the free markets, and eliminating bonuses and material incentives that had been introduced earlier. It also called for increasing the role of the party in economic supervision with a view to ensure that state priorities were carried out. Castro while supporting the rectification process criticized the economic liberalization practised in Cuba during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s:

Enterprises that tried to become profitable by theft, swindles, swindling one another. What kind of socialism were we going to build along those lines? What kind of ideology was that? And I want to know whether these methods were not leading us to a system worse than capitalism, instead of leading us toward socialism and communism. That almost universal chaos in which anyone grabbed anything he called These things were becoming habitual and generalized. If this is not combatted energetically the masses would start to get skeptical, discouraged and demoralized, and the ideas and objectives of our revolutionary process would become discredited.(1)

Under the rectification process, imports were reduced to the minimum with a will to find its own solutions and reduced external economic dependence as much as possible. These economic policy decisions were oriented towards the dominance of the country's interests over those of enterprises and towards eliminating the notions and the behaviour which for years attempted to sustain a level of consumption of industrial products totally divorced from Cuba's productive capacity and economic development. Regarding labour, rectification meant relating wages to output. Under the rectification programme, Castro emphasised on the need for voluntary labour. The rationale behind the idea of voluntary labour was two-fold. One was to utilise the surplus labour and the other was to raise the revolutionary consciousness of the labour.

1 Granma Weekly Review, 14 December 1986.

Castro argued that what Gorbachev was implementing by way of economic restructuring was already experimented in Cuba and finding that it only contributed to further inefficiency, he has therefore chosen to move to the next phase i.e. rectification. He defended the rectification process as restoring a proper balance (perhaps a synthesis--to use a dialectical term) between idealism and materialism in economic policy. Castro said "we have lived through the experience--we have lived through two experiences, the one before and now this one, the two of them; we have seen the negative consequences of both of them and we could see even some positive things in them".²

While underlining the need for rectification, Castro nevertheless admitted that it was not an one-time action and pointed out that the compulsions of the dire economic circumstances that has made rectification imperative. Elaborating further on the idea of rectification, Castro stated that the initiatives envisaged did not address the long-term illogic of the bureaucratic centralist economy. As Castro said

...rectification implies making more accurate use of the system and mechanisms we have now, an economic management and planning system which...was a horse, a lame nag with many sores that we were treating with Mercurochrome and

...

2 *ibid.*

prescribing medicines for it, putting splints on one leg, in short fixing up the nag, the horse. I said that the thing to do now was to go on using that horse, knowing its bad habits, the perils of that horse, how it kicked and bucked, and try to lead it on our path and no go wherever it wishes to take us.... But we'll see how far we get, even riding on the old nag full of sores, but correctly led, for as long as we don't have anything better than the old nag.(3)

Arguing against the implanting of free market forces, Castro stated such market mechanisms within socialist economic order would only produce negligible gains in efficiency. What is more, it would weaken the political legitimacy of a socialist regime. To Castro therefore there was no need in Cuba to choose between the ruthless pressures of market mechanisms and the bureaucratic distortions of central planning. Instead, a process of rectification would introduce central prioritizing from above, supported by intensified political work and political supervision from below and, above all, help Cuba out of the hard currency crunch. He foresaw that resource flows into Cuba specially from the Soviet Union would dwindle over the years and in 1987 as the Soviet Union had prescribed a ceiling on future aid to Cuba, Castro cautioned his people by stating: "It's hard to conceive of having more resources or more foreign help; from now on, everything additional must undoubtedly come from our work, intelligence, and effort. Nothing will be easy".

3 *ibid*, 18 October 1986.

4 *ibid*, 11 January 1987.

To a considerable extent, the economic initiatives under the aegis of the rectification programme produced the desired results. It reduced the level of consumption considerably from 1984 through 1987, consumer purchases of food, clothing and household appliances were nearly negligible. It might have been because of lack of goods in the stores but certainly not because of lack of cash. As a consequence of the application of new rules on bonuses, average monthly wages dropped in Cuba from 203 pesos in 1987 to 182 pesos by mid-1988 which in turn contributed to strong growth in cash savings. Under yet another new programme, the Cubans who wanted to purchase western goods in special stores were to pay by selling their family jewelry. Such jewelry was then converted into exports for hard currency. In the process, Castro was able to justify his reluctance to further liberalize the economy along free market forces and at the same time underlined that Cuba will have to make greater economic sacrifices in order to safeguard the basic revolutionary goals.

With the economic difficulties mounting further, in March 1990 Castro declared what he called a "special period in the time of peace" and paved the way for implementing even more stringent economic measures. Of

these, efforts towards water conservation, road construction and the construction material industry were most significant. With a view to arrest the economic discontentment Castro adopted measures to mobilise surplus labour and engage the labour towards boosting food production. Under this scheme, in March 1990 about 4000 Cuban conscripts "voluntarily" extended their military service for two months to work in the fields. Minibrigade movement was revitalized. Further steps were taken with a view to make the contribution of the voluntary labour more rational and productive and at the same time move towards advanced form of collective work, based on the communist spirit of work. Wages were to be determined as under socialism and work discipline based on the collective's authority. The Manati plan was introduced to increase the reforestation programme for timber and fruit trees, with active participation of the masses. By Torquino plan efforts were made to stop the exodus of the mountain population, and to increase the measures for economic and social development of the country's mountainous regions. Thus rectification appeared to be a return to the pure socialist principles of Ernesto Che Guevara evident during the early 1960s, the principles that gave breath and life to the Cuban kind of socialism.

Whereas the above-mentioned economic measures were intended to increase the use and the productivity of the labour, Castro by 1990 envisaged certain far-reaching economic reforms which would contribute to meeting the challenges in terms of its external balance of payments. With the inflow of resources from the Soviet bloc getting increasingly curtailed and, as a consequence of which Cuba's external debt liabilities soared. Reducing its current trade accounts, Cuba had to explore new avenues in terms of its external trade relations. Traditionally the mainstay of Cuban exports consisted essentially of sugar and nickel. With the preferential trade exchanges that Cuba had with the Soviet bloc coming to termination in the wake of the collapse of Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) the need for seeking new items of exports instead of its traditional sale of sugar and nickel began to be considered. Two important sectors were identified which offered rich potentials for meeting the foreign exchange crunch. One was the sector of pharmaceuticals and clinical appliances. Thanks to the development of biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry, Cuba has begun producing certain life saving medicines. To mention a few, Cuba has developed streptokinase prescribed for heart ailments; Hepatitis B Vaccine, medicine for skin burns--in all of which Cuba has the

distinction of being one of the leading producers in the world. Also, detection devices such as SUMA 321 HIV for diagnosing such deadly diseases like AIDS have also been perfected by the pharmaceutical sector of Cuba. These have offered new avenues for earning foreign exchanges which are currently being examined for export promotion. So much so Castro during the 4th PCC stated: "I can assure you that biotechnology and the pharmaceutical and the medical equipment industry offer us great prospects, and one day they may bring in much more revenue than our sugar. That gives you an idea of the size of it".⁵

Yet another new economic sector which is being considered as a potential source for raising the foreign exchange reserve is tourism and hoteliering. With a view to promote this sector Cuba is considering opening the sector to foreign investment. Emphasising the importance of tourism as an alternative source of foreign exchange, Castro in a statement to the 4th PCC stated:

If they (foreign investors) bring capital for building the hotel plus their experience--that is technology and the market, and we provide the workforce and materials, it is absolutely correct to create an association, from which we will both benefit. If we didn't do that, the beaches wouldn't be used, and the hotel wouldn't be built. Joint ventures don't clash with any principle of Marxism-Leninism, socialism, or the Revolution. They may clash with sentimentalism: We'd like the hotel and all the profits to be for us.(6)

5 Granma International, 3 November 1991.

6 ibid.

Presently, Cuba has entered into collaboration with Spain, Mexico and Venezuela for building infrastructures for hotel industry. At the same time Cuba has also liberalized its policy towards foreign tourism. According to available data in the year 1988 Cuba admitted 306,200 tourists from abroad who generated \$ 125 million in revenues. It was 66 percent above the mid-1980s average. Earnings from this sector grew to an estimated 16 percent in 1989 contributing approximately \$ 145 million. In 1991, tourism brought in around \$ 400 million, counting both direct income at the tourist institutions and indirect income of other institutions. Current plans call for increasing the number of foreign tourists to 600,000 by 1992 or 1993, to generate a potential revenue of \$ 700 million. About 85 percent of Cuba's tourists come from outside the East bloc, with Canadians, Italians, and the West Germans being the most prevalent. So, Cuba has taken an aggressive campaign to attract foreign investment to develop the tourism industry and Spanish investors are playing a leading role in the joint ventures.

Political Innovatives

Just as the innovative reforms that Castro ushered in to restructure the economy, he also introduced some new measures to reform the Communist Party of Cuba. At the same time, he even introduced reforms to the different elected bodies of the government and in the sector of press and information media.

At the 3rd Congress, far-reaching changes were introduced to the elected bodies of the government. In the past, election of representatives to the grass roots municipal bodies, known as Organs of Popular Power (OPP) were on the basis of nominations from the PCC although voting was compulsory and universal. The elected members of the OPP, in turn, elected delegates to Cuba's fourteen provincial assemblies as well as deputies to the National Assembly. In other words, PCC was in full control of the selection, nomination and campaign processes. Following the 3rd Congress of the PCC some cosmetic changes were introduced by which the nomination of candidates to the OPP was delegated to the electorate. In other words, while it meant that candidates to the grass roots bodies may be nominated by the electorate, since the choice ^{of candidates} /will have to be from within the members of the PCC, it offered no scope for any candidate outside the PCC to contest the elections. At the 4th Congress Castro stated that further

steps are being undertaken in the election of members to these bodies as he said:

The delegates from the electoral districts will continue to be nominated and elected by the people, and on the same principles, drawing from these delegates from electoral districts, we propose that the National Assembly nominate and elect directly the delegates to the provincial assembly; nominate and elect directly, without political maneuvering and through the fairest mechanisms that offer equal opportunities to all of becoming deputies to the National Assembly, the supreme authority of the state.(7)

Notwithstanding the claim that Cuba was "moving toward improving...the political system", the pre-eminence of the Communist Party of Cuba was further reinforced in the 4th Congress. While the 4th Congress declared that the deputies to the National Assembly and the delegates to the provincial assemblies will be elected by the direct vote of the people and the right to contest election was open to every eligible citizen, it was ensured that no candidate can contest outside the ideological framework of Marxism-socialism. It is in this context Castro made it abundantly clear that Cuba needed only one political party and strongly warned those who had illusions that Cuba would "allow pocket parties in Cuba, to organize the counter-revolutionaries, the bourgeois and the Yankee lover".⁸ On the other hand, Castro said that he has

7 ibid.

8 Facts on File(New York, N.Y.), 2 September 1988.

streamlined channels for party workers to express their views, but within the limits of the communist party discipline. In January 1990, Castro announced that delegates to local communist party organizations in workplaces would be chosen by secret ballot from among the candidates who will be selected by the workers themselves. In February 1990, the Central Committee of PCC announced it would begin a process of "perfecting" institutions while maintaining a "single, Leninist Party based on the principles of democratic centralism".⁹

A draft resolution was also approved which gave the Central Committee exceptional powers to adopt, in accordance with the situations that the country may face. These powers include taking political and economic decisions and promote legislation and state actions as it deems necessary, in order to fulfil the supreme objectives--to safeguard the nation, the revolution and socialism. Further drastic decisions taken during the 4th Congress in the political sphere were--the elimination of the structure of the secretariat of the Central Committee, the politbureau was empowered to create from among its members a working group to attend the affairs of the party leadership and present reports at its meetings.

9 Granma International, 20 October 1991.

The category of alternate members in all party entities was eliminated. The powers of the Party's National Conference were broadened.

During the 3rd Congress, Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro and his associates (raulistas--known as hard core Marxists) constituted the largest single bloc in the politbureau and secretariat. Although Raul Castro did not acquire a new title, his position considerably strengthened. Four of the politbureau members--Vilma Espin, Abelardo Colome, Jose Machado Ventura and Jorge Risquet Valdes were from the raulistas. Among ten politbureau alternatives, division generals Ulises Rosales del Toro and Senen Casas, along with Jose Ramirez Cruz and Jose Ramon Fernandez were raulistas. There were also at least three raulistas in the nine-member secretariat. In addition to Fidel and Raul Castro, only Risquet and Machado Ventura were members of both the politbureau and the secretariat. It was speculated that the coordination between policy making and implementation was largely in the hands of raulistas. Thus the evidence of Raul Castro's enhanced status, suggested that he emerged from his previously shadowy place as one of the regime's most feared hard-liner. But during the 4th Congress the tilt was on the other side i.e. reformist dominated over the hard-liners. Vilma Espin and Jorge Risquet Valdes

were dropped from the politbureau. Reformists like Carlos Aldana, Juan Almeida, Roberto Robaina and others were given privileged positions.

Yet another issue which bedevilled Castro's Cuba ever since mid 1980s was the human rights issue. There were allegations made both inside and outside Cuba that there was widespread human rights abuses in Cuba. So much so in July 1988, Ricardo Bofill, a self-styled human rights activist went to the court with a writ petition demanding that he should be permitted to launch the pro-Human Rights Party. He also sought that the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be incorporated into the preamble of the Cuban Constitution. At the instigation of the United States a United Nations' human rights committee was authorised to visit Cuba and report on issues relating to the violation of the human rights. There were other instances of members belonging to the Union of Communist Youth complaining about the lack of democracy as well as what they called Castro's "personality Cult". Also, protesters and human rights activists were planning a public demonstration in front of the Soviet embassy in Cuba around the time when Gorbachev was scheduled to visit. Again, when the United Nations Human Rights Committee that charged the Cuban government for human rights violations, advocates of

human rights in Cuba hailed the United States for its role. In response to all these activities, the Cuban government took a very stern stand. In some instances these ^{human} rights advocates were tried and even imprisoned.

As a policy pronouncement the Cuban leadership emphatically stated that there has never been any incidence of either human rights violation or discrimination against any particular group. Castro himself stated that in Cuba there will be nothing against the revolution but everything under the revolution and for the revolution. What, in other words, was implicitly stated by Castro was that if there was any discrimination it was against those who were opposed to the cause of the revolution which in his judgement was not any violation of human rights. In a similar vein Cuba's Vice Minister of Justice Carlos Amat stated:

The Cuban Government has been more flexible in its treatment of prisoners of conscience when a climate of detente has existed and the Revolution has not been threatened.... If we return to the hot war, we will go back to being tough.... We are not going to tolerate fifth columns that try to undermine the Revolution.(10)

10 Gillian Gunn, "Will Castro Fall?", Foreign Policy (Knokville, I.A.), Summer 1990, p.143.

Regarding the question of freedom of press Castro always maintained that the Cuban people enjoyed complete freedom of information. The Cuban press published freely on a variety of issues in recent years, such as the trial of General Arnaldo Ochoa as well as on the social problems like teenage pregnancy, AIDS danger and workers absenteeism etc. A monthly periodical Opina was reflecting very regularly on consumer complaints. So free was the press in Cuba, Castro while commenting upon the negative reporting in Cuba said that "...the Cuban people have been in and are still in a state of war...". One could not expect the sort of unbridled criticism that "...one might find in French, British or American newspapers".¹¹ Castro affirmed that he was satisfied with the improvements in the Cuban media. He told a meeting of journalists "these days newspapers are my main source of information, even though I receive many other kinds of information... and I couldn't say that a year ago".¹² During the 4th Congress, there was more emphasis upon the role of the media. Jacinto Granda, director of Granma affirmed that this "special period in the time of peace" was decisive for

11 Granma Weekly Review, 2 November 1986.

12 ibid, 2 August 1987.

the country and for the press. Quoting the experience of Soviet Union, he said:

We know from recent experience the great harm that can come from a press that does not commit to the principles, to the people, to the country.... That road will never be followed by the Cuban Press...which is committed to revolutionary, responsible, serious and profound journalism.(13)

Ideological Reformulations

Since the beginning of the Revolution, Cuba had its own ideological orientation. Even heavily dependent on Soviet Union, there still were pronounced ideological differences between the two countries. An important factor contributing to the ideological difference is the Cuban history itself. Unlike Eastern Europe, where Soviet leadership imposed Marxist socialism by force, Cuba carried out its revolution without foreign intervention. The adoption of Marxist socialism, in a sense, was an output of the hegemonial regional superpower, the United States. Thus in Cuba, unlike in Eastern Europe, historically there has been a degree of congruence between nationalist and Marxist values.

Through a combination of appeals to revolutionary idealism and discrete material incentives Castro laid the foundations of a socialist economy. This strategy was

closely linked to his rectification campaign announced in April 1986. Rectification was the revival of the socialist principles of Ernesto Che Guevara evident during the early 1960s. During the 3rd PCC, Castro emphasised solidarity with the Non-Alignment Movement, support to the national liberation movements, a revolutionary ideology, Third World Countries and against "capitalist imperialism", and East-West conflict. But as time passed, Castro continued to shift his ideology according to time and circumstances.

During 1988, Castro tilted his emphasis from Marxism-Leninism and East-West conflict to nationalism, anti-imperialism, and North-South conflict. In December 1988, Castro said:

There are two kinds of survival and two kinds of peace, the survival of the rich and the survival of the poor; the peace of the rich and the peace of the poor. That is why the news that there may be peace, that there may be detente between the United States and the Soviet Union, does not necessarily mean that there is going to be peace for us. (14)

During his visit to Cuba in April 1989, Gorbachev criticized the strategy of export of the revolution which according to him amounted to intervention in the internal matters of other countries. But Castro did not see himself

14 New York Times, 11 January 1989.

as exporting revolution. In his perception, Cuba was engaged in a struggle countering United States' intervention in the Western hemisphere and as opposing South Africa's intervention in Africa. In turn, Castro criticized Gorbachev's policies on grounds that his policies did not show sufficient firmness against United States military involvement in the Third World. "The Soviets", he suggested "have sought to deepen detente between the superpowers at the expense of the interests of the world's poor countries in confrontation with imperialism".¹⁵ Castro publicly questioned whether Gorbachev's diplomacy had evoked reciprocating concessions from the United States. "We don't have any indication", he said, as Gorbachev waited his own turn to speak, "that the imperialists have adopted this new international thinking".¹⁶ In December 1989, Castro characterised the United States' intervention in Panama as "a slap in the face and a humiliation for the Soviet peace policy".¹⁷

Castro has tried to equate his version of socialism with Cuban nationalism. In a speech in December 1989 Castro asserted: "In Cuba Revolution, socialism, and

15 ibid.

16 ibid, 8 April 1989.

17 Granma Weekly Review, 16 April 1989.

national independence are insolubly linked.... If capitalism returned some day to Cuba, our independence and sovereignty would disappear forever. We would be an extension of Miami".¹⁸ On the occasion of the return of Cuba's dead soldiers from the African wars in late 1989, Castro equated their death in the service of the revolution. He said: "They died for socialism...we will be able to follow their example... socialism or death!".¹⁹

Castro not only represented himself as a faithful son of communism but also projected himself as a defender of the Third World against new abuses by the "old imperialists" and by the so called newly exploitative former socialist countries. Castro expressed: "Now imperialism is inviting the European socialist countries to join it in this colossal plunder.... The prize promised by imperialism is a share of the plunder wrested from our people, the only way of building capitalist consumer societies".²⁰ Castro has also tried to press Cuba's Third World leadership role by taking a radical position in favour of cancellation of debt to Western bankers.

18 Gunn, n.10, p.140.

19 Fidel Castro, Socialism or Death (Havana, 1989), p.3.

20 Granma Weekly Review, 17 December 1989.

During 4th Congress Castro clearly highlighted Cuba's ideology. He expressed:

The 4th Congress unalterably maintains the revolutionary, anti-imperialist solidarity [which is the] essence of our foreign policy; and its position of mutual respect and brotherly unity with nations that are building socialism. It also maintains loyalty to the interests and aspirations of developing countries and the integration with our brothers and sisters in Latin America and the Caribbean.(21)

Castro reaffirmed, more than ever, Cuba's unrestrained support for the universal and inalienable right of nations to self-determination, sovereignty and nonintervention in their internal affairs. He fully supported the issues of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and North-South conflict and assured that Cuba's Marxist-Leninist ideology was not a hindrance in solidarity with the Third World.

Although Castro's ability to articulate Third World anxieties does not guarantee him with some tangible economic resources, it does offer some diplomatic protection. Castro's aim is to insure that United States will pay a significant diplomatic price if it moves against Cuba. It was proved, when United States' effort to charge Cuba of violation of human rights in the United Nations was not successful.

21 Granma International, 3 November 1991.

In November 1985, the Catholic bishops, clergy and laity issued a document which represented their desire to reconcile the differences between Marxists and Catholics and to play an "active and positive role in Cuba's future", agreeing on the government's basic social goals. Castro's government in response, introduced a new Law of Association and formation in December 1985 which empowered every citizen the right to profess and practice his faith. Again in January 1986, a new Office of Religious Affairs was created which discouraged discrimination against believers in public offices and places. Castro also praised the important role played by the liberation theology in social and political fields in Latin America. A book "Fidel and Religion" was published which contained the views of Castro on religion. In December 1985, Ramiro Valdes the Minister of Interior was dismissed on the charges that he was against Castro's soft line on religion. Not only did Castro improve relations with the Church both in and outside the country, he even encouraged the pilgrimage throughout the island of a statue of the Cuban patron saint, the virgin of charity. In April 1990, Castro announced that Christians would soon be permitted to join the communist party. Improved relations between Castro and the Catholic Church were highlighted when Pope John Paul II (Second) agreed

to visit Cuba. At the same time, Cuban government has made it very clear that liberty of conscience and freedom of religious practices were guaranteed in Cuba but the use of religion to undermine the ideology of the revolution would not be accepted at any cost. During the 4th Congress, Castro declared that Cuba was the most secular country in the world. He expressed:

Now no one will be able to accuse us of discrimination against anyone, and our Constitution will be complete where once it was remiss in this respect, when it says: 'No one can be discriminated against for reasons of gender or skin color', and we will add to this religious beliefs. Far from weakening our Party, this will strengthen it in the eyes of the nation and eyes of the world.(22)

CHAPTER V

CUBA'S POLICY INITIATIVES: GLOBAL

Having discussed at some length the policy initiatives purported to introduce changes in the economy and society of Cuba essentially with a view to meet the challenges of the "new thinking", in this fifth chapter an attempt is made to briefly sketch some of the significant global initiatives that Castro undertook in recent years.

The Cuban leadership has in recent years been attempting to deal with the changing trade and economic relations with the Soviet Union and the East European countries. Among others, such efforts include importantly diversifying and increasing further its economic linkages with an array of countries with whom it had in the past been trading. Cuba has improved its economic relations with People's Republic of China (PRC) and a host of Latin American countries. These initiatives are an attempt to compensate for the abrupt cut in Soviet aid and support and the sudden rupture in trade ties with Eastern Europe. It is also believed that improved diplomatic ties with Latin America and China will offer Cuba some protection possibly against United States' attempt to isolate Cuba.

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Until 1989, Cuba's economic relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries went along quite normally. Then in 1989, with the disappearance of socialist governments in Eastern Europe, Cuba had to depend entirely on the Soviet Union. But in 1990, problems arose with the Soviet Union also. About 86 percent of Cuba's trade was with socialist countries of which 75 percent was with Soviet Union. The Soviet Union paid a preferential price on goods it imported from Cuba. But as the years went by the prices of the products from the Soviet Union went up, while the price of sugar and its by-products remained the same. It was in these circumstances, a formula of sliding prices was introduced.

In 1990, Cuba signed an agreement for 5.131 billion rubles worth of Soviet exports, of which only 75 percent were shipped by 31 December 1990. Cuba's oil supply was reduced from 13 million tons to 10 million tons and it was for the first time that Cuba in its history of the last three decades faced short fall in the supply of fuel. In the 1991 agreement, the price of sugar was considerably further reduced, and the value of exports were measured in U.S. dollars and not in rubles. This

agreement, according to estimates meant a loss of more than a billion U.S. dollars for Cuba. So under these circumstances, Cuba in order to maintain the continuance of supply of fuel, food, essential raw materials and spare parts, stopped buying all luxuries and nonessentials. By the end of 1990, Cuba had to limit sales of television sets, radios and refrigerators. Purchase of cars, agricultural equipments, tractors and transportation equipments were reduced to the minimum. According to an official report: "By 30 September 1991, Cuba received only 95 percent of the contracted fuel, but received none of the rice, 50 percent of the split peas, 16 percent of the vegetable oil, 71 percent of the lard, 11 percent of the condensed milk, 47 percent of the butter, 18 percent of the condensed milk, 47 percent of the butter, 18 percent of the canned meat, 22 percent of the dry milk, 11 percent of the fresh and canned fish, 16 percent of the fertilizer and none of the sulphur".¹ Lack of caustic soda, sodium carbonate, laminated steel, synthetic rubber, ammonium and a host of other raw materials made many projects and industries to be closed which further contributed to an economic crisis.

1 Granma International, 3 November 1991.

Cuban leadership in these critical circumstances maintained that Cuba will receive special treatment in trade relations with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries beyond 1990 and also hinted at the inevitability of such a special trade relationship. To this effect, Castro said:

We are the only ones who buy those Bulgarian forks. Impossible! They are such worthless things and have so many problems that we are the only ones who buy them in this trade relationship that has been established. And sincerely speaking, how many hundreds, and even thousands, of these forklifts are idle in warehouses?... The Hungarian buses travel six kilometers on a gallon of fuel. They fill the city with smog. They poison everybody. We could get together some data. We could get statistics about the number of people killed by Hungarian buses.(2)

Castro made clear that the manufactured products of the East European countries were non-competitive in the world market and Cuba has always been the buyer of the last resort. On the occasion of the Bay of Pig's 30th anniversary on 19th April 1991, Castro said:

I really don't know where they /Eastern European countries/ will find clients for many of the products of those countries. As soon as they are put on the market. I think there will be people paying to return them or who will at least exclaim,

.....

'Listen, please, don't give this to me even for free'. But there is talk of some possible trade exchange, of some products in exchange for others. In short, that was already a hard blow, and the reduced fuel supplies was a very hard blow, due to the number of activities we are forced to cut back. (3)

Cuban leadership expected that even in future, if East European countries will continue to have access to Cuban goods (sugar, honey, citrus fruits, green peppers, nickel), they will continue to sell manufactured products to Cuba on terms that will accord with Cuba's capabilities.

Some Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) members too have suggested that instead of the barter system, trade with Cuba will be in hard currency payment. The switch to hard currency trade transactions obviously will pose problems for Cuba because its hard currency reserves have considerably declined in recent years. As of June 1989, Cuba's hard currency reserves were down to \$ 87 million, of which \$ 69 million was in cash. The total amount of reserves, it is estimated, will cover less than six week's imports from Western countries.

It is against these critical circumstances, Cuba has launched a new strategy to help adjust the expected reduction in its trade with Eastern bloc countries. The evolving strategy seeks renewing its trade ties with a host of Latin American countries and establishing new economic links with China.

Latin America

"We seek integration with the rest of Latin America". These were the words with which Castro underscored the importance of Latin America in Cuba's new international initiatives at the 4th Congress of Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Although he had expressed the same sentiment as far back as in 1972, he had then stated that it may take a long time before such integration took place. As Castro put it: "In the future, we will be economically integrated with Latin America.... But that will take time. We can't make plans based on an integration that could take 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 years - the last for the most pessimistic".⁴ It looked as though that time has come now in 1991 that Cuba should seek its identity with the rest of the Latin American countries. That it chose to integrate itself with Latin America was obviously on account of its increasing isolation from particularly the Eastern bloc of countries.

4 Granma Weekly Review, 6 August 1972, quoted in Rhoda Rabkin, "Implications of the Gorbachev Era for Cuban Socialism", Studies in Comparative Communism (Stoneham, M.A.), vol.23, April 1990, p.43.

In this sub-section, a quick survey is offered of the significant developments in Cuba's increasing relations with the Latin American countries. It may be recalled that in the wake of the Cuban revolution in early 1960s, Cuba was practically declared as an "untouchable" by all Latin American countries with the only exception of Mexico. However, over the years the diplomatic relations with a number of Latin American countries were restored. In fact, by the late 1980s Cuba could count as many as fourteen Latin American and Caribbean with which it had reestablished diplomatic links, like Uruguay in 1985, and Brazil in 1986. Exchange of visits by the leaders of Cuba and other Latin American countries became frequent during the decade of 1980. According to one observer: "These improved relations have resulted from Castro's reducing Cuba's previous high visibility in revolutionary causes in Latin America and seeks to build credibility as a legitimate state actor with Latin America's new democracies".⁵ Cuba's initiatives went even beyond during these years. Castro, for instance, took active role in seeking resolution to the central American crises. Castro's backing of the contadora process seeking negotiated political settlement to the Nicaraguan tangle

5 Jorge Dominguez, "Cuba in the 1980s", Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.), vol.65, no.2, Fall 1986, p.123.

between the Sandinistas and the contras, his reduced public emphasis on merits of Salvadoran guerilla groups are a few of these initiatives.

Subsequently, in 1987, endorsement of the Central American peace initiatives offered by President Arias of Costa Rica further enhanced the positive image of Fidel Castro in Central America. Some argue that Castro's initiatives in these matters were "in line with that of his Soviet patrons" suggesting thereby that these initiatives were made by Castro at the instance of Soviet Union. "By accentuating Cuba's credentials as a legitimate state actor, Castro has placed Cuban foreign policy closely in line with that of his Soviet patrons", says one Cubanologist.⁶ Others have argued that Castro "by reducing Cuba's previous high visibility in revolutionary causes in Latin America" was seeking thereby "to build credibility as a legitimate state actor with Latin America's new democracies".⁷ Where the truth lies, perhaps, it is difficult to say what is however important in the context of the present analysis is that Cuba in the 1980s had decidedly chosen to reorient its relations with the rest

6 W. Raymand Duncan, "Cuban-Soviet Relations: Directions of Influence", cit. in E.A. Kolodziej and R.E. Kanet, ed., The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World (Hongkong: Macmillan Press, 1989), p.81.

7 Dominguez, n.5.

of the Latin American countries. The Latin American countries also seem to have favourably responded to Cuba's renewing its ties with its Latin neighbours. When Cuba contested for the seat in the Security Council of United Nations in 1989, sizeable support came from the Latin American countries.

Alongside deepening diplomatic ties with Latin America, Cuba also initiated steps to promote two-way trade with its Latin American neighbours. Notwithstanding the fact that Cuba's export potentials to Latin American countries were largely limited because its export products are very similar to that of the rest of the Latin American countries in addition to hard currency constraints which further inhibited two-way trade between them, nevertheless major Latin American countries have shown keen interest in exploring possibilities for increased trade links with Cuba. Of these countries, Brazil is important. Brazil's trade grew from \$ 2.3 million in 1988 to an estimated \$ 120 million in 1989, and current indications suggest that it is likely to grow even in the future following a 1989 agreement to exchange about \$ 100 million worth of Cuban Meningitis B Vaccine for products supply by Petrobras, the Brazilian state oil company. This agreement will ensure Cuba a guarantee in case the Soviet Union delays

or cancels its delivery of oil refining and extraction equipments. Cuba's support for Argentina during the 1982 Falklands conflict contributed to the warming of relations between the two countries. Argentina was the second biggest buyer of Cuban goods among Cuba's non-Communist trading partners in 1988, just behind Spain. Trade has also grown with Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. Trade ties with many of these countries are based upon barter rather than hard currency.

Latin American countries have also assisted Cuba economically by permitting Havana to set up "front" companies to circumvent the United States embargo. Because of a change in government in Panama, the aid from that country has been reduced to a large extent. However, many Latin American countries favour Cuba's reintegration into Latin America. The Group of Eight or the enlarged contadora countries consisting of Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Mexico, in November 1987, stated that Cuba should be invited to rejoin even the Organisation of American States (OAS). Their primary motivation seemed to be, as Brazil's President Jose Sarney expressed "a desire to persuade Cuba to conform to regional practices of diplomatic behaviour

and to reduce its interest in destabilization of hemispheric regimes".⁸

Cuba's response to this overture was positive as the Cuban press reported that Castro welcomed the proposal of the Group of Eight. Clearly this is an evidence of a definite change from the days when Castro vowed that Cuba would never join the OAS, which he had in the past described as the United States' "ministry for Colonies".

Moderation, meaning not intervening in the domestic affairs of others, seem to be the test that Latin American governments expect in return for the full acceptance of Cuba. Cuban leadership too has offered such an assurance. In February 1989, Castro in a press conference in Caracas stated: "It is incorrect to establish socialism as an immediate objective in our countries Before there would be socialism, Latin Americans should struggle for unity and integration of their foreign policies, especially on economic issues".⁹

8 Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Latin America, 26 January 1988.

9 Granma, 6 February 1989.

This positive approach that Cuba has shown has contributed further to the cementing of relations between the Caribbean island and the rest of Latin America. At the Ibero-American Summit held in Guadalajara in July 1991, twenty three Latin American statesmen affirmed to cooperate and build a more strong and dynamic Latin America which included Cuba. At the Summit, the blockade against Cuba was questioned by all the countries. In return, Castro offered: "We have told the Latin Americans that we are willing to give them certain preferential treatment for the sake of integration, for whatever investment they would like to make in Cuba. This would also imply that we have a right to invest in a Latin American Country".¹⁰ In saying so, Castro emphasised that such an economic integration with Latin America can be forged without ~~renouncing~~ socialism.

In the following month, at the 13th session of the Latin American Parliament, held in Cartagena, Colombia, the overwhelming majority of the parliamentarians expressed their solidarity with the Cuban people in the face of the grave economic situation, they were confronting and requested an end to the economic and trade blockade that has been imposed for the last thirty years. At this meeting, Colombia's President Cesar Gaviria assured that "the walls which have impeded Latin American integration for years are [in the process] being torn down".¹¹

10 Granma International, 11 August 1991.

11 ibid, 18 August 1991.

It is in the backdrop of these developments, Cuba moved a resolution before the United Nations against the United States' blockade. Cuba's move was supported by several countries of Latin America. Venezuela's President Carlos Andres Perez in supporting the resolution said "the blockade is unjustifiable in current circumstances and lacks validity".¹² Around the same time Gaston Encinas, President of the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies, made a declaration in La Paz in favour of lifting the United States blockade against Cuba which he described as a "historical injustice". Even Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Enrique Dreyfus criticized the blockade against Cuba by stating "We live in a new world in which we can not isolate Cuba. According to the principle of self-determination, the largest island of the Antilles must decide its own future".¹³ Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico--all expressed solidarity with Cuba. The influential Mexico city daily Excelsior proclaimed "helping Cuba is an inescapable obligation for Latin America... defending Cuba ultimately means defending the sovereignty of all the world's peoples regardless of the type of internal regime they have".¹⁴

12 ibid, 13 October 1991.

13 ibid.

14 ibid.

In the second week of October 1991, the PCC met for the 4th Congress. In his address at the Congress Castro reaffirmed his special bias towards Latin America and elaborated further on the modus operandi for integrating Cuba with Latin America. Specifically he stated:

We are ready to go farther and give a kind of preferential treatment to Latin American capital, in line with the declarations in Guadalajara and the need for Latin American integration, which we have always sought, even when the CMEA still existed. He said that it [CMEA] was transitory and that the natural arena for our economic integration had to be Latin America We are even ready to grant preferential treatment to Latin American capital. We are very receptive to foreign capital, which doesn't clash at all with socialism, Marxism-Leninism or the Revolution - much less is the exceptional conditions in which we are living.(15)

Fidel Castro's reassuring statement at the 4th Congress produced positive response from the Latin American leaders. The meeting of Group-3 consisting of Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia held in Mexico city in fourth week of October 1991 welcomed Castro's statement at the 4th Party Congress and invited the Cuban leader to explain further the details relating to the preferential treatment that Castro has offered. Highlighting G-3's keen interest in further strengthening Latin America's relations with Cuba, Venezuela's President Perez said that Cuba "will be

15 *ibid*, 3 November 1991.

definitively inserted in the life of the region within the fundamental concepts in which politics evolve in the Latin America of today".¹⁶

In a similar vein, Mexico's President Salinas de Gortari said that Latin America has "come to know of economic modifications in Cuba such as the opening of important sectors to foreign investment and there is a will on the part of Cuba to promote Latin American investment to those sectors which have been opened" which he said the G-3 welcomes. He went further to assure Fidel Castro that "the solution to Cuba's internal problems is an exclusive responsibility of the Cubans". However, he added a word of caution when he said that "what happens in Cuba is bound to have repercussions in the region" and it is for this reason that the "internal transformations being carried out by the will of the Cubans themselves are closely followed" by the Latin American countries.¹⁷

All these recent developments clearly indicate two contrary trends in respect of Cuba's reintegration with Latin America--one suggests that Latin America would

16 Press Report on the G-3 (Embassy of Cuba, New Delhi, 1991), p.3.

17 ibid, p.2.

support Cuba irrespective of whatever political changes that might occur in the coming years within the island and the other, closer relations between the two will largely depend on the kind of economic restructuring that will evolve in Cuba. That Castro has conceded to opening up the economy for foreign investment, as he had stated in the 4th Congress of the PCC, suggests that Cuba's integration with Latin America seems to be most likely in the near future.

People's Republic of China and Western Europe

In its search for new trading partners Cuba in recent years has concentrated on PRC. The relations between Cuba and PRC chilled in the mid-1970s, when both governments supported opposing sides in Angola. But relations slowly improved in the 1980s. In 1989, Castro began hoping that PRC as an alternative for the goods and the technology which it formerly imported from the Soviet Union and the East European countries. The PRC too has a large potential for Cuban sugar exports. A Cuban delegation attended the celebration of the Chinese revolution's 40th anniversary. Castro also accepted an invitation to visit Beijing. A China-Cuba Friendship Society has recently been established to develop detente and cooperation between the two countries.¹⁸

18 New York Times, 20 January 1990.

Economic ties with PRC at the same time have also improved. By the end of 1988 China was Cuba's third largest supplier of consumer goods, and in the first six months of 1989, PRC was the second largest purchaser of Cuban sugar. The 1990 trade increased upto \$500 million which was more than three times the 1987 figure of \$150 million. It was best for Cuba as the trade was in favour of Cuba. In the first quarter of 1989 Cuba sold PRC 67 percent more than it purchased. Cuban-PRC trade protocols for 1990 and 1991 suggest that Cuba would export biotechnology products, citrus fruits, processed fruit juices, tobacco, rum and speciality textiles, and import cosmetic items and bicycles. PRC has purchased significant quantities of sugar from Cuba (e.g. nearly 1.4 million tons in 1988), but Chinese purchases differ from year to year. The prices at which transactions are taking place also are not so favourable compared to the prices at which Cuba in the past sold sugar to the Soviet Union and the East European countries. In 1988, the world market price for sugar was about 10.2 cents/pounds, but the Unit value of Cuban sugar exports to the PRC was 7.7 cents/pounds. In the later years the price of sugar was raised by the PRC. The PRC agreed to provide Cuba with machinery components, technical assistance to establish bicycle-assembly plants and plants to produce electric fans. The two countries also negotiated an agreement to test

Chinese electronic products in Cuba to assess their resistance to tropical conditions, in order to determine if they could be used in Cuban tourism installations.

It is likely, Cuba received the support of PRC in the Security Council if United States raises issues like human rights. Ideologically and politically too both countries seem to be closer to each other than before.

Cuba's trade with West was blocked in 1986, when it suspended payments on the estimated \$ 6.77 billion it owed to Western nations. Cuba was forced to cut trade with the West by \$ 900 million a year. But Cuba has again maintained trade relationship, it exported traditional luxury products, mainly rum and cigars, as well as providing some raw-materials and tropical goods. Total exports to capitalist countries in the first quarter of 1989 were 56 percent higher than for the same period the previous year, and such exports have been growing faster. Cuba's trade with the European community has been about \$ 800 million a year, and as of November 1989 it appeared that for the first time the trade balance for the year tipped slightly in Cuba's favour.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A major objective of the present monograph has been to examine and assess the evolving relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union specially since the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and offer some prognoses about the future prospects of Cuba. While undertaking such a task, attempt also was made to narrow the focus of the analysis and study the implications of Gorbachev's novoe myshlenie on Cuba. Specific issues such as the impact of novoe myshlenie on Cuba, the attendant policy reorientation on the part of the Soviet Union towards Cuba, Cuban responses over time to both the ideological underpinnings of the "new thinking" as well as the changing policy postures of the Soviet Union and finally, Cuba's initiatives to meet the challenges that Soviet policies posed have been discussed, though not comprehensively--all with a view to make some attempts at prognostication on the future course of development in Cuba.

In undertaking a study along these lines, it was thought appropriate that some attempt also is made to compare Cuban-Soviet relations prior to the advent of Gorbachev with the evolving relations since. Although Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union can be traced to

the beginning of the Cuban revolution in 1959, admittedly there were many ups and downs in the relations between the two countries. However, these ups and downs at no point of time precipitated any serious crisis nor, for that matter, occasioned any sudden rupture in relations. It may be added, even during the period of 1985-91, with the unfolding of Gorbachev's "new thinking", relations between the two countries did not climax to suspension or rupture. No doubt, Kremlin's posture regarding future ties with Cuba appeared murky. In fact, until Gorbachev remained at the helm of affairs, no precipitous action was either envisioned or implemented. Aid levels and economic assistance were reduced but overall it appeared that Gorbachev had tried to carry out this process in a manner that is minimally disruptive to Cuba. Nor did he display any inclination to cut Havana totally adrift. It is only with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of what is commonly described as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the historic relations of Cuba towards the newly emerging Russian Republics may perhaps take a less accommodating turn!

As has been stated, Cuban-Soviet relations during the last thirty-two years obviously experienced several moments of crisis. Number of factors both bilateral issues and extraneous circumstances exacerbated the crisis.

Yet, mutuality of interests and certain broad understanding and agreements both in terms of bilateral matters and global policies were never seriously questioned. There was a perceptible convergence of interests between the two countries.

Be that as it may, the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and his enunciation of perestroika and glasnost introduced a new trend-setting dimension in Cuban-Soviet ties. For, perestroika in effect, questioned the very basis of Soviet policies towards Cuba. Periodic statements of assurances notwithstanding, perestroika and the ensuing debate both in the Soviet Union and Cuba created a new climate--political and economic--in which the future of Cuban-Soviet relations began to move. It did portend some turns and twists in Cuban-Soviet relations more serious than in the past.

What is however remarkable is the foresightedness of the Cuban leadership in preparing the country towards the evolving new situation. Well aware of the negative impact that Gorbachev's perestroika would make both within the Soviet Union and the East European countries, Fidel Castro even as early as 1986 discounted its usefulness to Cuba. Also, he underlined the disastrous consequences it would have on the East European countries.

However, he was both circumspect and reticent in openly voicing the complications that perestroika would introduce in Cuban-Soviet relations. As a measure of precaution or, perhaps, with a view to face challenges arising domestically because of perestroika, Castro undertook some initiatives at the Third Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) in December 1986. Without openly criticising Gorbachev's "new thinking", Castro obliquely hinted at the inefficacy of perestroika as far as Cuba was concerned. It so happened that just at the time the Third Congress met, Cuban leadership too was taking stock of its "restructuring" of the economy along "capitalist" lines and found that the liberalisation as was practised in Cuba at the instance of the Soviet Union was counter-productive. And therefore, precisely at that moment when Castro, had launched el proceso de rectificacion it more or less coincided with Gorbachev prescribing, at the 27th Congress of Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU), perestroika as the panacea to all the political, economic and ideological ills of the Soviet Union. In that sense, the year 1986 is undoubtedly a benchmark in the Cuban-Soviet relations. For one thing, it heralded an open clash in basic philosophy, and for another, it marked the beginning of the end in the longstanding relations between the two countries.

Nothing on ground, however, occurred then that portended in any significant ways that the "beginning of the end" had already begun. No precipitous action was either in sight or in the offing. Economic assistance and transactions between the two countries were neither terminated nor suspended. Only, the volume of economic interaction was somewhat curtailed. On the other hand, Soviet leaders were making statements that they were not even remotely considering any drastic steps that would impinge on the existing relations. Nevertheless suggestions were there which indicated the possibility of "de-ideologisation" in Soviet relations with Cuba.

The year 1989 which saw the disintegration of the Eastern Europe with most of the communist regimes falling one after the other introduced a more disturbing influence in Cuban-Soviet relations. For one thing, with the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the opening of their economies to Western capitalism, and more importantly, the unification of East and West Germanies created serious economic difficulties for Cuba. For, Cuba's trade with East European countries, particularly with East Germany was substantial over the years. Not only the two-way trade between Cuba and East Germany was disrupted with the German unification, subsequently, the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance

(CMEA) denied Cuba of a fairly well-protected preferential trade with the Soviet bloc countries.

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Apart from the economic disabilities, the fall of Eastern European communist regimes, politically speaking, forced Cuba into increasing isolation. Not surprisingly therefore, the Cuban leadership now openly questioned the desirability of the East European countries moving away from socialism to capitalism. On more than one occasion, Castro himself described that the political changes witnessed in Eastern Europe as "very sad". He went further and attributed Gorbachev and his perestroika having been responsible for the disastrous transformative changes taking place in that region. While admitting that there were roadblocks in building a communist state, he was, however, forthright in stating that adopting "capitalist" path was undoubtedly not the appropriate strategy.

Against all these odds--political, economic and ideological--Cuba continued to remain committed to the cause of socialism. Even when Gorbachev visited Cuba in April 1989, after meeting with the US President and indirectly persuaded the Cuban leadership to relent and revise its ideological commitments, Castro made it abundantly clear to the Soviet leader that he would make



no such changes whatsoever. Apparently, pressure must have been brought on the Cuban leadership by the Soviet Union especially at that time when Gorbachev was busily negotiating and seeking some kind of reconciliation with the United States. Subsequently too in a way, the message perhaps was conveyed to the Cuban leadership, this time, by reducing considerably the volume of economic assistance. It is ironic that whereas in the past the volume of Soviet economic aid to Cuba was directly proportional to the extent of Cuba's commitment to socialist ideology, with Gorbachev it was just the opposite!

In any event, to all these pressures and overtures, Castro's response was in the negative. By now, not only was he convinced that the Soviet assistance and support to Cuba will dwindle further, he even conveyed it publicly to his people that Cuba may have to survive and continue its struggle in building a socialist society without Soviet assistance. So much so, by early 1990, he committed Cuba to what he called a "special period in the time of peace". At the same time politically influential Russians not directly associated with Gorbachev hinted that the process of "de-ideologisation" of Soviet foreign policy towards Cuba would be further deepened. They even argued that cutting off all collaboration with Cuba would

be a favour for it would help the island to return to the "path of world civilisation". In response, Castro's regime indicated that it was determined, if necessary, to move from the current "special period" to the "opcion cero" (zero option) of surviving in conditions of total economic isolation.

It is against these developments, the Fourth Congress of the PCC met in October 1991. While on surface, the Fourth Congress did little more than reaffirm the cero opcion line and adopted its Marxist-Leninist identity, a closer look however indicated a 'reformist' faction emerging rather strongly. The 'reformist' line favoured limited and "controlled" liberalisation of the Cuban system. Important elements of the 'reformist' line included giving up "internationalism" and stressing instead the "national" character of the Cuban revolution; dropping single party system and adopting pluralism but banning only anti-revolutionary parties; allowing the appearance of independent media as long as it is not anti-'revolutionary'; abandoning the absolute state monopoly of the economy and allowing some areas, like tourism and even some public services to pass into private hands; and last, seeking a rapid integration into world markets and moving away from an agro-export economy and pursuing the rapid development of modern technologies. Quite openly, the 'reformist'

line conceded that it was a "political error" to exclude religion from the party and dropped atheism as a requisite for party membership. Again, it was admitted that the economic system adopted in 1976 modelled on the Soviet system was yet another "political error". Political reforms included election to the national assembly by direct vote. The PCC also decided to cut more dead wood from the party's superstructure. The secretariat of the central Committee was abolished as were appointments of alternate members to all leading party bodies. This was accompanied by strengthening of the central committee's politbureau--though the ten 'alternates' were dropped and eleven new members were selected. Among them was Carlos Aldana who represents the 'reformist' line. Among the veterans who were shunted out of the politbureau to make way for new members were Armando Hart, Vilma Espin and Julio Camacho.

To what extent the currently witnessed "liberalisation" process would succeed will depend upon a number of factors. For one thing, ranged against the 'reformists' are those 'conservatives' within the party who steadfastly argue that any internal political changes tending to "liberalise" will be interpreted abroad as a sign of weakness and that this will precipitate a "final onslaught" against Cuban

socialism. To them "liberalisation" is premature especially when the US has not lifted the economic and military blockade. Besides, any controlled "liberalisation", they argue, over time would acquire a momentum of its own which will easily overwhelm its initiators. A coalition of dissidents outside the PCC calling themselves as the Concertacion Democratica Cubana (CDC) have since the Fourth Congress been campaigning for a formation of a provisional council of government, adoption of multi-party system and the abolition of the constitutional provision that makes the PCC the "superior force for the construction of socialism". The coalescing groups within the CDC mainly consist of Human Rights activists supported and funded by Cuban-Americans in exile. They are by no means a serious political force to reckon with at least at this juncture. This, in turn, brings to fore the role that the Miami-based Cuban Americans are likely to play with or without support of Washington. The influence wielded by the vehemently anti-Castro lobby led by the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF) and its chairman Mas Canosa is well-known. The extent to which the CANF will pose a threat to the 'reformist' line will largely depend on how the US administration wants to exploit it to seek a solution to the so called "Cuban question". Being an

election year, it is unlikely that the Bush administration would do anything precipitous to "resolve the Cuban question". That would give a breather to the 'reformists' at least for the next eighteen months or so.

More fundamental a question, the resolution of which will let the Cuban reform process succeed is how the economic situation is going to be tackled. In this regard, Havana has already launched a number of economic initiatives involving increasing emphasis on South-South linkages particularly in trade and related commercial ventures. An obvious problem that arises when contemplating expanded trade with other developing countries is the lack of demand for traditional Cuban products. A very few developing countries represent dynamic markets for items such as sugar, nickel and tropical citrus fruits. While increasing the volume of trade with developing countries is a welcome step, the key to transforming such trade into a vigorous growth component is the development on the part of Cuba are quite promising. Recognising bio-technology, pharmaceuticals and health services, Cuba has established a Centre for Bio-technology and Genetic Engineering that has already made important progress in creating several varieties of interferon and streptokinase--life saving drugs. The commercial potential of such research activities was recently demonstrated when Brazil purchased large quantities of meningitis B Vaccine developed in Havana.

Another very innovative new product line is Cuba's efforts to combine two of the island's major resources-- its potential as a vacation resort and its excellent medical expertise--into a "health tourism" industry. The basic idea of the "health tourism" is to provide at the same time medical services at considerably competitive prices as well as providing low-cost Caribbean holiday. To help raise the investment capital necessary for this specialised industry and service, Cuba has markedly liberalised its laws concerning joint ventures. Predictably, response to such joint ventures is encouraging. A host of Latin American countries have recently signed agreements for wide-ranging economic-technical collaboration programmes that will serve Cuba to promote future trade relations. At the same time there are indications that even developed countries such as Canada and Japan as well as some of the south-east Asian countries are evincing interest in the joint venture offers of Cuba. No doubt, for these ventures to become productive, Cuba needs time-- at least two to three years. What is therefore crucial is the coming two years. If during these years Cuba survives the cero opcion, it certainly should be possible for Cuba to overcome the economic crisis that is currently facing as a consequence of the disruption in its linkages with the moribund Soviet Union.

What perhaps distinguishes Cuba from other similarly placed countries is that historically Cuba has displayed a remarkable ability to meet the periodic political-economic challenges and emerge out triumphantly. No doubt, Cuba today is faced with a challenge unprecedented in its history. A combination of circumstances both domestic and global are at the same time severely testing its survival instincts today more than ever. That Fidel Castro's call for cero opcion is ungrudgingly accepted by a majority of the Cubans is a positive evidence of the islanders determinations to fight against all odds and emerge out of the present crisis once again triumphantly.

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