

# **Toward a Future Without Castro: Cuba's Transition to Democracy**

**By Jorge Mas Canosa**

**The situation in Cuba is becoming extremely critical. After Moscow's cancellation of all the economic and military subsidies to the island, the gross national product in Cuba in 1990 declined 10 percent, in 1991 20 percent, and at the rate of the first two months of this year, it is going to decline probably 60 percent in 1992. The city of Santa Clara, in the middle of Cuba, 90 to 95 miles to the east of Havana, has been practically paralyzed. Most factories have been closed down.**

**I just learned a couple of days ago, and it was confirmed by the news department of Radio Marti this morning, that 15,000 workers out of the agricultural department have been dismissed in Cuba. When you think about Castro's "zero option" measures such as gutting the agricultural department staff and sending people back to the fields to work, the desperate situation the Cuban government is very clear.**

**For the last 33 years Russia has been pumping into the Cuban economy between \$5 billion and \$6 billion a year. When you add up that assistance, it is larger than all the assistance provided by the United States to all countries in Europe and Japan under the Marshall Plan after World War II. That assistance to Cuba has made it possible for the Castro government to survive for 33 years. With that assistance gone, the Cuban government faces not only economic collapse but also greater political isolation.**

**Moscow Turnaround.** I led a group of Cuban American National Foundation leaders to meet with the new Foreign Minister of Russia, Andrei Kozyrev, on Christmas Day last year in Moscow. In that public meeting that was recorded by the Moscow press, he announced the cancellation of all the military and economic subsidies to Cuba, effective December 27, 1991. He announced the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Cuba. And he said that Russia was going to cast its first vote ever against the Castro government, and on behalf of human rights in Cuba, at the U.N. Human Rights Commission meeting now underway in Geneva. This vote on a twelve-point resolution which includes a condemnation of human rights violations in Cuba will likely occur in the first week of March.

**Moscow's cutoff of economic subsidies to Cuba and the inherent inefficiency of Castro's economic system has placed the Cuban economy in a more serious situation than the economies of Eastern Europe and Russia went through.**

**I strongly believe, given the information that is coming out of Cuba, that the economy is going to collapse by the summertime, and that Castro cannot do anything to stop this collapse.**

**Increasingly, communist officials who are now feeling the pain of economic collapse along with the rest of Cuban society are questioning the leadership of Castro for the first time. Political allies of Castro in Cuba, those who are around him, those who manage the government on a daily basis, are for the first time signalling their discontent with Castro's obsession with remaining mired in the past, defending a communist system which is destined to fail. These leaders are**

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wondering why Cuba does not accept those winds of freedom that are blowing in Eastern Europe and Russia.

So we see cracks in the facade, disagreements within the Cuban government.

In order to promote a peaceful transition in Cuba, we must have a strategy (and when I say "we" I mean the Cuban American National Foundation, and more broadly, the Cuban American community in the United States) to hasten the demise of the Cuban government and to prevent our population from becoming victims of violence and bloodshed in a chaotic transition in Cuba.

## **The Role of the U.S. Embargo**

Many people who question the embargo ask: Why impose an embargo that brings hardships to the people of Cuba? After all, the *nomenklatura* who are around Castro are fed every day, and they are fed very well. I reject that premise and I do not believe that the Cuban people inside the island agree with that notion either.

Let me make a point that I think is extremely important. When you provide resources to Cuba, all of those resources go into the hands of Fidel Castro. He is the one who administers the island. He has a farm called Cuba. He has 11 million workers, in effect, slaves working for him. Despite the tremendous assistance that Cuba received from the Soviet Union, roughly \$5 billion a year, the Cuban people since 1960 have been receiving food through a ration book. He has used such foreign assistance to buy the loyalty of the *nomenklatura*, the Party officials, to sustain himself in power.

In fact, opposition groups in Cuba—which I will talk more about later—have declared that it is Castro who gains and the Cuban people who suffer when countries trade with Cuba and have called for the support of efforts to strengthen Castro's economic isolation. The Cuban Democratic Coalition, for example, which is the largest opposition organization inside Cuba, formed by ten organizations inside Cuba, now seventeen, has sent out several messages calling for the support of a new U.S. legislative initiative to strengthen the U.S. embargo against Cuba.

This is the opinion of those who are leading the opposition inside Cuba, those on the front lines of opposition to Castro. We must deprive him of getting those resources into his hands so he can continue his dictatorship.

It is essential that we not only support the embargo, but that we invite our allies and our friends around the world to join us in an effort to increase the economic pressure on Castro.

## **Tightening the Economic Noose: A Proactive Policy Toward Cuba**

We are all enthusiastic that the Bush Administration is standing firm on keeping the U.S. embargo against Castro. The U.S. embargo is not against Cuba. It is Fidel Castro who controls the economic purse strings in Cuba and the embargo deprives Fidel Castro of those resources that he might use to satisfy his inner circle of Party officials and keep his dictatorship in power.

The embargo doesn't mean only resources. If the embargo is lifted, the extension of official credits to the Cuban government would be sure to follow because you cannot prevent Congressmen and Senators on Capitol Hill from calling for taxpayer-funded credits to help sell goods—rice, grain, or other products—produced by constituents in their districts. Then we Americans would be paying the tab for Castro's revolution and his brutal repression in Cuba.

So the Bush Administration is keeping pressure on Castro through the U.S. embargo. We all have to support our Administration along that line.

But we must go the extra mile for freedom in Cuba and support the Cuban Democracy Act. This initiative, sponsored by congressional leaders such as Representatives Bob Torricelli (D-NJ) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) and Senators Connie Mack (R-FL) and Bob Graham (D-FL), is a positive step in that direction. I know the Bush Administration has reservations about that bill but we support it for many reasons:

- ◆ First, it strengthens the U.S. embargo against Castro.
- ◆ Second, it offers to open communication with Cuba. And the more information that gets to the Cuban people, the more chance we have to prevail in ending the atmosphere of repression there. This is one arena we will never lose with the proponents of communism, the arena of the ideas.
- ◆ Third, I think it sends a message also to our friends around the world to join us in our support for the Cuban people. If such support is not forthcoming, the United States will weigh this factor when it considers trade, debt relief, and other arrangements with those who assist Castro.
- ◆ Fourth, I think that it makes certain that once Castro is out of power a new provisional government leadership in Cuba will get the food and medicine that they need, provided that they hold free and fair elections.

### **Building International Solidarity Against Castro**

I believe that it is essential to obtain the support of those few nations who are extending trade, credit, or other economic relief to the Cuban government. For example, I think that we have to make an effort to make certain that India does not provide Cuba with millions of tons of rice, which I believe is about to happen. There is no reason for a country such as India, which faces its own turmoil and economic challenges, to aid the Cuban government with rice shipments at this crucial juncture.

Diplomatic isolation of Castro is important. It sends a message to those around Castro that he is living on the fringes of the civilized world.

The tide of history is with us. This year, for the first time, I believe that Russia is going to deliver on the promise that the Foreign Minister Kozyrev gave us last Christmas and cast their vote against the Cuban government (joining with the United States, and all of us who are denouncing the Castro regime) to condemn human rights violations in Cuba.

### **Dialogue with Castro: A Dead-End Street**

The diplomatic isolation of Castro must take place as long as Castro continues to reject any meaningful economic, social, and political reforms and refuses to surrender power. Castro made it clear during meetings with the Presidents of Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia, that he was not going to introduce any reforms in Cuba. At the Fourth Party Congress in Santiago de Cuba he declared that democracy, as we understand democracy, is just a lot of garbage and that he was not going to engage in that type of activity.

So those who tried to persuade Castro, to sit down with him and negotiate some sort of accommodation with him (often called the dialogue concept) are proceeding on a dead-end street. There is no way you can reason with a man who turns his back against the very concept of positive democratic change.

## **The New Reality In Cuba: A Genuine Opposition Movement**

There is one signal that I think is very, very important that is coming out of Cuba. For many years we have had inside Cuba what is widely termed the dissident movement. These dissidents are very brave and courageous people who three or four years ago started defying Castro. They have suffered all kinds of reprisals. They also are the ones who promoted the concept of sitting down and talking with Castro to try to persuade him to bring about some openings. That effort has been an exercise in futility. Castro doesn't listen. Castro turned his back on them. Again, this effort is a dead-end street.

But now there is a grass roots opposition movement that is really building momentum in Cuba and adding hundreds of people to their membership. This movement is called the Cuban Democratic Coalition. It was founded by ten organizations. Now there are seventeen organizations becoming part of the Cuban Democratic Coalition. They don't call themselves dissidents. They call themselves opponents to the government. Those are the people who have called for civil disobedience, for peaceful resistance to Castro.

On September 6, 1991, they led a demonstration right in front of the Interior Ministry headquarters in Havana. They were clubbed, they were abused by the repressive forces of Castro. Their leader was sentenced to two years and ten months in jail. They come out every day with more and more members. And surprisingly, in a move which has never happened before in Cuba, they defiantly provided their names and addresses and identified their organizations. Their message is: We are here to fight Castro through peaceful opposition; we are not going to leave the island.

So to those who have thought, "Why aren't people coming out and demonstrating in the streets in Cuba, as it occurred Eastern Europe?" I can say: this is now happening in Cuba. It is a growing signal not only of discontent, but of the resolution of those inside the island to defy the Castro government and pay whatever price they have to pay to bring democracy about. We must support those people. Those people believe as we do that the Castro brothers are the source of the problem, and not the solution to the problem in Cuba.

## **Looking to the Future: Beyond Dialogue with Castro**

These new opposition leaders in Cuba have joined together to say, as we have: Look, we are ready to engage in meaningful conversation with Carlos Aldana, with Carlos Lage, with Roberto Robaiana, with whoever, the third, fourth, fifth man in Cuba. But let's not talk about Cuba's painful past but about the bright future of Cuba without Castro. Let's not talk about Castro because Castro is the problem. Let's see how we can engage in a solution to the Cuban problem. If you want to talk about Castro, and how to accommodate Castro in power, then call Ramsey Clark — or better yet Wayne Smith—because we are not going to engage in that type of conversation with the Castro regime.

Our message—from those of us in the Cuban American National Foundation—to Castro and those around him has been clear: There are two people that are ultimately responsible for the tragedy that has occurred in Cuba, and their names are Fidel and Raul Castro. From the third man down, we must come to terms.

I think that we have to send a message of love and hope to the Cuban people, and make certain that all of them know that the Cubans in exile are not thinking in terms of going back to Cuba to buy the island, to capture the island, to conquer the island, to hold people in Cuba accountable

for the actions in Cuba during 33 or 34 years. We must reassure the Cuban citizens on the island that we, the Cuban people, are all one people divided by one man.

At a certain point in our history we Cubans have to stop competing against each other, look toward to the future, and try to help build a country, not only based on freedom and democracy, but also on a market economy that offers the Cuban people the prosperity that they deserve and that Castro has denied them for 33 years.

### **Providing Hope for the Future**

The biggest crime that Castro has committed against the Cuban people is not to rob them of their freedom, to take away their food, to take away their prosperity, to take away their dignity. The biggest crime, the worst crime, that Castro has committed is to crush the hopes of the Cuban people. Every day Castro stands up and says tomorrow is going to be worse. The Americans are going to invade—listen to Bush, to Reagan, to the State Department—they are coming. I really don't think that we should let Castro get away with that kind of fear-mongering and hysteria.

I think that we must make certain that there is hope for Cuba after Castro is gone. And we must work to ensure that those who are in a position of power support a smooth transition, where bloodshed and violence have no place.

I am certain that there are a lot of people in the security apparatus in Cuba, in the Interior Ministry, in the armed forces, that would like to place Castro in a plane to North Korea, which would be a fine solution, a coup d'etat. I hear many people sometimes get alarmed and get distressed when they hear talk about a coup d'etat. There is nothing inherently wrong with a coup d'etat that leads to democracy. As long as Castro is in power there will be no solution to the Cuban tragedy. Castro is interested in three things: power, power, and power. And he will never surrender that power voluntarily. There is the experience of Hitler, Mussolini, and more recently, Saddam Hussein, Noriega. Some type of solution has to be induced, promoted, around those who surround Castro to make certain that a transition to democracy can happen.

Our role is to bring about that day. Our goal should be to shorten the time that Castro has left in power. To make certain that the suffering of the Cuban people will be reduced by our actions.

I think that we have made a contribution to that goal. We have a dream for Cuba tomorrow. We believe that every Cuban is entitled to envision, and to experience, a free, democratic Cuba. That is why we so much support the concept of the Torricelli bill, which calls for free elections to support any transitional government that calls for free elections in six months after Castro is out of power. Let's return that power to the Cuban people.

### **Preparing for Cuba's Reconstruction**

We must not create an atmosphere of holding people accountable. Property in Cuba cannot be simply returned to the former owners. We probably are the only organization in exile who has said that. And of course we have taken some heat from some in the exile community because we speak our minds and we feel that we have to take certain positions on behalf of the Cuban people.

We must observe and learn from lessons of democratic and economic transition in Eastern Europe and apply those lessons for the future of Cuba. And the experiences of Eastern Europe demonstrate that you cannot return properties to the former owners, for many reasons, but you can provide compensation to those with valid claims. And we could spend a couple hours on that. You may compensate with whatever the new government, the future government of Cuba,

might afford. And you can compensate the former owners with a lot of new rights. Those with valid property claims, for example, can be given points in bids for these properties.

Cuba has changed dramatically since 1959. The population has doubled. You must guarantee to the Cubans on the island: that they will take a very important part in the economic, political reconstruction of Cuba and regain the dignity that Castro has stolen from them; that the country belongs to them; that they will not be evicted from their homes, from their lands, from their properties; that the Cuban people are not going to be put on trial; that, indeed, they can have some food on their table.

If you send that message of hope, if you reaffirm that you are ready to discuss Cuba's future with those behind Castro, or underneath Castro, from number three down, I think that we would be making an important contribution to rebuild Cuba and to free the island.

### **The Blue Ribbon Commission on the Economic Reconstruction of Cuba**

Toward that end, we are preparing recommendations for the future. And the reason is very simple. In Cuba, there is no freedom today for anyone to get together and plan for a post-Castro Cuba. Anyone who is caught could end up in exile, or in jail, or probably on the execution wall if he is a military man. So, those of us who live in freedom have a responsibility to fill that vacuum and to be prepared for the day when Castro will be out of power.

In Eastern Europe freedom came as a surprise to most individuals. That is not going to happen in Cuba. We know that Cuba is going to be free, so we must prepare ourselves for that day to make certain that we will have a smooth transition from a totalitarian dictatorship to a pluralistic, democratic society—from a centralized economy into a free market economy.

We are ready to explain in detail to the Cuban people what the future can hold for them if free-market programs are adopted by whoever will be in a position of power in Cuba—to tell them that, yes, there is hope.

We have put together what is called the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Economic Reconstruction of Cuba. The Blue Ribbon Commission benefits from the participation of a multinational panel of economists, diplomats, and political leaders as well as professionals in the Cuban American National Foundation. This Commission responds to requests of the many multinational corporations, private investors, Japanese companies, French, Spanish, English concerns, that want to know about and invest in the Cuba of tomorrow. The Blue Ribbon commission provides a forum which gives them information about the areas of concern to them, that explains to them what our vision of the future of Cuba is, what are recommendations would be, in what direction we believe Cuba should move.

**Tremendous Potential.** And I can tell you that the amount of interest to participate in the development of a new Cuba is tremendous. We know that the potential economic success of a new Cuba is equally tremendous, if the conditions are proper—and by proper, I mean a free market economy and a leadership committed to democracy and to freedom.

If those conditions prevail in Cuba, investors will know that their money will be safe and also that they can eventually enjoy a return on their investment. With new capital the new leadership can begin to solve Cuba's economic crisis.

I truly believe that the knowledge, inventory, and relationships we have developed and the years of work that we have devoted to this issue can make a crucial contribution to this effort.

Yesterday we met with a very important investor, and he said that within 60 days after change occurs, he will put a factory in Cuba—a container and paper product business that will employ

between 100 and 500 employees. There are endless examples of the potential for commercial development and economic revival in Cuba.

The economic infrastructure in Cuba still has a base of viable industries, such as tourism, sugar, citrus, tobacco, and medical supplies, that can serve to revive the country immediately.

We believe that there is life after communism in Cuba, and indeed a very prosperous life.

**Cuba's Reconstruction.** The guiding principles of the reconstruction program for a new Cuba should include two elements that are missing in Russia and Eastern Europe.

The number one element of this philosophy is: do not count on official assistance from any country to rebuild Cuba. If you do that, you are dead. If you get in the international welfare line and wait for a handout, nothing will happen. The U.S. government, as with the world as a whole, does not have the aid money to give—particularly in the middle of a recession. So it is ill advised to rely on official assistance—excluding the likely need for some emergency assistance during the first few months after Castro is gone.

In any event, the best way to guarantee the independence of Cuba is not through government assistance but rather by letting the private sector grow. Cuban Americans alone can provide capital inflows of between \$3 billion and \$4 billion a year, which is half of what Cuba needs, at a minimum, to keep a viable economy running. And that is not counting the tremendous commercial interest and support that we have seen from entrepreneurs and multinational corporations around the world.

Second, we must foster involvement by Cubans exiles in efforts to revive the economy on the island. We—the Cuban people—have what no other country in the world has. We have 20 percent of our population living in the United States. When you count our children, there are roughly 2 million Cubans living in the United States. And everybody here who is not already an entrepreneur is interested in experiencing commercial success while helping to reconstruct a new Cuba.

So the Foundation has prepared what is called Mission Martí, a volunteer training project patterned after the Peace Corps concept. This training program has graduated roughly 1,500 young Cuban American professionals—engineers, architects, economists, and other professionals—who are ready to go to Cuban towns and cities with a population of five thousand or more to assist in the democratic and economic transition in a new Cuba.

So we have an available base of professional support and involvement that Eastern Europe and Russia do not have. The bureaucrats of the Communist Party are often the ones who are leading the key elements of the transition in those countries. They don't know about a free market economy. They don't know how the West conducts the business of going about business every day.

### **Life After Castro: Rebuilding a Post-Castro Cuba**

The recommendations and the programs that we have drafted in exile should not be imposed on the Cuban people. That should be submitted in a referendum to the Cuban people.

The government that will take over after Castro will be faced with tremendous problems. No liquidity, no cash, no credit, no reserves, no food, no oil—and they don't know how to turn the economic lights on.

We have worked with many investment firms in Wall Street, to make certain that a provisional government will be able at least to put out a bond issue for, say, \$500 million or \$1 billion to pro-

vide an infusion of cash to help keep a new government running. Because after Castro is gone, the children will still go to school, and the people will still get sick and go to the hospital.

**Costs of Transition.** Dismantling the totalitarian system in Cuba will involve social and economic dislocation. The army in Cuba must be demobilized, either by reducing it to a reasonable size, or abolishing the army completely. The latter is my preference. I think that we should not have any army in Cuba. That can be a source for consolidating or creating dictators in Cuba. The military is going to be out of jobs. Similarly, Communist Party officials and bureaucrats will be out of jobs.

So you must have an unemployment fund to avoid the kind of suffering that has occurred in Eastern Europe and Russia. You cannot leave those people out on the streets until the private sector reabsorbs that working force. An unemployment fund must be provided to ease the transition to democracy.

In addition, you have to reserve certain resources to give a reasonable compensation to the former owners of land, sugar mills, oil refineries, and so forth that were confiscated by Castro.

**Privatization in a New Cuba.** Given that reliance on official aid is not a viable option, enterprises and assets owned by the Cuban government will have to be sold to the private sector to finance vital programs. Funds derived from an aggressive privatization program will be needed to: 1) keep normal services of the government, such as education and public health; 2) pay for administration of government reconstruction programs, including privatization; 3) establish and maintain an unemployment fund.

The inventory of government assets in Cuba, I believe, will allow any government that adopts such a program to generate between \$7 billion and \$16 billion in less than two years to support Cuba's economic needs and buy time for the revival of the private sector.

Freedom requires that the Cuban government must get out of the business of being in business—sell the assets of the Cuban government, attract new capital into the island, and make certain that those who are inside the island participate.

Foreign investors, as well as Cuban-Americans, should not be allowed to buy any property in Cuba if they don't devote a portion (say, 20 or 30 percent) of the value of whatever commercial enterprise or properties that they buy to those who are working in that enterprise.

In this way you can make a nation of proletarians into a nation of propertarians. You can apply principles of privatization that were used, for example, in England toward power companies and other major industries under Margaret Thatcher. People on the island cannot be held responsible for their inability to leave the country or their lack of knowledge about free market activity in the West.

We must make certain that Cubans inside the island hear and know that once Cuba is free they are not going to be left out, that they have a stake in the future, and those who have the money will not come back to take the island away from them. That is important, and those are the messages of hope that we are bringing to the Cuban people.

**Endgame in Cuba.** Finally, I would like to say this: It is imperative that we keep our eyes open to what is going on in Cuba. Castro is obsessive. He is capable of the most brutal repression.

I believe that the Cuban people are going to decide for themselves their own destiny. Castro is going to be removed from power, in the short term rather than in the long term. I think that we are going to see a very important year for Cuba in 1992.



**Beyond Repair.** I am convinced that the Cuban economy will collapse by summertime—it's beyond repair. The political implications of this are extremely serious for Castro. It is increasingly apparent that the loyalty of the armed forces and the interior ministry is cracking, and it will weaken further as the economy goes into a more serious crisis. I think that there are democratic forces in Cuba who are moving very smoothly to make certain that bloodshed doesn't take place in Cuba. We all pray and hope that this is the case.

It is very encouraging, to see a new generation of Cubans—genuine opposition leaders—coming out in the street and risking their lives to bring about changes in Cuba. I think that the scarcity of goods in Cuba will bring about demonstrations in the next few weeks or few months. Those of us who live in freedom must remain alert and support the forces for peaceful change in Cuba which will challenge any effort by Castro to initiate a wave of terror in Cuba that could result in thousands deaths throughout the island.

Once universal, internationally monitored elections are held in Cuba, democratic institutions can be restored and the suffering of the Cuban people can be replaced by a new age of freedom, genuine democracy, and economic revival.

