History of Cuba

The Spanish Era

The history of modern day Cuba begins with the arrival of the Spanish in the early 16th century. The Spaniards colonized the island and established very profitable sugar plantations while enslaving the aboriginal peoples. These local cultures were all but erased through a combination of infectious disease and violence. Slaves from Africa were imported to the island to replace the indigenous populations. The result is that Cubans are ethnically European (descendants from Spain), African, or more than likely a mixture of both heritages. They are also predominantly Roman Catholics.

Nationalism in Cuba erupted in 1868 as the people tried to free themselves from Spanish control. The following thirty years were marked by bloodshed as several uprisings were suppressed by the colonial overlords. In the meantime the power of the United States was growing in the region both economically and militarily. As early as 1823 the American President James Monroe had issued the Monroe Doctrine which asserted that the Americas were their sphere of influence and Europeans should not meddle in the area. Americans investments in Cuba totalled over 33 million dollars by the end of the 19th century and there was a prosperous trade between the two countries. Many businessmen began to believe that if Spain could not protect American property and investments and provide a stable government then in the interest of commerce the United States should intervene in Cuba. Due to this feeling and popular sympathy for the plight of the Cuban rebels the United States declared war on Spain in 1898. Officially, the Spanish-American War started when the American battleship the USS Maine was mysteriously destroyed while stopped in Havana to protect American interests there. This event was blamed on the Spanish but the official cause has never been determined and speculation arose that the Americans staged the sinking of the USS Maine to give them a way to get the American public behind the war. In any case it had the desired effect as newspapers printed the popular headline: “Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain.”

The American Era

By 1902 the Americans had defeated the Spanish and they occupied the island. On the surface it was a victory for the Cubans as a new constitution was passed granting universal suffrage and other rights and freedoms. A popularly elected President would serve a maximum of two four year terms.
However, in reality the Americans retained a great deal of control over the country. They forced the Cubans to agree to the *Platt Amendment* in 1902 as a requisite for American withdrawal from the island. This allowed the United States to intervene in Cuban affairs for the “preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty.” This meant, for example, that Cuba could not sign treaties with other nations without American approval. Americans would have preferential access to the economy and would receive naval stations on the island (ex. Guantanamo Bay). This angered many Cuban nationalists and led to what some like to call the “Platt mentality” (Cuban governments relied on America and did not learn how to properly run their own affairs.)

The Cuban governments were characterized by corruption, bribery, and scandal. Public office was sought as a source of personal profit rather than a service to the public. Most opposition came from the working classes, peasantry, university students, and some educated middle class folk. Their protest was inspired partly by nationalism (ex. the popular slogan “Cuba for the Cubans”), the desire to improve working conditions, and a redistribution of farm land to the peasants. Political violence became common and as a result the army gained increasing power as it was needed to quell the frequent disturbances. After a revolution in 1933 removed an unpopular regime the Cuban government was increasingly controlled by the army.

In 1952 Fulgencio Batista led a successful coup with the support of the military. Batista had been running in the election but when it appeared he would lose he took action. He was a prominent politician and former head of the army. Batista had the support of the propertied classes and American business interests because they hoped the new dictator would impose law and order. However, significant divisions had begun to appear between the “haves” and the “have nots” in Cuba. In previous years Batista had gained some support from the lower classes by passing progressive legislation in the areas of health, sanitation, education and pensions. He also established a minimum wage. However, these achievements did not eliminate the problems in Cuba and Batista’s ties to the Americans made him unpopular amongst some. Massive strikes were brutally crushed by the government during the depression. Large plantation owners, ranchers, hotel owners, and those with close ties to Americans enjoyed much prosperity after the Depression. American tourists flocked to Cuba. Workers and peasants did not share in the fruits of the relationship with the United States. Cuba had one of the lowest standards of living and literacy rates in Latin America. Outside of Havana there were very few medical doctors. Unemployment reached 16% in 1957. This was fertile ground for left leaning revolutionaries. Though the Communist Party in Cuba was banned by Batista there were others willing to risk everything in the name of Cuban nationalism and the achievement of a more equal and prosperous Cuba. One such man was a middle class, university trained lawyer and advocate for the poor – Fidel Castro.

**Fidel Castro and the Revolution of 1958-1959**

Castro was born into a wealthy land-owning family. As a lawyer he took on the legal cases of poor people which made him very aware of their problems. Like all Cubans, he particularly resented the domination of Americans in every aspect of Cuban life. In 1947 he joined the *Cuban People’s Party* which campaigned against poverty and injustice. However, although the Cuban People’s Party was expected to win the 1952 election (Castro was a candidate), it was not given the opportunity due to Batista’s coup. Castro then decided that revolution was the only option for gaining power in Cuba and led an attack on the Moncada Army Barracks. This ended in disaster, but Castro was fortunate to
survive, and he used his trial to make a speech about the problems of Cuba. The international recognition and personal popularity that followed his speech forced the government to release him from prison. Spending time in Mexico he organized a group of 82 Cuban exiles and called them the 26th of July Movement (after the date of the attack on the Moncada Barracks). They launched a failed attack on the north coast of Cuba's Oriente coast and the 12 survivors (including Castro) fled to the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Slowly they gained support from peasant farmers and others in the area and launched a series of guerrilla attacks against the government.

When the guerrillas took control of territory they redistributed the land amongst the peasants. In return, the peasants helped the guerrillas against Batista's soldiers. In some cases the peasants also joined Castro's army, as did students from the cities and occasionally Catholic priests. In an effort to find out information about Castro's army people were pulled in for questioning. Many innocent people were tortured. Suspects, including children, were publicly executed and then left hanging in the streets for several days as a warning to others who were considering joining Castro. The behaviour of Batista's forces increased support for the guerrillas. In 1958 forty-five organizations signed an open letter supporting the July 26 Movement. National bodies representing lawyers, architects, dentists, accountants and social workers were amongst those who signed. Castro, who had originally relied on the support of the poor, was now gaining the backing of the influential middle classes. Batista responded to this by sending more troops to the Sierra Maestra. He now had 10,000 men hunting for Castro and his 300-strong army. Although outnumbered, Castro's guerrillas were able to inflict defeat after defeat on the government's troops. The United States supplied Batista with planes, ships and tanks, but the advantage of using the latest technology such as napalm failed to win them victory against the guerrillas. Eventually Batista was run out of Cuba and Castro marched into Havana (Jan. 9 1959) to become the country's new leader.
Castro’s establishment of an authoritarian state

Key question: How did Castro impose his authority on Cuba?

All the Cuban revolutions prior to Castro’s had begun with great optimism, only for them subsequently to founder. Determined to avoid similar failure, Castro judged that no matter how high his ambitions for Cuba he could achieve them only if he had complete, controlling power.

Castro’s consolidation of power

Castro made a number of key moves to consolidate his position at home:

- A Fundamental Law of the Republic decreed that authority now rested in a Council of Ministers, led by Castro as Prime Minister.
- Press freedom was severely restricted.
- The University of Havana lost its autonomy and came under government control.
- Public show trials were held of ministers, officials and previous supporters of Batista. Many were subsequently executed.
- The Communist Party was invited to join the 26 July Movement in government by providing officials from its ranks.
- Huber Matos, a key military figure in the 26 July Movement but a strong anti-communist, was removed and imprisoned for treason.
- The moderate leaders of the labour unions were removed and replaced by pro-Castro communists.

Relations with the USA

In seeking to consolidate his power after the revolution, Castro knew that relations with the USA were the biggest problem. Anticipating that there might be a breakdown, he had already begun moving to the Left (see page 7) at the time he took power. That was why he drew closer to the Cuban Communist Party, offering them minor posts in government. There was also a practical reason. The 26 July Movement which he had led to victory lacked the trained officials necessary for running the government in the new Cuba. The flight of the majority of the managers and officials who had worked for the Batista regime left large administrative gaps. To help fill these, Castro turned to the communist cadres from whose ranks officials could be drawn.

Cuban–US problems

Had it been only a matter of politics, some form of accommodation might have been possible between Castro and the USA. Initially, his revolutionary government had American backing. At the time of his toppling of the Batista regime in 1959, Castro described himself as a ‘humanist’ rather than a
Communist, a category Washington found acceptable. For a time, indeed, he was something of a hero figure to the US public. The admiration did not last long, however. As a means of uniting the Cuban people, Castro, influenced by Che Guevara, chose to adopt a strong anti-Americanism, asserting that the poverty of Cuba was a direct result of the USA's imperialism. This became the justification for the expulsion or takeover of a large number of US business concerns. By the end of 1960, the refineries and assets of the following oil companies in Cuba had been seized:

- Royal Dutch Shell
- Standard Oil
- Texaco.

Along with this went the takeover of these major foreign companies:

- Coca-Cola
- Moa Bay Nickel Company
- Roebuck
- Sears.

The first response of the USA was to apply diplomatic and financial pressure. When this did not budge Castro, Washington withdrew its diplomatic recognition of the new Cuba. Fearing that they were now dealing with a communist island only 90 miles (145 km) off the Florida state coast, many high-ranking Washington officials turned their thoughts towards armed intervention in Cuba. They were disturbed by the realization that Castro's revolution had become a considerable Cold War coup for the USSR. Following the expulsion of US companies from Cuba, the Soviet Union had been quick to sign a commercial agreement and to offer diplomatic and economic assistance. The USSR hoped, and the United States feared, that the establishment of a Soviet-backed Marxist state in Cuba would be the prelude to the rapid spread of Soviet-style communism throughout central and Latin America. A US Congressman declared that 'for the first time since 1917 free America has the toad of Communism squatting on her very doorstep'.

The Bay of Pigs, 1961

Early in 1960, Eisenhower authorized a covert CIA programme for using Guatemala as a training base for Cuban émigrés in preparation for a future attack on Castro's Cuba. The hope was that this would provoke a popular rising that would topple the regime. A secret mission statement defined the CIA's aims (see Source C).

SOURCE C


The purpose of the programme outlined herein is to bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the world.
people and more acceptable to the US in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of US intervention. Essentially the method of accomplishing this end will be to induce support, and so far as possible direct action, both inside and outside of Cuba, by selected groups of Cubans.

The attack was launched in April 1961 soon after Kennedy, the incoming president, who had earlier been a Castro admirer, had given it his approval. It proved a fiasco. The invaders failed to receive the support they had expected from either the local Cubans or, more critically, the USA, and were killed or captured as soon as they landed. Forewarned of the attack, Castro’s forces were waiting for them. It was obviously a military disaster for the USA, but an even greater diplomatic and political one. The Soviet Union could barely contain its joy and the young President Kennedy his embarrassment.

A victory parade was held in Havana. Life, a popular US magazine, described how ‘Havana gleefully noted the wealth of the captured invaders: 100 plantation owners, 67 landlords of apartment houses, 35 factory owners, 112 businessmen, 179 lived off unearned income, and 194 ex-soldiers of Batista.’ In a grand gesture of defiance to the USA, Castro announced to the cheering crowds at the parade that Cuba would now become a fully communist state. What he meant by this soon became apparent when elections were declared to be no longer necessary now that Cuba was effectively a one-party state.

Relations with the USSR

Castro’s stand against one of the world’s superpowers was hugely popular in Cuba but it was fraught with risk. The hard reality was that his adoption of communism had further compromised Cuba’s independence and ability to compete commercially. It had already mortgaged its sugar crop to the USSR. Clearly, the USA would no longer be the main purchaser of Cuba’s other goods. The only alternative was to sell to the Soviet Union, the only buyer comparable to the USA. The result was that, far from being free to do as it wished, Cuba now became wholly reliant on the other superpower, the USSR.

The Soviet Union was swift to build on the moves it had already made. Within a month of Castro’s declaration of Cuba as a communist state, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, formally promised to defend Cuba against any future aggression by the USA, accompanying his promise with the pronouncement that ‘the Monroe Doctrine is dead’. Supplies of Soviet arms to Cuba were on their way, in addition to the Soviet Union’s advancing of millions of dollars worth of credit and equipment to the island.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

Unbowed by Kennedy’s embarrassment over Cuba, Khrushchev’s USSR took its most provocative step so far in the Cold War. During the 19 months following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Soviet Union’s increasing arms provision to Cuba culminated in the installation on the island of Soviet nuclear...

**KEY TERM**

**Monroe Doctrine** A warning given by President Monroe in 1823 that the USA would not allow other powers to colonize or interfere in any part of the Americas, and would regard itself as the protector of the region.

What was at stake for Castro and Cuba in the missile crisis?
missiles with a capability of striking every major state in the USA. Che Guevara led the Cuban negotiations over their positioning. In October 1962, US reconnaissance aircraft brought back photographic evidence of the missiles and their silos in an advanced stage of construction.

The Soviet explanation was that the devices were there to defend Cuba against further foreign intervention but, since this claim followed a previous denial that the USSR had installed any missiles at all in Cuba, it served only to increase US fears. Kennedy announced that a naval blockade of Cuba would operate until the missiles were dismantled and removed. He added that, if any attempt was made to use them against the United States, he would order retaliation in kind. Kennedy backed his ultimatum by putting the United States Air Force (USAF) and the Polaris submarine fleet on war alert.

When Khrushchev likened the proximity of Soviet missiles in Cuba to that of US ones in Turkey, Kennedy replied that the US commitment to European defence, which the Turkish bases represented, was in no sense comparable to the Cuban missiles whose only conceivable purpose was to threaten the United States.

The critical decision was Khrushchev's. Would he be prepared to continue at the risk of full-scale nuclear confrontation? The answer came on 28 October, the day when the course of the Soviet vessels would bring them within the exclusion zone imposed by the US navy. From the Kremlin came the order to the Soviet ships not to enter the zone. In the following days, a number of contacts were made by letter and telephone between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Subsequently, the Soviet leader let it be known that the Soviet missiles would be removed from Cuba. For its part, the USA undertook to reduce its bases and missiles in Turkey.

The outcome of the crisis
Soon after the crisis had passed, Guevara asserted that had the Cuban leaders been in control of the missiles, they would have used them against the USA. This may have been bravado after the event but it was clear that Castro and Guevara felt betrayed by the Soviet withdrawal. There was no hiding the reality that Castro had been merely an onlooker in the crisis. The drama had been played out between Kennedy and Khrushchev. In an attempt to preserve his status, Castro sought to claim a moral victory. He expressed great pride in the enthusiastic mass response of the Cuban people to his call for them to prepare to defend their island against the expected US invasion. He made adroit use of the missile metaphor to claim a form of parity for Cuba with the superpowers (see Source D, page 217).
SOURCE D


The Cuban people is invincible and has a right to maintain its dignity and prestige unsullied! Because we possess long-range moral projectiles that cannot be dismantled and will never be dismantled! And these are our strategic weapons, our defensive strategic weapons, and our most powerful offensive strategic weapons!

Economic policy

The economic policies that Castro adopted were an integral part of his attempt to consolidate his authority. He had inherited a series of economic problems that were not of his making.

Economic problems

- Cuba’s vital sugar industry had suffered significant shrinkage on the world market.
- The sugar refiners had failed to modernize their industry by mechanization and adequate investment. The result was that in 1959 the island was producing only 10 per cent of the world’s sugar, compared with 25 per cent twenty years earlier.
- In that same period, US investment in Cuba’s sugar production fell from 60 per cent to 35 per cent.
- The decision of most of the industrial managers to leave the island when Batista was overthrown deprived Cuba of crucial expertise and so undermined Castro’s plan for reinvigorating the economy.

Castro’s economic reforms

To tackle these problems, Castro adopted the following measures:

- Large landowners were deprived of their land and an Institute of Agrarian Reform was created with the main purpose of breaking up the latifundias and ‘returning the land to the people’.
- The sugar industry, Cuba’s major source of revenue, was nationalized.
- Government subsidies were introduced in order to lower the rents and rates paid by the poor.
- State investment was directed into Cuba’s infrastructure to improve communications and public services, including communal housing in urban areas.
- Plans to redistribute income and raise workers’ wages were introduced.
- To save on expenditure, cuts were made in the imports of food and consumer goods.
- Rationing was introduced to lessen food shortages.

According to Source D, what weapons do the Cuban people possess?

What did Castro aim to achieve through his economic policies?

KEY TERM

Latifundias The Cuban landowners’ great estates.
**Diversification**

Castro’s original plan had been to diversify the Cuban economy so that it would no longer be wholly dependent on sugar. But by the mid-1960s, he realized that this was unworkable. The attempt to develop different crops that could be marketed as profitably as sugar had proved a failure. Furthermore, the plan to develop industrial programmes as alternatives to sugar production had not been successful. This was partly a result of the flight of so many managers from Cuba immediately after the revolution; the skilled personnel required for successful diversification were simply not available.

A further reason was the decision Castro had made soon after coming to power to break economic ties with the USA. The move had left Cuba heavily reliant on the Soviet Union for economic survival, as exemplified in the Soviet purchase of the island’s annual sugar crop. Cuba did not possess the economic freedom to diversify. The consequence was that, for much of Castro’s era, Cuba became a sugar-based, industrially inefficient economy with the only financial backing coming from the Soviet Union.

Having accepted that the attempt to diversify had been ineffective, Castro tried to go back to sugar as the traditional staple. But his earlier actions had created their own problems. Much of the sugar cane had been destroyed or ploughed up in preparing the soil for the new crops, such as cotton or soya bean. In some cases it took up to four years to replant effectively and even then the yields did not match the good years of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Adding to the difficulties was the dilapidated state of the mills and refineries which had been allowed to run down. Nature also played a part, with unusually bad weather contributing to disappointing sugar harvests. The 1960s saw an 8 per cent drop in sugar production across the decade.

**The ‘10 million ton harvest’, 1970**

The poor agricultural performance did not prevent Castro from launching a scheme intended to sustain the revolutionary momentum that had propelled the 26 July Movement to power. The drive towards his brand of Cuban communism was intensified. Further agrarian reforms resulted in two-thirds of the land coming under government control in the form of state farms. This move towards greater centralization was similar to the collectivization programme in Stalin’s Russia and Mao’s China (see pages 32 and 127). Castro proposed making the 1970 sugar harvest, expected to be abundant, the centre of a great popular rallying. He asked the Cuban people to look beyond selfish material considerations and see the new socialism as a moral movement, where individual advance was meaningful only if it occurred as part of the communal whole. Labelled the ‘10 million ton harvest’ before it had actually been gathered, the 1970 harvest was presented as a symbol of what was achievable through collective endeavour.
In the event, '10 million ton harvest' was a major disappointment, not simply because it fell short of the projected figure by some 2 million tons, but also because the desperate means used to try to make the yield meet its target damaged the soil and the cane, severely reducing the prospects for future harvests:

- The underlying problem was that the migration of land workers to the factories that had occurred under the government’s prompting in the 1960s had removed skilled cane cutters from the sugar plantations.
- Those brought in to gather the harvest lacked the knowledge and technique to perform the task adequately.
- In some areas, corrupt officials distorted the figures in order to suggest that they had achieved better results.

The 1970 harvest came to symbolize the new Cuba, but not in the way Castro had intended. It revealed the economic dislocation and continuing corruption in administration that the revolution was supposed to have eradicated.

The harvest failure was part of a larger problem. If planning was to work, there had to be expert planners, but these were in short supply. There was abundant enthusiasm among the revolutionaries who now ran things, but enthusiasm was not enough. It was not a substitute for managerial skill. The consequence was poor decision-making which stifled rather than encouraged expansion.

**Opposition to Castro**

The combination of failed economic policies, increasing authoritarianism and a growing sense of disappointment with the way the revolution was working in practice led to the growth of opposition. Those who had regarded Castro’s 26 July Movement as a movement for liberation now began to have doubts.

The worldwide adulation among liberals for the Cuban leaders (see box below) served to make it additionally troubling to the idealists in Cuba when they realized that the admiration felt by outsiders for Castro’s revolution was based on a misunderstanding of the actual situation. Unfulfilled hopes were, therefore, an important element in the formation of opposition. The same idealism that had motivated support for Castro now aroused opposition to him.

**International icons**

Internationally the 1960s had been a period when many people, particularly the young, had begun to challenge the old established governments and the ideas on which they were based. The challenge was not always clearly articulated; it tended to be a protest movement rather than a defined set of objectives, but it had taken its inspiration from such developments as **Maoism** in China (see page 156) and Castroism in Cuba, which were interpreted as representing a new form of politics liberated from the corrupt capitalism of the West and the rigid communism of the **Eastern bloc**. It was in this atmosphere of youthful rebellion that Castro and Guevara became iconic figures. Posters bearing their words and images became commonplace on Western university campuses.
agencies in Florida complained of Castro’s dumping his unwanted population on the USA.) Subsequently, however, Castro grew concerned that Cuba was losing too many of the skilled personnel it needed. Regulations were introduced forbidding Cubans to leave without acceptable reason. The restriction added to the feeling that Cuba was a closed, authoritarian society.

Occasionally, however, in order to reduce political tension, Castro would allow large numbers of Cubans to leave. One such moment occurred in 1980 when 10,000 people, reacting against food rationing, besieged Cuba’s Peruvian embassy appealing for asylum. But Castro always accompanied such occasions with vast propaganda displays of support for himself and the regime. His intention was to show that the overwhelming mass of the population backed the revolution, contrasting with the relatively tiny number of selfish individuals who refused to stay and continue the struggle to achieve Cuba’s destiny. ‘Let them depart in shame’ was his dismissive reference.

**Changes in Castro’s style of government, 1970–90**

No longer able to turn for advice to Che Guevara, who had left Cuba in 1965 and was killed in Bolivia two years later, Castro had hard decisions to make. Conscious of the limited economic gains the revolution had made in its first decade and of the opposition that had developed in reaction to the economic measures, Castro responded by increasing political repression. But he also took major steps to adjust the organization of the government. Admitting that the failed 1970 harvest programme had revealed the limitations of the previous approach, he decided on a policy of depersonalizing the revolution. This did not mean he gave up power; he still retained ultimate authority, but he chose to delegate more while at the same time spreading the base of government. His response to criticism of the growth of bureaucracy was not to cut bureaucracy but to make it function more efficiently.

**The Cuban Constitution, 1975**

To give greater formal authority to the system which had been created since the 1959 revolution, a new constitution was adopted. Its most prominent clauses stated that:

- Fidel Castro, as First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party and President of the Council of Ministers, was head of government
- Cuba was a socialist state, with the Communist Party as the only recognized political group
- local assemblies, drawn from members of the Communist Party, were to provide delegates for the National Assembly, an elected body of 600 members
- the Council of Ministers was to be drawn from the National Assembly.

**Political and administrative changes**

Under the terms of the new constitution, Castro’s government created:

- Ministers
- Clearer line of services.
- The police
- The 26 July Movement
- The legal system
- While not on tribuna, remain government

**Rectification**

Castro was still making his pen and it was clear that he remained firm in administrative reform. Accompanied by the governor, rectification, hard practical

- To enable Cuban workers to make his pen
- Incentives to managers were discussed
- Studies were made
- A quota system was introduced
- Priority in the large factories and plants was given

**Effects of revolución and rectificación**

- Between 1976 and 1979, the government had achieved a virtually complete social and economic transformation.
- However, in 1980, there was a setback in production due to the effects of the American embargo.
- Under the decameters, some farms had to sell their production for the government, but they were obliged...
Political and administrative changes
Under the terms of the new constitution, a number of important administrative and political changes were introduced:

- Ministers had greater freedom to act on their own initiative.
- Clearer lines of responsibility were drawn between departments and services.
- The police force was made part of the armed services.
- The 26 July Movement and the Communist Party were merged as one party.
- The legal system was streamlined to make court procedures simpler.
- While not given full independence, the trade unions were entitled to sit on tribunals concerned with workers’ rights and to make recommendations regarding economic planning.

Rectification
Castro was sincere in his wish to broaden the base of his authority and to make his personal role in government less obviously dominant. However, it was clear that, whatever the adjustments he allowed, the reins of power remained firmly in his hands. He also knew that the political and administrative alterations would be mere tinkering unless they were accompanied by genuinely productive economic changes. It was to that end that the government under him initiated what became known as rectification, an approach intended to combine revolutionary idealism with hard practical realism. It was meant to apply especially to the economy.

- To enable Cuba to keep pace with modern technology, computers were introduced into factories and offices.
- Incentives were reintroduced into the workplace. Productive workers and managers were to be rewarded with pay increases and bonuses.
- Studies were conducted to make work practices more productive.
- A quota system was introduced, laying down targets to be achieved in designated areas of production.
- Priority in the supplies of materials and labour was to be given to areas and plants where the evidence suggested they would be most productively used.

Effects of rectification
Rectification as an economic programme had mixed results:

- Between 1971 and 1976, Cuba’s GNP grew each year by 10 per cent, which compared favourably with less than 4 per cent annually in the preceding five years.
- However, in the following half decade, 1976–81, the growth figure fell back to 4 per cent annually.
- Under the drive for efficiency, workers with higher skill levels received bonuses, but the less skilled remained on basic or decreased wages and were obliged to move to other jobs or locations.

KEY TERM
Rectification A revitalizing of the Cuban revolution by the correction of past errors.

GNP Gross National Product, the annual total value of goods and services produced by a country at home, added to the profits from its export trade.
Austerity

The economic decline in the late 1970s led Castro’s government to reappraise its policies for the 1980s. A major difficulty was that there was little room for manoeuvre commercially, a result both of Cuba’s dependence on the Soviet Union and of the US embargo applied to Cuban trade since 1962. By the early 1980s, Cuba was in a predicament:

- The US trade embargo restricted the outlets for Cuban products to a limited number of countries, which resulted in Cuba’s trade balance always being in deficit.
- Since sugar was its main export, Cuba was particularly susceptible to adverse changes in world sugar prices. This increased Cuba’s need for the Soviet Union to continue to buy the bulk of its sugar crop at a fixed price.

SOURCE E

Castro speaks to thousands of Cubans on the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, 1968.

What information about Castro does Source E provide?

- Practically it.
- Cuba was in.
- It owed a fu.

Castro’s response was sacrifices for the people, unexpensive imp.

Although a de 1974, he mod each accordin to the work of Cuba’s poor w not achieved but the basic effort. Hence by the regime

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In the late 198 down the corr came in 1991 itself. Having now had a ma of the USSR "Soviet Union emerged from honour the O purchase of hu

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- Cuban inc.
- In that sam from 13 ml
- In a deeper were cut at the main m
Practically all Cuba’s oil purchases were from the USSR.
- Cuba was in debt to the USSR by some 7 billion dollars.
- It owed a further 3.5 billion dollars to international banks.

Castro’s response was to call for more austerity. Cubans had to make sacrifices for the national good. He repeated his familiar ‘moral’ appeal to the people, urging them to consume less, which would reduce the need for expensive imports, and to work for lower pay or for no financial return at all. He claimed that the need for this arose from the plain fact that Cuba had a surplus of labour. Some of this could be soaked up by increasing the size of the army and by encouraging young revolutionaries to go abroad, but the basic answer lay in the Cuban people settling for less in material terms.

Although a declared communist, Castro was not an orthodox Marxist. In 1974, he modified Marx’s maxim ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ to read, ‘each Cuban should receive according to the work he does’. His desire to improve the conditions of Cuba’s poor was genuine but he believed the improvement had to be achieved not by government handouts but by individual and communal effort. Hence the severity with which slackers and saboteurs were treated by the regime.

The Special Period – Cuba after 1991

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of resistance movements brought down the communist regimes in all the Eastern bloc countries. The climax came in 1991 with the collapse of the communist government in the USSR itself. Having been heavily dependent on Soviet assistance since 1959, Castro now had a major problem. The fall of the Eastern bloc and the disintegration of the USSR left communism a broken system. Castro’s adherence to the Soviet Union was now his handicap, not his safeguard. The new Russia that emerged from the old USSR maintained contacts, but felt no obligation to honour the Cuban-Soviet agreements. Castro could no longer rely on the purchase of his sugar or the financial subventions he had hitherto enjoyed.

The impact of Cuba of the USSR’s collapse

The consequence was increasing strain in the Cuban economy as it sought to adjust itself to the new situation. This era of hardship was dubbed ‘the Special Period’, its particular features being:

- In that same period, Cuba’s annual supply of oil from Russia dropped from 13 million tons to under 2 million.
- In a desperate bid to save energy, power supplies to homes and factories were cut and there was a return to horse-drawn vehicles and bicycles as the main means of transport.
KEY TERM

Subsidiary companies
Businesses that operate separately in particular areas, often under a different name, but ultimately under the control of a parent company.

Marxism
Relating to the ideas of Karl Marx, a German revolutionary, who had advanced the notion that human society developed historically as a continuous series of class struggles between those who possessed economic and political power and those who did not. He taught that the culmination of this dialectical process would be the crushing victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie.

Varela Project
A Catholic organization calling for political and religious freedom in Cuba.

- The fuel shortage seriously handicapped the production of nickel, one of Cuba’s main exports after sugar and tobacco; output fell from 47,000 tons to 29,000 between 1990 and 1994.
- Cuban commerce was further damaged by the USA’s extension of its trade embargo to include US subsidiary companies operating in other countries.
- Strict rationing was introduced to cope with food shortages and people were discouraged from eating meat; locally grown rice, beans and fruit became the standard fare.

Castro’s response
Faced with the collapse of communism in Europe, Castro was quick to assert that Cuba’s revolutionary aims remained unaltered. This was where his consistent refusal to embrace orthodox Marxism stood him in good stead. His earlier insistence that his communism was a Cuban creation born of Cuban conditions was a reassessment of his right not to have to conform to any external interpretation of what a communist revolution should be. It was another area where his outlook mirrored that of Mao Zedong in China (see page 114).

Despite Castro’s restatement of his commitment to Cuba’s revolution, there were hopes among some in the government and many outside that the Special Period would lead to a liberalizing of his regime. There were signs that these hopes might be realized. In 1992, the National Assembly made a number of changes in the constitution, a significant one being an adjustment of the electoral rules so as to allow voting by secret ballot in the election of Assembly deputies. But to avoid any suggestion that the Assembly was challenging Castro, Carlos Lage, the Vice-President, emphasized that whatever reforms might be adopted they would not change Cuba’s ‘socialist essence’.

Castro himself made a number of adjustments to indicate that in the post-Soviet era he was prepared to make concessions in Cuba’s interests:

- He allowed the US dollar to operate again as legal currency in Cuba.
- He encouraged tourists to come to Cuba, particularly from the wealthy USA.
- In 1994, he made an agreement with US President Clinton permitting an annual quota of 20,000 Cubans to leave for the United States.
- In 1998, a similar agreement allowed Cubans to receive unlimited amounts of American dollars from their émigré relatives in the USA.
- In 1998, Pope John Paul II visited Cuba at Castro’s personal invitation. One consequence was Castro’s agreeing to lift the restrictions on the Varela Project.
- Better relations were established with the European Union which had earlier criticized Castro for his repressive policies.

Increased
Despite the Cuba allow Cuba to begin releasing Cuba from the Black Spots of hostility and government censures, the political landscape had added Castro as the evil. Based on this, Castro was allowing Cuba to begin freeing itself from the Black Spots of hostility and government censures.

There were signs that the execution of the economic liberalization was being attempted and the economy was improving.

Castro’s new thinking
How fragile the world oil prices were over one hundred years, and how partial recovery could be with a deal with Venezuela. When Cuba sent test tubes to clear initiative, the centres of the European Union put forward a revised plan in favour of the US dollar as legal currency in Cuba.
judging that Mao’s China was now the only remaining force in international communism, Castro was keen to increase economic and political ties with it.

In the wake of the widespread destruction caused by a hurricane that struck Cuba in 2001, Castro authorized the buying of massive food supplies from the United States. It was the first time in 40 years that the American embargo had been officially suspended. Castro maintained his principles, however, by refusing to accept the supplies as part of a US government humanitarian aid package. He insisted upon a commercial agreement.

**creased authoritarianism**

Despite the concessions, Castro let it be known that he was far from ready to allow Cuba to become a fully open society, certainly not politically. In 2002, began reversing his earlier tolerance at the time of the Pope’s visit, by impinging down again on the Varela Project when it openly pressed for greater civil rights in Cuba. In March 2003, in what Castro’s opponents called ‘Black Spring’, 40 Varela members were imprisoned for receiving money from hostile foreign countries and using it to campaign against the Cuban government.

Suppressing the Varela Project, Castro was reacting as much to US assurances as to developments in Cuba. In 2002, President George W. Bush added Cuba to a list of countries he regarded as forming ‘the axis of evil’. Based on dubious intelligence reports, Bush’s belief was that Castro was allowing biological weapons to be developed in Cuba.

There were stronger grounds for Bush’s animosity in 2003 when, in what was regarded internationally as an unnecessarily vindictive act, Castro ordered the execution of a group of Cuban dissidents who had seized a ferry in an attempt to escape to the USA. This time the EU was sufficiently angered to order economic sanctions to be placed on Cuba.

**Fidel Castro’s retirement**

How fragile Cuba’s economy was became evident in 2004 when a spike in world oil prices caused a severe fuel shortage in Cuba, forcing the closure of over one hundred factories; these included sugar refineries and steel mills. A partial recovery came a year later, however, when Castro did an exchange deal with Venezuela’s President, Hugo Chavez, under which, in return for oil, Cuba sent teams of doctors to practise in Venezuela. It was one of Fidel’s last initiatives. His growing frailty led to his increasing withdrawal from the centre of things. In 2006 he effectively stood down from government in favour of his brother, Raúl.