

Cuba's National Assembly adjusts socialist model to a changing world

By Tom Whitney

Cuba is facing serious economic and financial problems. The U.S. economic blockade causes many of them. And Cubans live in a world overwhelmed by pervasive corporate greed, wars, populations in distress, and climate change. Such were the circumstances greeting Cuba's National Assembly as it met May 31 and June 1 in an "extraordinary session." On the agenda were documents fundamental to the project of building a socialist society in difficult times.

Cuban President Raul Castro told delegates that, "These are the most studied, discussed, and re-discussed documents in the history of the Revolution." And, "These fundamental programs approved recently by the Central Committee of the Party, and backed now by the National Assembly of People's Power, reaffirm the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution and the role of the Communist Party as the lead force directing society and the state."

Castro also reaffirmed Cuba's solidarity with Venezuela's beleaguered Bolivarian Revolution and called for the return of political legitimacy to Brazil.

Jennifer Bello Martínez, 25 years old, presides over the Federation of University Students and is a member of Cuba's Council of State. Speaking to a reporter for *Cubadebate.cu*, she echoed an important theme of the two-day session: newer generations will soon be taking charge of Cuba's revolution.

Bello declared that, "young people are at the point of being protagonists in this discussion process. The documents ... speak for the full development of our generation [and] express the need for young people to regard the Revolution as a permanent undertaking."

The two documents discussed at the National Assembly's special session carry these titles: "Conceptualization of the Cuban Economic and Social Model for Socialist Development" and "Guidelines for Policies of the Party and the Revolution for the period 2016 – 2021."

Delegates did not discuss a third basic document entitled "Bases for a National Plan for Social and Economic Development until 2030." That one requires further preparation, and approval by the National Assembly is anticipated in December, 2018.

Delegates expressed concern that the documents before them contradicted each other in one important area. One section of the "Conceptualization" document calls for regulation of wealth and property, but one "Guideline" prohibits concentration of wealth and property.

Marino Murillo, a former economics minister, told delegates that failing to deal with the quandary represents "one of the biggest risks we are facing." It's the most widely discussed issue in Cuba, he said, arguing also that documents won't make a "negative

phenomenon” disappear. Murillo called for private employment “to be perfected.” The National Assembly determined that regulation would continue.

The Assembly’s job was to approve the documents, but with previously added modifications. The Sixth Communist Party Congress had originally approved the documents in 2011, and the Seventh Congress did so again in April, 2016, with modifications. Between June 15 and September 20 of 2016, 14.3 percent of the Cuban population attended 47,470 meetings at which the documents were discussed and changes proposed.

In April members of the Communist Party’s Central Committee met with Assembly members in their home provinces to discuss recent modifications. At a plenary session May 18 the Central Committee approved both documents and any modifications added along the way.

The extraordinary session began with four commissions looking at the modifications. Assembly members were part of one or another commission, each of which represented a set of Assembly working groups all fitting into a particular category of Cuban society.

The commissions first approached the “Conceptualization” document and its [“fundamental questions.”](#) These included: “concentration of property and wealth;” differences as to functions and roles of the state, governmental, and private businesses; “the Cuban educational system and its impact on society;” and “development of the personal trajectory and life of Cuban youth.”

The commissions approved 61 out of 73 proposed modifications. These modifications were added to others approved at the Seventh Party Congress. As a result, [92 percent of](#) the original Conceptualization document is now changed.

The commissions worked on the “Guidelines” document also. The recent plenary session of the Party’s Central Committee had considered [18 proposals](#) for modifying some of the 274 Guidelines. It accepted eight of them, and re-worked them into six existing guidelines.

[These guidelines dealt with:](#) “ethical behavior among leaders, workers, and organizations;” rearrangement of “entities for science, technology, and innovation;” promotion of direct foreign investment; reduction of the state’s financial contribution to social security; “rescue of the role of work and income for generating products and services;” and ways to increase state income from transportation services.

President Castro set the tone for deliberations by the Assembly. We will “advance in our continuing update of the economic and social model,” he declared, adding that Cuba will “change everything that must be changed.” Furthermore, “we will do it at a speed permitted by the consensus we forge within our society and our proven capacity to do things well.” We will thereby “avoid grave errors that could compromise our successful fulfilment of this gigantic and honorable task.”