

OXFORD IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME



HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS 1880–1981

COURSE COMPANION

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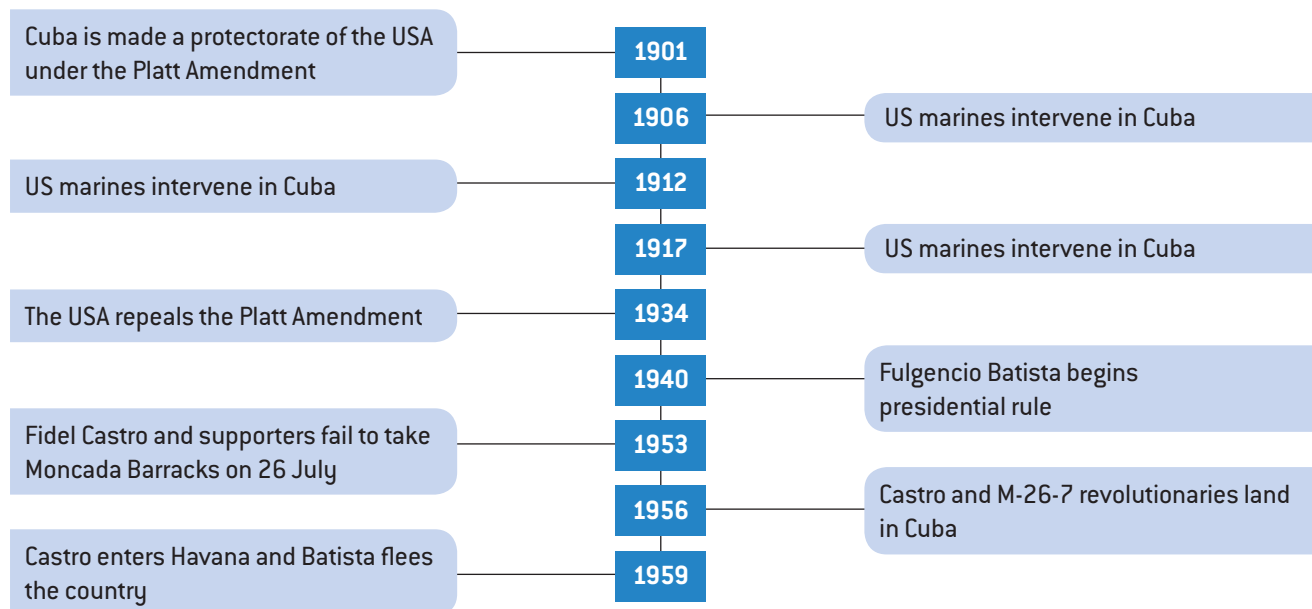
5 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, 1945–1980

Global context

Like the rest of the world, the 30 countries and dependencies in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced social, economic and political changes and challenges between 1945 and 1980. The geopolitical forces of the Cold War certainly affected Latin America and the Caribbean. Political responses to these forces varied from country

to country, from the continuation of democracy to 'populist' movements to outright conflict, revolution and the establishment of authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s. Areas of study include: conditions for the rise to power of new leaders; economic and social policies; and the treatment of women and minorities.

Timeline



5.1 The Cuban Revolution

Conceptual understanding

Key questions

- What conditions in Cuba gave origin to the revolution?
- What were the successes and failures of the revolution?

Key concepts

- Causation
- Perspectives
- Significance

Background

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean Sea, with a current population of over 11 million people. Since colonial times, beginning in the late 15th century, it was the entry port of Spain to the Americas. As the indigenous Taíno population was destroyed, African slaves were transported for labour. Over time, as was the case all over the Americas, the population mixed.

In the 19th century, Cuba's proximity to the USA made it attractive to that young country, which was interested in buying Cuba and adding it to the union as a slave state, before the US Civil War. Cuba is 97 miles from the US coast of Florida. As other Spanish colonies in the Americas fought for independence in the 19th century, Cuba's independence movements failed. Despite impassioned intellectuals who fought for it, many Spanish royalists fleeing other newly independent countries came to Cuba, adding a strong pro-Spanish sentiment to the island. The port city of Havana was the first place to which Spain sent their navy and troops to claim back the empire and keep the peace on the islands, so independence movements were effectively quelled in Cuba.



▲ Cuba

Sugar plantations and African slavery continued and grew in Cuba in the 19th century. Large US sugar and transportation investments increased, even though slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886. In 1898, when the US cruiser *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbour, allegedly by the Spanish according to the US press, the USA invaded Cuba and ended Spanish rule. This was the emergence of the USA on the world stage. Cuban intellectuals who had fought for independence from Spain had also sought economic independence from the USA, but Cuba was made a protectorate of the USA under the Platt Amendment in 1901. This was repealed in 1934, but by then US hegemony was firmly established.

The Platt Amendment and the subsequent deep US involvement in the island's affairs created simmering resentment in Cuba in the first half of the 20th century. The Cuban government was prohibited from entering into any international treaty that would compromise



Cuban independence or allow foreign powers to use the island for military purposes. However, the USA reserved the right to intervene in Cuban affairs to defend Cuban independence and maintain 'a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty'. The Cuban government also had to improve sanitary conditions on the island and relinquish claims on the Isle of Pines (now known as the Isla de la Juventud). It had to sell or lease territory for coaling and naval stations to the USA. This clause ultimately led to the perpetual lease by the USA of Guantánamo Bay. The Cuban government had to make a treaty with the USA that would make the Platt Amendment legally binding by incorporating its terms in the Cuban constitution.

Political causes

Given the legacy of the Platt Amendment and the enormity of US investments in Cuba, in the sugar industry, banking, telecommunications, tourism and more, the USA intervened with marines in 1906, 1912 and 1917 to defend these interests from unstable governments. By the 1940s US intervention changed to supporting authoritarian politicians who perpetuated the status quo, while keeping up the pretence of democracy and elections. One especially corrupt politician was a former sergeant named Fulgencio Batista, who was alternately in power as president or ruled through puppet presidents in 1940–44 and 1952–59.

The Batista government corruption created mounting resentment against the USA, as university students and workers demonstrated for 'Cuba for the Cubans'. Batista's crackdown was brutal, and many dissidents were imprisoned and tortured. James DeFronzo, a US academic historian, has characterized the 1940s and 1950s in Cuba as enacting minor reforms in agriculture, labour and education, but nothing that challenged US businesses. In addition, he notes that the Cuban governments under Batista's aegis, when he himself was not president, were 'corrupt and notorious for theft of public funds'.

Once the USA repealed the Platt Amendment in 1934, Cubans were disappointed to see that US interests and influence continued, as the Cuban business leaders and political leaders supported it. Some disgruntled Cubans, following the intellectual **José Martí's** ideas, formed the **Auténtico Party**, calling for true, authentic reforms, and an end to corruption and dependence on the USA. By 1947, when Auténtico politicians proved ineffectual, many members left to form the **Ortodoxo Party**. They vowed to disclose corruption and restore honour to a Cuba truly independent of entrenched US influence. One member, running for Congress, was a charismatic young lawyer called Fidel Castro.

Another political party that was slowly making headway among industrial and manufacturing workers, especially Afro-Cubans, was the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Its members were particularly active and successful in producing union leaders and pressuring businesses and the government to accept some labour demands.

By 1952 Batista felt sure enough of USA support to end the 'presidency' of Carlos Prío Socarrás with a military coup, pre-empting elections and taking over the government. This became the political trigger to the revolution.



▲ Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista circa 1935

José Martí

Cuban national hero during the 1890s and leader of the independence movement from Spain.

Auténtico Party

Cuba's largest opposition party to Fulgencio Batista, in power from 1944–1952.

Ortodoxo Party

Splinter party from the Auténtico Party in 1947. They had nationalist ideals and were fed up with government corruption.

ATL Communication skills

On YouTube, find the film *El Mégano* (1955), by Cuban film director Julio García Espinosa, about wood coal burners. Starting 12 minutes into the clip, watch about five minutes of the film.

What does this excerpt tell you about the harsh life of the charcoal makers? How are the 'rich folks' portrayed?

Social causes

Social inequality grew in Cuba as a result of the seasonal nature of the sugar industry. Both Cuban and foreign-owned sugar plantations and mills let their workers go for part of the year, creating a wandering class of workers who then crowded the cities, desperate for any kind of work, but generally as domestic servants in the tourist industry. Unemployment figures were between 20% and 30% between 1943 and 1957, adding to social inequity.

Land ownership also compounded the social situation, as sugar plantations and cattle ranches owned one-third of agricultural land. This created a large group of landless peasants, who were habitually underemployed and earned less than one-fifth of Cuba's per capita income in 1956. Statistics show a skewed panorama: overall the literacy rate in Havana was 88%, but it was only 50% in the countryside. Amid the opulence displayed in Havana at hotels and gambling casinos, the disparity was obvious to all and fuelled resentment and social malaise.

Middle-class Cubans were also feeling underpaid and exploited working for US businesses when compared to US standards at the time. The US per capita income in 1956 was US\$2000 a year, but the Cuban per capita income was only US\$374. Cuba's national statistics relating to the availability of medical services, communications (telephones) and transportation (automobiles) as well as to food intake were among the top in Latin America, but this was a reflection of the Havana tourist industry and not spread out in Cuban society. Indeed, all classes felt the pinch in lack of food supplies and fuel, as the government could no longer purchase them.

Cuban and US business owners felt increasingly annoyed with Batista as social protest in the form of guerrilla warfare from the 26 July Movement (M-26-7) burned mills, industries and public works to force Batista out. Batista and the army were unable to prevent this.

Economic causes

In the early 20th century sugar constituted 80% of Cuban exports, which often suffered '**boom and bust**' cycles. The island was especially hard hit during the Great Depression in the 1930s. There was more stability, albeit at lower prices than the world market value, after the Second World War when Cuba had a guaranteed 28% access to the US market. Cuba provided a safe environment for US investment so that by the first third of the 20th century the USA controlled 75% of Cuba's sugar production, as well as banking. By the 1950s, the USA owned 85% of all foreign investments. This also included a growing concern: tourism. Cuba became known as the playground of the Caribbean.

Vast land tracts were used for sugar cane, which forced Cuba to import food, as internal agricultural production was insufficient to feed the population. Sugar plantations and mills hired dependant farmers and farm workers. These workers were only employed for parts of the year and became part of the urban proletariat at other times.

By the middle of the 20th century an uneven distribution of wealth was apparent in Cuba. Statistics showed high income among professionals, especially in medicine. There was great advancement in communications development (telephones) per capita.

boom and bust

Refers to economies that are dependent on exporting one product, and who are therefore vulnerable to prices rising or falling, usually with devastating national results.

ATL Communication skills

On YouTube, find the hotel scene from the film *Our Man in Havana* (1959), set in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

What does this clip tell you about the hotel scene in Havana?



Rule of Fidel Castro (1945–80)

Cuban nationalism

Elections in 1952 did not take place, because Batista, with the support of the army, took over the government. Dissident groups planned a revolt. This was the ill-planned attack on the Moncada Barracks, led by Fidel Castro on 26 July 1953. These were young people, some from the Ortodoxo Party, who were sick of the Batista government corruption and were steeped in the independence movement of 1898 and the ideas of the poet José Martí.

The revolt failed; some rebels were killed and others imprisoned. Castro and his group used the ensuing trial to expound on the corruption of the government. Castro used his oratory skills in an impassioned speech titled 'History will absolve me'. Nonetheless, he was found guilty and jailed until 1955, when he was exiled to Mexico. The exiles now called themselves 'The 26th of July Movement, (M-26-7)' in remembrance of the failed Moncada attack.



▲ Fidel Castro (on the left) and his companions being conveyed to Vivac prison in Santiago de Cuba, 1953

The Cuban Revolution

From Mexico, with his brother Raúl Castro and the Argentine revolutionary Ernesto (Che) Guevara, Castro planned a landing in Cuba in 1956, but it failed. The M-26-7 survivors, including the Castro brothers and Che Guevara, fled to the Sierra Maestra Mountains in south-eastern Cuba.

ATL Communication skills

On YouTube, find the video clip of *Cuba before Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution*, Part 1/12.

Watch this clip with one or two classmates and discuss the following.

- 1 What impression does this 1950, US-made film give of Cuba?
- 2 How does this fit with the following quote?

'Cuba is a rich country with too many poor people' (Fidel Castro).

ATL Research and communication skills

On the Internet, find and read Castro's *History will absolve me* speech.

What were Castro's main grievances against the Batista government?

ATL Research and communication skills



▲ Fidel Castro and Che Guevara

What does this photograph convey about Castro and Guevara?

The group of rebels resorted to guerrilla warfare until they were able to gather enough support among the peasants and the urban proletariat. As the Cuban military realized that Batista had few supporters, his troops abandoned him; even the USA no longer backed him. Castro and his M-26-7 supporters were able to take over and enter Havana in January 1959.

Political issues

A major priority became institutionalizing the revolution in order to create a more equitable Cuba. As the dominant classes lost power and emigrated, mass mobilization of volunteers stepped up to help. This led to the creation of the Junta Central de Planificación (JUCEPLAN) – the central planning committee – in 1960. Castro knew that Cuba needed reform to create a more equitable society, and thought a centrally planned government and economy would be more efficient in instituting broad changes and facing opposition, especially from the USA. A major political consequence of the revolutionary government led to the **expropriation** of US property valued at US\$1 billion. In addition to US antagonism, Castro also alienated many middle-class Cubans who found his measures too radical and left the country (10% of the population).

Close to Castro was his brother Raúl and the Argentine Che Guevara, who were Marxists. Through them, Castro used the organizing power of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). This proved to be a useful alliance once the revolution succeeded, although members of the party had not supported him before. Castro used their discipline and labour organization to help restructure the government, thus uniting M-26-7 guerrillas and leaders with communist ones. This relationship was strengthened once the Soviet Union conveniently stepped in to support Castro when the USA pulled out and **boycotted** Cuba.

expropriation

When property is taken by the state for public use, with or without approval of the owner and with or without compensation.

boycott

The ban on all commercial relations with a country as a form of punishment.



Economic issues

Another major structural change in the government dealt with the farm hands in the sugar industry. This led to the formation of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) in 1959. Its target was to nationalize the mostly US-owned sugar mills and land. The INRA began by limiting the size of landholdings, breaking up the huge sugar plantations, many of them foreign-owned. The land was distributed to rural workers.

Although rural worker conditions improved, the overall production goals were not achieved. By 1970 Castro wanted to produce a record harvest, or **zafra**, of 10 million tons. This was a symbolic figure and meant to be a moral victory, but the target was not reached, and greatly disappointed idealists and volunteers from all over the world who came to help.

A poster by Eufemia Álvarez, produced in 1970, had a caption: ‘tras el fracaso de la zafra de los diez millones, este afiche llama a convertir ese revés en una victoria’, which translates as ‘After the failure of the 10 million tons *zafra*, this poster calls for turning that setback into victory’.

Castro did succeed in raising wages for workers, gaining approval among both rural and urban workers. He also established highly successful literacy campaigns. Students took one year off and taught people to read and write. For a year, 300 000 volunteers collaborated in this campaign, which generated results as well as a sense of unity and purpose to the first years of the revolution.

Consolidation of the Cuban Revolution

In 1960 small businesses were nationalized, about 58 000 in total, including businesses producing most goods and services. However, labour absenteeism was high – between 20% and 50% – as there was little incentive to work and little to buy. In addition, when middle- and upper-class Cubans left Cuba for the USA, they left a gap in both capital for new business and professional expertise.

Oil for fuel and electric power became scarce as the Cold War world sided with the USA in boycotting all economic transactions with Cuba. This was a setback for industrial and agricultural production. As some countries (Canada, Mexico, Spain and others) slowly broke away from the boycott, joint ventures carefully planned by the Cuban government set up new enterprises and industries to spur the economy.

Although the moral imperative of social equity worked for a while to motivate Cubans to work selflessly for the benefit of all, by the 1970s wage incentives began to be used, as they tend to produce better long-term results. By 1976 small-market economy measures were introduced, such as establishing farmers’ markets, in an effort to make the Cuban economy grow. These measures worked well – perhaps too well – and by the 1980s were rescinded to prevent corruption of revolutionary and socialist ideals.

In any case, the military and economic assistance of the Soviet Union from the 1960s to 1990, as the major buyer of Cuban sugar, certainly helped stem the greatest effect of the US boycott of Cuba. At first the USA used its clout to convince many countries to join the embargo, but by the late 1990s most countries had decided to ignore it. In 2009, 187 countries in the UN General Assembly formally voted against the US embargo of Cuba.

zafra

Spanish word meaning ‘sugar-cane harvest’.



▲ Volunteers trying to reach their 10 million ton harvest target

Class discussion

Under what conditions will people rally behind causes for ethical reasons?
Why are material rewards needed for people to continue to support them?

As Fidel Castro aged and became ill, he delegated power to his younger brother Raúl Castro. Since being elected President by the Cuban National Assembly in 2008, Raúl Castro has opened up the acquisition of consumer goods, such as computers and mobile phones. He has improved the quality of public transportation with Chinese buses and continued to allow small private enterprises, such as restaurants, taxis and the lease of state land by farmers.

Social and cultural policies

Castro's social programmes were definitely in favour of the working classes. A countrywide literacy campaign, where students and literate volunteers travelled to rural locations in 1961 to teach other Cubans how to read and write, became emblematic of the first social policies of the revolutionary government. New schools were built and teacher-training institutes founded. The campaign was a resounding success and increased the government's popularity. Other popular measures included building rural hospitals and clinics and opening private beach resorts to the public. Even so, despite an initial rise in wages, living standards became uniformly low.



▲ Young women working for a literacy campaign, parading with big pencils in the streets of La Havana during the Cuban Revolution, 1 May 1961

As the guerrilla fighters began to take over the Cuban army, many pro-Batista officers were tried and executed in public trials. Although the world watched this gruesome display in disgust, the retribution sat well with many Cubans, who were tired of torturers and assassins in their military and police forces.



An important social development in revolutionary Cuba had to do with gender. As the 'playground of the Caribbean' and the site of mafia-owned gambling and prostitution rackets, Havana in the 1950s had been known for its 100 000 prostitutes, reputedly the highest amount of prostitutes per capita in the world. By 1961 the rehabilitation of prostitutes had begun. They were sent to boarding schools, often with childcare centres for their children, to be trained as seamstresses, textile workers in factories, workers in workshops and banks, and as drivers. They were given healthcare and psychological support. Some went on to further their studies.

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was founded in August 1961 by Vilma Espín, guerrilla fighter in the Sierra Maestra. She was a chemical engineer who had studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology when she joined the M-26-7. Later, she married Raúl Castro and became deeply involved in the Cuban government, especially in advancing women's education and equality. Under her leadership until her death in 2007, the FMC began by rehabilitating prostitutes, but soon Espín convinced Fidel Castro of the necessity of gender equality and opportunities if Cuba was to progress and socialism succeed. Women had to be incorporated into the workforce.

The FMC grew to 3 million members. Schools were organized all over Cuba, with a strong impetus to convince women to study. They were trained as office workers, mechanics, tractor operators and chicken producers, and received instruction on the tenets of socialism in Cuba. The FMC also organized centres for sex education, childcare facilities so that women could work outside the home and organized public health brigades where women were trained in vaccinating children.

ATL Communication skills

On YouTube, find the songs *Comandante Che Guevara* by Silvio Rodríguez (1965) and *El Chacal* by Jose Conde and Ola Fresca (2007).

Look at these video clips and listen to the two songs with a classmate, preferably one that understands Spanish. Do the songs sound similar? They are. However, the first song by Cuban singer Silvio Rodríguez praises Che Guevara as a mythical figure and hero of the revolution, while the second calls him 'El Chacal' or 'The Jackal'. It is by Cuban American José Conde, who sings about the Batista officials and sympathizers executed after summary trials led by Guevara in the early days of the revolutionary government.



▲ Vilma Espín (centre, in plaid skirt), President of the Federation of Cuban Women, welcomes Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, 1 November 1973

The FMC was also responsible for creating cultural campaigns among Cubans to end racial discrimination and prejudice against Afro-Cubans, as well as gender bias in the Cuban population. By 1974 the FMC began working on the Family Code, a truly revolutionary change in culture

ATL Communication and thinking skills

Read Vilma Espín's obituary, *Vilma Espin de Castro; Politician Empowered Women in Cuba*, in the US newspaper *The Washington Post*, 19 June 2007.

Compare this to the obituary issued by the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), *Vilma Espin, 1930-2007: A Heroine of the Cuban Revolution, A Builder of a New Society*, as well as Fidel Castro's words at the time of her death in 2007.

TOK discussion

How far can we say that the different political perspectives of these obituaries agree or disagree with Vilma Espín's life and accomplishments?

ATL Research skills

Trace the course of persecution of other minorities, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses, in Cuba after the revolution.

that called for both spouses to share fully in household and child-rearing tasks. Discussion groups were formed all over the country to explain and convince Cubans of the importance of gender equality in daily life, not just the workplace. Women faced fathers and husbands who traditionally had not allowed them to work outside the home. In 1953 only 13.5% of Cuban workers were female. The needs of the revolution turned out to be a strong argument. Some jobs could be done near home in the country, such as beekeeping, raising rabbits and chickens, and growing vegetables. Others required more study, for example, the professions. By 2012, females made up 46% of the Cuban workforce.

In addition, the Family Code attempted to change the culture of the double standard where men and women worked all day at a factory and came home for the woman to cook, care for the children and do laundry while the man rested. Although the double standard has diminished, if not entirely, women have an ear in the FMC should they require support at home.

Although the Family Code was revolutionary in changing traditional gender roles, this was done within the framework of traditional values of heterosexual marriage and family. Homosexual behaviour was punished in the penal code and during the 1960s the gay community was persecuted. Military Police raided beaches and gay bars and detained gays in re-education concentration camps. Gays and lesbians revoked their membership of the Communist Party. By the early 1970s the brutal raids and homophobia began to ease and public policy was liberalized by decriminalizing homosexuality in 1979. Vilma Espín's daughter, Mariela Castro, now heads the National Center for Sex Education where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, such as homophobia, are openly discussed starting in 5th grade classrooms.

The Cuban poet and novelist Reinaldo Arenas was persecuted for his homosexuality under Fidel Castro's regime. His writings were banned in Cuba, he fled the country and published numerous works in France and the USA. Suffering from AIDS, Arenas committed suicide in New York in 1990.

Treatment of opposition

At first, in 1959, support for Castro was overwhelming for his toppling of the hated Batista. As months went by, however, some moderates began to wonder about democratic elections. Castro avoided the issue of elections by giving in to popular demands relating to issues such as wages, universal education, agrarian reform and calling this more important. Fidel Castro said 'Politiquería (politicking) is as odious as tyranny'.

By April 1961, when Castro publicly announced that Cuba would be governed by the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) under his leadership, many M-26-7 and more moderate leaders in the government protested. When they resigned, they were joined by anti-communist Cubans, landowners and former Batista soldiers, forming a counter-



revolutionary guerrilla army in central Cuba. The CIA assisted them with air-dropped supplies. Still, support for Castro was enormous, and men and women joined in the defence of the revolution. The counter-revolutionary forces were defeated and thanks to **Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR)** in the cities, dissent was starkly reduced. Even so, in Castro's Cuba, political dissidents left the country or were jailed.

Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR)

Militias formed in Cuba by Castro in 1960, when foreign invasion appeared about to happen.

Successes and failures

Free and accessible education for all through to university and complete health coverage have been the much-touted successes of the revolution. Certainly, compared to conditions in 1959, this is so. Cuba has the lowest infant mortality in all of the Americas, for example. As for social and cultural changes, gender equality has improved markedly – 63% of university graduates are women, over 40% in scientific and technical fields. In the government, women comprise 40% of Cuban leaders.

By 1976, a new constitution entrenched the PCC rule with a state administration and popular organizations. These consisted of assemblies with elected officials and secret ballots who chose delegates to the National Assembly, 90% of whom were PCC members. The purpose was to practise daily socialism. Cuba has also continued to maintain strong armed forces.

After the 1980s and the end of Soviet support, there has been more economic liberalization, as manifested in farmers markets, fairs and private real estate. However, corruption has spread too, leading to many trials and jailings, including apparatchiks (members of the Communist Party) and dissidents.

In the 1991 Fourth PCC Congress, Fidel Castro unequivocally expressed: 'We are the only ones and there is no alternative'.

In 2000 the government began liberalizing agricultural cooperatives, legalizing self-employment and home-based tourist restaurants, trying to diversify the economy. However, the country is still dependent on the income from sugar.

As for failures, despite educational access for all, professionals find that this does not make for material improvement or good salaries. Until 1990, consumer goods were poor quality Soviet or Soviet bloc manufactured goods. Hard times for Cuba occurred after the end of Soviet subsidies in 1990 with the break-up of the Soviet Union. This also affected repairs of Soviet machinery and spare parts.

Another failure of the revolution is providing free, popular elections of leaders and representatives. More political participation in local cadres and block committees has occurred in the 21st century, but no national elections have been allowed and dependence on Fidel Castro's charismatic leadership has now switched to dependence on his brother Raúl. It has been hard to keep up revolutionary fervour for half a century, despite the Castros' ability to sense the needs of people and to inspire them with a common purpose; this fervour wears thin after 50 years.

In addition, despite the negative associations with the past when Havana was the playground of the Caribbean under Batista, Cuba has had to allow tourism and hotels to be built by Spain and other European, Korean and Chinese hotel chains. Through this, the island's tropical beauty and lovely climate can attract tourists and much-needed revenue.

The Cuban Revolution has proven more far-reaching than any in the Americas, including the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Cuba's economy was drastically changed to a classic communist model: central planning with very few private enterprises. It has a one-party communist system. An objective of communism is a classless society, and this was also a goal of the PCC. This has been changing in the last few decades with political connections or revolutionary pedigree creating some privilege.

On the positive side, the levels of literacy and professionalism as a result of education for all, free medical care and extended life expectancy all compare favourably with western European countries. Rural Cuba has profited from this especially and has avoided rural to urban migration, thereby supporting sugar and agriculture.

In the final analysis, it can be ascertained that the revolution succeeded in spreading the wealth in the country and providing equity among Cubans, as demonstrated by excellent medical coverage and educational opportunities for all. This also includes other areas of achievement, such as sports. Cuban athletes have excelled in boxing, as well as in other Olympic sports. Literacy levels are one of the highest in the world: 99.8%, according to the 2010 census.

Impact of the Cuban Revolution

US reaction

In 1960, Fidel Castro made a trip to the USA. As retaliation for Cuban expropriations of US investments in Cuba, the Cuban Airlines airplane that brought him to New York was taken over by the US government.

At first the USA waited and observed, but by 1961 decided to act by supporting, financing and training a group of Cuban exiles covertly by the CIA. President Eisenhower broke diplomatic ties with Cuba in January 1961. After intelligence reports affirmed that once an invasion took place Cubans would all join the exile army against the Castro regime, he authorized an invasion of Cuba with US support in April 1961 at the Bay of Pigs. The results were a fiasco, as the Cuban people were organized and able to repel the attack.

The Cuban reaction reaffirmed and strengthened Castro, who then came out as a socialist '**Marxist-Leninist**', but also as a nationalist defending Cuba from foreign invasion. This led to the creation of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a popular militia that surged from 300 000 to 800 000 members. Cuba got closer to the Soviet Union and, especially in the 1970s, adapted Soviet institutions and models to Cuban reality.

Castro was always afraid of another US invasion. By 1962 the Soviet Union was actively arming the Cuban defence system. The USA sent U-2 spy planes to take photographs in Cuba and these showed that the Soviet Union was installing a nuclear missile base in Cuba, to defend it from

ATL Communication skills

Watch the video clip called *Fidel Castro speaks English to American reporters* on YouTube.

Listen carefully to Castro protesting the US takeover of the Cuban Airlines airplane.

Despite his English language difficulties, how successfully does Castro convey his feelings and opinions?

Marxist–Leninist

Term used to refer to someone who adheres to the communist principles espoused by Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin.



another US invasion (see page 405 for information on the Cuban Missile Crisis). The world watched aghast, as US President John F Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev were 'eyeball to eyeball' on the brink of nuclear war. After intense negotiation, the Soviet Union removed missiles and the USA promised not to invade Cuba.

The Cuban revolution prompted Kennedy's **Alliance for Progress**, as a way of promoting peaceful instead of violent revolution. Later it was deemed more practical to support anti-communist governments and dictatorships that were willing to receive US aid to suppress communist guerrillas in their countries (see, for example, El Salvador).

After 1975 the USA was unable to keep countries such as Italy, Mexico, Canada and Spain from trading with Cuba. Between 1970–75 eight Latin American countries established diplomatic relations with Cuba. In 1996 the USA passed the Helms–Burton Act in order to put more pressure on countries that wanted to trade with Cuba. This included suing international companies that used former US-owned businesses in Cuba. Due to firm opposition abroad, as well as a strong anti-Castro Cuban lobby in the US state of Florida, US Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama have not implemented these measures fully. So far, no US Congress has allowed for the lifting of the embargo on the grounds of Cuba's lack of democracy and human rights abuses. However, these serious issues have not stopped the USA from supporting the military dictatorships in Guatemala and Chile, or authoritarian oil-producing governments in the Middle East and Africa.

In 2009 President Barack Obama lifted travel bans and money remittances to Cuba by Cuban Americans, but at the time of writing, his administration has not been able to lift the embargo. However, diplomatic relations between the two countries are now on the road to normalization, after Presidents Obama and Raúl Castro met at the Summit of the Americas in Panama in April, 2015. Party politics and losing precious Cuban American votes appear to be the causes.

Alliance for Progress

US aid program offered to Latin American countries by US President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to help improve the social and economic conditions that would encourage socialist revolutions.

ATL Communication and thinking skills

Look at this contemporary cartoon about the Missile Crisis.



- 1 Where is Cuba in this cartoon?
- 2 What message does this convey about Cuba's role in the crisis?

Effect on Latin America and the Caribbean

An important immediate effect of the Cuban Revolution in Latin America and the Caribbean has been the sheer vitality of the revolutionaries in engaging popular support to topple an abusive regime. Soon after, as Cuba became a communist country defying US geopolitical hegemony in the Americas, the Cuban example caused admiration and, in some cases, desire for imitation. This caused members of the new Cuban revolutionary government to consider exporting the revolution as inspiration for young revolutionists all over the continent in the 1960s and 1970s. The Argentine Che Guevara was one of the strongest proponents of this, although Fidel Castro, ever mindful of US retaliation, was more cautious. For Che Guevara, it ended in death in Bolivia in 1968 while he was exporting the revolution there.



▲ Erich Blossl was a German aid worker in 1967 when Bolivian military officers asked him to photograph Guevara's corpse. His photograph circled the globe and remains a haunting image to this day.

Cuba continued to inspire leftist revolutionaries after the creation of OLAS (the Organization of Latin American Solidarity) to support communist parties and revolutionists such as the Tupamaros in Uruguay and Salvador Allende's socialist government in Chile in 1970 and in Angola in Africa in the mid 1970s.

Impact on the world

In the 1960s and 1970s at least 50 000 Cubans in the military were sent to assist African rebels in Angola and South Africa. It can be said that they helped to overturn the apartheid government in South Africa.

Cuban doctors and health workers have been sent abroad starting in 1963, when the first medical workers were sent to Algeria. Cuban doctors were the first responders in the Haiti earthquake in 2010. The Cuban government has also sent teachers, nurses and engineers as advisers to developing countries, particularly in Africa.

ATL Social and communication skills

Find out if there are Cuban immigrants in your community and interview them as to their opinions on the Cuban Revolution's successes and failures.