

PART TWO OF TWO

SUBJECT: CUBA : VALEDICTORY

TROPICOLLAGE

7. Many well-intentioned British visitors to Cuba assume the role of experts by taking in a short and agreeable 'tropicollage'. We lack a Cuban exile community in Britain unlike Miami, Spain, Italy, and France.

So real knowledge about Fidel, his objectives and methods is scarce. Those who live here see the fear of most Cubans to make even anodyne criticisms.

We used, perhaps reasonably, to give Castro the benefit of the doubt. Is Cuba really worse than the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean in human rights? And Cuba's inclusiveness of health and education are a reality. Extra-judicial killings are indeed rare; though beatings and harassment commonplace. Crime and corruption are not in world rankings but are growing. The main difference in Cuba is that it is the law which limits freedom of expression, formation of parties and trade unions, access to information, freedom of assembly, travel, and rights over property and employment. So the sacrifices Cubans have made for their modest benefits continue to be enormous.

US/CUBA;EU/CUBA

8. The US dimension remains difficult. Most Cubans want change (I would guess over two-thirds) quickly. Most, though, do not want free-market capitalism or an imposed US solution. Due to ceaseless propaganda, many Cubans fear the implications of freedom but realise that what they have is suffocating and sterile.

Castro has used the US embargo to maintain his control and to point to the external aggressor. He probably never wants it lifted. That would be the best reason for the US to do so. The embargo has had some effect in limiting tourism receipts, access to IFIs and dissuading overseas' investors. But it is not the major reason why big economies like Japan, India, China, Mexico, Brazil are small economic partners for Castro.

The EU, despite everything, has stuck to the Common Position and non-coercive diplomatic measures. A lot of Cubans have noticed. The EU, the major commercial and cultural partner here, needs to remain active in Cuba, retaining the initiative with an ever more proactive outreach to civil society.

## FUTURE

9 The future - whenever that starts - should be bright for Cuba. My first impressions have not changed. We use Cuba's special allure to get many visitors to come out here for expenses only. Cuba's resources too are more than enough to build prosperity. Most now agree what needs to be done. Despite widespread resignation, we may see more intellectuals and the Church finding ways of saying so before Castro dies. Few countries have been held back so obstinately by their leader. Cuba is sitting on a goldmine of wealthy diaspora families and the certainty of massive US reconstruction money. There will be opportunities and respect for EU and UK companies and institutions beyond any resumption of full US relations.

Paya and some other remarkable Cubans promote social and economic reason and argue for reconciliation. Some 300 other peaceful opposition remain in jail

The UK can help encourage optimism and confidence that there are better solutions, whilst preserving some achievements of the Revolution. Cubans will need plenty of can-do to rebuild society from the roots. But Cuba has always been amongst the most fertile of lands.