

EDITORIAL

THIS ISSUE

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This issue of the *International Journal of Cuban Studies (IJCS)* was prepared in the early Spring of 2024. Readers would be reminded that this was the time when the US presidential election cycle was still in the primary process, the genocidal bombardment and invasion of Gaza was still underway, and the second anniversary of the Russian military action in Ukraine was being marked. Unsurprisingly, in Cuba, all of these events were topics of discussion because they all, in one way or another, had portentous implications for the future of the revolution. Judging how the shifting sands of the geopolitical landscape might affect the island is one of the key purposes of this journal and to that end, while acknowledging these external forces are not overtly discussed in this edition, we offer these articles to provide context and background to the evolving political and economic developments in Cuba at this worrying juncture for the world. What they suggest is that despite the cleavages that are widening between Cuba's allies (Russia, Iran, and China) and its neighbours (the US and Canada) there are very significant reasons to suppose that world trends will not affect the bilateral relationships that much.

Marcel Kunzmann is a young researcher who recently joined the editorial board of the *IJCS*, and he has contributed a highly detailed and cogently argued Special Report on the economic situation he found in the island on an extended visit there in January and February. He writes that Cuba has now passed the phase of timid "reform socialism" and is facing the challenge of developing a new form of relationship between plan and market. He suggests the process must become one of reform "with Cuban characteristics" that definitively puts the island on the stated long-term goal of a "prosperous and sustainable socialism". This will require rethinking decades-old structural economic challenges. The outcome of this huge endeavour may not be certain, he concludes, but if Cuba does achieve success, it would not be the first time that Caribbean socialism has surprised the world.

Peter McKenna from the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, analyses the decades-long Canadian–Cuban relationship. He says it poses several interesting and insightful questions about the “what” and “why” of Canada–Cuba relations. It has endured, he concludes, because of the economic and political advantages afforded by the “US factor” that allows Canada to play the “Cuba card” and expand its footprint in the Americas. Second, he says, the Cubans have undertaken significant efforts to make the bilateral relationship work. In addition, the hundreds of thousands of Canadian tourists, valuable educational and cultural ties, important business linkages and active solidarity groups in Canada all make anything other than engaging with the Cubans more difficult. Moreover, officials in Ottawa realize that the opposite of engagement would entail embracing a failed US approach to Cuba, which is obviously a political and economic non-starter. Lastly, the electoral considerations alone are not lost on Canadian political leaders and thus require the continuation of constructive relations with Havana.

Understanding the Canada relationship is followed by an article from Havana on the Helms Burton Act and how it maintains an iron grip on US policy towards Cuba. Ariadna Cornelio Hitchman of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Seida Barrera Rodríguez and Ernesto Dominguez Lopez of the University of Havana study the Helms-Burton Act as an intersection of domestic and foreign policy, American law, and international law. They explain the making of the law as an illegitimate process. They discuss the legality of the statute within the American law and point out its inconsistencies and open contradictions with the constitutional framework of the United States, as it violates some its core principles and provisions. They further examine the legality of the Helms-Burton Act according to the international law and determine that it violates several fundamental principles included in the Charter of the United Nations and other major international treaties and charters of international organisations, of which the United States is signatory. As such, the “law” is in fact not legislation in the true sense of the term. The article underlines that regardless of who might win the presidential election, policy towards Cuba is unlikely to change.

In the article that follows: “American Tourists in Cuba: Implications of Cross-Cultural Encounters” Lana Wylie of McMaster University, Canada, explains how, despite the Helms Burton Act, following the Cold War, Americans returned to the island as visitors. This grew especially after Raúl Castro and Barack Obama began to “normalize” relations. Although the numbers have declined during the Trump presidency and the pandemic, interest in traveling to Cuba remains and a significant number of Americans continue to visit the island. Using an “other diplomacies” framework, Lana discusses the impact of tourism encounters on the evolution of the US–Cuba relationship, paying attention to the

degree to which encounters between American citizens and Cubans have the potential to inform public opinion and influence the relationship between the two societies and their polities. She concludes that despite the restrictions on travel to Cuba that were reimposed by the Trump administration many Americans remain interested in Cuba and would like to travel there. These connections have the potential to have a major influence on the future of relations between the two countries.

US citizens' travelling to Cuba is one tie that binds their two countries, but it is not the most significant. Rafael J. Betancourt of University of Havana argues that Cuban Residents Abroad (CRA) are an even greater force that moderates the relationship. He shows how this group that amounts to 10% of the entire Cuban population has the potential to significantly contribute to Cuba's economy through tourism and remittances. CRA constitute a huge diaspora, with strong ties to Cuba. Their travel to the island, even if primarily to visit family, has a notable economic impact, especially on private and local economies. Remittances from CRA are also substantial, representing a top source of foreign earnings for Cuba, though recently limited by US restrictions. However, various obstacles still hinder the CRA's full economic participation, including outdated policies, limited travel services catering to CRA, and complicated remittance channels. The Cuban government could boost CRA contributions by facilitating their travel, investment, and remittances through updated policies, expanded local initiatives, allowance of more private sector participation, and overall reintegration of CRA into economic life. Balancing CRA participation with equitable development, however, remains a challenge.

The final academic article in this issue is by Rosalina Montes, Leosveli Vasallo and Lourdes M. Martínez, from the University of Cienfuegos, Cuba and Antonio Escarré and Andreu Bonet, of the University of Alicante, Spain. They trace the development of Coffee production in Cuba from 1950 to 2017. They show that production had its highest value in 1961, but since then has steadily decreased. They evaluate coffee production through a chronological series of data: production (production, yield) and cultivation areas, and determine the influence of the loss of productive areas on the productive values. In the period since 1961 they show that the evaluated variables decreased significantly by 36.8%. They argue that this decline is mainly due to internal factors: armed conflicts, migration, inadequate management, and the economic crisis.

Broadly speaking these articles underline how Cuba's future remains in its hands. The government has achieved a great deal of sovereignty within the context of an asymmetric relationship with its closely neighbouring superpower. Without doubt, the nature of the Helms-Burton Law makes a change in this relationship extremely difficult to foresee anytime soon. However, there are

significant forces, mainly stemming from civil society and business, that mitigate the potential for an even bigger rift to develop. Without a change in the fundamental Blockade policy of the US, all that Cuba can do is pursue a domestic agenda that must try to develop the productive forces without undermining the socialist nature of the revolution. Continuing to maintain a good relationship with Canada, reform the economy, encourage tourism and the laws regarding the Cuban Residents Abroad, are four ways forward suggested here.