

A horizontal banner with a dark green background. On the left side, there is a lighter green, semi-transparent graphic of the Spanish flag, showing the three horizontal stripes and a star. The title text is centered over the banner.

**THE SPANISH TRANSITION AND  
THE CASE OF CUBA**

**By  
Carlos Alberto Montaner**

**INSTITUTE FOR CUBAN AND CUBAN-AMERICAN STUDIES**  

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**UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI**





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# Cuba Transition Project – CTP

The Cuba Transition Project, at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies (ICCAS), University of Miami, is an important and timely project to study and make recommendations for the reconstruction of Cuba once the post-Castro transition begins in earnest. The transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, Nicaragua, and Spain are being analyzed and lessons drawn for the future of Cuba. The project began in January 2002 and is funded by a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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- The CTP is publishing original research, with practical alternative recommendations on various specific aspects of the transition process, commissioned and written for the CTP by ICCAS Staff and U.S. and foreign scholars with expertise on Cuba.
- The CTP is developing four key databases:
  1. A full-text database of published and unpublished articles written on topics of transition in Cuba, as well as articles on transition in Central and Eastern Europe, Nicaragua, and Spain. It also includes an extensive bibliography of published and unpublished books, theses, and dissertations on the topic.
  2. A full-text database of Cuba's principal laws, in Spanish, its legal system, including the current Cuban Constitution (in English and Spanish), and other legislation relating to the structure of the existing government. Also included are the full-text of law review articles on a variety of topics
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Prepared for the Cuba Transition Project (CTP)  
Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies  
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**By**

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## **Introduction**

On November 20, 1975, at 83 years of age, General Francisco Franco died after having ruled with a strong hand in an authoritarian dictatorship that had begun in 1939. Surprisingly, Franco's death marked the start or acceleration of the process of democratization that managed in only a few years to completely tear down a regime created after the victory of the "nationals" in the civil war (1936-1939). The aim of this paper is to examine this experience in order to determine if it may prove a useful study for the Cuban people today, given that Cuban President Fidel Castro has reached the age of 76 and ruled for 44 years in a tyranny that is displaying clear symptoms of exhaustion.

## **Spain and Cuba: Parallel Histories**

The peoples of Spain and Cuba often fail to realize the historical similarities shared by both countries throughout much of the twentieth century. Many often perceive the rupture of 1898 as a total severing of ties that split the political destinies of the two nations, yet a more detailed examination reveals evidence to the contrary.

During the 1920s, Cuba as well as Spain underwent tense moments during which the principles of democracy were weakened. In the West, the conflict between communism and fascism began to intensify, characterized by social chaos and violence, with numerous assassinations and a high degree of murders carried out against union members. In a majority of the towns located in the Peninsula and Cuba, both edges of the Atlantic pleaded for a political "strong hand" so as to reorganize the common life. In 1923, the wave of institutional disarray and failure brought to power General Primo de Rivera who, convinced of the virtues of fascism, put an end to half a century of rule under the parliamentary monarchy, which had emerged during the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in 1875. A majority of Spanish society welcomed Rivera's arrival with relief.

In 1925, Cuba elected General Gerardo Machado precisely because

he was perceived as an energetic man capable of “meter en cintura.” As Secretary of Gobernacion during the administration of José Miguel Gómez (1909-1912), Machado had left behind a legacy as a military man who would not tolerate misbehavior, even if he had been the one to order the violations. During this period, characterized by low sugar prices, constant union uproar, and a few scandalous political assassinations, the Cubans, in addition to “homes, roads, and schools,” as promised by Machado, demanded order. The General, nationalist and, to a certain degree, anti-Spanish, believed that one path to obtaining order would be the deportation of rebellious immigrants living in the old capital to Spain. He accused them of being anarchical union members or communist gangsters.

Political ties existed between the riada of the Spanish immigrants in Cuba, mainly from Galicia, Asturias, and the Canary Islands, and thus it is not strange that some collusion would exist between these and the more radical Cuban union members. A stream of pro-Spanish sentiment was also evident in Cuba, as demonstrated by the creation of a volunteer battalion composed of Hispanic-Cubans who fought in the colonial war of Morocco alongside Madrid. Thus, for many Cubans and the significant number of Spanish immigrants who were arriving in Cuba or returning from their homeland, the developments in Spain were experienced in an intimate fashion. For example, the assassinations of the Spanish Jefes de Gobierno Eduardo Dato and José Canalejas were planned or executed by Spaniards previously living in Cuba, and the murder of José Calvo Sotela — a primary instigator of the Spanish civil war — was carried out by a Cuban assassin who had escaped from Cuba following General Machado’s flight. Such phenomena bear strong resemblance to the fate of Antonio Cánovas del Castillo who, toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fell victim to an Italian anarchist armed and funded in Paris by exiled members of the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

As such, at the beginning of the 1930s, both the Spanish and Cuban “strong hand” governments begin to undergo crises. In 1930, President Primo de Rivera resigned, and in 1931, following municipal elections in which a broad coalition of republicans, Catalonian nationals and socialists gained power. King Alfonso XIII also resigned and marched into exile. The Bourbons once again exited the political arena. For the second



time in less than six decades, the Spanish was testing the republican model of organizing the state.

In Cuba, the political convulsions prove different but equally intense. Machado's government, which had arrived to power through democratic means, had delegitimated itself through its actions contrary to the law. By extending his authority via a docile parliament that violated the Constitution of 1901 in the midst of an economic crisis generated by the "crac" of 1929, Machado hastened a widespread insurrection that culminated in 1933 with the resignation and exile of the general and the dissolution of his government.

If in 1931 Spain inaugurated the second republic, and in 1933 the Cubans experienced the first revolution, both political jolts ended in disaster. In 1936, prefaced by a wide array of disorder, the Spanish civil war commenced only to conclude three years later after the death of thousands and the ascension of General Francisco Franco, proclaimed the "Leader of Spain by the grace of God," a traditionally medieval way to establish the authority of the monarchs.

The Spanish civil war also was experienced fervently both within and outside of Cuba: within, the acrid division in the Cuban political society between the republicans and the nationalists testified to the war's far-reaching effects, while abroad, the war spurred the participation of more than one thousand volunteers in the conflict, the majority of whom were drafted by the communists to serve in the International Brigades. Given the diminutive size of the Cuban population at the time — barely four million — the number of volunteers was proportionately the greatest number offered by any nation in the defense of the Spanish republic, which demonstrates to the great extent that developments in Spain were seen by Cuban natives as their own.

Yet, the failure of the republic was not limited to Spain. In Cuba, between 1933 and 1940, following the collapse of the Machado administration, a former military sergeant, Fulgencio Batista, would assume the role of national leader. Batista, however, would rule in the shadows from the military barracks while a few nominal government officials in essence occupied the presidency. This eliminated or debilitated the institutional framework, while the judicial system and the equilibrium of power that should accompany a true republic was also expunged. Cuba finally

regained institutional democracy in 1940, and Batista emerged as the victor in reasonably credible elections that would be followed by two “authentic” governments.

Thus, the two countries, in a parallel manner, were entering a period of relative political tranquility, despite the fact that in Spain the period of calm was ushered in under the boot of the military and the sign of fascism. Concurrently, formal democratic norms welcomed Cuba’s political serenity. These norms were later destroyed in 1952, when Batista, via a military coup, dissolved the legitimate government of Carlos Prío, in turn precipitating an armed insurrection that seven years later spurred the appearance of Castro on the Cuban political panorama.

## **Change and Paralysis in Spain**

Further study of the historical political landscape of both Spain and Cuba reveals other notable similarities. Franco had emerged as the youngest general in European history — in 1939 he was only in his 40s — and as such during his time at the head of the country made few moves to establish mechanisms for the transition of power or to return the country to the level of normalcy it had previously enjoyed. Indeed, the support Franco had received from the Spanish middle-class had not been one aimed at anti-democratic rule, but instead offered in an attempt to find an end to the disorder, violence, anti-Catholicism, and Catalanian and Basque separatist movements. Yet, shunning the conservatism that characterized the national Catholic movement and focusing on the vision afforded to him by the Falanges, who had accompanied him on his victorious military campaign, Franco interpreted the popular support he had received as well as his own political triumph as an invitation to create a regime not only different from that of the brief Second Republic, but also from that of the reviled political structure of liberal parliamentary monarchy established during the Restoration.

Upon the conclusion of World War II and the defeat of nazi-fascism, Franco began to come under divergent pressures for change in the direction of democracy. One of these pressures mirrored all regimes whose organizing principle rests on the nearly exclusive authority of a single

leader: What to do when this Messiah, who enjoys the absence of either competition of parallel, disappears from the political spectrum? Logically, the answer to the aforementioned question centers on generating mechanisms for transition, but such a process requires establishing institutions and awakening the aspirations of other individuals.

In 1945, Juan de Borbón, son of King Alfonso XIII and friend of democratic political ideology, asked again for the restoration of the monarchy. Franco ignored Borbón's call, but began to warm to the idea of reaching a compromise between the Western institutions of democracy and his "strong hand" regime. As such, Franco imagined his democracy as one of an "organic" nature that did not rely on "disorganized" political parties, but instead functioned on the foundations of society's natural organizing principles: families, unions, and economic producers. In turn, Franco discovered in fascism a way in which to sustain his personal power indefinitely.

Hence, Franco came to the conclusion that a monarchy headed by Don Juan would soon revert back to the decadent liberal excesses of the days of King Alfonso XIII, but surely would result in a starkly divergent regime if Juan Carlos, Don Juan's son, were educated in the principles and values of the Movement. Should the time arrive for Juan Carlos to assume power and the heir to the throne exhibit signs of subordination to the moral and political authority on Franquism, as well as a commitment to extending the work initiated by the triumph of 1939, then Restoration could serve to ensure the persistence of Franquism. Meanwhile, a political phenomenon — global in scale — contributed to the consolidation of Franquism: the Cold War worked to generate a shift in Washington's assessment of Franco's Spain from a former ally of the Nazis to a US ally in the struggle against communism within the global strategy of "containment" against the imperial power of the Soviet Union. In 1951, the United States and Spain re-established diplomatic relations, in 1953 the first U.S. military bases were installed on Spanish soil, and in 1955 Spain gained admittance to the United Nations (UN).

In 1962, Franco began to believe he could simultaneously maintain the political pillars of the regime while preparing the country for his absence. For some years the young Prince Juan Carlos had received a painstaking education in the arenas of political ideology and did not

exhibit symptoms of subscribing to the commotion characteristic of the Western democracies. As such, the moment arrived to declare that, at the proper time, when Franco's omniscient hand was no longer present, the monarchy would be restored and Juan Carlos would occupy the leadership role of the state as King. Yet, the oversight of the government and the management of the public sector would remain in the hands of man with a "strong hand", much like Franco's, who would continue with the work of the Movement. In 1967, Franco, certain of the individual who would replicate his strong man rule, named Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco to that position. From that moment on Franco began to state, first in private and then in public, that "the future is certain, quite certain." Indeed, Franco appears quite confident that, after his death, the character of his regime would continue unabated.

Nonetheless, the Spanish people did not have to wait for Franco's death to witness changes that signaled a substantial modification of the fundamentals of Franquism. Throughout the 1950s, the Falanges begin to lose power while the Catholics, in a context much more receptive of progressive thought, acquired strength. Finally, in 1959 the technocrats with ties to *Opus Dei* assumed control of the economy and liberalized it, hence aligning Spanish finances with the global markets while also welcoming foreign investment. The economic framework envisioned by the autocratic-nationalism was abandoned. Spain aimed to integrate itself into Europe, where the wheels of the Common Market had already begun to turn. Obviously, in order to reach their objective, it proved necessary not only to liberalize the economy but also to loosen the reigns on certain civil liberties. Consequently, in 1966 the young minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne proposed a law, subsequently ratified, eliminating media censorship. The move proved to be one step in the right direction.

In December of 1973, the assassination of Carrero Blanco by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) [Basque Homeland and Freedom] generated tremendous political reverberations. In a single moment, the regime's ideological successor had disappeared when an explosion launched his vehicle onto the terrace roof of a nearby building, killing both Blanco and his driver. ETA had emerged at the start of the 1970s as a Basque separatists organization, but throughout its struggle had been developing communist perspectives. Franco, at 81 years of age and ailing, found both his

mechanisms for a smooth succession of power had vanished. Would, then, the future of Franquism still be “certain, quite certain?”

The man chosen to succeed Carrero Blanco and manage the survival of Franquism was former Attorney General Carlos Arias Navarro. He was infamous for being a hard-liner, but in the end he did not live up to his reputation. While the Spanish appeared officially satisfied with the regime, as reflected in electoral consultations, it soon became evident that an enormous amount of internal pressure pointed in the direction of democracy and pluralism. “Democrats” — normally a term reserved for the enemies of Franquism, whether or not they were subscribers to the ideology — among the military, the bishops, the judges, the professors, and the old political parties were struggling to emerge from the underground known to the political police who preferred to scrutinize the activities of its enemies rather than obstruct or disrupt them. Finally, imbued with a great deal of realism, Arias Navarro authorized a law allowing political associations, in turn channeling the still embryonic emergence of distinct parties within the Movement.

In 1974, Franco’s deteriorating health came into public light and the opposition began to mobilize for the era of post-Franquism. The general consensus among the political class, especially within the camps of the opposition, held that despite any precautionary measures directed by the Pardo Palace or the strength of the regime or the economic bonanza in which Spain found itself, Franquism could not survive without Franco. Why not? Essentially, the political class realized that the political system rested on moral illegitimacy and that a non-fascist regime could not successfully rule through oppression and force. This was despite the fact that Franco — a leader born not out of ideology but of the barracks — had convinced himself that the “demons” that stood as obstacles to the realization of a Spain characterized by social harmony were the tendencies of Spaniards toward anarchy and an inability to surrender themselves to the rule of law (impulses Franco believed stemmed from the “perfidious Masons, the Jews, the gold belonging to Moscow, and the illogical traditions of liberalism”). As such, while Franco held that the rule of law should always manifest itself in a strong and authoritative voice that could deliver order to his fellow citizens, his attempts to translate these beliefs into the dogma of his political regime failed.

Hence, by 1974, Franquism suffered from the loss of its mystical component. The majority of its subscribers now based their adherence on personal interests, the memory of the civil war, the weight of inertia and the supposed lack of advantages afforded them by a change in governance. A majority of the forty million Spaniards enjoyed per capita incomes approximating 75 percent of that exhibited by the European Community, unemployment remained low, 80 percent of the population owned homes, and the level of individual savings stored by the country's solid banking institutions proved exemplary. Thus, why embark upon a struggle for change?

Simply put, the political class has become increasingly demoralized and dissatisfied with the Franquist regime. Those younger members of Spanish society, who had not directly experienced the civil war but had reaped its benefits, did not exhibit strong ties to Franquism but instead embraced the opposition. The European Community stood as an attractive political structure for most Spaniards, while Franquism, despite its positive economic results, had become ideologically bankrupt. As reality dictates, any political regime that fails to gain social acceptance can only continue to maintain a thin degree of legitimacy through the use of force — Iraq's Saddam Hussein serves as a prime example — or by demonstrating that it rests upon a unique moral foundation. However, during the mid-1970s, Franco's regime grew unwilling to undertake a methodology of repression or engage in a serious internal debate concerning political and ethical questions increasingly posed by members of Spanish society. Change, thus, proved inevitable.

## **Change and Paralysis in Cuba**

Resembling Franco two decades before, Castro came to power in 1959 as a consequence of a military victory over the dictatorship. At 33 years of age, Castro's legitimacy rested on his military victory over Fulgencio Batista and afforded him the opportunity to assume the undisputed leadership of Cuba. While an exhaustive examination of Castro's rise to power moves beyond the scope of this paper, it does prove important to touch upon one detail: Castro, while publicly committing himself

to the restoration of democracy and the Constitution of 1940 — which remained the main desires of the Cuban population and the objectives agreed upon by the opposition, including the Movement of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July — secretly aimed to perpetuate his power and construct a regime that would break with liberal and republican traditions of Cuba. Castro, much like Franco, exhibited Messianic characteristics and viewed himself as the founder of a new nation that, ideologically, would distance itself from the first 57 years of Cuba’s republican life. Both dictators defended their distinct ideas, and coincided in their moves to break with the past and envision themselves quite similarly in near god-like status.

Cuban civil society underwent a serious process of debilitation and destruction throughout the 1970s. While Franco found a method and ideological alibi to found his personal dictatorship in fascism, Castro found the same in communism. Not only was 95 percent of Cuba’s productive machinery, both industrial and service oriented, appropriated by the state in its effort to engender a communist state, but all private organizations were dismantled as well, thus circumscribing public political participation to a militant arena constituted by a handful of institutions under the rigid control of the state: the CTC, the Federation of Cuban Women, the Communist Party of Cuba, and the Writers’ and Artists’ Union of Cuba, to name a few. In reality, these organizations served not as associations through which the citizenry could aggregate to defend shared principles and ideas, but defended the totalitarian model of rule imposed by Castro.

The similarities between Franco and Castro also spill over into the geopolitical arena, as both found their respective form of salvation in the Cold War. Faced with the looming figure of the United States, Cuba sought protection from the Soviet Union, who at the times meant to establish global hegemony by disseminating its model of governance throughout the Third World. Cuba agreed to the establishment of Soviet military bases within its territory as Spain did for Washington and joined the (CALECON) as a protected partner. Gradually, the Cuban regime lost its distinctiveness and, following increased levels of inflation and the failure of the “\$10 million sugar crop” in 1970. Eventually, such factors led the government to copy the Soviet model of production and administration of the few resources the country could utilize.

By the mid-1970s, Castro faced the dilemma of succession and

regime institutionalization. The chaotic era of the revolution had apparently reached its conclusion and the time had come for the creation of an infrastructure capable of supporting the regime once the generation of “founding fathers” no longer existed. During the time, the (PPC) held its first Congress. A new constitution modeled on that of Bulgaria, which, like all the “brothers of the East” was based on the Soviet model of the 1930s is drafted. Castro also established a line of succession which placed the leadership of the country in the hands of his brother, Raúl Castro, should he not be able to continue. Unlike Franco in Spain, Cuba opted not to institute a division between the leadership of the state and that of the government. Like Franco’s choice of Juan Carlos and Carrero Blanco to prolong his rule in his absence, Castro placed that responsibility on his brother’s shoulders, who was only five years younger than Castro.

Nonetheless, as in Spain at the edges of Franco’s will, opposition forces emerged in an attempt to gain parcels of power and attract government officials who did not adhere to the orthodox ideology. As such, the “institutionalization” of communism in Cuba created opportunities for the surfacing of “reformists” and those looking to widen the political space. In doing so, they sought to distance themselves from the unadulterated ideology espoused by Castro. The case of Humberto Pérez, a Cuban economist, serves as a prime example of such dissension: Pérez moved to decentralize the administration and create market mechanisms that made Castro quite nervous. Only a few years before the same role had been undertaken by Carlos Aldana, who, at the height of Gorbachov’s *perestroika*, believed it possible to relegate Castro to the role of a “queen mother” who did not take part in the work of government. Naturally, Aldana ended up displaced from power and discredited within the inner circle of Fidel and Raúl Castro as he faced accusations of corruption. A decade later, accused of coveting Castro’s authority, Roberto Robaina, the young and eccentric foreign minister, faced the same end.

By the start of the 1980s, Castro became discouraged by the Soviet-style bureaucratization of Cuba and the loss of personal power that such a process signified. In response, Castro launched a political agenda based on “rectifying errors.” In doing so, Castro moved the government away from both the free market system and previously established material incentives. Unbeknownst to him at the time, such a policy would lead the



country in the opposite direction of Gorbachov's *perestroika*. Indeed, the political gap proved most evident in the most well-informed ministries and departments, such as the Ministries of External Commerce, External Relations, and Internal Relations. The Cuban nomenclature soon grew resentful of the Cuban regime's reorientation and, in a clandestine manner, divided itself between reformers and hardliners. Yet, given the prevalent nature of Castro's command at the time, the reformists soon adopted the hardliner platform. Indeed, the entire process resembled a choir orchestrated by the political police.

In 1989, Generals Ochoa and Tony of the National Guard were executed. Their assassinations pointed to links with narco-trafficking elements, but it must be noted that their deaths also stemmed from the discovery of secret recordings of the two men joking about Castro and disparaging the "revolutionary project" while in the Ministry of the Interior. That same year, the Berlin Wall as well as the Soviet Union crumbled. In Cuba, Raúl Castro assumed authority in the Ministry of the Interior, which at that point became "occupied" by the military, and the government struggled to devise a formula to sustain the system without resorting to change, despite the forthcoming absence of Soviet aid. What emerges is *gatopardismo* at its finest: the granting of slight alterations as marginal concessions needed to ensure that the system remains intact. During this time period dollarization arrived, as did public and private corporations, and *cuentapropismo* marked the reemergence of peasant markets and the conversion of state granges into cooperatives. Such measures stood not as ways to sustain the communist model but instead to prop it up during its lowest moment.

Faced with the aforementioned developments, many *criptorreformistas* begin to believe that the revolution had entered a period of real change. However, both Fidel and Raúl Castro — the former the most vehemently — labored to pause any substantive alterations to their form of rule. The National Assembly of Popular Power, presided over by Ricardo Alarcón, publicly responded to the Cuban Democratic Platform and rejected any form of dialogue with the opposition. The young Roberto Robaina was designated the Chancellor due to a specific educational characteristic: *Granma* announced that he stood as the analyst most capable of interpreting Castro's thinking. During the 1990s, the

party held two congressional meetings, and through such associations the unalterable principles of Marxist-Leninism were ratified.

In the same manner in which the level of the regime's repression diminished during the "tardofranquismo" and as a consequence of Spain's necessity to integrate itself into Europe, in Cuba a similar diminishment evolved out of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's prioritization of human rights on the U.S. foreign policy agenda and the Soviet acceptance of the Helsinki agreement. Indeed, these critical junctures lead to the liberation and expatriation of thousands of Cuban political prisoners, as well as the emergence of political space for the opposition through the accentuation of human rights norms. In Cuba, the latter phenomena's origins are evident in the release of prisoners from the communist rank and file such as Ricardo Bofill and Adolfo Rivero Caro and dissidents from the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement, such as Gustavo and Sebastián Arcos or Dr. Martha Frayde.

Following the new prominence of human rights on the geopolitical agenda, professional Cubans such as a group of independent lawyers form the organization "Ignacio Agramonte" began to establish themselves at the margins of the state. Soon, the establishment of such organizations was followed by the appearance of independent associations of journalists, economists, doctors and bookstores. In the province of Oriente, some peasants who still enjoyed rights to small plots of land formed the National Alliance of Independent Agriculturalists. With time, the National Alliance came to have 17 landowners among its national membership. Support for the peasants came from the National Center of Scientific Studies, a guild comprising independent agricultural engineers and researchers. From exile abroad, the College of Agricultural Engineers and the Cuban Democratic Directorate send a variety of aid to the National Alliance. Indeed, after three decades of repression and suppression, civil society is beginning to emerge and organize within Cuba. Among the actors in the nascent Cuban civil society, the efforts of the Catholic Church should be noted, despite the discord evident in its dioceses and publications such as *Vitral*, by Dagoberto Valdés.

Within this context, the engineer Oswaldo Payá, head of the Christian Liberation Movement, launched his Project Varela initiative, supplemented by aid from dozens of dissenting political organizations. Utilizing

opportunities afforded by Cuban legislation, Project Varela aimed to reclaim the rights and liberties denied to the population by the regime. The initiative managed to obtain ten thousand signatures. While the government has persecuted Project Varela's coordinators, it no longer stands in a position of strength that would allow it to indiscriminately jail or execute individuals who in essence are not advocating a change in the political regime, but are simply gathering to defend their legitimate interests, exchange points of view, or ask that the laws of the nation be implemented.

Simultaneously, significant movement has also appeared in the communities living in exile. First, the Spanish transition has served as an example for the Cuban people that it is possible to employ non-violent methods for the successful demise of a totalitarian or semi-totalitarian regime. Yet, the rally in Cuba for change reached its zenith point following the emergence of *perestroika* and, most importantly, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the furious dismantling of the European communist bloc. As such, in 1990, liberals, Christian Democrats, and Social Democrats living in exile established the Cuban Democratic Platform as a means to advocate a non-violent struggle for political transition. Interestingly, even the name of the association is reminiscent of the Spanish experience. The group aims to form an alliance between the democrats and generate the conditions necessary for the transition to democracy in Cuba. Indeed, the importance of collaboration between democratic forces and those internationally oriented has consistently been evident.

The political gatherings and developments demonstrate that the basic premise of the Castro brothers remains the continuance of the regime. In the summer of 2002, in preparation for a new session of Congress, and in response to the Project Varela, Castro forces millions of Cubans to sign a petition directed at the National Assembly of Popular Power so that all might find themselves obligated to live under communist rule. Subsequently, the move demonstrates that dissatisfaction remains evident throughout Cuban society, including some members of the government, and that the momentum points to exactly the type of change Fidel and Raúl Castro aim to uproot.

## The Spanish Transition

With the revelation of Franco's failing health in 1974, the opposition — until then a fragmented entity — aggregated into two large coalitions. The more radical vein within the Marxist political class launched the "Democratic Assembly." Within the Marxist-rooted group stood various political groups, including the Communist Party, presided over by Santiago Carillo; the Popular Socialist Party of professor Enrique Tierno Galván; and the Workers Party, an independent and outlawed union originally founded by the communists only a few years before. Following the establishment of the Democratic Assembly was the founding of yet another — albeit comparatively more moderate — political coalition in 1975: the National Platform of Democratic Convergence. Based on an agenda which sought the right to assembly and a free press, the National Platform of Democratic Convergence comprised the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, whose general secretary at the time was the young lawyer from Seville, Felipe González; a social democratic group founded by Dionisio Ridruejo; and a former Falange writer who had genuinely shifted his ideologically to subscribe to the democratic political model. The closest inspiration in coming together as a coalition remained the German Social Democrat, former German Chancellor Willy Brandt.

Finally, on November 20, 1975, after several weeks of agony, Francisco Franco died. Two days later, the Courts, the closest Spanish approximation to a Parliament, held sessions while Juan Carlos emerged as King, just as the legislation had decreed. Indeed, it would seem that at first glance, the continuity of Franquism had been assured. The reformists, most of whom were of Christian Democratic origins, begin devising a plan to democratize the regime. A quiet struggle transpired within the halls of the Courts and secret meetings in Zarzuela, the neighborhood of the monarchs. Those seeking to ensure the continuation of the regime noted that Franquism enjoyed complete public support, as demonstrated in the elections and referenda that had been orchestrated under Franquism. Indeed, these latter individuals proposed neither change nor a return to the *partidocracia* of before.

The King, until then an enigma, joined the band of democratic proponents, but Arias Navarro, the Prime Minister, remained unconvinced.

As such, in July of 1976, King Juan Carlos, through the Courts, chose Adolfo Suárez as Navarro's replacement. Suárez, a young and little-known lawyer, had spent his entire professional life as an *apparatchik* of the Movement. Once at the head of the government, Suárez began his campaign to change the political model. He immediately realized that the broadening of public participation would prove integral to reaching his objective, as Franquism's illegitimacy had sprung from political exclusion. Additionally, the two European powers Germany and France make it known to Suárez that integration or solidarity would not be forthcoming unless the political rights of all Spaniards were respected. The United States echoed the warning. As such, Suárez proposed the construction of a democratic party composed of reformist elements from within the state and the moderate members of the opposition. In brief, the burial of the Movement was secretly decided upon.

In November, the Courts issued unexpected decrees granting political amnesty, promulgating the Political Reform legislation that encouraged political plurality, dismantling the ideological persecutors known as the Tribunals of Public Order, and, ironically, the Courts also announced their own dissolution in order to make way for a new judicial infrastructure. Across all media of communication throughout Spain, Franquism was declared to have committed *harakiri*. Elections were subsequently slated for June of 1977.

Before the elections took place, Suárez set in motion two significant phenomena. First, the Prime Minister established the Federation of the Center for Democracy as an umbrella entity designed to bring together his own supporters who had broken off from Franquism. Second, Suárez legalized the Communist Party, the monster headed by the old military, who refused to forget the offenses sustained during the civil war.

Suárez realized that democracy could only be engendered in a collaborative initiative that included the communists as well as the socialists. As such, the *quid pro quo* came into focus: everybody could participate in a level playing field in exchange for institutional harmony. Essentially, this required accepting the monarchy as well as willingness to be subject to democratic elections. Suárez and the king stood willing to invite political parties into the political arena, but only those ready to accept the absoluteness and finality of the law.

The aforementioned events, of course, took place during a time of great social tension, under increasing pressure from groups located on either ends of the political spectrum unwilling to accept the proposed democratic norms. The message from the far right declared the entire transition process a falsehood given that “sharks (the Franquists) do not tend to sprout GACELAS”. Meanwhile, the far left, dominated by those waxing nostalgically of the days of falangism, proclaim that the *partidocracia* would yet again render Spain fragmented and destroyed. Both sectors undertook violent and lethal acts. Nonetheless, in June of 1977, elections took place and Suárez’s party emerged the victor with 32 percent of the votes.

Second place went to the PSOE and third to the Communist Party. Thus, Suárez managed to maintain power, but soon realized that the consensus of all the major political parties must be achieved in order to effectively govern. From the search for consensus emerged the Pact of Moncloa, a government program endorsed by the opposition forces. Despite the opposition’s subscription to the Pact of Moncloa, Suárez’s main intention remained maintaining the integrity of the state. In 1978, the Courts born out of the 1977 elections declared themselves in need of a constitution and charged a dozen of their members, mainly professors from the political right, to draft a new Law of Laws. The drafting committee included politicians from the right, such as Fraga Iribarne, as well as communists, such as Solé Turá. The Constitution that emerged, reflecting the high degree of compromise prevalent among all the negotiators throughout the drafting process, came under the consideration of the Courts, and, once ratified in 1978, was approved by the majority of the Spanish population through a public referendum.

Nonetheless, the UCD government’s time in power proved short-lived. By 1979, Suárez emerged as the victor of new elections, but with a sharply decreased mandate. In 1980, a motion for censorship was produced that severely weakened the UCD. Soon, the UCD lost touch with its political roots and began to exhibit signs of fragmentation. The political fault lines within the party ran parallel to ideological divergences manufactured by the *barones*. Hence, exhausted and disillusioned, Suárez resigned at the start of 1981 and the Courts chose Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo as his successor. During the transition of power, several units of the Civil

Guard revolted, constituting a dangerous military coup, but also the last lashing of the Franquist tail. Indeed, from the Palace of Moncloa, the king, with the cooperation of other military units, managed to quell the attempted coup.

The failed coup serves as the starting point for the accelerated and formal Spanish consolidation of democracy and Westernization. By 1981, Spain was welcomed into NATO, and only a few months later, in 1982, the Socialist opposition won the elections with a margin of votes exceeding any of those ever garnered by the UCD. Not since the civil war had the Spanish Socialists ruled and thus their enemies feared the country would undergo a turn toward radicalism. However, the expected ideological transformation failed to manifest itself. González, who opted for the free market model as well as the privatization of the public sector, managed to negotiate Spain's entrance into the European Economic Community while concomitantly maintaining strong ties with the Reagan and Bush administrations, the latter of whom was able to count on Spanish troops in the Gulf War of 1991.

In the meantime, the Spanish per capita income continued to rise, rivaling levels common to the developed world. However, despite the country's unprecedented economic progress, Felipe González — until then the only democratically elected leader to continuously rule in Spain — lost the 1996 elections to José María Aznar. Aznar was a member of the Popular Party, a liberal-conservative coalition built upon the sociological vote of the political dealignment suffered by the UCD as well as the PSOE. The latter's drain in electoral strength emerged amidst increased news of corruption prevalent throughout the 14 years of socialist rule. As such, the significant points during this tumultuous time in Spain's history were the modernization and moderation of the country's political forms of representation and the smooth transition of power as a symbol of the transition process' conclusion.

## **Lessons From the Spanish Transition for Cuba**

While Cuba and Spain certainly exhibit distinct realities, they also share many values and a common COSMOVISIÓN. Indeed, Cuba

existed as an extension of the Spanish empire until 1898, leading to increased ties between the two nations most notably reflected in the extensive immigration of Spanish citizens to Cuba. Such connections constitute a shared history that results in a common way of reasoning and reacting.

Unfortunately, political transformation will most likely not occur in Cuba until Castro's death, as it occurred in Spain with Franco. However, this does not mean that the political opposition should simply resign itself to the mercy of time. The emergence of Cuban civil society must be accelerated, cooperation with external dissidents fomented, a pact between internal and foreign democratic elements established, the occupation of any political space ceded by the government attained, and compromise with the reformists within the Castro regime negotiated.

While the economic legacy in post-Franco Spain remains considerably more vibrant than that Castro is leaving in Cuba, this element serves merely to complicate but not determine the outcome of the political situation. The Franquists, together with the king and Suárez at the head of the government, were compelled to democratize Spain not solely due to its economic standing, but because the country was undergoing historical and geographical exigencies which demanded such a transformation. Indeed, Franco's death marked the conclusion of a variety of eras that hung over the lives of many Spaniards including the civil war as well as the conflictive relationship between the fascists and the communists.

Cuba also exhibits powerful demands on its political system. Castro remains a product of far left communist ideology born in the 1940s and 1950s. With the triumph of the West in the Cold War and the reevaluation of democracy throughout the entire Latin American continent, whoever inherits the leadership role in Cuba will soon realize that only a single avenue exists for the reformulation of the Cuba political system. Today, Cuba continues to be denied membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) as well as the Río Group; the European Union refuses to accord the country any form of SPECIAL aid; and the doors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund remain shut. As such, when Castro no longer stands as an actor in the political arena, increased pressures will be leveled on the country to abandon the inefficient dictatorial model of rule.



The number of economic and political aid offers to catalyze a transformation should prove copious. Should the collective revolutionary model be discarded, the United States will undergo a momentous shift in attitude in order to stem the tide of what may become a massive Cuban exodus for the shores of southern Florida in search of economic well-being. The United States will certainly enlist the support of the European Union as well as Asian nations to participate in stanching the Cuban stampede through heightened aid efforts. Indeed, the clamor for change will only increase in light of the aforementioned incentives, and political paralysis will dim as an option. Why would Castro's successor opt for political paralysis?

There is little reason to believe that the functionaries within the Castro regime, while publicly swearing their loyalty to the revolution, truly adhere to the regime's political ideology. Did we not assume that Robertico Robaina was elected Chancellor due to his impressive capability to interpret Castro's thoughts? Three pillars form the foundation of the regime's "legitimacy": fear of the country's leader, loyalty, and the fear of change. Once Castro dies, the loyalty factor will no longer be capable of supporting the heavy weight of illegitimacy. Castro's death will facilitate Cuba's turning its back away from "Castroism," especially given the absence of a coherent ideological concept and the abundance of the fancies and arbitrary resolutions characteristic of the regime. What may finally help unite those subscribers of the current political model, much like in the case of Spain, will be the emergence of a plan for transition exhibiting tolerance for all elements within the political spectrum as well as an emphasis on the notion of elections as the main determinant of who will govern and for what period of time.

All of the aforementioned points require a willingness to forgive the mistakes made in the past. The Spanish managed to find compromise following a civil war during which both parties inflicted high levels of damage upon the other. Indeed, after Franco's death, instead of dwelling on the past, the Spanish opted to dedicate themselves to the salvation of their collective future. This should serve as an example for the Cuban population.

Curiously, the totalitarian experience often proves so brutal that it affects the natural sociological makeup of a population. Franco, who had

spent his childhood during the turbulent first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and who thought of himself as a military officer in every conceivable respect, thought the Spanish to be a society prone to anarchy, chaos, and violence — all factors resulting in poverty, which, in his mind, demanded their reigning in through a short and taut leash. Yet, following his death, the moderate, pacifist and tolerant nature of Spanish society was allowed to flourish. The country engendered political plurality and has never before experienced such economic advancement as that currently evident.

Cuba can face the same fate as that of Spain. Castro continues to be convinced that the Cuban population is a warlike race eager to stand off against the United States and the European Union in defense of a collective revolutionary model; yet, after a thorough analysis, what emerges in Cuba is a population characterized by a high degree of prudence, saturated with political discourse, and composed of individuals who take advantage of every opportunity to travel to the developed world and launch individual development projects. From these projects one infers a thirst throughout the entire Cuban population for the opportunity to reach a level of economic well-being that could allow them to live their lives in their own country, with no need to immigrate in order to realize their dreams. That is to say, Castro has suffocated the revolutionary spirit in Cuba, much like Franco slated the authoritarian spirit in Spain.

Castro's attempt to give pause to Cuban history by submitting that the collective revolution would never be substituted must be discarded. Castro, like Franco, believes that he has the future "certain, quite certain," but that is not the case. As has been noted in this article, neither the government nor its adversaries have remained stable in their respective positions of strength. One or the other has been forced to adapt to circumstances beyond their control as well as changes in history. While it is true that Castro adheres to completely anachronous conceptualizations of the world, and it is also true that Castro has been able to retard Cuba's adaptation to the changing cultural and historical conditions of the world community to which the country belongs, the imposition of such anomalous and arbitrary measures will not be able to sustain themselves indefinitely.

A clear symptom of the inevitable failure of the proposed "communism forever" can already be discerned in the increased mobilization

within Cuban civil society when faced with the weakening and routine behavior of the government, despite the infinite pressures and harassment faced by individuals partaking in this sector of society. While the communist institutions stand without hope for the future, a sentiment prevalent throughout the Communist Party to the FEU to the CTC, within the heart of Cuban society more and more individuals accept the risk of taking measures to challenge the regime. It is possible to state that no other communist nation, with the possible exception of Poland, has ever counted on such a well-nurtured and varied opposition as that which today exists in Cuba. When the moment arrives, the pressure applied by civil society will break open the dams.



## About the Author

**Carlos Alberto Montaner** was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1943 and has resided in Madrid, Spain since 1970. He has been a writer, journalist, and professor at several universities across Latin America and in the United States. For over thirty years, several dozen journals have published his weekly column in Latin America, Spain, and the U.S., making his weekly articles available to an estimated six million readers. In the beginning of the eighties, *Cambio 16* rated him as “maybe one of the most read columnist in the Spanish language.” In 1990 he created alongside exiles and Cubans residing in Cuba, the *Liberal Cuban Union* (ULC) with the goal of bringing democratic changes to the island through non-violent means. The ULC, shortly after its formation, affiliated itself with *International Liberals*, of which in 1992 Montaner was elected vice president, a position the he has occupied since that time. In the early nineties, ULC helped form a coalition of democratic Cubans with democratic Christians and social democrats to present a united front against Castro’s dictatorial regime.

Montaner has published over twenty books several of which have been translated into many different languages, including English, Portuguese, Russian, and Italian. Among his most well known and re-edited works are: *Viaje al corazón de Cuba [Journey into the Heart of Cuba]*, *Cómo y por qué desapareció el comunismo [How and Why Communism Disappeared]*, *Libertad: la clave de la prosperidad [Freedom: The Key to Prosperity]* and the novels, *Perromundo [Darned World]* and *1898: La Trama [1898: The Scheme]*. Editorial Planeta and the University of Arkansas edited a book on critiques of his work: *La narrativa de Carlos Alberto Montaner [The Narrative of Carlos Alberto Montaner]* in 1978. Two of his most polemic essays are the best-sellers, *Manual del perfecto idiota latinoamericano [Manual of the Perfect Latin American Idiot]* and *Fabricantes de miseria [Fabricators of Misery]*, which were both written in collaboration with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza and Álvaro Vargas Llosa. In his second-to-last work, *Las raíces torcidas de América Latina [The Twisted Roots of Latin America]*, published in 2001, Montaner looks from a historical perspective at one of the most disturbing facts of our culture: why is the America that emerged from Iberian

colonization the most poverty stricken and unstable segments of the Western Hemisphere? Before this work, the author had contemplated this issue from a different perspective in two books published by Plaza & Janés: *La agonía de América* [*The Agony of America*] and *No perdamos también el siglo XXI* [*Lets Not Also Loose the XXI Century*]. His next publication will be *Los latinoamericanos: identidad e historia cultural* [*Latin Americans: Identity and Historical Culture.*]

His last book, *Cuba: un siglo de doloroso aprendizaje* [*Cuba: A Century of Painful Learning*], was released in 2002 during the celebration of the first century of the independence of the Cuban republic and was mostly the result of a series of lectures given at the University of Miami.

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