

## ***How does Cuba's Political System Work?***

### **1. Basic issues/facts**

- Cuba's current Constitution was approved in a referendum in 1976 with 95% backing.
- Presidential terms are of 5 years – there is no limit on how many terms a president can serve. Fidel has been President since 1976.
- Article 94 of the Cuban Constitution states: "In cases of the absence, illness or death of the president of the Council of State, the first vice president assumes the president's duties."
- Cuba's national legislature, the National Assembly of People's Power (Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular), has 609 members who serve five-year terms. Candidates for the Assembly are elected by public referendum. All Cuban citizens over sixteen years of age who have not been found guilty of a criminal offense can vote.
- Article 131 of the Constitution states that voting shall be "through free, equal and secret vote". Article 136 states: "In order for deputies or delegates to be considered elected they must get more than half the number of valid votes cast in the electoral districts." Votes are counted in public view. By law, there must be at least 2 candidates, and there can be up to 8. Turnouts are regularly over 95%.
- The National Assembly elects the Council of Ministers (the Cabinet) and Council of State, which form the executive branch of government. Fidel is elected as President of both these bodies. To be President of Cuba and the Council of State therefore, you have to be an elected member of the National Assembly and therefore have to have been elected by over 50% of the electorate in their own constituency (as Fidel is currently). In turn, Fidel has to be elected as President by a vote of the parliament.
- Political parties are not involved in the selection of candidates in the elections or in campaigns for the Assembly. Candidates do not have to be members of the Communist Party to run. Almost half Cuba's national parliament are not members of the Communist Party
- Candidates run as individuals on the basis of their records and not in highly expensive, party-ran campaigns, meaning that ordinary people have a chance of getting elected.
- Community and civil society organisations such as trade unions play a major role in the nomination and selection of candidates through local meetings of a commission set up for the purpose.
- The National Assembly is the *supreme* body with legislative power – the body directly elected by the people. All decisions made by the the Council of State and Council of Ministers (which the President heads) are referred back to the Assembly for approval at its twice yearly meetings.
- The current Cuban Parliament (2006) is extremely representative. Of the 609 deputies in the National Assembly: 219 are women (36%), 8% more than the previous legislature. 33% are black (4% more than in the previous Assembly) and 25% are manual workers in productive or service industries.
- All provincial and municipal assemblies are also directly elected.
- All those elected as municipal representatives are required to meet with their electorate in public meetings and give account of their activities. They can be removed by their constituents at any time during their term.
- In recent years, there have been increasing numbers of ministers appointed who were children or not yet born at the time of the 1959 revolution. (e.g. Felipe Perez Roque was born in 1965 and is the Foreign Minister.
- The average age of the ruling body of the communist party is under 50.

## **2. Role of Communist Party in Elections and Politics:**

When people talk about human rights and the political system in Cuba, they often comment on the issue of the Communist Party, suggesting it has a monopoly on politics in the country. However, it is important to realise that:

- The Communist Party is not an electoral party and it is not a requirement that one be a member of the Communist party of Cuba to be elected to any position.
- The party does not propose, support nor elects candidates.
- Because of legal restrictions it does not decide on the formation or composition of the Government.
- The decisions the CP takes are binding only upon its members.

## **3. Cuban President's Powers**

The President of Cuba is invested with the power to implement the following

- Represent the state and the government and conduct their general policy;
- Organize and conduct the activities of, call for the holding of and preside over the sessions of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers of Cuba;
- Control and supervise the development of the activities of the ministries and other central agencies of the administration;
- Assume the leadership of any ministry or central agency of the administration;
- Propose to the National Assembly of People's Power, once elected by the latter, the members of the Council of Ministers;
- Accept the resignation of the members of the Council of Ministers or propose either to the National Assembly of People's Power or the Council of State the replacement of any of those members and, in both cases, to propose the corresponding substitutes;
- Receive the credentials of the heads of foreign diplomatic missions. This responsibility may be delegated to any of the vice presidents of the Council of State;
- Assume the supreme command of all armed institutions and determine their general organization;
- Preside over the National Defense Council;
- Declare a state emergency in those cases provided for in this Constitution, stating his decision, as soon as the circumstances permit it, to the National Assembly of People's Power or to the Council of State if the Assembly is unable to meet, according to legal effects;
- Sign decree-laws and other resolutions of the Council of State and the legal provisions adopted by the Council of Ministers or its Executive Committee, and arrange for their publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic;
- Assume all other duties assigned it by the Constitution or by law.