CHAPTER III
CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL-POLITICAL REFORMS, 1991-95

Systemic crisis had by the mid-1980s called for a major campaign for rectification of past errors and to make the Cuban economy and polity gird up its loins to become self-sustainable. The third party Congress took steps to recalibrate and reform socialism to meet the impending challenges. However, the collapse of the special ties with Soviet socialist bloc countries produced new challenges and threats that could have undermined the Cuban revolution. ‘Special Period in Times of Crisis’ was official expression to denote the grave challenges and threats facing the Cuban economy and polity. The preceding Chapter gave a description and analysis of the initiation of measures aimed at internal economic reforms, or restructuring, and the insertion of Cuba into the world economy. The measures, by promoting economic growth and efficiency, were designed primarily to protect and preserve the social gains and achievements of the revolution. The Chapter also examined the making of the crisis in the 1990s and measures at course correction both economic and political.

In the backdrop of the first two Chapters, the present Chapter describes and analyses the complex process of change- ideological, constitutional and electoral-political, and economic- mainly from 1991 to 1995. In an effort to scientifically arrange facts and date, and their analyses, the present chapter is divided into four major sections, with each section comprising sub-sections.

The first section deals with holding of the fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in the critical years. It examines the debate on the course of the revolution, shaping of the economy and direction of electoral-political reforms. The debate was not only at the elite level confined to PCC brass but also in the street, among ordinary Cubans. The Congress led to a major turnover of party leaders at the highest level.

The second section deals with the major constitutional revision and updating that took place in 1992. It also examines the election for National Assembly held in 1993.
The third section deals with the process of grass-roots participation and governance in Cuba, emphasising on the Organ of Peoples Power, Popular Councils, National Assembly, Council of State and Council of Ministers. It also highlights the role of civil society and mass organisation in the evolving reform scenario in Cuba, as well as assesses the role of labour unions and workers’ parliaments in the process. The section towards the end analyses the evolving trajectory of Cuba’s socialist democracy, and, whether, in the first place, it can be described a democracy?

Fourth Congress of PCC, 1991

With the idea of holding PCC’s Congress meeting, the call for the Fourth Party Congress in March 1990 sought an unprecedented openness in debate, not just among party members, but also among the entire populace, to foster greater participation and build “the necessary consensus” for the government’s policy response to the ‘Special Period’. However, the call was so extraordinary that people did not know how to respond. The revised call also set limits, noting that the discussions were intended to provide “political clarification” and that the socialist character of the Cuban system and leading role of the party were open to debate (Perez-Stable 1990).

Eventually, some three million people participated in the pre-Congress discussions. Sharp debate ensured on such issues as whether to allow religious believers to join the Communist Party and whether free farmers markets, abolished during rectification, ought to be resumed (Granma 1990). The social and economic issues that concerned people most were the rising crime rate, the poor state of public transportation and housing, and the overall deterioration in the standard of living. The principal political criticisms voiced in the discussions concerned the sclerotic bureaucratism that had overtaken local government and the mass organisations, especially the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), which some people argued should be disbanded or merged with the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR).

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1 The call means the proclamation of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC).
The party itself underwent significant changes at the fourth Congress. Its statutes were amended to redefine the PCC as the party of the "Cuban nation" rather than the party of the working class, and the new statutes emphasised its ideological roots in the ideas of Jose Marti as well as those of Marx and Lenin. The prohibition on party membership for religious believers was lifted, and the process for choosing new party members was simplified so that more members could be drawn from work centers based on a vote of their co-workers (dropping the requirement of sponsorship by existing members or prior membership in the Communist Youth Union (Union Juventud Comunista-UJC). Over the next five years, these changes brought a number of new members as the PCC’s ranks grew from 611,627 at the fourth Congress to 780,000 in 1997. However, on the eve of the fifth Congress by 1997, some 232,000 people, or one-third of the PCC’s total membership, had joined the party since the beginning of the Special Period (Reed 1992).

However, in the political realm, reforms have been dramatic and could be seen as an extension of the changes initiated earlier as part of the rectification process since 1986. To counter the political weakness they saw in Soviet socialist bloc, the Cuban leaders sought to reform their political institutions by making them more responsive to popular concerns. In the PCC, the first wave of change was the introduction of secret-ballot elections of party leaders at the base (in the workplace "nuclei") in early 1990s. Prior to that, elections had been by open nomination and a show of hands. Subsequently, new municipal and provincial leaders were elected (in the usual way, from slates of pre-selected nominees), producing a 50 per cent turnover in municipal leaders and the replacement of two of the fourteen provincial secretaries (Perez-Stable 1999).

Next came a major downsizing of the party bureaucracy preceding the fourth Party Congress. The number of departments in the Central Committee staff organisation was reduced from 19 to 9, and the staffs were cut by 50 per cent. The Party Secretariat was abolished as a separate organisation, and its organisational responsibilities were distributed to individual members of the Politburo. Provincial committee staffs were cut as well, and overall, some two-thirds of the positions in the PCC’s paid apparatus were abolished. In the posts that remained, a significant number of the incumbents were replaced (Eckstein: 1994).
The fourth Congress also adopted the suggestion that all delegates to OPP assemblies be elected directly by their constituents and called for the strengthening of the National Assembly’s work commissions. “The growing and legitimate wish to our population to participate in a more active and direct way in the decision-making process, made obvious in the discussion of the call to the fourth Congress must be echoed in its OPP’s structure”, the Congress concluded (Ibid). However, it rejected proposals made in the pre-Congress meetings that candidates should be allowed to campaign and thereby present contrasting policy views. Nor did it endorse the idea of allowing competing policy views in the state media.

By most accounts, the limited reforms produced by the fourth Congress resulted from an internal struggle in the PCC between a ‘reform’ faction led by party ideological chief Carlos Aldana, UJC First Secretary (and later Foreign Minister) Roberto Robaina, and economic manager Carlos Lage, and a ‘conservative’ faction led by Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and Jose Ramon Balaguer. The ‘reformers’ pushed for the use of market mechanisms to speed up economic recovery and for greater political space for dissenting views that were not manifested by counter-revolutionaries. The ‘conservatives’ argued that rapid economic change would undercut the party’s political control and that any political opening in the midst of economic crisis risked setting off a torrent of criticism that might sweep away the regime, as happened in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Initially, the ‘reformers’ seemed to have the upper hand. In early 1990, the Central Committee’s announcement of the campaign to ‘revitalise’ the party was accompanied by a call to create ‘a climate favourable for the development of creative thinking and fertile debate’. At the same meeting, Robaina was elevated to an alternate member status in the Politburo (Granma Resumen Semanal, 25 Mar 1990). The call for the fourth Congress followed shortly thereafter, stimulating unprecedented discussion, as we already have discussed. Yet, the call also contained a warning that the right to debate and criticise would not extend to regime opponents; “Counter-revolutionary and antisocial elements...should be warned that acting at this time as the puppets of imperialism will mean... becoming the biggest traitors Cuba has ever had and that is how the law and the people will treat them” (Ibid). Nevertheless, the ‘reformers’ fared reasonably well in the new leadership lineup; Carlos Lage and Abel Prieto, head of the National
Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), were added to the Politburo, joining Aldana and Robaina.

After the Congress, the locus of debate between 'reformers' and 'conservatives' shifted to the local and national OPP elections scheduled for late 1992 and early 1993 - the first OPP elections to be held under the new direct ballot system. In which, the most significant change in OPP recommended by the Fourth PCC Congress and implemented by constitutional changes in 1992 allowed direct election of provincial and national people's power delegates. Reforms saw the electoral process as a means of initiating political liberalisation. “The system we’re putting in place will allow the emergence of new sectors that disagree with our policies, as long as they do not have a counter-revolutionary past, nor a connection to the United States”, explained a senior Politburo member. “The electoral changes will not be cosmetic”, speaking on the record, Aldana also affirmed the party’s determination to open the electoral system gradually, albeit without allowing opposition parties to form. “Those that are in the internal opposition will have the opportunity to be elected, without ideological requirements”, he promised (Ibid).

(i) Changes in the PCC Composition

The membership of the Politburo was increased up to 14 at the third congress, to 25 at the fourth congress. Twelve new members were elected. Carlos Lage Davila, Roberto Robaina and Pedro Ross Leal promoted to alternate membership in a February 1990 shakeup were elected as full members of the Politburo at the fourth congress. The category of alternate members in party’s all entities was eliminated. Only eight members remained from those elected to the full membership at the third congress. Influential figures like Armando Hart, Pedro Miret, Julio Camacho, Jorge Risquet, and Vilma Espin were dropped from the Politburo, but they remained members of the Central Committee. 2

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2 Party's provincial secretaries Esteban Lazo and Jorge Lezcano retained their positions in the Politburo, but the party secretaries from Guantanamo (Raul Michel), Matanzas (Luis Alvarez), and Camaguey (Lazaro Vazquez) were replaced by Ciego de Avila (Alfredo Honda), Las Tunas (Alredo Jordan), and Cienfuegos (Nelson Torres). The replaced ones remained members of the Central Committee. Three new women were elected to the Politburo, Yadira Garcia Vera, an engineer by profession; Maria de los Angeles Garcia belonging to the party bureaucracy in Santiago; and Concepcion Campa Huego, a scientist, working on the research and development of the vaccine against Meningitis B. Compared to the third congress, where Vilma Espin was the only woman, women's number increased three-fold in 1991.
Two new appointments were made, Abel Prieto Jimenez and Candido Palmeiro Hernandez, which by most Cubanologists were described as "out of way appointments". Prieto from writers' union may have been rewarded for promoting culture, literature, and arts. Palmeiro, without any political background and without holding any state office, was appointed, perhaps, for doing well in tasks assigned to him. Presumably, he was rewarded for the remarkable achievements of his contingent3 (The Cuba Report 1992).

The extraordinary steps were suggested only under dire circumstances, so there appeared no danger of overriding the local autonomy. Also, a strong Central Committee could act as a check on the extreme decisions of the Politburo and leadership. Hence, the process remained more institutionalised. But, at the same time, some rift could be observed between the Central Committee and the Politburo.

Further, some of the drastic decisions taken during the fourth congress in the political sphere were the elimination of the structure of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, the Politburo was empowered to create from among its members a working group to attend the affairs of the party leadership and present reports at its meetings. The administrative bureaucracy was removed to cut extra deadwood between the leadership and the masses. Hence, a more direct link was established between the two.

At the fourth congress, Castro stated that further steps are being undertaken in the election of members to these bodies. He said:

The delegates from the electoral districts will continue to be nominated and elected by the people, and on the same principles, drawing from these delegates from electoral districts, we propose that the National Assembly nominate and elect directly the delegates to the provincial assembly: nominate and elect directly, without political manoeuvring and through the fairest mechanisms that offer equal opportunities to all of becoming deputies to the National Assembly, the supreme authority of the state (Granma International, 3 November 1991).

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3 According to a writer: "It is hard to imagine these two (Prieto and Palmeiro) as influential policy makers, nor one be certain in this instance that their promotion means that they have finally 'arrived'" (The Cuba Report 1992: 84).
Notwithstanding, the claim Cuba was “moving towards improving... the political system”, the pre-eminence of the Communist Party of Cuba was further reinforced at the fourth Congress. While the congress declared that, the deputies to the National Assembly and the delegates to the provincial assemblies will be elected by the direct vote of the people and the right to contest election was open to every eligible citizen, it was ensured that no candidate can contest outside the ideological framework of Marxist-socialism. Thus, in the 1990s Cuba followed the path of process of democratisation as other Latin American countries (Nafey and Priya 2000: 1-39).

New Politburo Members

- Fidel Castro Ruz : First Secretary
- Raúl Castro Ruz : Second Secretary
- Juan Almeida Bosque
- Carlos Aldana Escalante
- Concepción Campa Huergo
- Julio Casas Regueiro
- Osmani Cienfuegos Gorriarán
- Leopoldo Cintra Frías
- Abelardo Colomé Ibarra
- María de los Angeles García
- Yadira García Vera
- Alfredo Hondal González
- Alfredo Jordán Morales
- Carlos Lage Dávila
- Esteban Lazo Hernández
- Jorge Lescano Pérez
- José Ramón Machado Ventura
- Cándido Palmero Hernández
- Abel Prieto Jiménez
- Julián Rizo Alvarez
- Roberto Robaina González
- Carlos Rafael Rodríguez Rodríguez
- Ulises Rosales del Toro
(ii) **Reshaping the Economy**

During the fourth Party Congress, the leadership discussed various measures to recover and boost the economy. A major emphasis was put on the promotion of hotel, tourism, joint ventures with foreign capital, biotechnology exports, and new trading partners in an effort to mitigate the decline in economy. At the same time, Castro left no doubts regarding what path Cuba should take: “And there will not be an economy, by whatever name; it was nothing to do with socialism and our economy will be programmed and planned” (*Granma International*, 5 May 1996). Leaving the structure of the economy unaffected, a series of strategies were adopted after the fourth congress to revitalise the economy. To begin with, Cuban managerial class was exposed to Western management consultants to learn techniques of market research, product design and promotion, quality control, packaging, finance, negotiation, human resource development, intellectual property production and so on. As a result, with these new skills, Cuban managers could become agents of changes. All proposed changes will be discussed in the chapter under the title ‘Principal Economic Changes and Developments since 1993.

(iii) **Ideological Reformulation**

The term ‘communist’ was given a new meaning after a debate on ideology in the fourth congress. According to a report in *Granma International*, the term ‘communist’ has not been used simply to designate someone who believes in a particular doctrine or adheres to a certain line of thinking. Above all, Communists are seen as people dedicated to the ideals of national independence, social justice, and progress for our people, the very goals of the Revolution (*Granma International*, 30 Nov 1994).

Also, there were signs of toning down of the ‘socialism or death’ slogan. ‘Saving the achievements of socialism’ became the slogan of the day. Castro declared in
November 1993 that “the readiness to achieve success is more important than the readiness to die” (Granma International, 8 Nov 1993). Further, he reiterated his view to the National Assembly of People's Power that the economic crisis was forcing the government to accept “setbacks in the building of a socialist society.” Castro said in an interview that

in no book of Marx, Engels, or Lenin is it said that it is possible to construct socialism without capital, without technology, and without markets…. In the case of a small island like Cuba… it is especially difficult to develop using only one’s own resources. It is for this reason that we have no alternative but to associate ourselves with foreign companies that can bring capital, technology, and markets…. We are dealing with … a world where a large part of the socialist system has collapsed (Gunn 1992).

By August 1995, the ideology of the Cuban revolution took a new turn. Fidel Castro, while addressing an International Youth Festival in Havana, commemorating the centennial year of Jose Martí’s death in 1995, declared: “We are introducing elements of capitalism into our system, into our economy, this is a fact”. He stressed that the implementation of capitalism is not accidental, but a well thought-out strategy. Because “we have also discussed the consequences, we have observed from the employment of those mechanisms. Yes, we are doing this i.e. implementing capitalism”. At the same time during the fourth congress, Castro reiterated the ideology of the PCC:

The fourth Congress unalterably maintains the revolutionary anti-imperialist solidarity [which is the] essence of our foreign policy; and its position of mutual respect and brotherly unity with nations that are building socialism. It also maintains loyalty to the interests and aspirations of developing countries and the integration with our brothers and sisters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Granma International, 3 Nov 1991).

Castro reaffirmed, more than ever, Cuba’s unrestrained support for the universal and inalienable right of nations to self-determination, sovereignty and non-intervention in their internal affairs. He supported the issues of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and North-South conflict and assured that Cuba’s Marxist-Leninist ideology was not a hindrance in its solidarity with the Third World.
Constitutional Changes and Electoral-Political Reforms

On 12 July 1992, the National Assembly of Popular Power (ANPP) discussed a series of constitutional changes. The ANPP revised 42 articles and updated 34 of 141 articles of the 1976 Constitution. According to article 141, a referendum can be held in the event of total constitutional reform, or change in the powers of the ANPP or the Council of State. While, it was debatable that the quantity and type of the changes legally required a referendum, the government could have called one for political reasons but did not. According to an author, "Cuban leaders chose not to risk a process that might have belied the consensus that they claimed supported their rule?" (Perez-Stable 1993). But against it, the OPP elections were held in 1992 having support of the party and leadership. Singh (1999) argues that at the time of an intense debate on piecemeal process of capitalism, the speaker of the ANPP, Juan Escalona, declared that the revised Constitution would in no way imply a transition to capitalism. He asserted: "Let the enemy not be deceived. They will find nothing in this text that implies retreat, nor a return to the past, because we bow to no pressure". Changes pertinent to foreign businesses were many. But more important than the changes would be the manner in which the Cuban government implements the constitutional changes, and the policies created there under. Main highlights of the amendments are:

(i) Political references to the former Soviet Union and the Marxist-Leninist party were deleted and references were given now to the party of the Cuban nation, based on Marxism-Leninism along with the ideals of Jose Marti.

(ii) Cuba remained a constitutionally defined socialist state which provides for the Communist Party of Cuba to be the highest leading force of the society.

(iii) Cuba was declared a secular rather than an atheist state and certain freedoms of religion were provided.

(iv) Direct election for national, provincial deputies and municipal delegates was provided.

(v) Presidential powers were expanded to include, among others, the power to declare a state of emergency in case of or before the imminence of attack, national disasters, or catastrophes which, by their character, size or type affected internal order of the security or stability of the state.
President Fidel Castro was given greater control over the Cuban military organisations and National Defence Council, whose mission is to direct the nation and conditions of the state of war, during the war or general mobilisation or a state of emergency was created.

Affirmed Cuba’s willingness to cooperatively integrate with Latin America and Caribbean countries toward economic and political integration.

Dual citizenship was specifically prohibited and children born while their Cuban parents resided abroad would not automatically be considered as Cuban citizens.

A new provision tied the environment and the natural resources of Cuba and recognised a link between the environment and sustainable economic and social development to improve human life, ensure survival and well-being, and the security of present and future generations.

Article 14 previously stated that the state was the owner of all means of production, and the Constitution now stated that they owned the basic or fundamental means of production.

The transfer of state property to individuals and businesses, with the prior approval of the Council of Ministers, was permitted so long as the goals of the transferee did not conflict with the founding political and other principles of the state and so long as the state concluded that the private activities promoted Cuba’s economic and social development.

A specific provision (Article 23) was made to provide for the recognition of autonomous state enterprises which were owned and regulated by the state but operated, to a certain extent, independently of the state with the enterprises’ own financial resources.

Foreign trade was the exclusive monopoly of the state but modification allowed quasi-government or private agencies and certain individuals to participate in export and import activities.

The Political Institutions

In this section, an attempt is made to describe the process of governance in Cuba. How political institutions function at the different levels and what is the process of selection or election of the delegates or candidates? Interestingly, they call it Organ of Popular Power. The Organs of Popular Power consist of a five-
tiered set of assemblies beginning at the neighbourhood level, and moving through the circunscripción (district) electoral level, the municipal level, and the provincial level to the national level. At the level of the neighbourhood, citizens select, by a show of hands at a general public meeting, a Secretary and President, whose task is to run the nomination proceedings for the rest of the meeting. Potential candidates for the later elections at the circunscripción level are then nominated from the floor. From the several potential candidates (the minimum being two), one is elected at the meeting, again by a show of hands. The individual chosen then becomes the neighbourhood nominee for the circunscripción election. In these elections, one representative is selected by secret ballot in enclosed voting booths and by a simple majority (with a runoff, if necessary), to represent the circunscripción in the Municipal Assembly.

The municipal assemblies and not the citizens directly select the delegates to the 14 provincial assemblies (one delegate for every 10,000 inhabitants and for a portion of people greater than 5,000) and the deputies for the National Assembly (one for every 20,000 inhabitants and for a portion exceeding 10,000). Circumscripciones electorales may select candidates from outside the relevant area. Similarly, the municipal assemblies may choose delegates to the provincial assemblies and deputies for the National Assembly who are neither delegates to the municipal assemblies, nor residents of the relevant municipalities. The modes of operation and the responsibilities of the municipal and provincial assemblies and the National Assembly and of the Council of State are outlined in the Constitution. According to the Constitution, the National Assembly is the supreme organ in the political system. It selects the Council of State, and is also the ultimate constituent

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5 At the municipal level, the nominations occur at street meetings, where it is the constituents who directly participate and control the selection. Each municipality is divided into several circunscripciones, or districts, comprised of a few hundred people. Each circunscripción nominates candidates and elects a delegate who serves in the local municipal assembly. On October 20, 2002, in “14,946 circunscripciones, 13,563 municipality delegates were elected from a total of 32,585 candidates”. There is a high degree of popular participation in the selection of candidates, marked by active and uncoerced citizen interaction and involvement. The members of the community first make their decisions about who would be appropriate candidates, and then those people are nominated as candidates. The elections at the municipal level are competitive and the casting of ballots is secret. By law, there must be at least two candidates and a maximum of eight. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, then a run-off election is held between the two candidates who obtained the most votes. Consequently, in order to complete the 2002 local government elections, a second round was held in 1,383 constituencies. (Granma weekly Review, “Resolution on the Organs of People’s Power,” 11 Jan. 1976.
and legislative body. It is the supreme economic authority, being empowered to
discuss and approve the national economic and social plans, the state budget, and
the nature of the economic management system. It is the foremost authority on
such matters as the general outline of foreign and domestic policy. It selects the
members of the Supreme Court and the Attorney General. It exercises the highest
supervision over the organs of state and government.

The executive body of the National Assembly is the Council of State,
which represents the former when it is not in session, and which is charged with
overseeing the implementation of its decisions. However, another body, the
Council of Ministers is the highest-ranking administrative and executive organ.
Members of this body are appointed by the President of the Council of State and
approved by the National Assembly. The Council of Ministers includes the
President, Vice President, and Secretary of the Council of State, together with all
ministers, the head of the Junta Central de Planificacion (JUCEPLAN), and some
others. At the provincial and municipal levels, the assemblies are charged with
overseeing and controlling the administrative leadership and local enterprises in
their relevant jurisdictions, with aiding in plan formulation and implementation in
their relevant areas, with upholding the Constitution, and defending the rights of
citizens and socialist property, and with legal and appointive tasks.

However, the municipal and provincial assemblies do not possess
independent revenue-raising capabilities. Two important mechanisms exist to
ensure that delegates to municipal and provincial assemblies and deputies for the
National Assembly continue to be in closing contact with their constituents and
responsive to their needs, suggestions and criticisms. Firstly, delegates must be
‘accountable’ to their electors. In practice, this means that they must meet every
four months with their electors and listen to complaints, grievances and proposals,
and then they may transmit upward. They also report back to their constituents on
their own activities and those of their respective assemblies. Municipal assembly

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7 The National Assembly chooses from amongst its members the Council of State, which is
accountable to the National Assembly and carries out its duties and responsibilities, such as the
passage and implementation of decrees, when the Assembly is not in session. The Council’s
decisions and decrees must be ratified at subsequent sittings of the National Assembly. The Council
of State also determines the composition of the Council of Ministers, and both bodies together
constitute the executive arm and cabinet of the government. The President of the Council of State
serves as head of both the government and state.

8 The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, Chap. VIII

9 Ibid, Chapter IX.
delegates are required to set aside a specific time every few weeks for consultation with constituents, though often this consultation may occur also on a more informal and frequent basis. Secondly, delegates and deputies are subject to recall by their electors. If a delegate or deputy is thought to have been negligent in his or her duty, those who elected that delegate or deputy can remove that person from office and select another representative. Thus, co-ordination between the elected members helps to respond the arising problems in common daily life.

After a description on the process of political functioning in Cuba, it is required to deal with the role and power of three important political institutions—National Assembly of People’s Power, Council of State and Council of Ministers.

(a) National Assembly of People’s Power

The National Assembly of People’s Power is the supreme body of state power. It is a constituent and legislative authority, which represents and expresses the sovereign will of the people. The National Assembly of People’s Power is comprised of deputies elected by a secret vote. The deputies are elected for a period of five years. The period can be extended by virtue of a resolution of the Assembly in the event of war or in case of other exceptional circumstances that may impede the normal holding of elections.

The National Assembly of People’s Power elects among its deputies the Council of State, which consists of one President, one first Vice-President, five Vice-Presidents, one Secretary and 23 other members. The President of the Council of State is, at the same time, the head of state and head of government. The Council of State is accountable for its action to the National Assembly of People’s Power, to which it must render accounts of all its activities. The powers and functions of National Assembly are as follows:

(a) To decide on reforms or amendments to the Constitution as per Article 137.
(b) To decide on the constitutionality of laws, decree-laws, decrees and all other general provisions.
(c) To discuss and approve the national plans for economic and social development, and the state budget.
(d) To approve the principles of the system for planning and the management of the national economy, monetary and credit system.
(e) To approve the general outlines of foreign and domestic policy.
(f) To elect the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the National Assembly; and to elect the President, the first Vice-President, the Vice-Presidents, the Secretary, and the other members of the Council of State.

(g) To declare a state of war in the event of military aggression and to approve peace treaties.

(h) To elect the President, Vice-Presidents and other judges of the Supreme Court; and to elect the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney Generals of the Republic.

(i) To revoke the election or appointment of those persons elected or appointed by it; and to revoke in total or in part the decree-laws issued by the Council of State.

(j) To approve, modify and annul laws after consulting with the people when it is considered necessary in view of the nature of the law in question;

(k) To grant amnesty;

(l) To establish and modify the political-administrative division of the country pursuant to that established in Article 102;

(m) To exercise the highest supervision over state and government bodies, and to appoint permanent and temporary commissions.

(n) To call for the holding of a referendum in those cases provided by the Constitution and others which the Assembly considers pertinent.

(o) To establish its rules and regulations.

(http://www.asanac.gov.cu/ingles/English%20The%20Structure%20of%20Cuban%20State.html)

(b) Council of State:
The Council of State is the collegiate body of the National Assembly of People’s Power. It put its resolutions into effect and complies with all the other duties assigned by the Constitution. It is the highest representative of the Cuban state. All the decisions of the Council of State are adopted by a simple majority vote of its members.

The Council of State is invested with the power to:

   a) Call special sessions of the National Assembly of People’s Power.
   b) Decide the date for the elections for the periodic renovation of the National Assembly of People’s Power.
c) Issue decree-laws in the period between the sessions of the National Assembly of People’s Power and to exercise legislative initiatives.

d) Give existing laws a general and obligatory interpretation whenever necessary.

e) Make all the necessary arrangements for the holding of referendums called for by the National Assembly of People’s Power.

f) Decree a general mobilisation in special circumstances i.e. in the defense of the country and assume the authority to declare war in the event of aggression or to approve peace treaties - duties which the Constitution assigns to the National Assembly of People’s Power - when the Assembly is in recess and cannot be called to session with the necessary security and urgency.

g) Replace at the initiative of its President the members of the Council of Ministers in the period between the sessions of the National Assembly of People’s Power and to appoint or remove at the initiative of its President the diplomatic representatives of Cuba in others states.

h) Issue general instructions to the courts through the Governing Council of the People’s Supreme Court and to issue instructions to the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic.

i) Grant decorations, pardons and honorary titles, and to grant or refuse recognition to diplomatic representatives of other states;

j) Ratify or denounce international treaties and to name commissions.

k) Suspend the provisions and resolutions of the Council of Ministers, Local Assemblies of People’s Power which run counter to the Constitution or the law or detrimental to the interests of other localities or to the general interests of the country.

l) Approve its rules and regulations.

(c) Council of Ministers:

The Council of Ministers is the highest ranking executive and administrative body of the government. The Council of Ministers consists of the head of state and
government-President, the first Vice-President, the Vice Presidents, the Ministers, the Secretary and the other members. An Executive Committee is formed by the President, consisting of President, first Vice President, Vice Presidents and other members of the Council of Ministers. The periods between the meetings of the Council of Ministers, the Executive Committee decides on matters under the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is accountable to and periodically renders account of its activities to the National Assembly of People’s Power. The law regulates the organisation and functioning of the Council of Ministers. Powers and role of the Council of Ministers include:

a) To organise and conduct the political, economic, cultural, scientific, social and defence activities outlined by the National Assembly of People’s Power.
b) To propose and draft general plans for the socio-economic development of the state and after the approval by the National Assembly of People’s Power supervise their implementation.
c) To formulate the foreign policy of the Republic and work for the better relations with other governments.
d) To approve international treaties and submit them for ratification by the Council of State, and to direct and control foreign trade.
e) To draft state budget and after approval by the National Assembly of People’s Power, ensure its implementation; and to adopt measures aimed at strengthening the monetary and credit system.
f) To draft bills and propose them for the consideration in the National Assembly of people’s Power or the Council of State, accordingly.
g) To watch national defence mechanism, the maintenance of order and security at home, the protection of citizens’ rights, lives and property in the event of natural disasters.
h) To coordinate and supervise the activities of the agencies of the central administration and local administrations;
i) To implement the laws and resolutions of the National Assembly of People’s Power and the decree-laws and provisions issued by the Council of State and, if necessary, dictate the corresponding regulations.
j) To issue decrees and provisions on the basis of and pursuant to the existing laws and supervise their implementation.
k) To revoke the provisions issued by heads of central state administration agencies when these are contrary to the instructions issued from a higher level and whose fulfilment is compulsory.

l) To propose to the Provincial and Municipal Assemblies of People’s Power the revocation of those provisions adopted during their specific activities by the provincial and municipal administrations subordinated to them, when these are contrary to the instructions approved by the central state administration agencies, in the exercise of their functions.

m) To propose to the National Assembly of People’s Power or to the Council of State the suspension of those resolutions and provisions issued by the local assemblies of People’s Power which infringe existing laws and other provisions or are detrimental to the interests of other communities or the general interests of the people,

n) To assume any duty assigned to it by the National Assembly of People’s Power or the Council of State.

(ii) National Assembly Election, 1993

From the proclamation of the Special Period, there have been four national elections in the year 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2007-8. These elections are, therefore, particularly significant in assessing the popular support for the Revolution and the government. The 1993 election was held just two and a half years into the Special Period, in the midst of the difficult phase. However, the 1998 and 2003 elections occurred well into the Special Period when, despite the economic recovery, the economic situation was still to be improved, and the political and ideological impact of the crisis and the measures implemented would have had time to seep into and undermine popular support for socialism and the revolutionary project. The elections held after 1993 will be discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters.

Beginning with the first election in 1993 for provincial and national delegates under these new regulations, the government has campaigned hard for people to cast a voto unido (that is, a straight ticket vote for all the nominated candidates), which the vast majority of people have done. Voting has been portrayed more as an affirmation of support for the regime than as a means for
voters to select among competing candidates or policies. In fact, the national election of 1993 ended up being transformed into a plebiscite on the Revolution, socialism and the leadership of Fidel Castro. While the election was not centred on a contest between rival candidates or parties, voters could render a protest vote by boycotting the election or by ballot spoiling or leaving the ballots blank. The Cuban exile community in Miami broadcasted hundreds of hours of programming into Cuba exhorting voters to do just that. In the run-up to the vote, radio stations broadcast was an estimated combined total of 1,112 hours (the equivalent of more than forty-six days) per week into the island, urging an electoral boycott. Even Lawton Chiles, then governor of Florida, called for Cubans to annul their vote. On the island, the election was treated as a de facto referendum. An intense campaign was launched, calling for a Voto Unido (unified vote): a vote for the entire slate of candidates. Thus, the TV, press and mass organisations urged both a Voto Unido and Si Por Cuba (Vote for Cuba). On 24 February 1993, Cubans went to the polls (August 1999).

It is to be noted that this was a secret vote; there was even no military presence at the polling stations. Foreign journalists or any foreign visitor could and did observe the voting process and the vote count. More than a hundred journalists from twenty-one countries witnessed the elections. Furthermore, children guarded the ballot boxes. It is instructive to note that there was not one accusation of voting fraud. The Miami-based magazine Contrapunto stated: “The counting of votes was impeccable. It was open and public, and since over 120,000 people were involved in 30,000 polling stations, the results could not be tampered with” (Cole 1998: 122).

In the face of Miami predictions that up to 50 per cent of the ballots would be spoiled or blank, Cubans overwhelmingly demonstrated their support for the revolution, socialism and the leadership of Fidel Castro (ibid). A Cuban explained that when each person was alone in the voting booth with their conscience, the vast majority chose to demonstrate their support for the national project embarked upon in 1959. From the eligible electorate of more than 7.5 million, 99.6 per cent voted. It must be emphasised that in Cuba voting is not compulsory, as it is, for example, in Argentina. From the total votes casted, 92.97 per cent were valid, with 94.99 per cent of valid ballots casted as a ‘unified vote’. In short, 87.96 per cent of the electorate overwhelmingly expressed their support for the Revolution. Elizardo
Sanchez, the prominent 'dissident' and government opponent in Cuba and President of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation accepted the validity and legitimacy of the vote, acknowledging that the mandate of the Cuban government had been renewed.

(iii) Grass-Roots Participation and Governance

Many Cubanologists argue that mass participation at the grass-root level and multi-level process of governance are the specificity of the Cuban political system. The governance is being performed with the Organ of Popular Power (OPP) and Popular Council (Consejos Populares). As the Organ of Popular Power (OPP) has already been discussed in the chapter, the role and power of Provincial Assemblies of People’s Power will be described here, followed by an analytical description of the function of Popular Council (Consejos Populares).

(i) The Organ of Popular Power (OPP) works at grass-root level, which ensures maximum participation of populace in the political process of the country. It functions at three levels municipal, provincial and national. At the municipal level Popular Council (Consejos Populares) and at the national level National Assembly involve with the Organ of Popular Power. In the next section Popular Council (Consejos Populares) will be discussed, while the National Assembly has already been discussed in the previous section titled 'The Political Institutions'. In this section, an attempt has been made to look into the activities at the provincial level by taking into account the role and power of provincial assemblies of people’s power.

(a) Role and Power of Provincial Assemblies of People’s Power

a) To obey and help to enforce the laws and other general regulations adopted by the higher state bodies.

b) To approve and control the execution of the province’s income and spending budget and plan according to the policies agreed upon by the competent national agencies.

c) To elect or recall the President and Vice President of the Provincial Assembly; and to designate or substitute the Secretary of the Assembly.
d) To participate in the drafting and supervision of the state budget and technical-economic plan corresponding to the entities located in its territory and subordinated to other bodies as prescribed by law.

e) To control and supervise the activities of the provincial administration body with the help of its work commissions.

f) To designate or substitute the members of the provincial administration body at the proposal of its President.

g) To determine according to the principles established by the Council of Ministers, the organisation, functioning and tasks of the entities in charge of carrying out the economic, production and services, educational, health care, cultural, sports, protection of the environment and recreational activities, which are subordinated to the provincial administrative body.

h) To adopt agreements concerning administration matters in its territory and which, according to law, do not correspond to the general jurisdiction of the central state administration or to that of the municipal bodies of state power.

i) To approve the creation of organisation of the People’s Councils at the proposal of the Municipal Assemblies of People’s Power.

j) To revoke in the framework of its jurisdiction, the decisions adopted by the provincial administrative body or propose their revocation to the Council of Ministers when these decisions have been adopted while acting according to the faculties entrusted to them by the centre-state administrative agencies.

k) To study and evaluate the rendering of accounts reports presented by their administrative body and the Assemblies of People’s Power which are their subordinates, and to adopt the pertinent decisions regarding those reports.

l) To set up or dissolve work commissions and to strengthen legality, public order and the country’s defence capacity.

m) To entertain all the relevant applications of the policy on cadres drawn up by the higher state bodies.

(http://www.asanac.gov.cu/ingles/English%20The%20Structure%20of%20Cuban%20State.html)

(b) Popular Councils:

Popular Councils (Consejos Populares) serve as a real basis for solving problems. Article 103 of the Cuban Constitution establishes the municipal assemblies as the
highest local organisations of state power.¹⁰ Their mandate is primarily exercised through the *Conejos populares*, which represent a form of neighbourhood government. The *consejos populares* emerged as an important innovation in the early 1990s and were primarily aimed at enhancing the power of the municipal and provincial assemblies with the purpose of curbing corruption and the growing underground market. The *consejos populares* have decentralised some of the powers of the government system, providing a more substantive connection between local government and upper echelons of the state. This is part of the considerable decentralisation in administrative decision-making that was initiated in the 1990s. (Roman 1999).

In organising community forces, the councils are an important source of self-government. The *consejos populares* are invested with considerable decentralisation in administrative and decision-making power. Their objectives are to work towards meeting the population’s welfare i.e., economic, educational, cultural and social needs, while promoting efficiency in the production and service industries. Each *Consejo popular* has the responsibility for the economy of the particular neighbourhood (Ibid). Consequently, the role of people in affecting and transforming the conditions of their lives is amplified. Extensive popular participation is at the centre of the Cuban model of governance and is manifested not only in the form of workers’ parliaments. Moreover, this participation impacts on the everyday issues that confront ordinary Cubans.

*(iv) An Assessment of the Political-Electoral System in the 1990s*

In reviewing the Cuban electoral system, few striking points emerged. Cubans are not preoccupied with a mere mechanical implementation of unchanging model. Contrary to dominant preconceptions, the Cuban political system is not a static entity. Cubans are involved in an intense learning process whose hallmark has been experimentation and willingness to correct mistakes and missteps by periodic renovation of the project. Thus, the system responds to popular demands for adjustment. One of the challenges the system wrestles with is that “excessive centralisation of power and paternalism has reduced the efficacy of the public’s participation and self-management” (Ibid). Consequently, a number of measures and changes were enacted to enhance and remove obstacles to political

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¹⁰ *Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1993.*
participation in the process of socialist development. This is how, in 1992, the constitutional and electoral laws were modified to require the direct popular election of all members of the national and provincial assemblies. Also, the creation of the popular councils in the early 1990s was directly aimed at increasing the power of local government and reducing the impact of bureaucracy. The political system and process is always in flux and evolving in response to the creative actions of its citizens. In 1992, the electoral system altered to facilitate more effective and efficient popular participation and input into decision-making. The National Assembly became a body elected directly by the Cuban electorate.

The function of the PCC is significantly circumscribed, as it does not operate as an electoral party. It is proscribed by law from playing any role in the nomination of candidates. This is integral to harmonising the concept of a single party with the idea that the people should nominate and the people should elect. We had to make it work in practice, because what was known to exist in the world when there wasn't a single party was a multiplicity of parties, and this was the only known procedure for carrying out elections. So we had to create something new, something more just, more equitable, more democratic, more pure, because our main concern was to preserve the purity of our electoral process and prevent any politicking or corruption from filtering in (Madan, N. et al 1993).

There is no formal campaigning, which curtails the role of money in Cuban elections. Instead, a month before the election, a biography of each candidate is displayed in various public places, where they can be perused at the convenience of the entire electorate. The objective of circumscribing formal campaigning is to avoid the emergence of a ‘class’ of politicians. Elections in Cuba are free of the commercial advertising whereas this process dominates the political system in capitalist and other socialist countries. Professional politicking and politicians are viewed as symbolic of the corrupt past and marginalisation of the citizenry that's at the provincial and national levels, candidacy commissions select and shift through thousands of people. The commissions are comprised of representatives from the various mass and grassroots organisations and are presided over by workers' representatives chosen by the union. The PCC is prohibited from participation in the work of the commission, ensuring “that the grassroots delegates are nominated without any intervention from the Party". Indeed, “in principle and practice a peasant or taxi driver can be member of these Commissions”. The commissions' recommendations are then presented to the municipal assemblies for final approval.

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characterised pre-revolutionary Cuba. Consequently, the sons and daughters of workers and peasants comprised all the delegates of the national, provincial and municipal assemblies. Ernesto Freire, President of the National Candidacy Commission, stated the goal is to establish for all Cuban citizens “the space and opportunity in equality of conditions”.

To become a member of the governing structures, individuals don’t have to be rich, they don’t have to be landowners, or great industrialists, or multi-millionaires. They don’t need money, they don’t need anything except decency and civic worth.... We wanted to avoid politicking at all costs, we wanted to have a fair, really fair, process in which a person’s worth, a person’s personal history, a person’s qualities would be the deciding factor (Madan, N. et al 1993).

After the amendment in the constitution in 1992, the National Assembly became a body elected directly by the Cuban electorate. By law, up to 50 per cent of National Assembly deputies can be municipal assembly delegates. During 1998-2003, in the National Assembly, 46.3 per cent of the delegates were from the municipal assemblies. The other members of the National Assembly were national or provincial figures, politicians, managers, scientists, doctors, workers, teachers, intellectuals, peasants, athletes, artists and leaders from religious and other spheres. The selection process ensures a broad representation of society as: the electoral commission made up of all civic organisations and sectors of the population spends over a year going from province to province, town to town, sifting through tens of thousands of proposed candidates to come up with the most representative slate of candidates to make sure that every sector of the population is truly represented. That slate is then presented to the population to vote up or down (as occurs in other countries, as well). But even

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13 For example, on 1 December 2002, in preparation for the 2003 elections, the municipal assemblies approved 1,199 candidates for the provincial assemblies and 609 for the National Assembly. The candidates had been selected from an original of 57,340 proposals, of which 32,585 were made at constituency level; 7,273 in provincial plenary sessions of the mass and student organisations, the Central Organisation of Trade Unions and the Association of Small Farmers, and 15,857 in those organisations’ national plenary sessions.
then, citizens can choose to vote yes or no, one by one for each of the 601 candidates.\textsuperscript{14}

Each member of the National Assembly, including Fidel Castro, is directly elected and must receive more than 50 per cent of the vote in her or his constituency. In Cuban municipal, provincial and national elections, the turnout is very high, usually in the ninetieth percentile. The high turnout is a product not only of political reasons i.e., one’s feeling of civic responsibility, but also cultural reasons. These include a highly developed sense of community and ‘\textit{vamos para la calle!}’ (Let’s go to the street!) of which, the social aspect of voting is one part. Also, although a single national delegate list is put to the electorate, not every candidate on the slate receives the same number of votes, an indication that Cuban voters are both aware of and exercise their right to vote only for those they feel will adequately represent them (Spalding: 2003).

The National Assembly, for example, has ten permanent commissions. It met from 16 to 20 December 2002 to discuss more than forty topics, including the fishing industry, the environment, the restructuring of the sugar sector, the production of medicine and links between Cuba and the European Union, particularly Cuba’s decision to apply to join the Cotonou Agreement an economic accord between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific states (\textit{New York Times}, 22 Dec 2002).

A nature of co-ordination exists between the elected municipal delegates and the people they serve. Each delegate must live in the electoral district (usually comprising a maximum of two thousand people). The municipal assemblies, which, meet four times a year, elect a President, Vice-President and a Secretary. These are the only full-time paid positions in Cuban local government; all other members of the municipal assemblies are unpaid and continue in the jobs they had before they were elected. Delegates have a high degree of familiarity with their constituency and are constantly on call. Every six months, there is a formal accountability session at which complaints, suggestions and other community interests (\textit{planteamientos}) are raised with the delegates. Issues at these sessions include a constellation of problems, such as “the repair of public fencing, a leaking water main; the need for more recreational and sports facilities, the lack of public

lighting, a problem at work that has not been solved at the local level, etc” (Cole 1998: 38). The delegate attempts to resolve the matter or provide an explanation at the following accountability session. In short, the delegate accounts for her or his work carried out since the previous session. Each planteamiento is carefully recorded, and majority of them are resolved. For example, in October 1999, the Camito Municipal Assembly, in the province of Havana “reported that of the 583 problems presented to them by that date, some 81 per cent have already been solved” (New York Times, 22 Dec. 2002). These planteamiento sessions have resulted in local issues being taken to the national level where they are examined and discussed, thus ensuring popular input into government policy. If constituents are dissatisfied with the performance of their representative, then she or he can be recalled or voted out in the next round of elections. For example, in 1989, only 45 per cent of delegates were re-elected and 114 were recalled (ibid). In the municipal elections of the year 2000, 47.87 per cent delegates were re-elected. In the working meetings of the provincial assemblies and the National Assembly, the main goal is to achieve ‘unity and consensus’. The unanimous votes that occur do not represent, as critics charge, imposition by the PCC, but rather legitimate consensus worked out in lengthy discussion at several levels.

**Civil Society and Mass Organisations**

The mass organisations are a key feature of the participatory culture that typifies Cuba. They are national and inclusive, augmenting the representative governmental structures by providing an organisational and institutional means by which civil society both expresses itself and intervenes in the decision-making process. Indeed, they play a key role, as no decision on matters that concern these organisations is made without their consent. Mass organisations, unlike the Communist Party, are granted through Article 88 (c) of the Constitution the right to propose legislation in the areas that fall under their jurisdiction (Alarcon: 1999). Hence, these organisations have a substantial existence, and Cuba is replete with almost daily assemblies, meetings and gatherings of various organisations to discuss and examine particular issues, in conjunction with the participation of government officials. This is part and parcel of the political process.
The Cuban mass organisations are frequently described as the nation’s primary channel for articulating popular demand. There are four major mass organisations: the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). Each of the Cuban mass organisations has state sponsorship and a monopoly on the organisation of the interest it represents. All state workers belong to the CTC, all small farmers to ANAP. Approximately 80 per cent of all adult citizens belong to the CDR, and more than 80 per cent of women belong to the FMC. The membership for these last two organisations would be even greater were it not for their practice of excluding those citizens of questionable revolutionary commitment.

The Cuban mass organisations are charged with responsibility for representing interests, nonetheless, subject to the leading and orienting role of the party. The party formulates general directives concerning fundamental questions of economic, social, political, and cultural development of the country, such as concerning the problems that pertain to the different social sectors. The party also has responsibility for ensuring the most adequate selection and placement of cadres on the part of the mass organisations. Lacking autonomy, the mass organisations can with some justice be viewed as agencies of the Cuban government responsible for promoting “non-antagonistic” forms of interest representation.\textsuperscript{15}

These organisations have very specific functions and responsibilities, and are in addition to the Communist Party, the Young Communist League and the Confederation of Cuban Workers. The mass organisations are supplemented by numerous professional and other associations that represent the specific interests of other sectors, including lawyers, economists, journalists, writers, artists, physically challenged people and stamp collectors. In short, these associations and organisations embrace practically all the activities, interests and problems of all Cubans. Thus, Cuba has what some would term an active and vibrant civil society, despite the reality that ‘civil society’ is invariably conceived as an entity despite existing against the state. For example, political struggle in communist societies is seen as the struggle of civil society as such against a monolithic party-state.

\textsuperscript{15} Plataforma Programatica del Partido Comunista de Cuba (1976), La Habana: Departamento de Orientacion Revolucionaria del Comite Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba.
The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución- CDR), formed in 1960, is a network of committees across Cuba. The organisations have been primarily designed to report 'counter-revolutionary' activities as well as promoting social projects with the slogan -“¡En cada barrio, Revolución!” (In every neighborhood, Revolution!). The CDR officials have the duty to monitor the activities of each person in their respective blocks. There is an individual file kept on each block resident, some of which reveal the internal dynamics of households. The CDR is the largest and most grassroots of all the mass organisations, with a membership of more than seven million people. They were established to organise the population to repress counter-revolutionary activity, i.e., sabotage and terrorism (Lorimer: 2000). However, the CDR’s functions evolved to encompass a wide range of social and community activities, for example, public security efforts recycling drives, cultural and children’s events, vaccination and blood donation campaigns. They generate community cohesion and togetherness; the CDRs have created a social network that is critical for all sorts of activities.

Cuban leaders consider CTC as the most important of the mass organisations. The high (relative to other mass organisations) participation of union representatives at all levels of the party, state, and government testifies to the importance and prestige accorded to the CTC. But the CTC’s record in defence of workers’ interests suggests that the special attention given to the organisation and its high degree of integration into the structure of governance has been a mixed blessing for its working class membership.

In most respects, the Confederation of Cuban Workers is at the opposite end of the spectrum from ANAP. As representative of the entire working class of Cuba, the CTC defends the interests of a huge mass, and the well-being of ideological raison d’etre of the Revolution. With 17 leaders on the Central Committee, and the right of its Secretary General to attend sessions of the Council of Ministers, it is the best institutionally represented at high leadership levels of all of Cuba’s mass organisations. The same pattern of strong representation holds also at lower and intermediate levels. Since early 1980s, CTC leaders at the provincial
level were promoted to serve on provincial party committees and their executive bureaus.

The National Association of Small Farmers (*Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños- ANAP*) is a cooperative federation formed in 1961, dedicated to promote the interests of small farmers in Cuba. ANAP has over 300,000 members. ANAP provides training, agricultural extension and other services to its members by cooperation with NGOs, mainly from Canada and Europe. The association often negotiates with the Cuban government on prices of agricultural production, credits, and other farmers' interests. Currently ANAP members produce 52 per cent of the vegetables, 67 per cent of the corn, and 85 per cent of the tobacco grown in Cuba (Sinclair et al. 2007).

As the small farmers' group, ANAP has distinguished itself from other mass organisations through its independent and successful defence of peasant interests. If family income is the standard, there would seem to be great truth in this observation, for the small farmers have been a financially advantaged sector of Cuban society since the mid-1960s (Carmelo 1981). ANAP has achieved this gain despite the small size of its constituency and despite the ideological incompatibility between private farming and Marxism.

ANAP’s success derived largely from the coincidence between its members’ financial self-interest and policies that promote broader national objectives. At the same time, ANAP’s lobbying of the government has been part of a complex give-and-take bargaining process, in which victory is always tenuous. For example, ANAP championed the free farmers’ markets (at which beginning in 1980 food was sold at market prices) in alliance with central planning officials who were interested in augmenting food supplies (Carmelo 1981). However, at the Sixth Congress of ANAP, Castro said that he had been persuaded by the ANAP delegates that price ceilings (at a high level) would achieve the same object without penalising the consumer or arousing resentment against the farmers. Yet the Sixth Congress did adopt a resolution favouring a tax on gross private sales.

The Federation of Cuban Women (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas-FMC*) was established in 1960 under the revolutionary government with Vilma Espín as its president, who fought in *Sierra Maestra* with Fidel and Raul Castro and later
married to Raul. She was the President of the FMC till her death in 2007. From its inception, the FMC has been successful in effecting positive changes in Cuban society. The FMC was deeply involved in the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961 and in supplying workers after the mass exodus of trained labour following the Revolution. A few of the stated goals of the FMC are: 1. Bringing women out of the home and into the economic activities to make them competent. 2. Re-organising peasant households that keep women in subservient positions. 3. Developing community services to alleviate domestic work and childcare and providing equal opportunities for women. 4. Mobilising women to get involved with political activity and work of government administration. 5. Providing adequate working conditions "to satisfy the particular needs of the female organism and the moral and spiritual needs of women as mothers" (Harris 1995).

The FMC's commitment to gender equality has been officially endorsed by the PCC, and in many respects the government has been more favourably disposed towards FMC aspiration than has the population as a whole. For example, in the 1981 municipal elections, 11.3 per cent of those nominated for local office were female, but the voters elected only 7.2 per cent females for these posts. Elections at the provincial and national level are subject to PCC manipulation, and the numbers of women at these levels are larger. In 1981, of the 143 women candidates nominated as National Assembly delegates, 113 or 79 per cent were elected. But of 660 male nominees, only 386 or 58 per cent were elected. The FMC has criticised administrative decisions when it has viewed these as insufficiently sensitive to women's concerns. For example, at the Third FMC Congress (in March 1980), the main report criticised discontinuation of an experimental programme that had opened stores and service units during evening hours for the convenience of working women. According to the report, the FMC was not consulted on the decision. In a closing address to the Congress, Castro took note of the FMC's complaints on the issue and expressed support for their position.

It can be noted that gender equality in education, work force participation, and political status have helped Cuban women to significantly improve their position in the society since the revolution. One may question the independent contribution of the FMC to this change, emphasising instead, for example, the impact of underlying modernisation trends, but there is no question that the FMC adopted a public posture that is critical, not only of 'tradition', but of ongoing
institutional practices and decisions. The commitment of FMC and initiatives of Cuban government brought females in mainstream in many areas.

In theory, all Cuban mass organisations are the organised expression of distinct constituencies whose interests they represent and defend in the policy-making process. In practice, however, representation takes place through a “consultation” process that leaves political initiative and control largely in the hands of trusted political lieutenants who cooperate closely with the highest party leadership. What is an acceptable interest to be organised and who will lead it are questions with which the party considers itself properly concerned. Consequently, the mass organisations encourage citizens to watch and report on their neighbours, urge workers to produce faster and better, encourage peasants to join cooperatives, and exhort women to join the paid labour force, despite their continued special responsibility in the home. It is unlikely that spontaneous voluntary interest associations would pursue the same agenda. As a result of limited autonomy, the mass organisations to a substantial degree represent the interests of the government to its members. The government keeps watch on all the activities of the mass organisations so that, the purpose of revolutionary steps to meet the demands of common people in a socialist system do not get derailed.

(i) Labour Unions and Workers’ Parliaments

Labour unions and workers’ parliaments are the base of Cuban socialist movement; some Cubanologists describe it as the backbone of revolutionary mission. The workers’ parliaments are equally an important civil society organisation. The workers’ parliaments have demonstrated that workers in Cuba have very definite and concrete rights. They have considerable inputs and say in their workplaces in major societal decisions. The unions are central to this promotion and exercise of rights. The Cuban union movement encompasses more than 98 per cent of workers through the 19 national unions. The unions are autonomous- a requirement prescribed by law- and completely self-financed through monthly dues. Thus, they work closely with the PCC and the government. Indeed, unions exercise considerable influence on these institutions, as both the PCC and the National Assembly have significant representation from unions and the working class (Roman 1995).
The CTC functions vertically at three levels in Cuba, with a structure consisting of a national, provincial and municipal office in all 14 provinces. The lowest level of trade union is called the union section (sección sindical), i.e., the departmental or shop-level union. The trend has been to reduce the size of the union sections to create a closer relationship between union leaders and workers enabling the leadership to better represent the latter. The union section elections take place every two and a half years. The candidates for the office are nominated by the workers and elected by secret ballot at the worker assembly. Generally, there is more than one candidate nominated for the election of each office. The union bureau (buró sindical) functions above the union section. The union bureau is similar to a 'local union' in the US. A single workplace with more than one union section may have its own bureau or even two or more if there are several large plants. The bureau represents the workers before management in negotiations of the collective bargaining agreement, in disciplinary matters and other issues of concern to the workers. The members of the bureau are nominated and elected by members of the union sections every two and a half years, but unlike the leadership of the union section, bureau officers are professional union workers paid by the provincial unions and generally do not hold jobs in the enterprise (Evenson 2003).

The function of Cuban union is two-fold: “1) to contribute in economic, political and social interests of the country and 2) to protect the rights and to work for better standard of living of Cuban workers” (Evenson 2002). Among the different relationships the unions develop with employer, the most significant is with the government. As the discussion of the workers’ parliaments illustrates, workers in Cuba have a definite role in shaping national policy. The government must consult the unions on all matters involving labour policy. If the government intends changing, for example, the labour code, it must go to the workers for approval. The workers conduct meetings among themselves, debate the proposals of the government and then decide whether they are amenable to the changes to the legislation. On many occasions, workers have accepted some proposal while rejected others. For example, in 1995, proposed alternations to social security were rejected by the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC), resulting in the legislation being sent back to be reworked. In 1995, a provision in the Foreign Investment Act that would have allowed joint ventures with foreign investors to directly hire Cuban workers was abandoned in the face of opposition from the CTC (Ibid).
mentioned in the discussion of the workers' parliaments, the unions also effectively challenged the 1994 proposal to tax workers' wages. By laws, workers meet in their work-centres twice in a year to participate in discussions on the economic planning of their company or enterprise. Agreements from the previous round of meetings are reviewed, reports from the administrators are discussed and examined, future plans and objectives are analysed, and measures are implemented if deemed necessary. The workers have the option of rejecting the proposals offered by the management, necessitating a round of negotiation between the workers’ representatives and the administrators. The resulting new proposal must be submitted to a workers’ assembly for ratification. The workers’ assemblies also determine the production norms and rates (Roman 1995).

In the case of labour for joint ventures with foreign investments, the Cuban Ministry of Labour and Social Security operates a special office, which is run somewhat like a union hiring hall. Foreign companies cannot directly hire or fire workers. If a problem with a worker occurs, the company has to discuss it with the Cuban manager and the union. The worker returns to the Ministry of Labour office if he or she needs retraining or replacement. Cubans working for a foreign investor have the same benefits and protection as other Cuban workers.\(^{16}\) Foreign companies are bound by Cuban social legislation.

Thus, discrimination on the basis of race, sex or ethnicity is tackled. A worker can challenge a dismissal as unfair or discriminatory with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security acting as the final arbiter. While workers in foreign enterprises must be Cuban or permanent residents, individuals who are not permanent residents can work at management and administrative positions. Wages are paid directly to the state agency, which in turn pays the workers. In addition, the management of wages allows the state access to a source of hard currency, which is used to maintain the healthcare, education and social security systems. It is also argued that while the wages workers receive are low- when US dollars are used as the gauge- their basic needs are met by the state, and they are protected by extensive labour and social legislation, effectively rendering real wages much higher (August 1999).

\(^{16}\) *Foreign Investment Act* 1995.
The primary work of the Cuban union movement is organised through the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), which unites all unions. The CTC organises, on a periodic basis, national congresses where Cuba's working-class democracy is most publicly put into practice. During the ‘special period’, there have been two such congresses 1996 and 2001. The 1996 congress was held five years into the intense economic crisis of the 1990s. The delegates discussed and debated many issues, focusing on the economic changes introduced and the national struggle to overcome the crisis. In preparation, a document dealing with many subjects pertaining to workers, *These for the seventeenth Congress*, was distributed to all of Cuba's workplaces at the end of 1995 and was discussed in the municipalities and then at grassroots union assemblies from 15 January to 15 March 1996. The main objective identified was the defence of the socialist Cuban Revolution by means of strengthening the role of workers. The document begins by stating that the “essence of this seventeenth Congress... will be to ...determine what we are to do, together with our people, their organisation and institutions, to guarantee under any circumstances the revolutionary power of the workers, by the workers and for the workers” (La Riva 1996).

The eighteenth Congress of the CTC was held in April 2001. This congress was preceded by seventeen months of workers’ assemblies at the base level, forums, delegate elections and a thorough discussion of the unions’ theses and twenty three proposed resolutions. At the congress, 1,675 delegates discussed about defending the revolution’s ideas and values, improving economic efficiency and production, and the strengthening of the union leadership at the base. The workers expressed their opinions on economic and social issues, and exchanged ideas and proposed solutions with government and Communist Party leaders. The problems that were discussed and analysed in considerable detail included, among others, employment and compensations; housing and transport shortages; the high prices in farmers’ market and recovering the previous production levels in sugar.

President Fidel Castro and other government ministers participated, made presentations and answered questions throughout the congress. Castro listened and spoke at length making detailed proposals that received strong support, particularly the recommendation to extend six-month paid maternity leave to one full year. This was adopted and implemented immediately. The congress also decided to allocate computers to the country’s primary-level education. It was also resolved to
endeavour to reduce unemployment to 4.1 per cent by the end of 2001. In his closing speech to the congress, President Castro focused on the nature of the state and workers’ power in Cuba. He emphasised on the contributions of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, V.I. Lenin and Jose Marti to Cuban socialist thought and the revolutionary project. He elaborated in detail on the ‘concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat’, especially as it applied to Cuba. Castro stressed that it is the Cuban working class that holds power and runs society for the benefit of all.

In a nutshell, the Cuban Revolution’s political stability is a product of the democratic characteristics that describe the political system and facilitate the existence of a community of mutual interests and actions. It is to be noted that the level of Cuban popular participation in day-to-day politics exceeds that of the West, where political participation for the vast majority is limited to casting a ballot at election time only. Cuban participatory socialist democracy can be considered a movement towards the ‘parliamentarisation of society’. Fidel Castro stated, “… not in search of a formal, alienating democracy that divides people, but rather a democracy that really unites peoples and gives viability to what is most important and essential, which is public participation in fundamental issues”.

The Cuban political and societal processes revolve around the base of its citizenry, which is the basis of policy formation and formulation. Thus, Cuban people are embedded with the creative process of politics and the policy strategy is a reflection of a process of socialist development through which people are empowered to fulfil their social potentials.

In the 1990s, a big debate in political arena emerged throughout the world on Cuban democracy and survival of socialist pattern of development. Cuba passed this test of survival after many hurdles such as loss of an important trading partner after the disintegration of the USSR, strengthening of economic sanctions by the United States through Torricelli and Helms-Burton Act and other attempts by the dissidents. In the beginning of the 21st century, debate moved to transition of power and what after Fidel, due to his ailing health. Here, an attempt is being made to deal with the important aspects of the debate on the Cuban democracy and its survival.
Whither Socialist Democracy!

Cubanologists, political scientists, academics have written extensively on democracy in Cuba and its survival. Many doubts have been raised on the nature of democratic process and a continuous debate on the survival of Cuban socialist system is an area of interest for researchers. The Cuban view of democracy includes an emphasis on the right to economic and sustainable development, a view put forward by the Margarita Summit of American States held in Chile in 1997.17 Certainly since 1989, there has been some improvement in Cuba’s human rights record, though crackdown occurred again in 2003. (Bond: 2003) With the view of strengthening the democratic process, there has been an increase in the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and relatively independent organisations on the island. By 1995, some 2,200 NGOs had been registered with the government, though only some of these were genuinely independent organisations. It is to distinguish in Cuba among congos (controlled governmental organisations), gongos (‘government-oriented non-government’ organisations), and more autonomous NGOs in the definitional sense, with Cuba currently demonstrating a wide spectrum of top down and bottom-up forms of organisation.18

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17 Although Cuba remains an active participant of the Ibero- American Summits, one of the few international forums open to it (Cuba had been suspended from the Organisation of American States in 1962), not all member states accepted Cuba’s claims to having a legitimate political system. Strongest critics at the time included Argentine President Carlos Menem and Nicaragua’s leader Arnoldo Aleman, known for his fierce anti-communist stance. Perhaps the greatest achievement was the forging of a common national spirit, something that most other Latin American republics had failed to do. At the same time, Cuba has kept extremely tight control on political opposition, has limited freedom of speech in political matters, and has developed a security mentality that has led to constant U.S. charges of human rights abuses (see the annual U.S. Department of State Country Reports for Cuba). Some commentators such as Arnold August have suggested that lively political debate does exist in Cuba, indicating some degree of political pluralism. Arnold August, Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-1998 Elections, (La Havana: Editorial Jose Marti, 1999), p. 21-23, 28. CNN Interactive, “Cuban issue among topics of Latin Summit”, 9 Nov ,1997, (Internet Access) and Edwin Williamson, The Penguin History of Latin America, (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1992), p. 457.

18 Castro has learnt from collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid destabilisation of communist governments in Eastern Europe and has opted for very little political reform combined with strictly limited economic reforms. The continual pressure from the U.S., in fact, has allowed him to dismiss internal opposition as U.S. dupes, and helped to mobilise a strong internal nationalism, thereby reducing pressures for political opening. Likewise, the immigration policy of the U.S., which readily receives Cuban exiles, has been used by Cuba. In most cases until recently, more dangerous dissidents have been arrested, and often offered their freedom so long as they leave Cuba thereby reducing pressure on the regime. Recent U.S. laws have made this even more predictable, with a 20,000 U.S. visas for Cuba annually, plus refuge for those viewed as political refugees, who can be readily granted work permits and residency after one year. Damian Fernandez, Cuba and the
To face the challenges due to economic crisis, the key issue for Castro's government had been the re-linking of the economy to the global capitalism system without undermining its political system. Thus, over the course of the 1990s, Cuba has dramatically changed its trade, technology and investment partners, modified its institutions of foreign trade, opened the door to foreign investment, developed international tourism at a breath-taking pace, and changed, albeit not so dramatically, the product composition of its exports. These changes represent the beginnings of the country's reinsertion into the international economy, or to be more precise, into the capitalist world system with socialist vision. This reinsertion or "relinking" follows a previously long period of "delinking" from the same world system, particularly during the 1980s.19

One element of this modern Cuban strategy remains the effort to play a strong role in marshalling the politics of the developing world.

During the tense period of the middle 1990s, Castro was willing for a time to open the doors of Cuba, letting any-one who wished to leave to do so. As explained in one account:

A new series of attempts by Cubans to leave the island began in the summer of 1994. Initially, the departures were largely by means of commandeering ships. Hijackings of tugboats, ferries, and even a naval passenger transport ship took place in the Bay of Havana between 13 July and 8 August 1994. The hijackers were occasionally assisted by the US Coast Guard and later given

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19 This was clearly seen when Cuba hosted the meeting of the G-77 developing nations (now in fact comprising some 133 countries), including a visit by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Kofi Annan stated that he was impressed with the social development of Cuba. Likewise, many Central and South American states have been very critical of the US led blockade of the islands. Cuba is willing to raise its profile in any international forum- it is probably on this basis that it has tried to put itself forward as the 2012 venue for the Olympics, an unlikely bid but one that has drawn some media attention. In January 2004, Cuba also hosted the 3rd Western Hemisphere Forum opposed to the Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA), 'with the participation of more than 1000 representatives of Latin American social movements. Pedro Monreal and Jack Hammond, "Sea Changes: The New Cuban Economy", North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) Report on the Americas, vol. 32, no. 5, Mar-April 1999, p.p. 21-29. Excite News, "Cuba Eyes 2012 Olympics", 1 June, 2001 (Internet Access) and Xinhua, "Anti FTAA Forum Opens in Cuba", Xinhua News Agency, Jan. 27, 2004.
political asylum in Miami. Frustrated by the government’s actions and accusing the United States of encouraging the departures, President Fidel Castro announced that henceforth Cubans were free to leave the island, and thousands of balseros (rafters) proceeded to leave on whatever small rafts they could construct (Vanderbush, Haney 1999: 387-408).

The ongoing trickle of refugees from the island continued to provide a kind of safety valve for internal tensions, but also continued to heighten tensions between Cuba and the US. At that time, Castro moved to Vatican to improve relations. In the meeting with the Pope in 1998, for the first time he wore a normal suit rather than a military outfit. Although, only some 150,000 Cubans openly practice their religion since controls on religious organisations were softened in 1991, it is believed that many more are sympathetic, with some 40 per cent being baptised.²⁰

There are some achievements credited to the revolution: improved literacy, improved food supply for the poor, provision of housing and education, an effective health-care system, and effort to reduce race and gender prejudices. (Williamson 1992) Cuba certainly tried to create a strong welfare and educational system, with the result that, in spite of the US embargo, the medical system of the country has been quite strong. Thus, Cuba in 1998 received the Health-for-All medal from the WHO (World Health Organisation). Likewise, Cuban doctors developed a meningitis B vaccine in 1998, which American companies wish to access, a move which Castro supports on humanitarian grounds. (Tremlett 1998) Thereafter, Cuba traded its medical expertise, services and medicines with Venezuela (in return for oil) and with Argentina (reducing Cuba’s 1.9 billion debt) in ‘swap’ deals. Cuban doctors have also been active in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, Malawi, Angola, Botswana, Chad, Lesotho and Tanzania (Africa News Service: 2004). Passing through all the hurdles, Cuba bravely survived their socialist nature of democracy.

²⁰ It must be remembered that although many Cubans remained religious, Castro had moved to remove the political influence of the Catholic Church by nationalising it rather than letting its political leadership remain overseas: hence the creation of the Episcopal Church of Cuba. The Pope has spoken out against the embargo of Cuba, arguing that it hurts many ordinary Cubans. In return for this diplomatic recognition, Castro has improved the ability of the Catholic Church to operate on the island. Newsday, “Pax Cubana: Let Papal Visit Thaw US–Cuba Relations”, News day, 18Jan.1998 (Internet).
In the above sections, an attempt has been made to describe and analyse the major political developments mainly from 1991 to 1995. Every organisation has gone through some structural changes to make it more functional and effective than before. In the next part of the chapter a descriptive analysis of economic policies implemented by the Cuban government will be discussed to conceptualise how these changes led to a meaningful economic reform in a socialist pattern of economic development. Now, this part of chapter will discuss the major changes and developments in economic sphere. The government introduced a number of changes in economic policy to restructure the economy to face the challenges posed by economic crisis.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The previous two chapters stated Fidel Castro Ruz brought Cuba closer to the USSR, aligned to the communist countries, formed Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), exported guerrilla warfare in Sub-Saharan and Latin American countries, and consolidated ideological orthodoxy and faith among the masses in the country. The dependence on one single trading community and not searching other modes of production caused difficult economic situation during the mid-1980s. At this time, many distortions and lapses had crept into the functioning of the revolutionary regime. The government initiated ‘rectification process’ to overcome the negative tendencies and campaigned to rectify the errors with the purpose to reconsolidate faith among the masses. The rectification process presented the appearance of an initiative to revitalise socialism. But, the disintegration of USSR deepened the depth of economic crisis in 1989. At that time, Castro declared a ‘special period in times of peace’ in 1990. In the special period a number of new policies were introduced which resulted in a positive direction of the economy in few years.

The present chapter outlined that the initiatives taken in fourth party congress of the PCC in 1991, certainly, resulted in a positive direction. The Fourth Congress adopted the suggestion that all delegates to OPP assemblies be elected directly by their constituents and called for the strengthening of the National Assembly’s work commissions. The ‘reformers’ pushed for the use of market mechanisms to speed up economic recovery and for greater political space for
dissenting views that were not manifested by counter-revolutionaries. The 'conservatives' argued that rapid economic change would undercut the party's political control and that any political opening in the midst of economic crisis risked setting off a torrent of criticism that might sweep away the regime, as had happened in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

During the Fourth Party Congress, the leadership discussed various measures to recover and boost the economy. A major emphasis was put on the promotion of hotel, tourism, joint ventures with foreign capital, biotechnology exports, and new trading partners in an effort to mitigate the decline in economy. Leaving the structure of the economy unaffected, a series of strategies were adopted after the fourth congress to revitalise the economy. In the first half of the 1990s, the Cuban government introduced many new initiatives at various levels. As a result, in the year 1991-1995, economy came on track without compromising two strong pillars of the socialist system, health and education. The generational changes in PCC composition, once again, reposed faith in Castro, socialism and revolution.

The constitutional reform in the year 1992 was a landmark event to bring back the faith of the masses in the government functionaries, which could be seen in the National Assembly election of 1993. The constitutional changes in 1992 allowed direct election of provincial and national people's power delegates. Reforms saw the electoral process as a means of initiating political liberalisation. The ANPP revised 42 articles and updated 34 of the 141 articles of the 1976 Constitution. Cuba was declared a secular rather than an atheist state and certain freedoms of religion were provided. Foreign trade was the exclusive monopoly of the state but modification allowed quasi-government or private agencies and certain individuals to participate in export and import activities.

The political institutions like National Assembly, Council of State, Council of Ministers and other organisations like Organ of Popular Power and Popular Councils (Consejos Populares) helped to reconsolidate faith of the populace in Cuban Socialism in a difficult time. The National Assembly of People's Power is a constituent and legislative authority, which represents and expresses the sovereign will of the people. The Council of State is the collegiate body of the National Assembly of People's Power the highest representative of the Cuban state. The Council of Ministers is the highest ranking executive and administrative body of
the government. The Organ of Popular Power (OPP) works at grass-root level to ensure maximum participation of populace in the political process of the country. Popular Council (*Consejos Populares*) involves with the Organ of Popular Power at the municipal level.

Mass organisations like Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), and Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) contributed positively in increasing grass-root participation. Labour unions and workers’ parliaments have demonstrated that workers in Cuba have very definite and concrete rights. The Cuban political and societal processes revolve around the base of its citizenry, which is the basis of policy formation and formulation. Thus, Cuban people are embedded with the creative process of politics and the policy strategy is a reflection of a process of socialist development through which people are empowered to fulfil their social potentials.

The next chapter will deal with the economic reform and change during 1993-95. In the chapter an attempt would be made to look into the areas and patterns of economic reforms since 1993, the process and pattern of restructuring the external economic sector and how reform led to economic recovery.