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The Confirmation of Democracy in Cuba



Photo by Nathaniel St. Clair

The Cuban electoral system confirmed its democratic character through the exercise of the popular consultative procedure that elected Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez as head of state and government. Cubans will now place their hopes in him to continue the island's revolutionary process, a paradigm of ideas and struggles for socialism and the independence of the nations of Latin America.

“I’m not here to promise anything, like the Revolution never did. I have come to fulfill the program that we have imposed on ourselves with the guidelines of Socialism and the Revolution”, the new President emphasized about his main work objectives.

Díaz-Canel had been First Vice President of the Councils of State and Ministers. Together with him, engineer Salvador García Mesa was proclaimed 1st Vice-President. Before that, Esteban Lazo had been re-elected President of the National Assembly.

On April 18, the National Assembly of People’s Power in Cuba (ANPP) was constituted in its ninth term session. It elected, from among its 605 newly-elected deputies, the members of its highest body, the Council of State. The latter, in turn, chose the new president of the Republic of Cuba at its first session, succeeding Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, who had been in charge of the nation’s government since 2008.

Initially, Raúl took up the position through normal succession when President Fidel Castro Ruz fell ill. It was his responsibility to replace Fidel in accordance with his duty as First Vice-President, a position that had been legally assigned to him by the National Assembly of People’s Power in the past.

During those two consecutive presidential terms, Raúl was elected and re-elected President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers by the will of the citizens expressed at the polls. However, on the second occasion, the Cuban revolutionary leader announced his decision not to run for re-election.

Raúl Castro had been, since the beginning of the insurrection against the Batista tyranny, the second figure in the leadership of the revolution. His performance at the head of the government earned him an increase in prestige as a leader, which was already great due to his brilliant performance at the head of the country’s defense.

No one questions that Raúl’s enormous authority and popularity would have enabled him to continue in the presidency for a third term, but Raúl Castro himself had advocated the need to renew the leadership of the revolution and the government, which, in the eyes of the people, turned compliance with his decision not to continue in office into something like paying a debt of gratitude to its President.

On the morning of April 19, marking the anniversary of the first defeat of U.S. imperialism in America at Playa Girón, Miguel Díaz-Canel delivered his first speech as President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers,

“With this legislature,” he stressed, “the culmination of the election process of the last few months, which the people have carried out conscious of its historical importance, and without any campaigning, corruption or demagoguery. Citizens have distinguished

humble, hard-working and modest people as their genuine representatives. They will participate in the approval and implementation of approved policies.

He added that anyone who wants to see Cuba in all its diversity can observe it in its National Assembly.

He stressed that he assumes responsibility with the conviction that all revolutionaries, from any trench, “will be faithful to Fidel and to Raúl, the current leader of the revolutionary process.

He then stressed, as another inherited achievement, that “unity has become invulnerable within our party, which was not born of the divisions of others, but out of the unification of those who sought to achieve a better country”.

“Raúl remains at the forefront of the political vanguard. He continues to be First Secretary of the Party as a reference point for the revolutionary cause, teaching and always ready to confront imperialism, like the first, with the rifle at the time of combat.

He highlighted Raúl’s revolutionary and political work, his legacy of resistance and in the quest for the nation’s improvement, his statesmanship, building consensus and leading the process of implementing the Party’s guidelines. He also mentioned how Raúl had supported the efforts to bring about the return of the Five Heroes that Fidel had predicted.

This session of the Ninth Session of the National Assembly was closed by Raúl with a vibrant and historic speech outlining many of the most urgent tasks facing the new Cuban President.

A CubaNews translation by Walter Lippmann.