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Cuba

New Prime Minister takes office in Cuba

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Cuba is reintroducing the office of prime minister, a position that had disappeared in 1976 with the country's first socialist constitution and which returns with the new constitution drawn up in May 2019. Who is this new head of government that nobody expected? How did he get the job and what are his likely political orientations?

No one expected him in this position. The press release announcing his designation emphasizes that he is a “modest and simple” man, something that does not seem very credible. The new Prime Minister was a hotel manager, then director of the hotel managers of a province, and later Minister of Tourism.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the states that orbited around the Kremlin, Cuba experienced its greatest economic crisis in the 1990s. Until the beginning of that decade, the tourism industry was depressed. The so-called socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which represented almost 85% of the country's trading partners, did not provide profitable tourism and essentially Cuba lived by selling sugar to Moscow.

The aforementioned economic crisis forced the government to fully focus on promoting tourism. Thus, today it is the industry with the highest sustained growth in the country, with almost 5 million foreign visitors per year.

Fifteen years ago, Fidel Castro appointed a new minister to serve the leisure industry: Manuel Marrero Cruz. A short time later, for health reasons, the old leader handed over power to his younger brother, Raul Castro. After two years of provisional status, in February 2008 Raúl Castro was officially proclaimed President of the Council of State and Ministers.

In March 2009 he made a questionable cabinet purge, sacking all the ministers of the Fidel government, arguing that they had developed a dangerous ambition for power. Only one minister appointed by the old leader survived this change: the Minister of Tourism who had been appointed by Fidel a few years ago.

Manuel Marrero Cruz survived not only this purge, but the entire period of the Raúl government, before being ratified by the new president, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, and, in addition, proposed by him, and approved by parliament, as new Prime Minister. Something becomes obvious, when the party newspaper said he was a “modest” companion, they meant that he had never been interested in power.

And it is true, Marrero Cruz is the typical businessman who only works to achieve the success of the company without expecting greater recognition from the boss than a pat on the back. He did not wish to rise in government: just to keep the country's tourism growing. To such an extent, that he ended up being appointed not only tourism minister, but also head of the Gaviota Business Group - property of the armed forces - which controls most of the Cuban tourism sector. While the rest of the political and administrative leadership of the country competed with each other to occupy positions of power, he only dedicated himself to fulfilling his work.

On 10 April 2019, after long citizen debates and a constitutional referendum, Cuba adopted a new constitution. Until this time, Raúl Castro - and before him Fidel - was simultaneously General Secretary of the Communist Party - the only party on the island and therefore the highest political office in the country - President of the Council of Ministers, effectively Prime Minister, and President of the Council of State, that is, Head of State. At the same time, in due course, both Fidel and Raul, held the highest military rank in the army they had founded. Raul knew that this was an anomalous concentration of power and that someone with such political and administrative strength could take the

nation where that person wanted.

Hence, from the new Constitution, there is a General Secretary of the Party - Raúl Castro Ruz, a President of the Republic - Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, and, since 21 December – coincidentally 140 years after Stalin's birth – the only minister who survived Fidel's departure from power and the arrival of his brother Raul, who also survived the election of a new president and their respective cabinet changes, plus the changes of a new constitution, Manuel Marrero Cruz, on this very day was elected Prime Minister.

But there is something we should not forget. Although the grey character of Marrero - at the same time a successful technocrat - was what guaranteed his remaining as Minister of Tourism while many fell, his long political survival and now his appointment as Prime Minister, also influenced something that many forget.

When the new president Díaz-Canel was nothing more than the head of the party in a remote province in the east of the country, Marrero Cruz was the tourism manager of this entire province. Coincidentally, the current First Lady was also from that province, and that was where Díaz-Canel met her. Also, purely by chance, the current first lady was appointed under the mandate of Marrero as a director of the tourism agency of the Ministry of Culture. And a detail that should not be forgotten: according to the new Constitution, the Prime Minister is appointed on the proposal of the President of the Republic. That is, Marrero Cruz was appointed by Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

As a successful director of hotel managers throughout Cuba, Marrero Cruz filled Havana's old town with hotels, oblivious to the sustained crisis of access to water suffered by those who live in that area of the capital. This election made by the president, ratified by parliament, and also approved by the Political Bureau of the Party, indicates the intentions of the new government that has been formed, while the old leaders of the revolution of January 1959 exit from power.

The former Prime Minister, like the current one, also had a beard, came from a remote province in the east of the country and had a long career of political resistance like the one just appointed. But Fidel Castro – the former Prime Minister – resisted the deadly traps of US imperialism in favour of Cuba and Manuel Marrero Cruz has been dedicated to resisting the traps of the Cuban bureaucracy in his personal favour. Fidel's relationship with the transnationals was to expropriate them, Marrero's relationship with the transnationals was to attract them. Fidel's relationship with the workers was to lead them to revolution, Marrero's relationship with the workers was to create VIP zones in the new hotels that have been built. In less than three months, defining measures will be taken in terms of the economic direction of the country. A prime minister, that is, a head of government, will have a lot of responsibility in the new direction of the nation.

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