

Importance of fidel castro's economic policies

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To what extent was Fidel Castros maintaining in power a result of his economic policies?

Fidel Castro was one of the longest ruling leaders in South America. This essay discusses the question if his maintaining in power was caused by his economic policies, namely his agriculture reforms, his reforms towards the ideals of the revolution and communism, the year of the ten million and the fight against the influence of foreigners, or by his social reforms, the influence of the foreign powers of the USSR and USA, the lack of an organized opposition, his personality and war-hero image and the state propaganda.

The main targets of the agricultural reforms are the creation of cooperatives, an increase in the efficiency, the restriction of "rich farmers" that means people who own too much land, a shift away from a monoculture and cheap food supply for the people. To reach these targets the state expropriated landowners with too much land and organized these areas in cooperatives, which were motivated to grow other crops. Everything had to be sold to the government at very low prices. This took motivation from farmers to produce more than they need and lead because of that and the fact that most of the cooperatives were bad organized and not as efficient as expected, to a decrease in productivity. The tries to shift away to a monoculture failed as well, they had to go back to sugar production in 1964.

The restriction of the farmers with too much land was maybe popular with the poorer workers, but that decision did not lead to a higher production or more popularity in the rest of the population; it was still an important reform,

especially because it was one of the reasons why the farmers supported him in the revolution.

Even if it was economical not really successful, it gave the population a picture of honesty. The year of the ten million was at the beginning a reaction on the enormous debts of the country, but it became a battle of Cubas pride. I think the Year can be seen as one of Castros biggest failures. The mobilization of the whole population was an incredible effort, the militarization of work was not very successful, the target of the 10 million tons was not reached and the campaign left soldiers disappointed because they were used for the sugar production, the economy damaged because they paid no attention to the other parts of the economy and overused the tools for sugar production and last but not least the population demoralized because they didn't reach the target, even with this big effort.

Another target of his politics was to minimalize the influence of foreign countries and firms. In the agriculture reforms was all land that was owned by foreigners nationalized and added to the land of the cooperatives. This lead on the one hand to more wealth under the Cubans, but also to a significant mistrust under foreign investors. The landowners were paid in bonds what caused protests of their governments. Especially the relationship to the USA became more and more complicated. Cuba continued with confiscating foreign wealth in the country what lead to the US Embargo in 1960. This had a negative effect on the Cuban sugar export.

The improving relationships with the USSR gave Cuba a new sugar market and access to cheap oil and development help. One of the relative successful politics was the increase in the taxes on luxury goods. This lead to a <https://assignbuster.com/importance-of-fidel-castros-economic-policies/>

decrease in import and higher tax income for the government. Interesting is also the enforcement of socialist and communist ideals. We can see that the government tried to nationalize as many firms as possible to enforce the socialist ideas. This led to an administrative chaos because the organization of so many firms was too complicated for the existing offices and it led to a decrease of productivity and efficiency.

The government tried also to enforce Che's ideals of voluntarism and solidarity. The unpaid extra hours and the unification of wages led to a decrease in working moral, poor working qualities and the massive emigration of specialists. They banned also farmer markets, what led to difficulties in the food supply of the people. These reforms led to a first economic crisis at the end of the 60's. Stabilization was achieved with the adoption of the economic model of the USSR. The economic growth took place till the Rectification campaign 1986 and the return to Che's working ideals of the new man.

This and the fall of the east bloc in the 1990's led to a new economic crisis and the special period in peacetime. An economic stabilization took place with the slow opening for foreign investments and the new tourism industry. Also the opening to the Dollar led to a success in the form of an increase in demand, because exiled Cubans started to send money back home. Also the concentration on industries like the sugar production, the nickel extraction and the tourism industry led to a slow positive development of the economy. Important for his maintaining in power were also the social reforms.

Things like higher wages, reduction of pension, the reforms of health and education system, the literacy campaign and the new workingman rights lead to the support of the lower classes for the government. The people were fine with these reforms, therefore they accepted to wait for democratic elections till Castro and the government established laws which enforced the targets of the revolution. These reforms in combination with a new gender politic lead also to the support of women. The government passed laws to enforce the equality of man and woman. They offered women access to better jobs and created daycare centers and other support for working woman. Even if the presence of women in the workforce remained lower than expected, the better situation lead to support for Castro as the membership of the FMC shows.

Soon after the revolution, the Movement started with the consolidation of their power. The liberals were brought out of the government; people inside the movement who were against Castro were imprisoned or exiled. They used show trials against political enemies and restricted the freedom of expression. Also the CDR and the UMAP's were important weapons against the opposition. All this left the opposition weak and unable to act. Also the fact that people could leave the country was a weakening of the opposition, because a lot of their supporters mainly members of the middle class were leaving the country.

That took the possibility of mass support out of every Anti-Castro movement. Not everybody was willing to stay and go into the opposition; it was easier for most people to leave the country. The support of the Soviet Union was also an important factor. Important for this support was also that he declared

in 1961 that he is Marxist-Leninist. Not only that they helped with military support, or the education of teachers, they were also the main sugar buyer. This was important for the economic stability of a monoculture economy like Cuba. It was also an alliance that gave a certain safety against the US, because it made an invasion without the risk of a nuclear war impossible.

The USSR became Cuba's main trading partner and insurance for political stability. One factor for his maintaining in power was from my point of View also the USA and the bay of pig invasion in the year 1961. Not only that the operation was a failure and let him look like a great military leader, it gave also a visible enemy to the Cubans. The danger from the US became real and Castro looked like the man to defend them from this danger, but for that his leadership had to be accepted. Also the fact that the attack did not lead to uprisings as planned was a consolidation of his power. Additionally it reinforced the image of him as a war hero and defender of the nation. It is not only the fact that he had now a visible enemy who united the country that was helpful for his maintaining in power, it was also the possibility to blame this enemy for economical or political difficulties that helped Castro to stay in power. Read the list of microeconomic policies

Most experts agree that his long governing period was also caused by his personality. He was a charismatic leader, a war hero, a skilled politician and was able to turn a defeat into a success. He was well known in Cuba since the attack on the Moncada Barracks. The fight in the Granma expedition and the following guerilla war made him a war hero for most of the Cubans. " The main source of the inspiration and legitimacy of Castro's revolution, however, has been the Cuban nationalist tradition in its more radical version.

Castro saw his movement as a culmination of a time-honoured struggle for independence and development [...]. (Sebastian Balfour, Castro, 1990)" Not only he, but also most of the people saw him as a fighter for their independence. As we can see after other independence struggles all over the world, it is highly unlikely that the fighters for independence will lose the support of the population as long as the idols of the revolution, like Raul and Fidel Castro or Che Guevara, are alive. In the first time of the provisional government he gave nearly every day speeches to the people about the targets of the revolution and the next reforms.

Because of that and his fight in the revolution he became one of the best known figures of the government, reforms were connected to him personal. His speaking skills were impressive as he showed in his famous " history will absolve me" speech and a lot of other speeches later. He was also known for his close contact to the people, in the revolution itself he had good relationships with the people in the fighting areas, he and his movement treated them better than the real army, paid for the food they took, explained the targets of the revolution, treated prisoners kindly and gave medical support. " The rebels leaders' humanity- and excellent strategy- were illustrated in the order to the revolutionary army that captured soldiers were to be treated with kindness, their wounded given medical support.(Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, Cuba, 1960)" Also after the revolution he continued with journeys to the rural areas to speak with people about their problems. Because of all this, Fidel became for most Cubans a figure of hope.

I think it can be argued that his economic policies were not the main reason for his long maintaining in power. Even if some reforms had a certain level of

success, like the higher taxes on luxury goods or the allowance of the dollar, other ideas damaged the economy in the long run. I think that the two main reasons for his maintaining is on the one hand the role he played in the revolution which was seen as a part of the fight for independence and his personality. He can clearly be seen as an example of a charismatic leader, after the definition of Max Weber (leadership that is resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him).