
Western Hemisphere

Richard Feinberg

Social Policies and Decentralization in Cuba: Change in the Context of Twenty-First-Century Latin America

EDITED BY JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ, MARÍA DEL CARMEN ZABALA ARGÜELLES, MAYRA ESPINA PRIETO, AND LORENA BARBERIA. Harvard University Press, 2017, 282 pp.

Voces de cambio en el sector no estatal cubano (Voices of Change in the Cuban Private Sector)

BY CARMELO MESA-LAGO, ROBERTO VEIGA GONZÁLEZ, LENIER GONZÁLEZ MEDEROS, SOFÍA VERA ROJAS, AND ANÍBAL PÉREZ-LIÑÁN. Iberoamericana, 2016, 214 pp.

The Cuban Affair

BY NELSON DEMILLE. Simon & Schuster, 2017, 448 pp.

Undertaking professional social science in Cuba must be a labor of love, for the available resources are grossly inadequate, ideological overseers are watching, official statistics are scant, and the authorities generally permit only small-sample field studies. Yet the collection of admirable studies presented by Domínguez and his esteemed Cuban collaborators manages to convey a compelling, if depressing, portrait of Cuban society. Universal health and education have produced worthy outcomes, but their quality is visibly deteriorating, and

efforts at reform have fallen short. Although good data are scarce, it is clear that socioeconomic inequalities are widening along gender, ethnic, and geographic lines. Cuba's highly centralized bureaucracy and tightly planned economy, both of which rest on ideological foundations resistant to reform, have repeatedly frustrated attempts to decentralize decision-making and increase democratic participation. Even these erudite authors struggle to recognize that renewed economic growth and higher labor productivity will require sacrificing some egalitarian social ideals.

Voces de cambio en el sector no estatal cubano supports a similar conclusion. The book was written by scholars at the University of Pittsburgh who teamed up with Cuban researchers to interview 80 Cubans participating in the island's emerging business landscape. The researchers recognize that their sample is necessarily small and nonrepresentative. Nevertheless, their findings are valuable and generally confirm what other small-sample studies have uncovered. Despite the many obstacles confronting Cuban entrepreneurs, most report a high level of satisfaction and are earning handsome returns and reinvesting for future growth. The Cuban private sector has added jobs, generated tax revenues, and improved the quality of services. Yet in recent months, Cuban authorities have criticized small businesses for earning "excessive" profits and for allegedly engaging in illicit practices that, they charge, undermine socialist ideals. Officials would do better to digest the many well-founded recommendations in *Voces de cambio* and further encourage the productive capacities of the Cuban people.