

Communist Party board resurrected

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HAVANA - Cuba's Communist Party on Tuesday resurrected a powerful executive council to shore up its authority and reassert ideological influence as President Fidel Castro nears his 80th birthday.

U.S. pressure has been building for sweeping democratic changes when he dies.

The resurrection of the party's secretariat is the latest move aimed at strengthening the island's political structure for an eventual future without Castro, who has ruled Cuba for 47 years and turns 80 on Aug. 13.

Although Castro appears healthy and there are no signs he plans to retire, recent moves on the island indicate a concentrated effort to strengthen the rest of the communist leadership while he is still alive.

Cuba's previous Communist Party secretariat was dissolved 15 years ago as a necessary cost-saving move amid an economic crisis caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been the island's key economic and political ally.

The resurrection comes at a time when communist officials say the U.S. government is intensifying efforts to promote regime change on the island after Castro is gone.

Later this week, the U.S. government is expected to release a new report calling for additional measures designed to promote a transition to multiparty politics on the island, rather than a continuance of one-party rule.

The Communist Party newspaper Granma said that the new secretariat will "help in the daily work of the party and will be charged with organizing and ensuring the execution and fulfillment of its accords."

It will be headed by Castro, who is first party secretary, as well as second party secretary Raúl Castro, the president's younger brother and legally designated successor.

Among the other 10 members are top orthodox party leaders José R. Machado Ventura, 75, and Estéban Lazo Hernández, 62. Most of the rest are in their 50s or younger and hail from outside Havana.

Raul Castro, who often goes months without making public appearances, has been shown frequently on state television in recent weeks and his speeches have been reproduced in full in government newspapers.

The 75-year-old defense minister last month spoke of the eventual succession of power in Cuba and indicated that a more collective style of leadership will be necessary in the future.

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CUBA

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BY ANITA SNOW
Associated Press

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