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politics

25Aug91 CUBA: FUTURE UNCERTAIN FOR SOVIET-CUBAN RELATIONS.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, Aug 25, Reuters - The question making the rounds in Havana, from ordinary citizens to party officials to diplomats, is, "Where do the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union leave Cuba?"

Those asking are getting no official help in forming an answer.

Neither the Cuban government nor Communist party have issued statements on the situation in the Soviet Union since Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's reinstatement last week and his effective disbanding of the Soviet Communist Party.

The media has continued to print news agency dispatches, without comment, that give the public a limited but accurate picture of events in the Soviet Union.

Sunday's only national newspaper, Juventud Rebelde, carried a series of front page sub-headlines under the general title, "Following the Resignation of Gorbachev."

The biggest sub-headline reads, "Bush and Major Applaud Virtual Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."

Cubans are asking what will happen now that Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin seems to have usurped the prestige and authority that Soviet leader Gorbachev once held.

Gorbachev has been viewed here as a friend of Cuba. In April 1989 he and President Fidel Castro signed a long-term friendship treaty.

Last month in London Gorbachev asked that Cuba's ideological self-determination be respected. Earlier this month, he rejected U.S.

President George Bush's suggestion that the Soviet Union abandon Cuba.

Under Gorbachev a 1991 trade agreement between the two nations was signed and Cuba was looking forward to an acceptable 1992

agreement. The Soviet Union supplies Cuba with all its oil and buys most of its raw sugar.

Yeltsin has displayed less enthusiasm about keeping friendly ties with Cuba. He has stated that the Soviet Union should not carry the burden of aiding Cuba when it has such overwhelming problems of its own.

The subject of Boris Yeltsin's apparent coolness towards Cuba was broached last month in an interview with Carlos Aldana, secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party.

Aldana said: "Yeltsin is not Cuba's adversary. And I would say that on the contrary he professes a respect towards Cuba that we express towards Russia and leaders who, like him in this case, have been elected as an expression of the will of the majority of Russian people."

Speaking of the future of Soviet-Cuban relations, Aldana said: "We do not only perceive these relations in terms of aid but in terms of trade, of just and equitable trade relations."

Aldana added, "I don't believe anyone can sustain that Boris Yeltsin opposes this sort of relationship."

In a closed session with Communist Party officials this year, Aldana spoke of the growing power of Yeltsin's "Democratic Programme". For over three decades, Castro has consistently praised Vladimir Lenin and the Soviet Communist Party. He has stated that without the Russian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution would have been impossible.

Over the past three years, however, Castro's perception had changed to deep distrust. Although he has not mentioned Gorbachev by name, he has attacked the idea of a market economy and multi-party system that has sweeping the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.