

**The Theory**  
of the  
**Cuban**  
**Revolution**

by Joseph Hansen

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**J**EAN Paul Sartre relates that at the beginning of the year some Cuban friends came to see him. "They talked at length, with fire, of the Revolution, but I tried in vain to get them to tell me whether the new regime was socialist or not."

Sartre was prevailed on to visit Cuba and determine for himself. Upon leaving, he offered his impressions in an essay of unusual interest, "Ideología y Revolución" (Ideology and Revolution), which was published in the March 21 issue of *Lunes de Revolución*.

"What first surprises one in Cuba — above all if you have visited the countries of the East —" he wrote; "is the apparent absence of ideology. Yet it is not ideologies that are lacking in this century; here too, they have representatives who from all sides offer us their services. Your leaders are not ignorant of them; they simply don't employ them. Their adversaries formulate the most contradictory reproaches: for some, this absence of ideas is nothing more than a trick; it hides the most rigorous Marxism which does not yet dare name itself; some day the Cubans will remove the mask and communism will be installed in the Caribbean, a few miles from Miami. Other enemies — or, on occasion, the same — accuse them of thinking of absolutely nothing: 'They are improvising,' I have been told, 'and after having done something they elaborate a theory.' Someone adds politely: 'Try to speak with the members of the government; perhaps they know what they are doing. As for us, I must confess that we know absolutely nothing.' And a few days ago at the University, a student declared, 'Autonomy becomes all the more indispensable since the Revolution has not defined its objectives.'"

In reply to all this, Sartre continued, he had heard a thousand times: "The Revolution is a *praxis* which forges its ideas in action." This reply, the French Existentialist philosopher and playwright held, was logically unassailable, but a little abstract. Citing a practical interest in clearing up the question of the theory of the Cuban revolution, he declared: "It is necessary to understand, certainly, the uneasiness — sincere or feigned — of those who say that they don't know anything or who reproach the revolutionary movement with not having defined its aims." Mentioning his first query — is the Cuban revolution socialist or not? — Sartre recognized that the question was not well put, due to the fact that from a distance one tends to be a "little abstract, falling into those big words that today constitute symbols rather than programs." Nevertheless, "Socialism? Liberal economy? Many intellects ask; they are convinced in good faith that a Revolution ought to know where it is going."

Sartre believes they are wrong. The French Revolution of 1789 was "totally blind." The same ones "who voted for the Republic were monarchists two years before. Everything terminated in a military dictatorship that saved the rich and reinstituted the monarchy. And, through the mirages of an inflexible rigidity, how many vacillations, how many errors, how many slips backward the Russian Revolution experienced during its first years!" A NEP imposed by circumstances, "failure to foresee" the wreck of the revolutionary movements in Europe or even its own isolation. "The new ideas were expressed within the framework of an ideology without flexibility, becoming converted into hernias: Socialism in one country, the permanent revolution; inventions which it was believed could be justified through quotations."

Sartre, presenting his credentials in

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this field, is clearly not to be taken as a serious theoretician of revolution. From his brief remarks about Europe's two greatest revolutions, it would be hard to escape the conclusion that revolutionary theory is of little use. Nevertheless, he finds it scarcely satisfying to reply in response to the question in Cuba, "Are you going to build Socialism?" that "*praxis* will define its own ideology."

Sartre found among the leaders of the Cuban Revolution two conceptions which he at first thought were contradictory. One of the leaders told him that the Revolution is unable to take a long-range objective "because it is a *re-action*, or if you wish, something that rebounds."

"He meant by this that your people, placed before a too powerful neighbor, never had the absolute initiative and saw themselves obliged to employ every recourse of intelligence and energy to *invent* a counterblow. And he added: 'How can we make long-range plans when we can find ourselves invaded tomorrow, or suffer the most intense economic pressure? Guerrilla war, resistance to economic blockade, would necessarily change the structure of our society. All we know is this: we will not be defeated. But the conditions of our struggle would change us: it will be *another* Cuba that sees the victory.' I understood that he meant that your 'improvisations' are not, in fact, anything but a defensive technique: the Cuban Revolution must *adapt itself* constantly to the enemy maneuvers. Perhaps the measures of *counterblow* will give birth to a counter-ideology?"

### Leaders Became Radicalized

However, other leaders talked about themselves. "I asked them questions about their lives, about the evolution of their thought. All of them told me that the Revolution had dragged them far beyond their first positions. Violent clashes had occurred and they had to confront severe realities: some of their old friends had not followed the movement; others, reluctantly in the beginning, had become *radicalized*."

The two concepts at first seemed incompatible to Sartre. "In the first case, I thought, one adapts himself, one temporizes, everything must remain fluid and principles must not constitute a hindrance. In the second, the revolutionary movement becomes more profound, in a sure and, as a whole, regular manner; there exist then an order of march, points of reference, a direction. Perhaps it would be too ambitious to call the discovery of an orientation an 'ideology,' but it must be admitted that the demands of *praxis* have changed the ideas of these revolutionary leaders."

Observing the reciprocal relation between Havana's masses and Castro, during the Cuban leader's speech following the blowing up of the freighter *La Coubre* as it was unloading munitions for the defense of the country, Sartre came to the conclusion that the two concepts "counterblow" and "radicalization" were actually interrelated and that they marked the entire course of the Cuban Revolution. In the rest of his essay he sketches this interrelation, beginning with the appearance of bourgeois-democratic patriots who had to find a class base in the "agricultural workers" in order to build an effective movement, then take up the agrarian cause to carry through the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship, and finally undertake radical economic measures to consolidate the victory and defend the country against imperialism. Sartre sees as the possible end point of this development, should the foreign pressure prove sufficient, "self-radicalization" of the Cuban Revolution and, as its economic counterpart, "radical socialization."

IN APRIL, a few weeks after the appearance of Sartre's observations, a book by Ernesto "Che" Guevara was published in Havana.\* As one of the top figures of the Cuban government, anything that Guevara writes is, of course, to be studied. In the particular field covered in the book, guerrilla war-

\* *La Guerra de Guerrillas*, by Che Guevara. Published by the Department of Instruction of MINFAR (Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces), Havana, Cuba. 1960. 187 pp. \$1.



fare, he is an undoubted authority, having proved this by his military leadership in the civil war. At present, as head of the National Bank, he is in charge of Cuba's foreign trade, a post of key importance in the defense of the country and in the development of economic planning. *La Guerra de Guerrillas* will undoubtedly be widely discussed in revolutionary circles throughout Latin America where Cuba is now pre-eminent as a source of inspiration.

Largely a handbook, the author deals in considerable detail with the practical side of guerrilla warfare in a country like Cuba under the conditions of a dictatorship like Batista's. As Guevara stresses, virtually everything he presents is taken from the Cuban experience and may not be applicable in every instance to other countries even those having much in common in the way of climate, topography and socio-economic inheritance. I shall not deal with this aspect of the book save to note the striking portrait that emerges of the average Cuban guerrilla fighter.

Recruited from the countryside, chances were that he came to the Sierra Maestra barefoot and unable to read or write. He had gone through a period of testing, not least of which was to obtain his own gun and ammunition, most likely by a raid on a contingent of Batista's armed forces. He did not come with blind faith. Observing the guerrilla leadership in action he had become convinced of its honesty and fairness, the sincerity of its program of agrarian reform and its will to carry the struggle through to the end.

The guerrilla's life was not easy — under constant threat of death, he was often like a hunted animal, scurrying from cover to cover. He had to make lightning marches by night, attack, and flee. Sometimes as much as three days went without food. Sleeping in a hammock at best, under a strip of nylon to keep off rain and insects, tension was never absent. A bath, a shave were luxuries to dream of. (Guevara notes that each man could be told by his individual odor and the whole force by its acrid smell, "repelling strangers.")

The firmest ascetism prevailed; the fighters living like monks or Spartans. An iron principle of the leaders was to lead by example "... the chiefs must constantly offer the example of a crystal clear and self-sacrificing life." All, leaders and ranks, shared and shared alike — no exceptions. This included not only the occasional handouts of tobacco but the rugged fare, the hunger, the risks and the worst hardships. As the guerrilla fighter's horizon widened under indoctrination, he became a revolutionary, charged with the conviction and fervor so characteristic of forces dedicated to a great cause.

The small guerrilla bands grew until they were able to hold considerable territory where, as a power dual to that of Batista, they were able to give a demonstration of what their government would be like. The guerrilla forces developed into a full-fledged army of such force, hardness and skill that nothing in the country could stand against it. Batista's forces melted away. The *barbudos*, the bearded ones, marched in triumph into Havana, many of them seeing the wonders of the nation's capital for the first time.

### Guevara's Conclusions

Is it possible to draw more general lessons from this experience than the best practical way to organize guerrilla forces and later convert them into an army? Guevara thinks so. He presents some rather far-reaching conclusions. It is these, of considerable ideological interest, rather than such items as a good recipe for making a Molotov cocktail, or how to trap a Sherman tank, that will undoubtedly arouse most interest. Here is how Guevara begins:

"The armed victory of the Cuban people over the Batista dictatorship has been, in addition to the epic triumph recognized in the news of the entire world, a modifier of old dogmas on leading the popular masses of Latin America, demonstrating palpably the capacity of the people to liberate themselves from a suffocating government through guerrilla struggle.

"We hold that the Cuban revolution made three fundamental contributions

to the mechanics of the revolutionary movements in America. They are:

"(1) The popular forces can win a war against the army.

"(2) It is not always necessary to wait until all the conditions are ripe for the revolution; the insurrectional center can create them.

"(3) In underdeveloped America, the terrain of the armed struggle must be fundamentally the countryside."

Explaining his first two conclusions, the Cuban revolutionary leader says that they speak against "the quietist attitude of revolutionaries or pseudo revolutionaries who take cover and cover up for their inactivity, under the pretext that against a professional army nothing can be done, and some others who feel that they have to wait until, in a mechanical form, all the necessary objective and subjective conditions are ready, without preoccupying themselves about accelerating them."

Guevara recognizes, of course, that certain minimum objective conditions must ripen before the "first insurrectional center" can be set up. "Where a government has come to power through any form of popular consultation, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, it is impossible to precipitate guerrilla warfare since the possibilities of civic struggle have not been exhausted."

On the third point, which is of greater interest, both in itself and as an indication of how at least this top leader views the Cuban revolution in its wider aspects, Guevara declares:

"The third contribution is fundamentally of strategic import and must be a call to attention for those who attempt with dogmatic criteria to center the struggle of the masses in the movements of the cities, completely forgetting the immense participation of those in the countryside in the life of all the underdeveloped countries of the Americas. Not that struggles of the masses of organized workers are to be depreciated, the analysis simply chooses a realistic criterion to estimate the possibilities under the difficult conditions of armed struggle, where the guarantees that

customarily adorn our Constitutions are suspended or ignored. Under these conditions, the workers' movements must be clandestine, without arms, in illegality and running enormous dangers; the situation in the open field is not so difficult, the inhabitants supporting the armed guerrillas and in places where the repressive forces cannot reach."

Developing his point further, Guevara specifies that since guerrilla action is best conducted "in wild and little populated places" the struggle for the demands of the people is centered "preferentially and even almost exclusively, on the plane of changing the social composition of land tenancy; that is, the guerrilla is above all an agrarian revolutionary. He expresses the desire of the great peasant mass to be owner of the land, owner of their means of production, of their animals, of all that they have dreamed of for years, of what constitutes their life and will also constitute their cemetery."

Of the two types of guerrilla warfare, Guevara sets aside the one which is complementary to the struggle of big regular armies "such as the case of the Ukrainian guerrillas in the Soviet Union." "What interests us," he continues, "is the case of an armed group which continues progressing in the struggle against the constituted power, whether it be colonial or not, which establishes a single base and which continues progressing in the rural surroundings. In all these cases, whatever may be the ideological structure that animates the struggle, the economic base is given by the aspiration to possess the land."

Seeking other examples to support his generalization, the Cuban leader points first of all to China:

"Mao's China begins as an eruption of workers' nuclei in the South that is defeated and almost annihilated. It becomes established and initiates its ascendant march only after the long march to Yenan when it settles in rural territories and places as the base of demands the agrarian reform. The struggle of Ho Chi Min in Indochina is based on the rice-growing peasants oppressed by the French colonial yoke and with



this force it continues progressing until it defeats the colonialists. In both cases there is an interruption of patriotic war against the Japanese invader, but the economic base of the struggle for the land does not vanish. In the case of Algiers, the great idea of Arab nationalism has its economic replica in the exploitation of almost the entire arable land of Algiers by a million French colons; and in some countries like Puerto Rico, where the particular conditions of the island have not permitted a guerrilla outbreak, the national spirit, wounded to the depths by the discrimination committed daily against them, has as its base the aspirations of the peasantry (although in many cases it is already proletarianized) for the land which the Yankee invader seized; and this same central idea was what animated, although in different projections, the small holders, peasants and slaves of the haciendas of eastern Cuba who closed ranks to defend together the right to possession of the land during the thirty-year war of liberation."

Guevara does not rule out the action of the city proletariat altogether. But, since city terrain is the most unfavorable for guerrilla warfare, only limited acts are possible. In other words, reversing the situation of the Ukrainian guerrillas, the workers can only complement the struggle of the guerrilla fighters in the countryside. At a final point in the civil war, however, when the guerrilla forces have swelled into a peasant army capable of regular battle, the city proletariat can find it possible to engage in mass actions "whose final result is the general strike."

**I**N THE closing section of his book, "Analysis of the Cuban Situation, Present and Future," Guevara offers some additional considerations. After more than a year in power, it is necessary, he thinks, to take "the exact dimension" of the Cuban Revolution. "This national Revolution, fundamentally agrarian, but with the enthusiastic

participation of the workers, the people of the middle class and even today with the support of the industrialists, has acquired great continental and even world importance . . ."

The Agrarian Reform, "extremely harsh" for those whom it displaced from ownership, put in motion INRA (National Institute of Agrarian Reform) which now "advances like a tractor or tank" breaking up the big landholdings. The Agrarian Reform was "antifeudal" but occurred in "capitalist surroundings" and against the monopolies. Thus it had to help the peasants and agricultural workers with credit and with machinery and "People's Stores."

"Of all the characteristics distinguishing it from the other three great agrarian reforms of the Americas (Mexico, Guatemala and Bolivia), what appears most important is the decision to carry it through to the end without favors or concessions to any class."

Production of such important items as rice, grain and cotton is developing rapidly, constituting "the center of the process of planning." Cuba's rich subsoil resources have been retrieved through petroleum and mining laws which may turn out to be "as important" as the Agrarian Reform. The profits of foreign monopolists have been limited. The small island of Cuba is leading the anticolonial struggle in the Americas and has been permitted to take "the heroic, glorious and dangerous post of the vanguard."

"Small countries have sought before now to maintain this position; Guatemala . . . which fell before the direct aggression of the colonialists; and Bolivia . . . which yielded before the terrible difficulties of the struggle despite having provided three of the examples which served the Cuban Revolution in a fundamental way: the suppression of the army, the Agrarian Reform and the nationalization of the mines . . ."

"Cuba knows these examples, knows the pitfalls and the difficulties, but knows also that we are in the dawn of a new era in the world; the colonial pillars have been swept down by the popular national struggle in Asia and in Africa. The tendency today toward

unification of the peoples does not come from their religions, from their customs, from their appetites, racial affinity or lack of it; it comes from the economic similarity of their social conditions and from the similarity of their eagerness for progress and recuperation. Asia and Africa shook hands at Bandung; Asia and Africa will shake hands with native and colonial America through Cuba here in Havana."

Guevara notes the decline of the old colonial empires in face of the popular upheavals. "Belgium and Holland are two caricatures of empire; Germany and Italy lost their colonies. France debates in the bitterness of a war she must lose, and England, diplomatic and skillful, liquidates her political power while maintaining economic connections."

The United States has replaced some of the old capitalist colonial powers but knows that this is "transitory." Wall Street's main field is Latin America. But if "all the Latin-American people raised the banner of dignity, like Cuba," the monopolists would tremble and have to accommodate themselves to a "new politico-economic situation and to substantial pruning of their gains." That is why the monopolists today attack Cuba as a "bad example." They accuse Cuba because of the road it has pointed out, "the road of armed popular struggle against the supposedly invincible armies, the road of struggle in wild areas to consume and destroy the enemy outside its bases, in one word, the road of dignity."

Guevara winds up discussing the possible variants of imperialist aggression against Cuba and the means of combating it. For defense he counts heavily on "international solidarity" and guerrilla warfare.

**L** EON Trotsky remarked in 1940, "The life-and-death task of the proletariat now consists not in *interpreting* the world anew but in *remaking* it from top to bottom. In the next epoch we can expect great revolutionists of action but hardly a new Marx."

Cuba, it would seem, has done her share toward verifying this observation. In their pattern of action, the Cuban revolutionaries feel certain that they

have pointed the way for all of Latin America. The proof is their own success. But when we seek to determine the exact meaning of their deeds, Marxist clarity is not easily found.

Are we to understand from what Guevara says that the peasantry has displaced the proletariat as the leading revolutionary class — in the underdeveloped countries at least?

If so, what does this signify for revolutionary perspectives in the highly industrialized countries? Must the perspective of proletarian revolution be considered unrealistic there? If so, how does this affect the defense of revolutions like the one in Cuba? And what does it signify for humanity on such an issue as the possibility of a Third World War? Can the proletariat by revolutionary means hope to prevent a nuclear conflict or must this possibility be relinquished as utopian — unless the farmers take the lead by mounting guerrilla warfare?

Guevara insists, quite correctly the facts testify, that Cuba now stands in the vanguard of the Latin-American revolution. This would seem to impose an obligation to examine the theories and programs affecting that revolution, particularly if Cuba has made a new discovery. Why did the others happen to go wrong? How did the Cubans happen to stumble upon the right road? If for no other reason, such an examination could prove fairly decisive for the defense of the Cuban revolution. Yet even Guevara seems to evade such questions, confining himself to a cryptic reference — the "quietist attitude of revolutionaries or pseudo revolutionaries." What revolutionaries or pseudo revolutionaries? The Stalinists? The Apristas? We are left in the dark.

It is quite true that the Cuban revolutionaries do not have any time for spinning fine theories. They are practical people, swamped with tasks. They scarcely have time to look up from the day-and-night schedules they have had to follow since they came to power.

Yet there are some questions about which the Cubans should be able to say a good deal. For example, how did it happen that the once-powerful Com-



munist party proved incapable of leading the revolution? How did it happen instead, that a handful of dedicated students were able to build a revolutionary movement from virtually nothing and accomplish what the Communist party failed to accomplish? The answer to that should prove instructive to all of Latin America and the entire world for that matter.

Such topics, however, are not very high on the agenda of the Cuban revolutionaries. Their boldness and sureness of touch in the field of action have no corresponding reflection in the field of theory. Despite Guevara's sweeping conclusions, the theoretical lessons of the Cuban Revolution have not yet been drawn.

By way of beginning this task, let us establish some preliminary points of departure.

The founders of the July 26 Movement started as petty-bourgeois democrats. Fidel Castro, for example, ran for Congress in the 1952 elections as a member of the Ortodoxo party (Partido del Pueblo). After Batista's March 10 coup d'etat, Castro shortly set out on the road to insurrection. This led him within a year to the famous assault on the Moncada fortress and then to prison and exile. On March 19, 1956, he declared his disillusionment with the Ortodoxo party and announced the July 26 Movement as an independent revolutionary organization. This proved to be primarily a party of action, dedicated to the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship. Although occasional blocs were made with other groups and parties, the essence of its politics was to remain independent and not to swerve from its primary objective. It was a revolutionary youth movement much closer to the campus in the beginning than to either the factories or the fields, although later it came powerfully under the social influence of the poorest peasants and agricultural workers.

Why weren't these youthful revolutionaries attracted by the Communist party? The answer would appear to be quite simple and even obvious. The Communist party was not revolutionary

enough. In fact, it was not revolutionary at all. It was tainted by its support of the Batista regime. Moreover, neither Stalin nor his heirs were exactly magnets to youth burning with the will to smash the dictatorship. Among other things, Moscow's policy of "peaceful co-existence"; i.e., maintenance of the status quo, which was faithfully echoed by the Communist parties throughout the world, was repellent to revolutionaries seeking above all things to alter the status quo.

The models and inspirational guidance they might have found in the early Soviet leaders were not available to them, or were at least obscured under the successive layers of Stalinist mud.

The Cubans turned to what was closest at hand — the leaders of the independence movement of the past century. These figures had a virtue lacking in the Stalinist movement: honesty. Implacable foes of tyranny of any kind, they were dedicated men capable of accepting martyrdom to advance the cause of freedom.

Thus it came about that the July 26 Movement marched under the banners of freedom, equality and independence, as if the main problem of a modern revolution boils down to re-enacting 1776, 1789, or — in Cuban history — 1868 and 1895. The 1956-59 struggle closely paralleled the struggle of 1895-98, including the opening landing and the final advance of the guerrilla forces. Although they did not consciously plan it that way, the Cuban revolutionaries, with their beards, even bore close physical resemblance to the heroes of the past century.

Moreover, they took power, as Guevara stresses, not at the head of the modern proletariat but at the head of the peasantry, a class that is vestigial from the pre-capitalist era.

The pattern seems to defy the Marxist theory that the proletarian revolution has superseded the bourgeois. Yet does it really invalidate the main laws of the world revolutionary process as much as it appears to when you look at the Cuban Revolution merely in isolation? If we connect it with the main international events of the past forty-odd years,

two outstanding facts of contemporary history at once offer a key: (1) the deepening decay of capitalism, which impels revolutionary outbursts no matter what the barriers; (2) the decades of defeats of the proletarian revolution in the capitalist centers due to the pernicious influence of the Communist parties under control of the bureaucratic caste that usurped power in the first workers' state.

That the main thrust of the Cuban Revolution from the beginning was against capitalist imperialism is well understood among those who overthrew Batista. When McKinley intervened in the civil war in 1898, the freedom fighters had virtually won independence from the Spanish colonial master. McKinley aimed at blocking Cuba's independence and bringing the island into the orbit of Wall Street. American capital soon became dominant in both the island's economy and politics. Under the State Department, Batista, like Machado before him, ruled in the style of a gauleiter. Consequently, it is not difficult to see that the main motor force in the Cuban upheaval was American capitalism.

It is perhaps not so easy to see that Batista's rule of a quarter of a century was no more necessary than the similar span of Chiang Kai-shek's rule in China. Had the Cuban Communist party responded to Batista's seizure of power in 1933 with one-tenth the energy and singleness of purpose later displayed by the July 26 Movement, there can be no doubt that among Roosevelt's headaches would have been a socialist Cuba. Instead the Cuban Stalinists used their influence in the working class to rally support to Batista just as the American Stalinists utilized their influence among the American workers to spread the debilitating cult of "FDR."

The pattern was fundamentally the same as that followed by the Communist parties throughout the world prior to World War II. This is the true explanation for the fact that more than forty years after the October 1917 Revolution, not a single Communist party has led a revolutionary struggle to success anywhere in the world save in China

and Yugoslavia; and in both these instances the leaderships disregarded the line laid down by Moscow. *Stalinism proved to be the most powerful brake on revolution in the experience of the proletariat.* This was so not only in Germany, France and Spain before World War II, to mention only the most outstanding examples where the workers could easily have taken power, but after the war, when millions of workers flocked into the Communist parties in France and Italy and other countries. If twelve determined men on Pico Turquino proved sufficient to start the avalanche that buried Batista, what couldn't the Italian Communist party accomplish with its millions of members if it displayed similar revolutionary determination and devotion to the socialist cause which it claims to represent!

On a world scale, taking the entire span since the advent of Stalinism, it is the same default of leadership in the working class, due to Stalinist exploitation of the proletarian tendency to turn toward the first workers' state, that finally resulted in the extraordinary spectacle today of revolutions breaking out in dozens of countries — not under Communist, but under petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois nationalist leadership. One may imagine what Lenin might say of a Soviet Union capable of putting satellites in orbit about the sun and photographing the other side of the moon, yet incapable of giving direct inspiration to revolutionary-socialist struggles in other lands; on the contrary, sabotaging them, and thus creating a vacuum in revolutionary leadership!

However, the extension granted capitalism did not remove the objective necessity for transcending the system. The great new fact in world politics is that neither Stalinism nor imperialism, nor the combination of the two proved capable of suppressing the revolutionary process indefinitely. They could not prevent it from breaking out finally on democratic issues that might even mask the proletarian direction. They could not prevent the revolutionary process from finding leaders capable of at least making a beginning even though they might



fail to meet the objective need — or oppose it — at the very next stage.

Unable to blast away the Stalinist obstacle, the revolution turned back a considerable distance and took a detour. The detour has led us over some very rough ground, including the Sierra Maestra of Cuba, but it is clear that the Stalinist road block is now being bypassed.

### **The Main Lesson**

It is not necessary to turn to Moscow for leadership. This is the main lesson to be drawn from the experience in Cuba. And it is the lesson to be drawn above all by the working class in other countries, especially the underdeveloped ones where the revolutionary potential is high. Once this lesson sinks home we will witness an acceleration of the revolutionary process that will not leave the slightest doubt that the main power in society resides with the working class and that it will not forfeit its manifest destiny of leadership in the decisive battles now looming.

A single revolution under the guidance of the working class anywhere in the world today will reveal such energy and dispatch in breaking out of the old society that in retrospect even the dynamic Cuban Revolution will appear drawn out and grossly out of proportion in toil and agony. That, however, will not detract from the debt the working people of the world owe the Cubans. To finally break the hypnosis of Stalinism, it became necessary to crawl on

all fours through the jungles of the Sierra Maestra.

Men and women capable of that, will prove capable, we think, of transcending the bourgeois limits set at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. Already indications of this are visible. The July 26 Movement came to power not in 1898 but in 1959; and within a few months it became amply clear that not even the simplest democratic aims could be achieved without far-reaching alterations in the economy. Here the revolutionary models taken from the past century could offer little in the way of guidance. Their theory was inadequate.

But economic planning, thanks to the October 1917 Revolution, is no longer a matter of theory. Models exist and a vast practical experience, both good and bad. To help solve their own problems, the Cuban leaders are evidently seeking to come abreast of modern times and are turning in this direction.

Thus the inherent tendency of the Cuban Revolution to develop in the proletarian direction has been accelerated and there is every possibility that in an indirect way the fate of Cuba will be profoundly affected by the proletarian revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky. As this pattern of action cuts its way to consciousness, we may hope that the influence of October will be reflected directly in the ideology of the Cuban Revolution.



*"No revolution has ever anywhere wholly coincided with the conceptions of it formed by its participants, nor could it do so."*—Leon Trotsky.

LISTEN, YANKEE—The Revolution in Cuba, by C. Wright Mills. Ballantine Books, New York. 1960. 192 pp. 50 cents.

CUBA—Anatomy of a Revolution, by Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy. Monthly Review Press, New York. 1960. 176 pp. \$3.50.

**I**N THE first stages of the Cuban Revolution, not much appeared about it in the way of searching analysis. Publicity was largely agitational, whether for or against. Consequently the worth of most early writings hinges largely on the accuracy of the reporting and the extent to which documentary material is included. This is especially true of some items, highly laudatory of the Revolution and its leaders, by authors who have since gone over to the counter-revolution.

The situation today is quite different. The character and meaning of the Cuban Revolution, of the government that displaced the Batista dictatorship and of the state now in power are under intense discussion throughout the radical movement on an international scale. The theoretical questions have come to the fore.

This reflects the course of the Revolution itself. It began as an ill-reported and ill-understood revolutionary democratic movement in a small island ruled by one of a dozen strong men in Wall Street's empire. Today it stands as a colossal fact in world politics—the opening stage of the socialist revolution in Latin America, the beginning of the end of American capitalist rule in the Western Hemisphere.

The two books under review are among the best in a new literature appearing about the Cuban Revolution, a literature written by serious thinkers accustomed to probing for the deep-lying forces and trends in modern society. These thinkers are fascinated by what this Revolution has revealed, for they feel that perhaps here may be found clues to titanic revolutionary events now drawing near. As Huberman and Sweezy express it: *"In Cuba they are actually doing what young people all over the world are dreaming about and would like to do."* (Emphasis in original.)

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Let's begin with *Listen, Yankee*. In writing this book C. Wright Mills displayed considerable courage. The author of *The Power Elite* and *White Collar*, to mention his best known books, staked a big reputation and high standing in academic circles when he decided to support the Cuban Revolution with such forthrightness. That he weighed the issues is evident from the following statement:

"Like most Cubans, I too believe that this revolution is a moment of truth, and like some Cuban revolutionaries, I too believe that such truth, like all revolutionary truth, is perilous.

"Any moment of such military and economic truth *might* become an epoch of political and cultural lies. It *might* harden into any one of several kinds of dictatorial tyranny. But I do not believe that this is at all inevitable in Cuba. And I do believe that should it happen it would be due, in very large part, to the role the Government of the United States has been and is continuing to play in Cuban affairs . . . .

"The policies the United States has pursued and is pursuing against Cuba are based upon a profound ignorance, and are shot through with hysteria. I believe that if they are continued they will result in more disgrace and more disaster for the image of my country before Cuba, before Latin America, and before the world." (Emphasis in original.)

To help enlighten his fellow Americans and as a service in countering the hysteria, Mills presents the Cuban revolutionary case. As a succinct presentation of the main facts that led to the revolutionary explosion, of the achievements since then, and of the aims, attitude and outlook of the main rebel forces, the book is a remarkable accomplishment. I cannot recommend it too highly to anyone seeking a quick briefing, particularly as a knowledgeable Cuban revolutionist, leaving aside diplomatic considerations, might give it to you on a visit to the island.

### It's Not Stalinist

The salient feature of *Listen, Yankee* is the clarity with which it presents the anti-Stalinist aspect of the Cuban Revolution. Most readers of the *International Socialist Review* will understand at once, I am sure, that this has nothing to do with the anti-Communism of the House Un-American Activities Committee or similar bodies of witch-hunters and counter-revolutionaries. Even in most Communist parties where the cult of the late dictator was once the first commandment, it is generally accepted today—since Khrushchev's Twentieth Congress revelations about

Stalin's crimes and paranoia—that to be anti-Stalinist does not automatically put you in Hitler's camp.

An understanding of the attitude of the Cuban revolutionists toward Stalinism is particularly important. The Cuban Communist party supports the revolution. The government, in turn, has respected its democratic rights, as it has the democratic rights of other radical groupings. It has refused to engage in any witch-hunting and has denounced anti-Communism as a divisive weapon of the counter-revolution. This, plus the aid solicited from the Soviet bloc countries (which undoubtedly saved the Cuban Revolution from going down), has been utilized to falsely picture the Cuban government as having succumbed to Stalinism.

The issue happens to be crucial in the United States for winning support for the Cuban Revolution in sectors of the trade-union movement, among intellectuals and on the campus. It is not just a matter of attempting to overcome hysterical Stalinophobia. In these circles the truth is widely known about Stalin's suppression of proletarian democracy, his frame-ups of working-class political opponents, mass deportations and assassination of socialist leaders. Many rebel-minded people in the United States, who offered their support to the Soviet Union, felt betrayed on learning the facts about Stalinism. Consequently, out of fear of being burned again, they are cautious. On the other hand, the appearance of a genuinely democratic socialist revolution could reanimate them. Besides constituting the only sectors of the population ready at present to give a fair hearing to the Cubans, they are an essential link in rebuilding a mass socialist movement in America.

Mills gives the question the importance it warrants, citing many facts to indicate the profoundly anti-Stalinist nature of the revolution. Among these he notes the stress placed on immediate benefits for the people, the readiness to listen and learn in all fields, the freedom that makes Cuba so exhilarating to radicals, above all those on vacation from the stifling atmosphere of McCarthyland.

On the decisive political fact of leadership, Mills has his Cuban protagonist write an entire letter (No. 5), explaining why the Communist party is not in power in Cuba and why it is highly unlikely even to seek power.

"The plain fact is, our revolution has outdone the Communist on every score. From the beginning up till today, always at every turn of event and policy, the revolution is always faster than the Cuban Communist Party, or individual Communists. In all objective facts, then, we are much more radical, much more revolutionary than they. And that is why we *are* using

them, rather than the reverse; they are not using us. In fact they are being very grateful to us for letting them in on the work of the revolution.

"In fact, this is the case generally with local Communist parties in Latin America. In a real revolution today, in Latin America at least, the local Communists are to the right of the revolution. Here in Cuba, certainly the revolution has outpaced them and does on every front. They always arrive too late and with too little. This has been the case in Cuba and it still is the case: They lag behind our revolution." (Emphasis in original.)

The truth is that Stalinism proved to be an insuperable handicap for the Communist party of Cuba, no matter how revolutionary-minded its ranks were; and it was by-passed by Castro's July 26 Movement.

### Capitalist Base Destroyed

On the theoretical assessment of the Cuban revolution as it stands today, Mills offers some interesting opinions. "The Cuban revolution" he observes, "has swiftly destroyed the economic basis of capitalism—both foreign and Cuban. Most of this power was foreign—in fact, North American. It has now been destroyed with a thoroughness unique in Latin-American history."

In his sociological estimate, Mills says, "The Cuban revolutionary is a new and distinct type of left-wing thinker and actor. He is neither capitalist nor Communist. He is socialist in a manner, I believe, both practical and humane. And if Cuba is let alone, I believe that Cubans have a good chance to keep the socialist society they are building practical and humane. If Cubans are properly helped—economically, technically and culturally—I believe they would have a *very good chance*." (Emphasis in original.)

As to political power, in Mill's opinion, "The Government of Cuba is a revolutionary dictatorship of the peasants and workers of Cuba. It is legally arbitrary. It is legitimized by the enthusiastic support of an overwhelming majority of the people of Cuba." In letter No. 6, the Cuban spokesman specifies that it is not a Stalinist-type dictatorship:

"In the most literal sense imaginable, Cuba is a dictatorship of, by, and for the peasants and the workers of Cuba. That phrase, 'dictatorship of workers and peasants,' was turned into a lie by Stalin and under Stalinism. Some of us know that. But none of us is going about our revolution in that way. So, to understand us, you must try to disabuse yourself of



certain images and ideas of 'dictatorship.' It is the pre-Stalin meaning of the phrase that is accurate for Cuba."

It is in the political area that Mills expresses the greatest worry for Cuba. "I do not like such dependence upon one man as exists in Cuba today, nor the virtually absolute power that this one man possesses." However, Mills believes that "it is not enough either to approve or to disapprove this fact about Cuba. That is much too easy; it is also politically fruitless. One must understand the conditions that have made it so; for only then can one consider the prospects of its development." The conditions include the form of struggle needed to overthrow Batista, the enormous counter-revolutionary pressure of the United States, and the fluidity of the present situation in which democratic forms have not yet been worked out in the living experience of the revolution.

Castro's leadership in the difficult revolutionary struggle brought him this exceptional personal power, but it is Mills' conviction that Castro is opposed to any leadership cult, is aware of the danger and will help the revolution to pass through it. "In my judgment," says Mills, "one must take seriously this man's own attempts to shift roles, even in the middle of his necessary action, and his own astute awareness of the need to develop a more systematic relation between a government of law and the people of Cuba."

### "Anatomy of a Revolution"

Let us turn now to the book by Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, the editors of the *Monthly Review*. They wrote this after a three-week visit to Cuba in March, 1960, publishing it as a special edition of their magazine. Events soon dated parts of it. The authors took another trip to Cuba and have now published a supplement, "Cuba Revisited," (December 1960 issue of the *Monthly Review*) which, I understand, is to be included in a new edition of the book.

The strong side of *Cuba - Anatomy of a Revolution* is its emphasis on economics. The authors do a good job of summarizing the main facts about Cuba under Batista, available in such books as Lowry Nelson's *Rural Cuba*, then turn to current problems where they offer the results of their own investigations on the scene. The facts they have assembled are encouraging indeed. Instead of collapsing, as the capitalist press has been predicting, the Cuban economy has grown stronger. Consider, for instance, the main crops, which have been the center of a planned expansion drive:

"Their total volume increased by almost one third in the first year of



*the Revolution, and there is no doubt that a comparable rate of expansion is being maintained this year.* China, it seems, is not the only country capable of 'big leaps forward'! But what other country has ever staged such a leap forward in the very first year of a Revolution and in the midst of a far-reaching agrarian reform? It can be said without exaggeration: in the Cuban Revolution the world is witnessing a process of socio-economic transformation and vitalization that is in many important respects without any precedent. Let the world look hard and draw the appropriate conclusions!" (Emphasis in original.)

When the agrarian reform was put through, predictions were freely made in the big press that the Cubans with their "lack of know-how" would speedily bring the cattle industry to ruin by slaughtering the breeding stock, some of it of top quality. The spiteful forecasts of the dispossessed cattle barons were not borne out. Huberman and Sweezy cite a representative of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization who said that while no figures were available for the island as a whole, Havana was eating 60 to 70 per cent more beef in March, 1960, than the previous year while the supply of beef cattle had also been sharply stepped up "chiefly owing to better feeding methods." The authors conclude: "There could be no better evidence than this that (1) the Revolution has already transformed the standard of living of the Cuban masses, and (2) this new and higher standard of living has come to stay."

### Some Flaws

In political matters, Huberman and Sweezy in general leave much to be desired, in my opinion. A few indications:

They manage to "credit" the "administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt" with having "abrogated" the Platt Amendment. They also criticize the same administration for withholding recognition of the Grau government and granting it to Batista; but the political necessity of tipping their hats to the FDR myth blocks them from seeing Roosevelt's role in establishing the foul Cuban dictator and maintaining his brutal rule.

In lauding the readiness of the Cuban peasantry to go directly to agricultural cooperatives, Huberman and Sweezy refer to the views of bourgeois land reformers who have aimed at breaking up large landed estates into small peasant holdings. "More radical thought, at least from the time of Marx," they say, "has generally rejected this aim on the dual ground that small-scale peasant cultivation of the soil is hopelessly in-

efficient and that a small peasantry is inevitably a reactionary, counter-revolutionary force. However, the Russian Revolution showed the difficulties which confronted any attempt to go directly from a system of latifundia to some form of collective agriculture. In spite of themselves, the Russian Bolsheviks were forced to distribute the land to millions of small peasants, and it was only much later after fierce and bloody social struggles and frightful agricultural losses that they succeeded in establishing the system of collective and state farms."

Thus they amalgamate Lenin's adherence to the political position of Engels with its direct opposite, that of Stalin. Engels held that collectivization in agriculture, despite its obvious economic advantages, could proceed only in accordance with the will of the peasants themselves. A revolutionary government could seek to convince them by argument and examples but in no case force them. That was how Lenin proceeded. Stalin, after first pandering to the rich peasants, collectivized Soviet agriculture by force. The catastrophic consequences still plague the Soviet Union. If a real lesson is to be drawn from the Cuban experience, it is the advantages to be gained by following the method worked out in theory by Engels and put into practice by Lenin in contrast to the brutal method used by Stalin. Huberman and Sweezy credit Cuba's success to Castro's knowledge of the peasantry and sensitivity to their deepest wishes. If Castro is not aware of the theoretical and historical background, the confirmation of the Marxist view is all the more notable.

A serious political error which Huberman and Sweezy themselves admit in their postscript to the book was the estimate that Washington would not slash the Cuban sugar quota. We remain uncertain as to why they made the error. Did they calculate that it was not in the best interests of capitalism to do this and that the powers that be would recognize this? Or did they underestimate the deeply reactionary character of both the Democratic and Republican machines? Fortunately, the politically astute Cuban leaders were not caught by surprise. As Castro indicated in his speech at the United Nations, they are well aware of the true relationship between "the shark and the sardine."

I mention these items with no thought of disqualifying *Cuba - Anatomy of a Revolution*. They are minor, if annoying, flaws in an excellent report and strong defense of the Cuban Revolution. My intent is to suggest that if the authors have any predilection it is in the direction of the Communist party. This gives certain of the things they say about Cuban politics much greater weight than they would otherwise have; for, rep-

resenting a break with their predilection, these views were undoubtedly pondered many times over before being expressed.

### Made by Non-Communists

From the origin of the July 26 Movement in 1953 until the rebel army was well on the way to victory, Huberman and Sweezy declare, "the Cuban CP was cool to and sometimes critical" of Castro's organization. The leadership of the revolution "owed absolutely nothing to the Communists..." Only Castro, if he should join the Communist party, could persuade any of the others to follow him. "Since no responsible observer, to the best of our knowledge, has ever suggested that Fidel has done any such thing, we conclude that the hypothesis of Communist infiltration of the leadership is a pure figment of the anti-Communist imagination."

Can the Communists get into position to "wrest leadership of the masses, of the revolutionary movement itself, out of the hands of Fidel and his colleagues in the army and government?" Huberman and Sweezy ridicule the possibility, pointing to the smallness of the Communist party and its lack of standing as against the size of Castro's following and their revolutionary record.

The authors go even further: "In our judgment, for what it is worth, the Communists could make no bigger mistake, now or in the foreseeable future, than to challenge Fidel and his close associates for the leadership of the Revolution. They would lose, and in losing they might easily do irreparable damage to the cause of the Revolution, which of course is also their cause. On the other hand, if they continue to pursue their present course, they may play an important, and in some respects perhaps an indispensable, even if subordinate, role in the building of socialism in Cuba."

To make their meaning still clearer, they compare the Cuban Communists with the American Communists in the New Deal period. "They worked hard and often effectively, trying of course always to push matters somewhat further to the Left than they would otherwise tend to go. While they won control in some unions, they were never in a position to make a bid for political leadership in the country and never caused any serious problems except in the minds of the right-wing lunatic fringe." In short, although the authors do not say it, since the thirties neither the Cuban nor the American Communists have played the role of revolutionists.

"All the charges and accusations concerning the alleged Communist character of the Cuban government and/or Revolution tend to hide what



may turn out to be historically one of the most important facts about the Cuban Revolution: this is the first time — ever, anywhere — that a genuine socialist revolution has been made by *non-Communists!*" (Emphasis in original.)

Castro and the rebel army, "calling themselves neither socialists nor Communists, in fact without any clearly formulated ideology, seized power in Cuba after two years of bloody civil war and proceeded with élan and dispatch" to do what needed to be done. "No one can now foretell the full implications of this startling fact," Huberman and Sweezy believe, "but no one need doubt that it will open up new vistas not only in the realm of social thought but also in the realm of revolutionary action."

Although there is considerable difference in the angle of view, in emphasis, in political inclination, and in the way they express what they observed, it is clear that the impressions which the Revolution made on C. Wright Mills on the one hand and Huberman-Sweezy on the other were not greatly different. The similarity extends to other fields.

What kind of social order does Cuba have? "For our part," declare Huberman-Sweezy, "we have no hesitation in *answering: the new Cuba is a socialist Cuba.*" (Emphasis in original.)

How did it get that way? After the seizure of power, "the aspect which the Cuban Revolution first presented to the world was that of a quite respectable middle-class regime." This gave rise to many misunderstandings. However, the real power remained in the hands of Castro. "A sort of dual system of government began to emerge, with Fidel on one side and Urrutia and the cabinet on the other." The "paradox between the essentially revolutionary character of the regime and the predominantly liberal-to-conservative personnel which represented it before the world" was resolved by March 1960. Two of the landmarks were Castro's resignation in July 1959 to force the resignation of Urrutia and Che Guevara's assumption of the presidency of the National Bank in November in place of Felipe Pazos. The Castro regime carried the revolution through to the establishment of a planned economy.

### Communist Party Viewpoint

*Cuba — Anatomy of a Revolution* was saluted with vexed criticism from spokesmen of both the Cuban and American Communist parties. (At this writing they have not yet got around to reviewing Mills' book.) The



CP finds it obnoxious to think that the label "socialist" should be applied to Cuba. It's a national democratic revolution, you see, in which the national bourgeoisie still plays an important role and in which the need for "unity" is foremost. In addition, Huberman-Sweezy slight the role of the Communist party in the Revolution and the increasingly important role it will play after the proletarian stage opens.

The two derelict authors answer the criticism somewhat disrespectfully with a footnote in their postscript: "Now that the big majority of the means of production are in public ownership, and the regime is rapidly developing a consciously socialist ideology, the Communist argument against classifying Cuba as socialist appears more and more clearly as mere verbal gymnastics. The reason for the Communists' adopting this position, however, is straightforward enough: they don't want to admit that it is possible for socialism to be built under non-Communist leadership."

One wishes that Huberman and Sweezy would venture to analyze this reluctance of the Communists. The question would seem not unimportant and very definitely related to their own belief that the Cuban Revolution has opened up "new vistas not only in the realm of social thought but also in the realm of revolutionary action." Isn't the failure of the Cuban Communist party central to this far-reaching conclusion? Wouldn't a knowledge of the reasons for the failure be of considerable value to other Communist parties — to the revolutionary-minded rank and file if not to leaders who never cause "any serious problems"?

In the dispute between the Communists and the editors of the *Monthly Review*, it appears to me that Huberman and Sweezy have the stronger case. In fact they hanged the Communist party theoreticians with their own terminology. If each of the countries in the Soviet bloc, including Albania, is "socialist," then why should this term be denied Cuba, which now has a planned economy — and far greater freedom than any of them?

The fact is that "socialist" was used by Stalin in the years of his psychosis as a mislabel for Soviet society. It was a way of proving that you can build "socialism in one country." This played into the hands of the worst enemies of the Soviet Union, for they never tired of agreeing and even emphasizing that socialism was what the Soviet Union had all right and therefore Stalinism and socialism were one and the same thing and if America went socialist you'd lose democracy and get frame-up trials and concentration camps here, too. To confer the badge "socialist" on Cuba may thus — unfortunately — be taken as a somewhat dubious

honor. The repugnance the Cubans feel for much that goes by the name of "theory" is not without good political justification.

In the early days the Soviet Union was called a workers' state; "with bureaucratic deformations," Lenin added. It was socialist in *tendency*: that is, it was a transitional formation on the road to socialism but not there by a long shot. Nor could it reach socialism on its own resources — such a concept, had anyone suggested it in Lenin's time, would have been dismissed as self-contradictory. The Soviet power was a working-class conquest in the international struggle for a world-wide, scientifically planned society built on the foundation of capitalism as a whole, or at least on the combined resources of several industrially advanced countries.

The concern the Bolsheviks felt for terminology was not due to an aesthetic pleasure in splitting hairs. Precision in applying labels reflected their concern over knowing exactly where they stood in relation to the goal still to be achieved. It was a good tradition, well worth emulating, like much else in Leninism.

### What Is It?

If Cuba is not "socialist" and is highly unlikely to achieve socialism by itself on one small island, what is it?

The Cubans themselves have been reluctant to say. Professing some disinterest in abstruse questions of theory, they have politely invited those of their supporters and well-wishers who are better informed in such matters to have at it. Meanwhile they propose to move ahead, with or without labels, to work out problems that permit no delay and that have kept their limited personnel going twenty-four hours a day. As their own guide, they find it sufficient to follow the broad generalizations of a humanism concerned with the fate of the humble. If you can tell a guajiro from an imperialist and hold government power, it seems to work out all right.

This pragmatic approach has added to the theoretical puzzle. If the Cubans don't know whether Cuba is socialist or not, how is anyone else to know? Jean Paul Sartre, on visiting Cuba, came away with the conviction that the world was witnessing something completely novel — a revolution impelled by blows from an imperialist power to respond with counterblows, each more radical than the previous. Would a revolution driven forward by such a process create its own ideology? That remains to be seen. In any case, Sartre found it a refreshing contrast to what he

considers the sectarian approach — applying a preconceived ideology to a revolution.

Others, stimulated like Sartre by the Cuban Revolution, have decided that even Marxist theory breaks down before such phenomena. What provisions are there in Marxism for a revolution, obviously socialist in tendency but powered by the peasantry and led by revolutionists who have never professed socialist aims; indeed, seem to have been limited to the bourgeois democratic horizon? It's not in the books!

If Marxism has no provisions for such phenomena, perhaps it is time provisions were made. It would seem a fair enough exchange for a revolution as good as this one. On the other hand, what books do you read?

### Paradox of Russia

The Cuban Revolution is not the first to have given the theoreticians something fresh to consider. The Russian Revolution exceeded it in that respect. In 1917 the entire world socialist movement was caught by surprise, including the Bolshevik party — not excepting even Lenin. Socialists wielding power at the head of the workers and peasants in a backward country like Russia! It wasn't in the book. Well... most of the books.

The Russian Revolution was fortunate in having a leadership as great in theory as in action. Four decades ago it was common knowledge in the socialist movement that one at least of the Russian leaders had accounted in theory for the peculiarities of the Russian Revolution in all its main lines — *some twelve years before it happened*. His name was Leon Trotsky.

Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution greatly facilitated the Bolshevik victory by giving the revolutionary cadre the clearest possible conception of the import of their action. But if Trotsky had not been there, had not made his great theoretical contribution, we may be sure that Lenin, consummate socialist politician and man of action that he was, would have led the Bolsheviks to power just the same and an accurate reflection in theory of the Revolution would have come later.

I mention this not only to defend the right of the Cuban Revolution to have its own peculiarities but to draw from Bolshevik theory to attempt to explain certain of these peculiarities.

The main power in the Cuban Revolution was the peasantry (as in Russia). But this peasantry shaded into the powerful mass of agricultural workers, which, because of the role of the sugar industry, constituted the most dynamic section of the Cuban proletariat. The agricultural work-



ers solidly backed the Revolution. The city workers favored the Revolution but were not in position to head it (unlike Russia) for two reasons. (1) The unions were strapped in the strait jacket of "mujalismo"; that is, a bureaucracy tied directly to the Batista dictatorship. (2) The political leadership was held by the Communist party, an organization devoted to "peaceful coexistence," "people's frontism," and the cult of Stalin, an organization which as Huberman and Sweezy put it diplomatically, "never caused any serious problems." (The CP leaders actually went so far in avoiding causing any serious problems for Batista that they pictured him as a man of the people and took posts in his government.)

The main demands of the peasantry were an end to hunger, an end to Batista's savage killings, and agrarian reform. (In Russia: Bread! Peace! Land!) These demands became the slogans of the July 26 Movement.

By all the criteria of origin, aims and social following, the July 26 Movement was a petty-bourgeois formation, but an extremely radical one. It had one plank in its program which separated it from all similar groupings and which was to prove decisive. It made a principle of armed struggle without compromise against the Batista dictatorship. To carry out this aim, it organized a peasant guerrilla movement that has been compared to Tito's and Mao's. Parallels can also be found, however, in the rich revolutionary experience of Latin America, including Cuba itself. Its formation was not as novel as its success.

#### Character of Government

On coming to power, the July 26 Movement set up a coalition government that included well-known bourgeois-democratic figures — and not in secondary posts. In retrospect these may have seemed middle-class decorations or mere camouflage hiding the real nature of the government. It is more accurate, I think, to view this government as corresponding to the political aims of the revolution as they were conceived at the time by its leaders.

But such a government stood in contradiction to the demands of the insurgent masses and to the commitment of the July 26 Movement to satisfy these demands. The Revolution urgently required far-reaching inroads on private property, including imperialist holdings. As Castro and his collaborators moved toward fulfillment of the agrarian reform they met with resistance from their partners in the coalition, a resistance that was considerably stiffened by support from Wall Street, which viewed them as the "reasonable" elements in a regime packed with bearded "wild men."

As Huberman and Sweezy correctly observe, "a sort of dual system government began to emerge." The displacement of Felipe Pazos by Che Guevara in November 1959 marked a decisive shift and the resolution of the governmental crisis, whatever hang-overs from the coalition still remained. The government that now existed was qualitatively different from the coalition regime.

Its chief characteristics were a genuine interest in the welfare of the bottom strata of the population, readiness to entrust the defense of the Revolution to them by giving them arms, clear recognition of the identity of the main enemies of the Revolution and resoluteness in disarming and combating them. It was even free from fetishism of private property. Yet it did not think of itself as socialist. It did not proclaim socialist aims. What should we call such a strange government?

Among the great discussions organized by the Bolsheviks in the first four congresses of the Communist International was one precisely on this question. Deeply buried under landslides of Stalinist propaganda, the minutes and resolutions of that discussion are not readily available. When you unearth them, your feeling is one of shock at their timeliness. Did the Bolsheviks really discuss such a question four years before Castro was born!

The Bolsheviks analyzed several varieties of "workers and peasants government"; that is, radical petty-bourgeois governments, indicating differences that would cause a revolutionary-socialist party to offer support or to refuse support. They also left open the possibility in theory of variants they could not readily foresee at the time. The general label they used for such regimes was "Workers and Farmers Government." Here we must expostulate a bit with the Bolsheviks; they also called the dictatorship of the proletariat a "Workers and Farmers Government." A representative from theoretically backward America might have asked for distinctive labels so he could more easily tell them apart. But the Bolsheviks discussed this point, too, and felt that it would not be confusing so long as everyone was clear on the difference in content, since the first kind of government would likely prove to be only a transient form preliminary to the latter type.

Of course, the Communist delegates in 1922 could not visualize such a change without the helpful presence of a genuine revolutionary-socialist party such as the Russian workers had in the Bolsheviks. A key question requiring our attention, therefore, is the absence of this factor

in Cuba. To find the answer we must turn to the world situation in which Cuba is locked.

### Death Agony of Capitalism

The most prominent conditioning force in international politics today is the deep decay of the capitalist system. Leaving aside the effect of such general threats as another major depression or atomic annihilation in a third world war, Cuba has experienced the decay of capitalism in two specific ways: (1) The deformation of national life through imperialist domination – monoculture, super profits, hunger, disease, ignorance, dictatorial rule, etc. (2) The economic and diplomatic strangulation a power like the U.S. applies to a colonial nation seeking independence. The moves emanating from Wall Street and the State Department, as many observers have noted, powerfully accelerated, if they did not make inevitable, the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution. Eisenhower "lost" Cuba much the way Truman "lost" China.

Next in importance to the death agony of capitalism is the existence and the growing power of the orbit where capitalist property relations have been transcended and planned economies constructed. Showing what can be achieved in economic, scientific and cultural progress, not to mention sovereign standing, these countries serve as practical object lessons. Their tendency to magnetize attention, especially in the underdeveloped areas, has become an active political factor that is now powerfully strengthened by the possibility of securing material aid from this source. The Soviet Union, by its mere existence, has always been – even in the terrible years under Stalin – a radicalizing force among oppressed peoples. The attraction was enormously increased by the Chinese Revolution and the fresh example which China has provided of how to break out of age-old stagnation and imperialist oppression. Cuba has been affected by all this in the most vivid and concrete way.

The third feature of world politics is the long default of the Communist parties in providing revolutionary-socialist leadership to the working class. For decades this signified betrayal and defeat in the most promising of revolutionary situations. Today it has finally begun to signify the emergence of alternative leaderships – the masses in the underdeveloped areas, having lost fatalistic acceptance of hunger, misery, ignorance and ruthless exploitation, have become impatient and are pushing forward whatever leaderships are at hand. Nationalists have filled the vacuum at least temporarily in many areas, but the tendency is toward



much more radical currents. Nowhere is this to be seen with greater clarity than in Cuba.

Finally, there is a tendency among the nationalist movements and newly emerging countries in the Far East, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America to seek mutual encouragement and support. The Cuban revolutionists for example, are in close touch with the Algerian freedom fighters. They have diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, India, Ghana, etc. Sekou Touré and Soekarno have been honored guests in Havana. Lumumba is a hero in Cuba. A radical move taken by any of them that proves successful has big impact on all the others. For instance, Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal when Egypt suffered the combined attack of Britain, France and Israel made a lasting impression.

In the light of this international background, the series of counter-measures taken by the Cuban government under pressure from the State Department are seen to have an ideological origin that does no violence to Marxist theory; in fact these countermeasures are explainable only by a theory grounded in the international class struggle.

#### Character of the State

Whatever the consciousness of the Cuban revolutionists may have been, not a single major measure undertaken by them was unique. "Intervention" of the latifundia and domestic and foreign capitalist holdings was undoubtedly as Cuban as the royal palms, but it finds a precedent in the "control" exercised over private enterprises under the Bolsheviks prior to the establishment of workers management of industry. A similar stage appeared in the Chinese Revolution. The expropriations and nationalizations are likewise far from novel. A government monopoly of foreign trade is in the Russian tradition; and the planned economy which Cuba has now begun is, of course, recognized by everyone as in the pattern initiated by the Russian workers and peasants.

In the October, 1960, issue of *Political Affairs*, James S. Allen, a spokesman of the Communist party, labels these as "measures of a state-capitalist type." This effort to avoid the label "socialist," as advanced by Huberman and Sweezy, is not very satisfactory. Are the measures of similar kind in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, Albania and China also to be labeled as "of a state-capitalist type"? Evidently not.

Aside from this, Allen's position has another flaw. What about the state? Is it capitalist? Can a capitalist state carry out such measures and still remain capitalist? Judging from the shrieks of the counter-revolutionaries and the froth on Wall Street's mouth, it is not possible.

The fact is that the state structure began to undergo alteration upon Castro's coming to power January 1, 1959. For good and valid political reasons, Castro insisted on smashing both the old army and the old police force. The lesson of Guatemala had been well absorbed by the July 26 Movement. A new army and a new police, based on the rebel forces, replaced the old. A nationwide militia was organized.

One could have decided that this was enough to require us at the time to call Cuba a workers state. But the premise for such a conclusion is that the conscious aims of the leadership are revolutionary-socialist, openly proclaimed, so that it remains only a question of time until the entire state structure is altered to conform to the needs of a planned economy. This political premise, of course, did not exist. It remained to be seen what course the pragmatic leadership would take and whether their proclaimed political aims would become altered as they sought to put into effect the reforms they advocated; or whether in sticking to their political positions they modified or gave up their social and economic aims. The outcome could only be determined by the struggle itself.

The results are now in. In the two years since the victory, the hold-overs from the old state have been sloughed off in the key positions although they may still hold authority in some sectors. With the completion between August-October, 1960, of the nationalizations in the major areas of Cuban industry, a new state had come into being so deeply committed to a planned economy that Cuba's course in this direction cannot now be changed save by an imperialist invasion and a bloody civil war.

Since the transcending of capitalist property relations and the construction of a planned economy correspond with the economic interests of the working class and are objectively socialist in tendency, we must, if we are interested in exact terminology, call this a "workers state," signifying that it is a state committed to the task of carrying Cuban economy and society forward through the transition from capitalism to socialism.

### **Proletarian Democracy**

It is true that this workers state lacks, as yet, the forms of proletarian democracy. This does not mean that democracy is lacking in Cuba.

Far more democracy exists today in Cuba than ever existed under any previous regime. It does mean that a government based on workers, peasants and soldiers councils, or some form of councils in the democratic control of the government, has not yet been worked out. Mills' observations about the concentration of power in one person are accurate.

Marxist theory admits the possibility of situations in which no alternative exists save such concentration of power. However, it regards this as exceptional and dangerous to the revolutionary interests of the workers and peasants. It is a sign of weakness in the organization of the struggle. The norm is the extension of democracy into all phases of the nation's life. It is not just a question of democratic rights but of organizing the most powerful defense and bringing the maximum power to bear in carrying out the structural changes and constructing the planned economy. Consequently, while defending the present Cuban government from attack from all quarters, Marxists advocate the earliest possible development of proletarian forms of democracy in Cuba. It would seem self-evident that this would add greatly to the political defense of the Revolution, above all as an example to be emulated in other countries.

This is the tendency in Cuba, as Mills notes, and one must join him in ardently hoping that the ferocious pressure from American imperialism will not lead to retrogression.

### What Next?

A new stage in the Cuban Revolution is now opening up of the greatest interest and importance. The leaders have convincingly demonstrated that they really meant it when they said they were prepared to carry the Revolution through to its necessary conclusion no matter where it took them. What have been the consequences in their thinking?

Looking back, they must note with some astonishment, I imagine, that it proved impossible to carry through simple humanistic aims, all of them long proclaimed by the bourgeois society that toppled feudalism, without taking measures that transcended capitalist property relations. Capitalism doesn't work for the poor. To fulfill their desire to turn the promise of a better life for the humble into reality, these men of powerful will found they had to put Cuba on the road to socialism. They discovered this through practical experience and not through preconceived notions. It is almost like a laboratory test. What theories did it confirm or disprove, or must we wipe the slate of theory clean and start fresh?



Is this experience not worth evaluation? Wouldn't the way be smoothed for revolutionists in other Latin-American countries, for example, if they knew the reasons for the course that had to be taken in Cuba? Surely the experience will be similar elsewhere in Latin America and other continents as revolutionists follow the example of the Cuban vanguard and bring their peoples into the mainstream of history.

Up to now the Cuban leaders have appeared as great revolutionists of action. Perhaps some of them may now venture into the field of theory with commensurate contributions. It is time, we think, to attempt to bring the theory of the Cuban Revolution up to the level of its practice. From such a development all the friends and supporters of the Cuban Revolution stand to gain — not least of all in the United States where the success of the July 26 Movement has brought new hope and inspiration to the radical movement.



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