

# *Freedom* *at issue*

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division between two main races (or nationalities) that exists in Guyana and existed in Cyprus. Some kind of constitutional innovation may be required to cater for these problems—for example, the requirement that laws be passed by a 60 percent vote, thus forcing power-sharing arrangements and compromise. One still hopes that in the long run this racial division can be overcome in the process of developing the nation, but in the present bleak situation it is difficult to be optimistic about this.

Considering the complexities, the most the United States may plausibly be able to do is back the idea of a broad-based government to replace the present minority one. It is noteworthy that proposals for national unity have been put forward by the WPA in which it indicated willingness to participate in a broad-based government, including businessmen, with the organized political left not necessarily holding a majority. Although WPA leaders undoubtedly have a radical Marxist background, they have shown, in recent times, a much greater awareness of the national problems and a flexibility and willingness to compromise.

The United States might encourage the trend toward a national government and the holding of free elections. (In the light of Guyana's history, these would have to be supervised by impartial observers.) U.S. aid policy might be

linked with the movement away from dictatorship and toward a broad-based, democratic government with representatives from all the recognized, major political parties, the business community, trade unions, and professional groups. Such a government could be an interim measure to stabilize the situation for two or more years and to restore democracy in all areas of national life. At that stage, supervised elections could be held, possibly under a revised constitution.

The Nicaraguan precedent is interesting in this respect, but it is not desirable to wait until the situation degenerates to the stage it did in Nicaragua to look for alternatives. The initiative could be taken now and the stage set for democracy by a suitable, carefully defined, and publicly articulated policy.

In the final analysis, Guyana must save itself. The most America can do is to define and follow criteria that are in keeping with its own best traditions. That is the only basis on which a lasting and mutual respect can be created. That was the basis of the Alliance for Progress. Political life in Guyana has been debased, and America should not be seen to be playing a part in this. It is time to make a stand for democracy! □

## Castro's "Revolutionary" Despotism

Alfred G. Cuzán

Ten thousand Cubans sought refuge in Havana's Peruvian embassy one weekend last April. Crammed elbow-to-elbow on the grounds, the roof, and even the trees of the sanctuary, the refugees heroically endured inhuman conditions for days and weeks before the government allowed them to leave. Hunger, the elements, lack of sanitation, harassment by neighborhood gangs, police intimidation, and fear accosted them. Many accepted government safeguards to return home while they waited for a way out of the country, only to be pelted with rocks and epithets by government thugs and "security" forces. The barbarism of the regime was clearly manifested in its attempts to punish the exiles for their act of sheer desperation. Yet, within two months, they were joined by another 100,000 refugees willing to undergo the most vexing humiliations in order to escape the island. Many were deported and forced to leave without their wives and children. A "freedom flotilla" mobilized by Miami's Cubans, against the opposition of the U.S. government, ferried them to American shores.

At the rate the Cubans were leaving, the country would have been empty of people in twenty years. Castro's own officials estimated that from 250,000 to a million of them would leave if the Mariel-to-Key West sealift were allowed to continue indefinitely. That would amount to from 3 to 10

percent of the country's population. About 10 percent lives abroad already, as a result of Castro's seizure of power in 1959. Faced with a new massive U.S. influx of Cuban refugees, President Carter ordered a naval blockade of the evacuation efforts.

This new Cuban exodus is only the latest and most dramatic rejection of Castro's socialist dictatorship by the Cuban people, whose evaluation of the regime is evident in their flight. This is not hard to understand. After twenty years of "revolution," the country is ruled by an absolute dictatorship whose *líder máximo* has made himself a powerful international figure by ruthlessly exploiting an enslaved people. The personal success of Castro and the communist elite around him rests on the military might of a despotic state whose control over practically all of Cuba's resources has resulted in the impoverishment of a once relatively prosperous economy.

The facts which support this judgment are evident and will be summarized here.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the myth of the "progressive revolution" persists, even among social scientists and journalists with easy access to the data—a circumstance probably reflecting the infinite capacity for wanting to believe, and an excellent example of the power of ideology over the faculties of observation and reasoning.

### Rule of force

First, there is the despotic character of Castro's "revolu-

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1. This and other notes are on page 20.

tion," which has one of the bloodiest records in recent Latin American history. Tens of thousands of Cubans have been imprisoned, and several thousand—nobody knows exactly how many—have been executed for resisting the power of the state. It has been estimated that in any one year of the two-decade old dictatorship, from 20,000 to 80,000 people have been prisoners of the government. Undoubtedly, the number of political executions would rise to Stalinist proportions had thousands of die-hard opponents of the regime not been able to find sanctuary in south Florida for their "counterrevolutionary" activities.

Real or imagined "enemies" of the government are dealt with harshly by the secret police. In his book, *Seven Years in Cuba*, Pierre Golendorf gives a chilling account of his persecution, arrest, interrogation, trial, and imprisonment during more than three years in the tropical "Gulag."<sup>2</sup> He tells of the inhuman treatment of the prisoners and the purely arbitrary system of "revolutionary" justice. Golendorf notes that many of his fellow inmates were apolitical young people of humble origin whose only crime was to attempt to leave the country in search of better material conditions. But a people not free to leave a country is an enslaved people. The entire island is, *de facto*, a prison.

Freedom of expression does not exist in Cuba. All newspapers, radio and television stations, publishing houses, bookstores, theaters—all media of communication—are rigidly controlled by the government. So also is education. Nothing may be taught, written, or in any way disseminated which does not conform to the propaganda interests of the regime. Poets and writers have been stripped of prizes awarded by international juries, denied publication of their manuscripts, imprisoned, and forced to confess their ideological "errors" in public.

But if the right of free speech is nonexistent in Cuba, can anyone seriously believe that there are any other rights? Cubans have no rights. No one owns anything, not even his own person. Everything may be confiscated by the government at will. Anyone may be arrested and sent to prison for purely arbitrary political reasons. No one can escape "volunteer labor" or conscription, except the relatives of the ruling elite. The police are free to enter any place suspected of being the scene of "counterrevolutionary" activities, even if these include harmless discussions or the writing of plays. No one's papers or even conversations are safe from the security apparatus of the state. Society is run in military fashion, from the commander in chief down to the lowliest worker, including the educational system and the judiciary. The "new socialist man" desired by the government is a "civic soldier" ready to give up everything, including life itself, for the "revolution."

### Economic exploitation

Next, let us inquire into how the people and the leaders have fared under this despotism.

To start at the top—throughout the history of mankind, the rulers of despotic states have, without exception, used their absolute power for maximum personal advantage.<sup>3</sup> Castro and his communist elite are no different. "Socialist" rule over Cuba has enriched them, and yielded them considerable political and military power, and international fame and influence in the political and cultural councils of our time.

From political obscurity in the gang wars of the University

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of Havana in the 1940s and 1950s, Fidel Castro and his brother, Raul, have been catapulted to the heights of world power-politics. Cuba's "maximum leader" is the nominal head of the "nonaligned" movement in the United Nations. He has lavishly entertained thousands of foreign guests who have visited Cuba to attend congresses on politics, "culture," and sundry topics of interest to the international left set. The expenses have been paid for by the millions of Cubans who toil daily for the "revolution."

The two brothers once occupied a few hundred square miles in Cuba's poorest and most isolated region with a ragtag rebel army of, at most, 3,000 men. Now their influence extends to Third World "client" states and underground political groups in Central and South America, Africa, and elsewhere. Their regular armed forces alone exceed 100,000 well-trained and equipped soldiers. At thirteen soldiers per 1,000 inhabitants, Cuba's military is the biggest in Latin America in proportion to the country's population.

Moreover, Fidel Castro is now taken seriously as a political, economic, and social theorist in universities in the United States and around the world. The international press quotes from his speeches, and he makes news in the most widely read newspapers and magazines. In short, no previous *caudillo* in the history of Cuba, and even much of Latin America, has achieved such personal success from the wielding of political power as this socialist "revolutionary."

Castro's personal aggrandizement has been financed at the cost of the impoverishment of Cuban society. The figures are quite telling on this point. Between 1960 and 1976, Cuba's per capita GNP in constant dollars *declined* at an average annual rate of almost half a percent (.04%).<sup>4</sup> The country thus has the tragic distinction of being the only one in Latin America to have experienced a drop in living standards over the period. Cuba used to rank with the top three or four countries of Latin America on such indicators of wealth as economic growth, and income, autos, radios, television sets, and telephones per capita. Now it has dropped to the bottom on the first of these measures, below the median on the second and third, and to sixth or seventh on the others.<sup>5</sup> Havana, once one of Latin America's most modern and beautiful capitals, has deteriorated to the point that it is now only a shell of its former self. Everything is in short supply, including clothes, housing, pencils, medicines, basic foodstuffs, electricity, and water. The population waits in long queues in order to obtain a meager monthly ration; barter and black markets are a way of life.

Contrary to the myth spread by the "revolution," Cuba's wealth before 1959 was not the purview of a privileged few, at least no more so than in the rest of Latin America.<sup>6</sup> There was not much of an aristocracy, in the sense that power and wealth were not concentrated in a few families. Land was more equally distributed than in most Latin American countries; really large latifundia did not exist. Cuban society was as much of a middle-class society as Argentina and Chile.

Julio Lobo, pre-revolutionary Cuba's wealthiest man, owned fourteen of the country's 174 sugar mills and about a million acres of productive farmland. Today, by contrast,

control over the resources of the country is concentrated in the hands of a tiny political elite whose rule extends to *all* the land, *all* the sugar mills, factories, mines, stores, machinery and capital, *all* the manpower—in short, to everything. The magnitude of the power exercised by Fidel Castro over Cuba's economy, particularly its agricultural sector, has no precedent in the country's history. René Dumont, a French agricultural expert who visited Cuba at Castro's own invitation, observed that the prime minister treats the entire country as his own private estate, acting like the *grand seigneur* of a socialist manor.<sup>7</sup> Golendorf described him as the biggest *latifundista* in Cuba's history.<sup>8</sup> Jorge Edwards, a Chilean diplomat who was able to observe Castro's living style at close range, noted the imperial ways of the man and likened him to Neptune, the Greek god of the sea.<sup>9</sup> Carlos Rangel concludes that Castro is only the newest *caudillo consular* (an autocrat allied to a foreign power) to emerge in Latin America, but with Soviet, not U.S., protection. He compares Castro to Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico despotically with American support at the turn of the century.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, the historical record does not support the myth that the "new, socialist, 'revolutionary' society" fashioned since 1959 is better than the old. Castro's tenure as *líder máximo* for more than twenty years of absolute rule is unprecedented in Cuban history; no dictator ever held so much power for so long a period of time. This control has been immensely profitable to Castro and the band of sycophants who serve him. However, this personal success is the result not of the creation of wealth, but of mastery with the gun—the secret police, the military, the prisons, the "rehabilitation" camps, the block committees, and the *paredón* (execution wall). For the country as a whole, the result has been general impoverishment and the loss of all freedoms.

### Socialism and dictatorship

Thus, upon close examination, Castro's "revolutionary" society is hard to differentiate from a fascist dictatorship. This is not surprising. Only utopians believe that thoroughgoing socialism on a mass scale is conducive to democracy and freedom. Not only has socialism never produced a free and humane society; it is incompatible with it. This is not difficult to demonstrate. Freedom and

democracy are contingent upon respect for certain individual rights, such as: ownership of one's own person, freedom of expression, the right to engage in peaceful voluntary cooperation with others in the fields of commerce, education, politics, culture, etc. But what are rights if not property? To say that an individual has a right is to acknowledge that there is something he owns which he may not legally be deprived of. To take away a person's rights is equivalent to depriving him of his property.

Under pure socialism, private property is abolished. All resources available in society—including the person of its members—become part of a common pool that the "collective" decides how to use. Individual ownership, even over self, is sharply restricted if not abolished altogether. Voluntary cooperation, for whatever purpose, without "public" authorization is forbidden. Everyone and everything is under the direct control of the "community" or the "state." Under such conditions, individuals have no rights. Nothing may be called one's own, no activity may be engaged in without permission. There is nothing which the apparatus of the state is bound to respect in the person or property of the individual. What is this if not slavery?

Moreover, when absolute power is vested in the state, as is done under socialism, the machinery of government invariably comes under the control, not of the most benevolent, but of the most ruthless members of the community. Where individuals have no rights, those who are most efficient in the use of force prevail. Contrary to Plato's expectations or hopes, the total control of society by the state does not generate much that can be legitimately called "justice." What it does produce is political exploitation of the many by the few.

But, whereas no despotism has ever been benevolent, all despotisms strive to reach what Wittfogel calls their "publicity optimum," principally by spreading the myth of state benevolence.<sup>11</sup> The propaganda machinery of the state never ceases to picture the rulers as selflessly working for the good of the people. A master in the use of propaganda, Fidel Castro has fully exploited the communications and educational instruments of the state for just this purpose. It is about time that intellectuals learned to penetrate his publicity curtain and discover the harsh realities of Cuba's "revolutionary" despotism. □

### Notes

1. The reader is strongly urged to look up the record for himself. In addition to the sources cited in the following notes, see Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Edward González, *Cuba Under Castro: The Limits of Charisma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974); Mario Llerena, *The Unsuspected Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Informe Secreto Sobre La Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Ediciones Sedmay, 1976); Manuel Rojo del Río, *La Historia Cambió en la Sierra* (San José, Costa Rica, 1970).
2. Pierre Golendorf, *Siete Años en Cuba* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, S.A., 1977). Golendorf is a former member of the French Communist Party. He first visited Cuba in the late sixties and returned in the early seventies to make a new life there. He was caught in the government's drive against writers and intellectuals in 1971, accused of being a CIA agent, and condemned to ten years in prison. He served more than three years of his sentence.
3. See Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).
4. See The World Bank, *The World Development Report, 1978* (Washington, D.C., 1978).
5. See, for various years, *Statistical Abstract for Latin America* (University of California, Los Angeles). See also *World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1978*. For pre-revolutionary Cuba, see Hugh Thomas, *The Cuban Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
6. Thomas, *The Cuban Revolution*.
7. René Dumont, *Is Cuba Socialist?* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974).
8. Golendorf, *Siete Años en Cuba*.
9. Jorge Edwards, *Persona Non Grata* (Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalbo, 1976).
10. Carlos Rangel, *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario* (Barcelona: Libros de Monte Avila, 1976).
11. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*.