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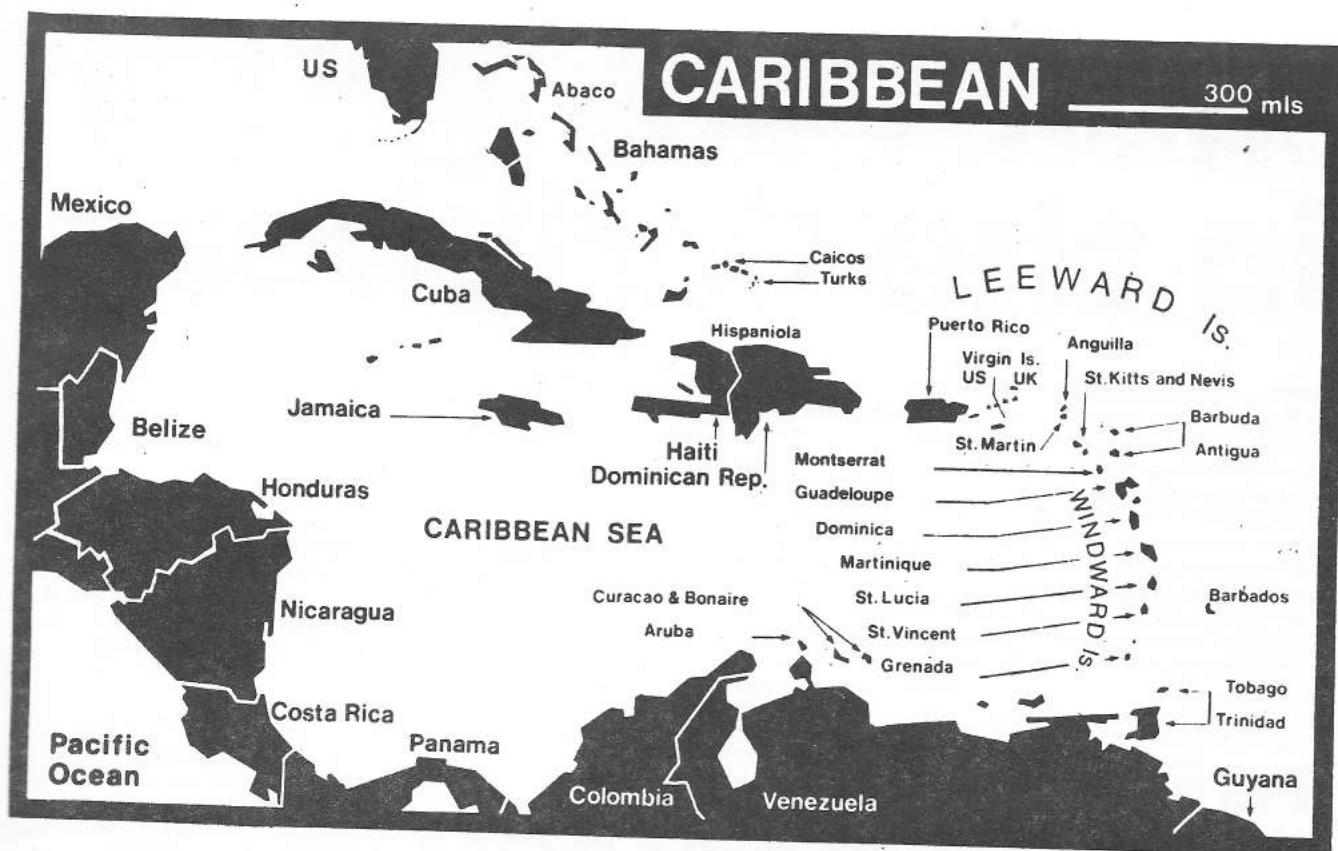
# **Cuba:**

## **Fading Star in the Caribbean**



**Plus  
Interview  
with  
Ana María Simo  
who appeared in the film  
Improper Conduct**





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*The Movie Improper Conduct and the Discussion over Cuba*  
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*Torch/La Antorcha*, December 15, 1984.

# Cuba: Fading Star in the Caribbean

**T**he Cuban government and its supporters make great claims for Cuban society: it is a homeland for socialism, a militant anti-imperialist fighter and a model of social equality and economic development. They claim that Cuba is socialist, that the workers and peasants rule the society. Supposedly, the government of Fidel Castro has developed Cuba's economic potential well beyond the bounds imposed by imperialism on dependent capitalist societies. This development has brought wide-ranging gains in the living standards of the masses and great strides towards equality.

Cuba's domestic achievements are matched, it is said, by its role in world affairs. Cuba is held up as an example for its break with U.S. imperialism and its continued defiance of the U.S. It is praised for being an active, militant force internationally for socialism and anti-imperialism, from Che Guevara in Bolivia, to the troops in

Africa, to the support for the Central American leadership, a model for overcoming dependency and a revolutionary force.

These claims are false or greatly exaggerated. The Cuban state is not socialist. It is state capitalist. Cuba has not broken the chains of imperialism. It remains a dependent capitalist country in a world dominated by imperialism. Castroism is not a force for national liberation and socialism. It is an obstacle in the road to constructing a truly internationalist, revolutionary socialist political force. This pamphlet will examine the role of Cuba in the world. To do so, it must first explore the nature of Cuban society, for Cuban foreign policy reflects and is shaped by the needs, goals and methods of the Cuban state. The first sections of this pamphlet will therefore explain the nature of Cuban state capitalism. A discussion of Cuba's foreign policy will follow.

## Part One Cuban Society

**T**hree characteristics mark Cuba as a capitalist society. First, Cuba is class divided; a ruling class controls the state and economy and exploits the workers and peasants. Secondly, Cuba's economy is subject to the crises and limits of capitalism. Thirdly, while the Cuban revolution initially brought a series of major reforms and improvements in living standards, this direction has been reversed. Cuban workers and peasants have seen their living standards and rights come under consistent, growing attack from the Castro regime.

### The Cuban Ruling Class

**C**uba is a class divided society. Politics, economy and social life reflect the basic cleavage of Cuban society into the rulers and the ruled; the bosses and the workers; the oppressors and the oppressed. The Cuban ruling class is a capitalist class. Its power, prestige and wealth derive from the exploitation of workers and peasants. Its class goals and ideology center on the accumulation of capital, i.e. building up the means of production. Cuba's ruling class is nationalist. It justifies its rule and its privileges by its ability to develop Cuba as a nation. Capital accumulation is the engine for national development. The Cuban workers and peasants are exploited to provide fuel for the engine. The ruling class, the elite of the party/state/military/economic apparatus, is the top bosses in Cuba. They design and run the system in which the workers have no power and provide the surplus for accumulation. To preserve their power, the Cuban rulers allow no independent organization in the society. Castro and company maintain a monopoly of all political, economic, social and military power, backed up by an efficient repressive apparatus. The Cuban ruling class is certainly less privileged and less flagrant about its privileges than the elites under

such former parasites and bandits as Somoza, the Shah of Iran or Batista. Compared to these, the Cuban rulers are austere, self-sacrificing and dedicated to the national good. The extent of privileges is not the key point, however. The ideology of the first capitalists — Puritanism and Calvinism and so on — was equally austere. These capitalists, for whom accumulation was a desperately difficult struggle, looked down with scorn on feudal, decadent, conspicuous consumption. Flagrant consumption was a sign of the Devil, while hard work, honesty and accumulating capital showed God's Grace. The nationalist/developmentalist ethic of the Cuban ruling elite is no more austere and no less capitalist than the Puritans. Secondly, the direction of Cuban society since the revolution has been towards greater privileges for the elite. Twenty-five years in power have corroded and corrupted Castro's original intense idealism. This corruption comes on top of the elitism which marked Castro's politics from the earliest days. Thirdly, the Cuban ruling class must hide its privileges far more than other ruling classes. Austerity and self-sacrifice are essential to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the masses. The struggle of the Polish workers is dramatic testimony to the consequences to the "Red Bourgeoisie" when its privileges show too grossly.

The Cuban ruling class is organized around state control over the economy. The present Cuban rulers gained power and cohered as a class through the revolution. Prior to the revolution, thieves ran Cuba for the imperialists who owned it. The professional middle class, students, the petty bourgeoisie, all saw their positions, wealth and influence stunted. Imperialist domination produced and sustained national underdevelopment. The good jobs went either to the imperialists or to Batista's cronies. The middle class and petty bourgeoisie identified their coming to power, their ability to run the country, with the struggle against imperialism and against Batista's repressive corruption. Breaking the power of the imperialists, the comprador capitalists and Batista required seizing their property



and nationalizing it. This was the only way to displace the old rulers, protect the society from imperialism and open up room for new, uncorrupted middle class elements to run the society.

This process and the outlook of the new bureaucrats of the regime are summed up very nicely by the authors Bray and Harding:

... most of the high government posts and the majority of the middle-level positions were manned by middle-class individuals who had not been Communists but were nonetheless dedicated to the revolution. . . . Most middle-class administrators, technicians, guides, and translators hold more responsible and powerful positions today than they would have held before the Revolution. The shift occurred because foreigners no longer make the fundamental decisions affecting Cuba, and also because of the emigration of skilled people and the explosion of new services and production. Anyone with skill in Cuba rises rapidly to top positions. . . . Many middle-class Cubans believe it is only they, and not the workers or peasants, who really understand the Revolution, including the need to sacrifice. These middle class revolutionaries criticize poor people who relate to the Revolution in terms of the material benefits it has brought them and are wont to comment about people who "had too much of a working class background to understand what the revolution was all about."

The roots of this process are clear in Castro's political evolution before the revolution and the nature of the revolution itself. In the early '50s, the *Partido Ortodoxo* provided Castro's political home. This party sought to be the orthodox continuation of José Martí's struggle for national independence. The *Ortodoxos* did not claim to be a working class party. They had a middle class base, with much of the revolutionary movement centered in the University. Castro and the *Ortodoxos* identified Cuba's problems as corruption and U.S. domination. If only honest nationalists were in power, then the tremendous wealth produced in Cuba could easily spur rapid, thorough national development. Castro's program included serious reform, and showed great concern for the poor, the workers and peasants. But it had not a hint of socialism, of the workers and peasants taking over society. Castro talked of "Jeffersonian democracy" and used vague, radical slogans such as "No bread without liberty; no liberty without bread." When Castro broke with the *Ortodoxos*, it was to use much more militant means to implement the same program.

The Cuban revolution demonstrates Castro's enormous courage and determination, but also his elitism. The guerrilla army that eventually ousted Batista started from the 20 survivors of the *Granma*, the small boat that Castro and his followers used to reach Cuba in 1956. The number of guerrillas never exceeded 2,000.<sup>4</sup> Of these, 60-80% were from the cities (the great majority being students and middle class), and the rest peasants.<sup>4</sup> The masses of workers and peasants did support the revolution. Mass support played an important role for the guerrillas. For instance, all classes participated in a general strike in 1957 against the regime that was quite successful. Yet, neither the working class nor the peasantry built mass, revolutionary organizations. When the guerrilla army marched in to Havana, the masses were supportive, but passive, spectators.

This elite domination have never changed. Cuba is unashamedly a one-party state, yet the popular masses neither created nor control this party. When the rebels took power in January, 1959, Castro needed to organize a coherent apparatus to administer the society. He did so in an elitist manner. Castro evidently believed that the best guarantee of the future of the revolution was to concentrate all decisive power in his hands and those of a small clique around him, including his brother Raúl. Castro's organization, the July 26 Movement, never held a national congress or a deliberative conference on any level.<sup>5</sup> Castro made all the decisions, and continued that tradition once in power. In the early years, Castro raced from one end of Cuba to the other, making spot decisions and holding mass rallies. Over several years, Castro forged a party out of his July 26 Movement (especially the guerrilla commanders), the *Directorio*

*Revolucionario Estudiantil* (an independent, revolutionary student group that fought Batista) and the pro-Moscow, Stalinist *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP). The creation of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) in 1965 did nothing to empower the masses or even the "communist" section of the masses. This party, which [supposedly] ruled the society, did not even have a congress for ten years. Castro appointed the Central Committee. Two-thirds of its members were active duty military officers, under the military discipline of the commander-in-chief, Fidel Castro. Professionals in the state/economic apparatus accounted for another 25%. After the creation of a party and a leadership, the next logical step was to create a rank and file. In 1969, the Party boasted a total of 55,000 members. By 1975, 202,000, four percent of the population, had joined the Party.<sup>6</sup>

The Cuban Communist Party is an organ of power for the Cuban ruling class. Its composition reflects this. Party membership is most concentrated among army officers (90%) and officials in the Interior Ministry (70%). According to 1975 figures, "political or administrative direction" personnel were over-represented in the party by a factor of 5.5, while workers were under-represented. The percentage of workers in the party fell from 40% to 36% in the three years following 1972.<sup>7</sup> While the non-party workers and peasants can nominate people to the party, admission is controlled by the party leaders. The rank and file have no real power.

The creation of the party did nothing to dilute Castro's personal power, or that of his brother. In the '70s, Castro was "president of the Council of State, president of the Council of Ministers, first secretary of the PCC, commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, General of the Army, chairman of the National Commission for the Implementation of the SGE, and can assume at any time the leadership of any central administrative agency. Raúl is vice-president of the Council of State, first vice-president of the Council of Ministers, second secretary of the PCC, minister of the Armed Forces and General of the Army."<sup>8</sup>

Defenders of the regime claim that the Organs of Popular Power (OPP), elected local governmental bodies, and the National Assembly, elected by the OPPs, give Cuba some real democracy. The OPPs, first elected in 1976, have power over limited, local concerns, including economic services and retail distribution. They have no say over basic decisions of the national economy, foreign policy and so on. Their funds are allocated centrally by the state. Acts of the OPPs can be annulled by other organs of the state and the Council of Ministers supervises OPP administrative departments. The OPP



Fidel Castro.

election rules allow no campaigning and no parties. This consciously prevents the OPP elections from allowing for a debate or discussion on any national political questions. In practice, the CCP decides who controls the OPP executive committees and managerial bodies.<sup>9</sup>

The independence of the National Assembly is fictitious. While only 4% of the population is in the CCP, 97% of the Assembly delegates are in the party or the Young Communist League (UJC). The delegates to the National Assembly reveal the usual hierarchy in capitalist society. Only 31% of the delegates in 1976 were workers, and only 22% were women. Eighty-eight percent had high school education or more, while less than half the society does.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, the National Assembly has never held a debate with serious differences on any important question.

The existence of a popular militia is also used to prove that Cuba is an armed, popular democracy. The popular militia was created to defend against U.S. invasion. It played a very important role in defeating the counter-revolution at the Bay of Pigs. Nonetheless, Castro disarmed the militia in 1964. He abolished it in 1973.<sup>11</sup> The militia has been revived only in 1983 to counter the growing threats from the U.S.

The elite of the CCP uses a thorough, efficient repressive apparatus to maintain its monopoly on power. While popular support has faded seriously over the years, the Castro government retains a great deal of popularity. Nationalist sentiment supports the government fervently when the U.S. threatens it. This allows Castro to rule without extensive terror. Nevertheless, the Cuban state does not allow any organization in society independent of the state. It does not allow any right to organize, strike, protest, any freedom of speech, of the press and so on. Those who criticize the regime or do not show the proper kind of morality and public spirit suffer discrimination in school, job, housing and other areas of life. They risk jail.

The Cuban ruling class relies on its mass organizations to mobilize, inspire and control the Cuban people. The most important of these are the Committees to Defend the Revolution (CDR). The CDRs are organized on a block-by-block basis. Originally, they served as a vigilance network when counter-revolutionaries, backed by the CIA, carried out systematic sabotage and disruption. This reactionary violence declined to almost nothing after the mid-'60s. The CDRs also played a crucial role in the literacy campaign and health campaigns. In the late '60s, they mobilized "volunteers" to cut sugar cane. The CDRs do little of this now. They basically serve as an information gathering network for the regime. The CDRs keep a constant watch on all activities in their area. The CDR leaders are appointed, not elected. The CDRs are also responsible for mobilizing people for government rallies, and they have a quota of people they must turn out. One Cuban described the activities of the CDR under which she lived:

Everyone in my apartment house is watched. When you go out, you have to say where. They clock you in and out. They want to know everybody's business. If I buy something, they know. If I bring a guest back, they observe; if it's a man, I have to leave the door open.<sup>12</sup>

The heart of capitalist repression lies in the process of production. Capitalism is a system of alienated labor, in which the vast majority have no control over their working lives, the tools with which they work on the product they create. The hours on the job are hours of slavery, in which the boss has all the power. As far as the relationship between the workers, the bosses and the process of production goes, Cuba is as capitalist as any country on earth.

Labor discipline in Cuba is not only severe; it is worsening. Any society that suffers from scarcity must require that people work, in fact, too hard for too little in return. This requires some form of labor discipline. A truly socialist society would see democratic, self-imposed labor discipline, which would gradually wither away. The direction would be towards less coercion, and more workers' control over production and workers' power.

Cuban labor discipline differs from labor discipline in many corporate capitalist countries. Unemployment and the threat of firing

is the most important single club the bosses use against the workers under corporate capitalism. With this weapon, the most prosperous capitalist societies can allow semi-independent unions and the right to strike, and can leave labor discipline to the individual capitalist. The Cuban ruling class, which had substantially ended unemployment until the 1980s, does not have this weapon. So, it has never tolerated unions independent of the state nor the right to strike. Moreover, its labor discipline measures stand out glaringly because they are state-imposed, nation-wide measures.

The first major ruling class offensive on labor discipline came in 1964-65. A new law "enforced sanctions for breach of Labor Discipline while the Grievance Commissions established in 1961 were abolished at the same time because they were regarded as too lenient."<sup>13</sup> The Labor Minister Augusto Martínez Sánchez explained the necessity of the law:

We have to admit that in the workplaces there are still undisciplined workers and for them we have to have disciplinary measures. . . . We still find workers who have not taken a revolutionary step and tend to discuss and protest any measure coming from the administrations.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the Military Units to Augment Production (UMAP) served as forced labor camps. "Enemies of the revolution," including gays and marijuana smokers were forced to work under back-breaking, horrible conditions. The UMAPs became such a scandal they were abolished. The mid- and late-'60s were years of "moral incentives" for labor discipline. The government sought to increase production through political mobilization. These are the years of massive amounts of "voluntary" labor (genuine enthusiasm mixed with not-too-subtle pressure) to cut sugar cane. The unions had almost no role in these years.

The regime shifted gears around 1970, driven by an economic crisis and an upheaval in foreign relations. Political mobilization and moral incentives gave way to more open inequality and coercion. To cover this increased repression, the government tried to renovate the unions. Trade union elections occurred in 1970, and the government claimed that now the unions would start defending the workers from management.

The union elections were a fraud. At the outset, the regime promised full freedom for discussion and criticism. Very quickly, this got out of hand.

When the CTC [the union federation—BD] was discussing electoral procedure, strong criticism was voiced by some union members against the traditional methods. This embarrassed the old union leaders, one of whom candidly complained: "We turned the rabbit loose before the hunter had his rifle ready." The Minister of Labor had to intervene to stop the critics, calling them "counter-revolutionaries" and "demagogues" and warning that such a "negative situation had to be changed radically."<sup>15</sup>

The result was an election in which only 33-50% of the expected number of candidates ran and only 65% of the expected posts were filled. Voter turnout was so low that no final figures were released. Even so, the old union bureaucrats were so unpopular that 77% of those elected held no office previously.<sup>16</sup>

Promises that the unions would now start defending the workers evaporated quickly. Fidel Castro made this clear in his May Day, 1971 speech, saying that "work productivity must from now on be the number one objective of the labor movement."<sup>17</sup> Raúl Castro repeated these sentiments in the same year.

The principal tasks (in which the unions should be involved) are productivity and work discipline; more efficient utilization of the workday; norming [setting output standards—BD] and organization; quality, conservation, and most efficient and rational use of both material and human resources.<sup>18</sup>

The state capitalists paid some lip service to workers' input into production planning. Bodies on which the workers would consult with management about production problems were created. But



the bosses made clear how limited such bodies would be. As Labor Minister Risquet stated,

The decision and responsibility (in the enterprise) fall to the management whose job is to take the daily, necessary measures required by the process of production. . . . One thing that is perfectly clear is that the management should have—and does have—all the authority to act. It is charged with a responsibility and it has the authority to make decisions.<sup>19</sup>

Even this limited form of consultation is ignored. In a 1979 survey, 34% of enterprises did not discuss production plans with workers at all, while 58% ignored the workers suggestions.<sup>20</sup>

The real heart of the new labor discipline system was a series of vicious laws. An anti-loafing law, passed in 1971, aimed at the total mobilization of labor. It sought to force people to get jobs. It also made absenteeism a crime, with punishment ranging from house arrest to two years of forced labor.<sup>21</sup> Absenteeism had reached the extraordinary figure of 20%, a situation Minister Risquet called "widespread passive resistance" to the regime. ±

The labor passbook system expanded in 1970. Each worker had to carry a book. It listed all his merits (e.g., voluntary overtime, overfulfillment of work quotas, high level of political consciousness) and demerits (e.g., poor productivity, bad attitudes, low political consciousness, absenteeism, quitting a job).<sup>22</sup> The labor code changed again in 1973, allowing for fines, transfers and firings for lateness, negligence and other infractions.

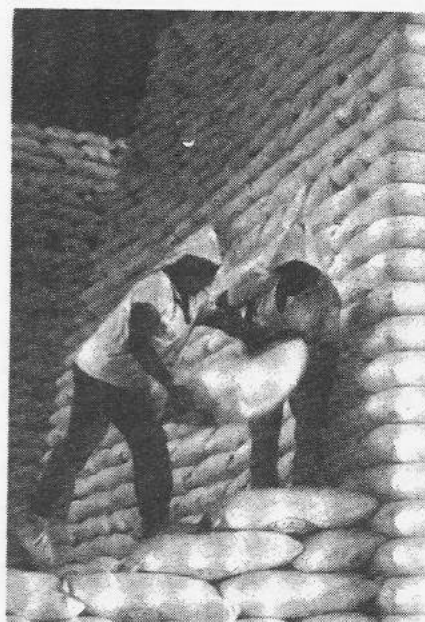
Marx called piece rate the form of payment most appropriate to capitalism. In Cuba, piece rate and work quotas (which also tie payment to output levels) were used little in the period of political mobilization in the late '60s. However, from 1970-72, 700,000 workers (one-third of the state labor force) were put on work quotas. By 1976, three-quarters of the public work force toiled under work quotas.

## The Cuban Economy

**T**he Cuban state capitalists have not been able to deliver on their promise of national development or sustained economic growth. Rather Cuba has suffered a series of economic downturns similar to other Third World countries. Certainly, the U.S. blockade has cost the Cuban economy a great deal. But the blockade is not a fundamental problem of the Cuban economy. If it were, the economy should have slowly stabilized and improved after the imposition of the blockade. However, Cuba today faces its worst economic crisis since the revolution — 20 years after the blockade was imposed.

The fundamental problems lie in Cuba's place in the world imperialist order and its capitalist nature. Cuba remains a dependent economy in a world dominated by imperialism. The growing global economic crisis is playing havoc with Cuba as with the rest of the world. Moreover, Cuban capitalism is based on the alienation and exploitation of the workers and peasants. They have no more motivation to produce than workers in other capitalist countries. And, Cuban managers and bureaucrats administer production to meet their own particular ends. Corporate capitalism suffers from the anarchy of production for profit, not use. State capitalism replaces this with the anarchy of production to meet quotas, not use. In the face of its enormous problems of inefficiency and low productivity, combined with relatively high social service expenditures, the Cuban economy has stayed afloat only through massive Soviet subsidies.

A hallmark of a dependent capitalist society is reliance on a single crop or mineral export as the heart of the economy. Before the revolution, sugar dominated Cuban economic life, summed up in the old saying, "*Sin azúcar, no hay país.*" (Without sugar, there is no country.) In 1958, for example, sugar accounted for 78% of Cuban



Cuban workers stacking sugar sacks.

exports.<sup>24</sup> Cuba has not been able to change this. The first attempt to break out of sugar dependency took place in 1961-63. The Cubans attempted to industrialize rapidly, leaning on Russia for economic aid and technical advice. This plan produced a serious recession, part of the blame for which must be placed on the U.S. economic blockade. However, by 1963, agricultural production had dropped 23% below 1959 levels, and mining and industry had fallen off as well.<sup>25</sup> In 1964-66, Castro balanced between Guevara's desire to forge ahead with rapid industrialization requiring forced, massive accumulation and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez's plan for a semi-market-style socialism, modeled on Russia during the Liberian experiments. In 1966, Castro decided for a form of Guevara's approach. The goal was to boost sugar output massively and quickly. With the high capital accumulation levels thus attained, Cuba could industrialize rapidly and escape dependence. Everything and everybody in Cuba was mobilized to reach the goal of a 10 million ton harvest in 1970. This effort suffered terribly from underplanning, overoptimism and lack of economic knowledge. Tremendous amounts of human and material resources were wasted, economic channels disrupted and production harmed. The 1970 harvest reached only 8.5 million tons. Worse, the shortfall for the entire 1966-70 period reached 25%.<sup>26</sup> Consumption levels fell drastically. Cuba was in the midst of a serious economic crisis.

Following 1970, the Cuban leadership abandoned its hopes of escaping dependency. Cuba recovered from the severe economic difficulties only by accepting its dependence, especially on Russia. Russia bailed Cuba out with massive subsidies, especially after Cuba joined COMECON (the Eastern European counterpart to the Common Market) in 1972. Part of the arrangement was Cuba's acceptance of a rationalized, market-influenced economic order. The subsidies and the economic rationalization did produce a recovery. Total consumption rose 52% by 1975 over 1970 figures.<sup>27</sup>

The economic rationalization accepted Cuba's dependence on sugar. Since the revolution, sugar has never accounted for less than 74% of exports. In 1974-76, it accounted for an average of 88% of exports.<sup>28</sup> Tobacco and nickel made up almost all the rest.

Cuba must import a wide-range of essential materials with the money earned from sugar. Cuba imports 30-35% of its food. It imports almost all its oil. Machinery, spare parts, fertilizer and other goods essential for production must also be imported (although Cuba is now manufacturing some cane cutting equipment). When the price of sugar falls, Cuba's imports fall with it. This has produced economic difficulties in 1976, and severe problems in 1980

and 1982. The price of sugar went above \$.30 a pound in 1974, only to fall to \$.07 a pound in 1978. Prices again went above \$.30, but fell below \$.10 in 1982.<sup>29</sup>

After the revolution, Cuba, like many Third World countries, suffered massive trade deficits and amassed towering debts in the face of the worsening terms of trade between agricultural goods and industrial goods. From 1902 through 1958, Cuba had a continual trade surplus (only three years saw a deficit).<sup>30</sup> From 1959 through 1978, however, only two years recorded a trade surplus.<sup>31</sup> This deficit totaled about 5.5 billion pesos. Cuba has financed its trade deficits with a huge foreign debt. Most of this debt is owed to the Soviet Union. However, Cuba is heavily indebted to the West as well. In 1976, the debt to the West was estimated at \$1.3 billion.<sup>32</sup> By 1982, this debt had climbed to \$3.2 billion. In the mid-1970s, Cuba's debt was the third largest in Latin America in absolute terms, and per capita far and away the highest — four times that of Brazil and three times that of Mexico. Cuba's debt-export proportion was 198% compared to a Latin American average of 122%.<sup>33</sup>

The Soviet Union holds the economic whip hand over Cuba. Before the revolution, the United States often accounted for as much as 70% of Cuban imports and exports. In 1978, Russia provided 69% of Cuban foreign trade.<sup>34</sup> Russia provides much of Cuba's food, much of its machine goods and 98% of its oil. Soviet subsidies have kept the Cuban economy afloat. Moscow generally pays above world market price for Cuban sugar and nickel, and sells its oil for below world market price. The USSR, which can produce enough beet sugar to meet its needs, could ravage the Cuban economy overnight by cutting off oil exports or refusing to buy sugar. It extends credits to cover trade deficits and developmental loans, as well as military aid. Some estimates of the amount of aid include: \$10 billion from 1959-75<sup>35</sup>, \$3 billion for 1979 alone<sup>36</sup> and \$4 billion in 1982.<sup>37</sup> The 1982 figure would mean more than \$1 a day per person in Cuba. Russia agreed in 1972 to postpone any Cuban repayment of its debt until 1985. In the coming sections on foreign policy, we will see why the Russian imperialists are willing to subsidize the Cuban regime.

Cuba's economic problems flow from its internal capitalist nature as well as its dependent status in the world imperialist system. The Cuban economy is plagued with the same problems of low productivity, massive waste and stagnating food production as the Soviet Union's is. Low productivity is directly tied to Cuba's success through the 1970s in eliminating unemployment. The unemployed were given jobs, but not necessarily productive ones. With the state providing either the payroll or unemployment payments, it was no more expensive and politically much more advantageous to put everyone to work. Castro discussed this in 1970:

At the time (of the triumph of the revolution) we practically invented jobs in order to give all those people work. . . . Nobody ever mentioned the matter of productivity as a fundamental thing. . . . Our population has increased, and yet, in some items, production is no higher; in fact it's lower. . . . What is this bottomless pit that swallows up this country's human resources. . . . the country's wealth, the material goods that we need so badly? It's nothing but inefficiency, non-productivity, and low productivity. . . . Everybody, every branch of the economy and practically every work center, is guilty of the same crime.<sup>38</sup>

This has resulted in a situation where often much time is wasted at work. "A time-loss study conducted in 1968 of more than 2,000 enterprises (but not published until mid-1970) revealed that from one-quarter to one-half of the working day was wasted."<sup>39</sup> This problem is fundamentally one of poor motivation on the part of the workers and managers, something socialism is supposed to solve better than capitalism.

Low quality and waste are other expressions of the lack of motivation that Cuban capitalism creates. President Dorticos said that Cuba had the world's highest consumption of spare parts.<sup>40</sup> In early 1972, a transportation crisis resulted from the fact that only 134 locomotives out of 300 were operable, the others needing



repairs. Similarly, 50,000 tractors imported into Cuba did the work of 7,000 because of breakdowns.<sup>41</sup> A study by the Cuban government in 1980 showed that most manufactured goods did not meet quality control standards. The study blamed workers and management who aimed at meeting production quotas regardless of quality.<sup>42</sup>

One of the dreams of the Cuban revolution was to diversify agriculture and achieve self-sufficiency in food production. Imperialism had made Cuba one huge sugar plantation. As with many other agriculturally rich Third World countries, Cuba depended on others for the very food it ate. Today the situation is even worse than before the revolution. Specifically, Cuba is even more dependent on sugar now than before. The developmentalist plans of Cuba's rulers lead to the same basic economic decisions as those the imperialist exploiters of Cuba had arrived at—channeling the best land, labor, investment and mechanization into sugar production. To make matters worse, food production depends heavily on the motivation and skills of the rural workforce. Yet, the Cuban government's constant pressure to control, discipline and exploit the rural workforce has meant terribly low productivity in the food sector.

The regime turned the co-operatives that emerged from the land reforms of the early 1960s into state farms. State farms cannot create the same motivation among their workers as private agriculture. Evidently, the state farm workers realize that the farms are not theirs, that they are being exploited by the state. Despite great advantages in credit, mechanization and quality of land, state farms are significantly less productive than private farms (about 20% of farm land in 1977). Yet, the government keeps great pressure on private farms, viewing them as dangerous to its control over the country. The state limits private agriculture and forces sales to state marketing agencies at low prices. During the drive for the ten million ton sugar harvest, the Cuban government went so far as to eliminate all private plots on state farms to forcibly mobilize all labor for sugar production. State capitalism has been successful in some areas suitable to mechanization and industrial-type organization. Egg production and fishing have increased almost tenfold. But production that relies on the motivation and skills of the rural producers have suffered greatly. In the 1960s, the government sponsored a major effort to improve the number and quality of cattle. Yet, the number of cattle per capita fell by 18% from 1958-75.

Castro, in 1971, gave an indication of this problem:

The former owners of a private farm had a tractor and it



lasted twenty years, but later, when the ownership of that farm passed to the state, a tractor lasted only two, three, maybe four years.<sup>43</sup>

Private farms averaged 12% higher output in sugar cane yield in 1977,<sup>44</sup> despite the advantages of the state farms in investment. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN, Cuba's agricultural performance in 1961-76 was the worst—tied with Chile—in Latin America.<sup>45</sup> Per capita food production fell by 26% from 1959-76, contrasting sharply with a doubling of industrial output from 1967-77.

In 1975, Cuba adopted the "Economic Planning and Management System." This incorporates the various forms of profit-loss accounting and market mechanisms which prevail in the Russian economy. These measures make factory managers aim at producing a profit, and de-emphasize quotas. The open search for profit does not make Cuban society more capitalist than before, but it does make its capitalist character somewhat clearer.

The search for profit and foreign exchange has led to Cuba inviting Western investment back to the island. In 1982—twenty-three years after the revolution ended imperialist ownership—Cuba passed a law allowing up to 49% foreign ownership in state companies. The *Economist* describes the terms as "generous by any standards."<sup>46</sup> The Cuban rulers are trying to sell their country just like other Third World capitalist nations. The Secretary General of the Cuban Chamber brags that in Cuba "there is no risk of revolution... no danger of nationalization... no danger of strikes." "Cuba is by far the most stable country of the region; strikes and labour conflicts are, they [the Cubans] point out, a thing of the past..."<sup>47</sup>

The search for foreign exchange has led to attempts to revive tourism. One of the revolution's proud achievements was ending Havana's role as international night-spot and gambling center. As the economy worsened, Castro moved to reverse this. "Cuba hoped to be back to the prerevolutionary figure of 300,000 tourists in the 1980s, most of them coming from the U.S."<sup>48</sup> The government built many new tourist hotels: six in 1976, nine in 1977, eight in 1978, and planned on building 13 in 1980. This construction comes while Cuban working people suffer an extreme housing shortage. But economic rationalization dictates that investment goes where profit and foreign exchange can be found. Castro has even warned that Cubans' vacations might have to be cut back to provide the facilities for tourists.

The Cuban economy has seen any number of specific gains. Industrial production has increased markedly since the revolution, much of the sugar industry is mechanized, egg and fish production has soared and so on. Yet, the overall picture is one of deepening economic difficulties. The world economic crisis of the 1980s has had its powerful impact in Cuba. As we will see below, the 1980s have brought the worst economic crisis to Cuba since the revolution.

## Living Conditions

**T**he tragedy of radical nationalism is clearly expressed in the living conditions of the Cuban people, their living standards, their rights and their struggle for freedom and equality. The early years of the revolution brought major gains to all the poor and oppressed in Cuba. The Castro regime implemented a wide-ranging series of radical reforms in the interests of the bottom layers of Cuban society. However, the need to accumulate capital, to develop the country in a world dominated by imperialism, cut off these reforms. By the 1970s, the Castro government was systematically attacking equality in favor of privilege, and rolling back many of the gains won by the working and oppressed people of Cuba.

The first years after 1959 saw great achievements. Castro, his governing layer, and the Cuban people saw no limits to their poten-

tial. Castro believed that an honest, nationalist government, armed with determination and courage, could accomplish anything. He sought simultaneously to raise the masses' standard of living, develop the economy past dependence, break the stranglehold of the U.S. and take long strides towards all forms of social equality. Castro knew that a determined nationalist course would bring down U.S. retribution, and he needed tremendous popular support to ensure his power against the counter-revolution and his rivals in the revolutionary government.

The Cuban revolution had several important advantages in social reconstruction that other revolutionary regimes do not have. The Cuban revolution left virtually no war damage, in sharp contrast to the devastation in, for instance, Vietnam. The Cuban revolution occurred in the middle of the post-World War II economic boom. Cuba had 15 years or so to try to develop before the international economic crisis tightened its deadly grip. Most importantly, Cuba was one of the richest Third World nations in 1959. It had the fourth highest GNP per capita in Latin America, the second largest percentage of the population covered by social security, the lowest infant mortality rate and the second lowest death rate. In some ways, Cuba's economy was comparable to weaker European economies. Its GNP per capita was similar to Romania; its energy consumption and literacy similar to Yugoslavia; newspaper circulation was similar to Italy; and the number of TV sets per capita similar to France (the highest level in Latin America).<sup>49</sup>

Cuba's wealth was distributed extremely unequally and much of it was squandered on luxury consumption. In particular, an enormous gap existed between the conditions in Havana and in the countryside. Many Cubans in the countryside lived without doctors or medical care, without running water or electricity, without solid housing or roads, and without work for months out of the year. A radical redistribution of the wealth could and did bring major gains to the bottom layers of the society, especially in the countryside. The redistribution of the wealth was facilitated by the flight of thousands of upper and middle class Cubans to the U.S. in the years after the revolution. Their homes, their property and their jobs were opened up to the revolution's supporters.

The Castro regime's first great egalitarian measure was the land reform. Even though it was quite mild (providing for compensation to the owners), the U.S. attacked the measure and increased its hostility toward the revolution. In the years that followed, the revolution nationalized all industry and banks. A second, more thorough land reform was enacted. The government cut rents in half, and then took housing out of the hands of the landlords. Rent payments changed into mortgage payments, as Cubans could buy their homes. The minimum wage, wage rates in general, pensions and social service payments all rose sharply. Electricity rates were cut. Health and education campaigns spread across the country. Resources were given to neighborhood organizations to build housing, schools, day care centers and other community projects. Public works programs virtually ended unemployment.

The revolution and the ruling elite can claim many impressive accomplishments. The illiteracy rate fell from 23% to 4%. The biggest impact was in the countryside, where illiteracy had been 42%. By the mid-1970s, elementary school education was almost universal, with 47% attending secondary school and 11% in college.<sup>50</sup> The revolutionary regime has trained over 200,000 teachers and the university enrollment is 18 times the prerevolutionary figure.<sup>51</sup> Cuba developed a universal, free health care system. The expansion in the number of doctors, hospital beds and clinics again meant the greatest change in the countryside. Health care improved most dramatically in the early 70s. Social security coverage increased from 63% of the population to 100%.<sup>52</sup> The government made serious attempts to deal with the housing problem, starting the first public housing programs and ending rent.

These measures accomplished a significant shift towards social equality. Even the *Wall St. Journal* had to admit that "abject poverty seems to have been abolished."<sup>53</sup> Best estimates indicate that 15% of the national wealth was taken from the top layers of society and given to the bottom-most, leaving Cuba with "probably the most

egalitarian" income distribution in Latin America.<sup>54</sup> Serious measures against racism and sexism increased the progress towards equality.

By 1963 or so, the early policies had to be changed. The national reserves had been used up and an economic crisis had hit. In the mid- and late-60s, the government severely constricted consumption and certain social service expenditures (especially housing and medical care). However, it retained its drive towards egalitarianism and for national independence. In the 70s, the government's policies allowed for significant increases in consumption. But this was tied to a conscious, across-the-board freeze and/or rollback on the struggle for equality. The increased consumption benefited the upper and middle layers of society above all.

The income distribution figures bear this out. The poorest layers of the society gained almost nothing in their percentage of national wealth after 1962. The poorest 20% of the population increased its share of the national wealth from 7.7% in 1962 to 7.8% in 1973. The second poorest fifth went from 12.3% to 12.5%. In 1973, the top fifth of society earned almost five times that of the poorest fifth.<sup>55</sup>

The drive towards inequality is expressed in the wage structure, allocation of goods, social service cutbacks, cutback rations and the development of the parallel and free markets. In the 1970s, material incentives replaced moral incentives, and attacks began on "petty bourgeois egalitarianism." In 1973, technicians and executives were granted a raise of 132 million pesos annually, while increases for agricultural workers (the lowest paid) were postponed in 1978 to avoid inflation.<sup>56</sup> By 1975, only 45% of the work force had seen any wage gains since 1962. Yet, the Cuban ruling class found the resources to begin importing cars for technicians and the elite to "increase their productivity" in 1974.<sup>57</sup>

Channeling resources into free social services is the most egalitarian form of distribution of scarce consumption funds. The increased consumption of the early 1970s occurred while some social services suffered cutbacks. These cutbacks increased as economic problems developed after 1975-76. Proposals to abolish rent entirely and raise the minimum wage were scrapped in the late 1960s. In 1973, the policy of granting full salaries to sick or retired workers in vanguard factories ended. 1976 saw the abolition of free public phone service. The average pension fell by 5% from 1975-78.<sup>58</sup> In 1977, daycare centers began charging fees.<sup>59</sup> The housing built in the 1970s is available only to rent, not buy.<sup>60</sup>

The Plan CTC-CI is another blow against equality. This plan, introduced in 1971, puts consumer durables, such as refrigerators,

washing machines, and bicycles, in the hands of committees of workers in the factories. These committees rank the applicants by their attitude and merits, i.e. if they produce and cause no trouble. Housing and vacations are also distributed in this manner, giving management another disciplinary weapon. The institutionalization of the 1970s also channels resources into enterprise funds, which then provide housing and social services. The size of the fund depends on the profitability of the enterprise, a form of profit-sharing counter-posed to egalitarian universal social services.

Rationing is another egalitarian measure when goods are in short supply. Rationing has been cut way back in Cuba. One study shows that in 1970, 94% of 274 types of consumer goods were rationed. By 1980 only 21% of 874 products were rationed.<sup>61</sup> The size of the rations has not improved. "In spite of the significant improvement in the 70s, rationing in 1978-79 was tougher than in 1962: quotas on 14 goods were lower, two were the same, only three were higher."<sup>62</sup> The Cuban rulers have instituted parallel markets, where prices range from three to eight times the official, state controlled prices, making goods available only to those who can afford them. Cuba also has its "diplotores," where Russians and others with hard currency can buy goods. Cuban working people are barred from these stores.

The same freeze and retreat on economic equality affected the struggle of women and Blacks for equality. Early strides towards equality gave way to the needs of production and stability. Castro's radical nationalism never encompassed an understanding of liberation of oppressed people such as gays, women and Blacks. Its early promises of formal equality have been left unfulfilled.

Cuba, formerly a slave society, has a large Black population, 35-40%. It has a long, deep racist history. Blacks suffered the worst living and working conditions. Discrimination and abuse ran throughout the society. Castro declared war on racial discrimination, and the revolution ended many forms of racist oppression. Elizabeth Sutherland, a North American civil rights activist, observed, "at the first level of perception, it was clear in 1967 that racism as it once existed in Cuba had been wiped out."<sup>63</sup>

But Sutherland also noticed that problems remained. Moreover, by the late 1960s, the importance of fighting racism had declined in order to promote production.

The Press followed up Fidel's speeches [against racism] with similar declarations and articles. Then, as the early years of the Revolution passed, this kind of campaign waned. Since the institutionalization of equality had been achieved, it was apparently considered unnecessary to push further. That seemed to be the general position of the nation's officials, both black and white.<sup>64</sup>

Today Blacks remain disproportionately on the bottom of Cuban society, with cultural values and life still poisoned with racism. One telling indication of this is the refusal of the Cuban government to publish any statistics by race from the 1970 census, even though the information was gathered.<sup>65</sup> Blacks are very under-represented in the Cuban leadership. The 1965 Central Committee was only 9% Black. Sutherland noted this.

Again something was troubling about the top leadership. With rare exceptions—like Juan Almeida, head of the army (long a province of blacks, for economic and historic reasons)—that leadership was white.<sup>66</sup>

Sutherland also discusses racism in culture. She saw not one Black woman among the many fashion pictures in *Mujeres* magazine and a great underrepresentation of Blacks in Cuban propaganda posters.

The situation is similar in industry. Sam Farber noted:

Cuban policy is that of "color blindness" rather than what North Americans call "affirmative action." I never saw a black or mulatto man or woman as a supervisor or manager of any place I visited in Cuba. . . . While I didn't witness any racist conduct in ordinary social intercourse, I did hear many racist opinions among supporters and opponents of the regime.<sup>67</sup>



Billboard reads On the March Towards New Victories.



The Venceremos Brigade consisted of North Americans, sympathetic to the Cuban revolution, who went to Cuba to help cut sugar cane. The following are excerpts from a statement by the Third World Caucus of the Venceremos Brigade, written in either 1971 or 1972.

1. Blacks — Racism in Cuba. Blacks feel that racism is not just attitudinal, but also institutional (see added page[of the original report] for definition of institutional racism). Black representatives from second, third and fourth brigades felt that the Cuban leadership and the arts reflect racism by the fact that black Cubans are not represented at all or proportionate to their population in Cuba. Media is another place where it was felt that blacks are not represented: billboards, magazines, sports pages in newspapers, etc.

**The Cuban Argument on the Question of Racism:**  
Color distinction causes division:

The Cubans say that everybody in Cuba is considered as being Cuban, whether they are black, brown, or white. Cubans have said that putting priority on race would cause division in Cuban society, which goes against the priority of building socialism. For black Cubans to begin to push the concept of black Cubans wearing afros and seeing themselves as involved in a separate struggle would cause division in Cuba.<sup>68</sup>

The report mentions that "study groups on the black struggle in the U.S. and on African struggles... [are] very easily misconstrued as counterrevolutionary and divisive... the Cuban government does not look favorably on these activities."<sup>69</sup>

Twenty-five years is not a long time in which to eradicate racism, a disease with roots going back centuries. The problem is that the Cuban government has stopped fighting racism. Instead, it sees any independent thought or organization among Black people as a threat. Opposition to racism is fine, as long as it's official and controlled by the white leadership.

Women made dramatic gains in the first stage of the revolution. The government proclaimed the equality of man and woman; the family code asserted it. Women won the right to abortion (free, as are other medical services) and birth control. Daycare centers, originally free, sprang up. Women make up 24% of the labor force, almost double the pre-revolution figure. Women certainly benefited greatly from the extension of social services, reduction in unemployment, etc. Pre-revolution Havana had an enormous amount of prostitution, which has been reduced considerably.

These gains are of great importance, but do not go beyond the bounds of bourgeois rights found in many other capitalist countries. Like other capitalist countries, in Cuban women work in "activities associated with conventional women's roles such as nursing, teaching, child care, restaurant services, garment industry and the like."<sup>70</sup> Women are barred by law from some 300 job categories.<sup>71</sup> In 1976, when jobs were scarce, the Cuban rulers discovered new "health and safety" reasons to bar women from certain job categories. Women suffer severe underrepresentation in the ruling elite. The National Assembly in 1976 had 22% women delegates. The party had less than 15% women, while party officialdom was 94% male.<sup>72</sup> A redefinition of sex roles has never been part of Castro's thought or the ideology of the revolution's leaders.

Women, gays and youth in particular suffer from the ruling class's revolutionary puritanism and its sexual repressiveness. Sexual repression is built into capitalist society. Capitalism requires pounding the work ethic into the laboring classes. They must be socialized to tolerate a life of drudgery, without satisfaction, pride or pleasure. Open sexuality, the assertion of sex for pleasure's sake, is a challenge to repressive socialization. Much of the Cuban ruling class may sincerely identify homosexuality and open sexuality with bourgeois decadence and the remnants of Havana's role providing sexual services for tourists. Their probable sincerity does not make them any less reactionary or oppressive, however. The oppression of gays makes state capitalist sexual repression clear.

In the early years, the Castro government did not make a special effort to attack gays. But with the increasing influence of the anti-

gay PSP, attacks on cultural freedom and homosexuality grew. By 1965, as the drive to accumulate gathered steam, the government launched a full-fledged campaign against gay people. In 1965 the poet Allen Ginsberg went to Cuba. In an interview later he said:

The worst thing was the talk about homosexuality and the challenge to the official position about it. Castro had taken an official position in a speech at the university in which he had attacked homosexuality. He called it degenerate or abnormal, saw it as a cabal, perhaps, a conspiracy. I think he praised the Young Communist League for turning in faires.<sup>73</sup>

This was also the year the UMAPs began.

The people carted off to UMAP camps included youths who showed "too much" concern with their personal appearance (long hair, colorful clothing, etc.); they were said to be victims of *la enfermedad* (the disease) or of "cultural imperialism." And homosexuals were high on the list of those requiring rehabilitation. Other victims were neighborhood people with a "bad reputation" in the eyes of the local block committees... Indeed, for gay people, and probably for dissidents and nonconformists of many stripes, the CDRs became a hated institution, a kind of secret backyard police.<sup>74</sup>

The sexual repression hit women as well. "There was a terrible time when an unmarried woman could be expelled from the Party for becoming pregnant."<sup>75</sup>

While the repressiveness eased slightly with the institutionalization, it did not change basically. The First National Congress on Education and Culture spelled out the anti-gay politics of the Castro government in 1971:

The social pathological character of homosexual deviations was recognized. It was resolved that all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading... It was resolved that for notorious homosexuals to have influence in the formation of our youth is not to be tolerated on the basis of their "artistic merits."

Finally, it was agreed to demand that severe penalties be applied to those who corrupt the morals of minors, depraved repeat offenders and irredeemable anti-social elements.<sup>76</sup>

The Congress also recommended eradicating "extravagant foreign fashions, customs and behaviors" such as long hair on men, mini-skirts, tight clothes and rock and roll.

The situation has not changed since the Congress. A gay man who fled Cuba discussed his experiences in the late 1970s.

Being in disagreement with the revolution. That includes being homosexual, being a freethinking individual... a woman who is sexually liberated and who shows that she doesn't buy all the Cuba machista ideas...

*What was your state of mind at that time?*

Well, when you're gay you live in constant fear which eventually becomes paranoia, being homosexual means you can't really trust anyone. At any moment anyone can accuse you of being homosexual, which means immediate dismissal from the School of Medicine, being branded by the system for life, perhaps prison at some point... or maybe only a \$300 fine, like two friends of mine had to pay not long ago.<sup>77</sup>

Cultural and intellectual freedom suffered a parallel sort of restriction. The early years of the revolution were quite notable for the freedom enjoyed. In the late 1960s, Castro courted left-wing intellectuals from around the world. He promised wide cultural and intellectual freedom, and implicitly attacked Russian repressiveness. Castro brought an ultra-avant-garde art show to Havana to highlight the contrast between Havana and Moscow. When Castro submitted to Russia, he chucked cultural freedom overboard. The arrest and subsequent confession of the prize-winning poet, Heberto Padilla, for counter-revolutionary writings signaled the end of Cuba's unique cultural freedom.

## 1980s: Years of Crisis

**T**he global economic problems of the 1980s have devastated many Third World nations. The combination of high interest rates, ballooning debts, shrinking markets for agricultural and mineral products and falling prices against the continuing inflation for industrial goods has brought great misery and suffering to the peoples of the Third World. Cuban state capitalism has been little able to protect Cuba from the international economic crisis. The Castro government, like others, seeks to deal with the crisis by squeezing and repressing the workers and peasants.

The Cuban social crisis deepened seriously in 1979 and broke into the open in 1980. The year 1979 saw another round of tightening labor discipline. The passive resistance of the working class drove Fidel Castro to attack the Cuban people as "lazy." Crime rose and there was "an appearance in certain neighborhoods of factions hostile to the government."<sup>78</sup> The thousands of people crowding into the Peruvian embassy in 1980 seeking to flee Cuba brought the crisis out into the open. When Castro opened the floodgates, around 125,000 (1% of the population) fled. In a secret speech in that year, Castro complained of the social decay and growing crime. "There will be no new starts on hospitals and schools this year, he declared. But 'whatever jails may be necessary' will be built, he said."<sup>79</sup> Another move to solve the crisis was a cabinet reshuffle. Fidel Castro gave himself four additional ministries, including the Interior. A major reason Castro allowed the Mariel exodus to take place was the growing unemployment problem in Cuba. Castro estimated that "tens of thousands of youth (will be) out of work"

and that "the employment problem [is] a real, objective one."<sup>80</sup>

The Cuban government wanted to export its unemployment in other ways. The Russians, due to their economic crisis, failed to deliver needed lumber.

Castro offered to send 10,000 Cubans to Siberia to cut the needed lumber and to be sure to get his quota next year. Lumbermen could be found among the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 youths who will be thrown out of work this year by economic difficulties, he said, or, he implied, from among the 'tens of thousands of our workers and internationalist fighters abroad' who are serving in Moscow's geopolitical interests more than in Cuba's.<sup>81</sup>

Cuba enjoyed a temporary recovery, but in 1982 things deteriorated again sharply. Cuban cash reserves fell by 70% in 1982. The lack of hard currency slowed imports drastically, and this, in turn, disrupted vital production.<sup>82</sup> Huberto Pérez, head of the Central Planning Board, estimated that exports to the West would cover only 63% of needed imports. Cuba was forced to join the long list of other Third World countries seeking to renegotiate its debt with the West in August 1982. The U.S. Department of Commerce, which easily could exaggerate the situation for its own purposes, claims that in 1982 "current availability of consumer staples, e.g. sugar, rice, beef, and coffee, clothing is less than in 1970."<sup>83</sup>

The economic crisis continues to mean repression. Amnesty International reported that five Cuban workers, originally sentenced to death, were convicted on charges of industrial sabotage. "Amnesty International received unconfirmed reports that the charges were connected with the attempts of the five men... to form an independent trade union."<sup>84</sup>

# Part Two

# Cuban Foreign Policy

## Overview

**A** great tragedy of the Cuban Revolution is its frustrated nationalism. The passion for national independence and integrity drove Castro and the guerrilla army. It has inspired the entire Cuban people. The revolution did burst the shackles of U.S. imperialism. But, 25 years later Cuba's national self-determination remains a dream. Cuba is both a client of the Soviet Union and dependent on the world imperialist market. It is desperately seeking an accommodation with the U.S., and it is willing to sacrifice the Central American revolution to achieve it. The heroic, idealist, anti-imperialist nationalism of 1959 has slowly changed into a cynical, subservient and accommodationist nationalism.

Cuban foreign policy since 1959 has always sought allies for Cuba. Its primary, defining concerns have been the defense of the Cuban regime and the expansion of its influence and prestige. These goals generally overlap with Castro's state capitalist/nationalist ideology. When Cuban national interests conflict with the ideology, the ideology is changed or ignored. Castro has sought allies internationally, using a wide range of tactics: from supporting revolutions

to selling them out; from condemning Russia to serving as its military agent; from heroic resistance to U.S. imperialism to seeking a treacherous accommodation with Washington; from aiding popular struggles against oppression to aiding oppressive regimes which put down popular upsurges. The only consistent thread is the defense of Cuba's national interests in a world dominated economically, politically and militarily by imperialism.

The immediate, powerful, unrelenting hostility of the United States to Cuba has dominated Havana's foreign policy thinking. Despite minor, temporary thaws, the U.S. has maintained a 25 year policy of attacking, subverting, harassing and weakening the Castro regime. From the Bay of Pigs, to the missile crisis, to the economic blockade, to the attempted assassinations and sabotage down to the current military threats and exercises, Washington has never ceased its war against Cuba.

To meet this threat, Cuba has maintained a constant, desperate, costly search for allies. Cuba needs allies to provide military, economic and diplomatic aid and defense against the U.S. Without



this, the Castro government would not likely survive. International alliances and prestige can also be used as diplomatic capital to arrange an accommodation with U.S. imperialism. Cuba has consistently invested a great deal of national resources to win allies to defend itself against the U.S., as necessary, and to make a deal with the U.S., if possible.

The Soviet Union is Cuba's major ally. The history of Cuban-Russian relations since 1959 is intricate and shifting. The Cubans and the Russians need each other, but have much in their history to cause mistrust and tension. Castro has sought leverage that could force the Soviets to make reliable military and economic commitments. Castro has adeptly used the Sino-Soviet split, U.S.-USSR tensions, and Russia's growing interest in the Third World to make Cuba indispensable to Moscow. For many years, the Soviet Union was reluctant to make firm commitments to Havana, fearing the costs and possible confrontation with the United States. Yet, Cuba's ability to refurbish Russia's tarnished revolutionary reputation and its ability to provide access to Third World regimes helped draw the necessary guarantees from Moscow. And the Soviet Union's stake in Cuba as a "socialist showcase" increases Castro's leverage with his patron.

Cuba has sought allies in the Third World energetically. Prestige and support from Third World regimes translates into valuable diplomatic capital in relations with both imperialist super-powers. Cuba has aided (and betrayed) revolutionary movements, made agreements with Third World regimes (some radical, others not), extended military and economic aid, championed Third World issues in the UN and sent troops abroad. Cuba's commitment to the Third World has definite limitations. Cuba's dependence on Russia has forced it to take some positions unpopular with its potential allies. In addition, Havana's attempts at accommodation with the U.S. limit its options. These three major factors— attempts to defend against and/or reach an accommodation with the U.S., efforts to insure Soviet military and economic guarantees, and measures to win allies and prestige in the Third World—combine with domestic concerns. Together, they have created the twisting, shifting history of Cuban foreign policy since 1959. In this section, we will divide Cuba's foreign policy history into five stages, recognizing that this necessarily involves some simplification of trends that appear and develop at different rates.

**1959-62:** These are the years of the consolidation of the revolution domestically, including the great reform measures that broke the power of the imperialists and native capitalists. Cuba begins its attempts at rapid industrialization. The U.S.'s hostility grows, leading to the Bay of Pigs invasion and economic blockade. Castro courts Russia, which slowly and reluctantly makes commitments to Cuba. The missile crisis leaves Cuba isolated from the U.S., but unsure about the Soviets who have demonstrated their arrogance and unreliability. Cuba is expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) and isolated from most Latin American regimes.

**1963-65:** Economic crisis causes retreat from rapid industrialization and leads to balancing between different economic strategies. Castro's trips to Russia help maintain alliance and bring increased subsidies. Cuba reaches compromise with Latin American Communist Parties to support armed struggle in selected countries. Castro puts out feelers for accommodation with U.S.

**1966-68:** The drive towards the 10 million ton sugar harvest aims at rapidly overcoming dependence. Consumption is ruthlessly lowered to aid accumulation; also, as a result of Russian economic pressure. Cuba loses confidence in Soviet defense guarantees. Castro seeks to break out of extreme international isolation through creating an international revolutionary pole and through strong support to Latin American guerrillas. Guevara's attempt at revolution in Bolivia leads to his defeat and death.

**1969-75:** Economic crisis leads to acceptance of dependency and Soviet-style economic rationalization. This, with Russian subsidies, produces economic recovery at the expense of social equality. Castro begins rapprochement with the Soviets by supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Cuba's desertion of guerrilla movements brings diplomatic relations with many Latin American countries,

the end of OAS sanctions and a thaw with the U.S.

**1976-83:** Growing economic difficulties and inequality produce increasing repression and social unrest. Cuba becomes extremely active internationally, asserting Russia's interests. It sends troops to Angola and Ethiopia and chairs the Non-Aligned Movement. The Central American revolution increases U.S. hostility to Cuba. Cuba vacillates between winning allies through revolution and holding back the struggle to accommodate the U.S.

## 1959-62

United States hostility to Cuba stemmed from the revolution's intense anti-imperialism and its nationalism. U.S. attacks on the Cuban Revolution did not result from Cuba's ties with the Soviet Union; these attacks created those ties. In 1959, the U.S. ruling class had not experienced the defeat in Vietnam, the radicalization of so many Third World regimes and revolutions in Latin America and Africa. Especially in Latin America, U.S. imperialism expected to get its way, with no questions asked. U.S. foreign policy strategists had no experience or desire to make deals to salvage some U.S. influence and power in the face of radical nationalism. The U.S. had relied on one simple, effective measure to deal with regimes in the Americas that crossed it: send in the Marines.

U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower began political attacks on the Castro regime as early as April, 1960. He targetted the land reform, a mild act which guaranteed compensation to the land owners, as we have seen. Eisenhower escalated by refusing to honor Cuba's sugar quota for 1960. When Cuba bought Russian oil, the U.S.-owned refineries on the island refused to process it. The revolution responded by nationalizing imperialist-owned property and later all banks and industry. The CIA funded and organized counter-revolutionary activity, including burning sugar fields and department stores. President John F. Kennedy launched the Bay of Pigs invasion in April, 1961. When the Cuban people defeated this ill-fated expedition, Kennedy continued to try to subvert the Castro regime. He instituted the total embargo on trade with Cuba. U.S. pressure resulted in Cuba being expelled from the OAS in 1962.

Cuba looked to the Soviet Union as U.S. hostility grew more blatant and dangerous. But Khrushchev had great doubts about developing relations with Cuba. At that time, the Soviet Union was not the world power it is today. It did not have the conventional military power to project a strong presence far from home. It had very little experience with close relations with governments not totally dominated by Moscow. Besides, Cuba offered little economic advantage to Russia, which could produce sufficient beet sugar to meet its needs.

Cuban aid shifted in the mid-'60s. A series of army coups deposed the more radical, pro-Cuban leaders, including Ben Bella and Nkrumah of Ghana. The Cubans then took up the task of building up the internal security apparatus for their friends. This reached extreme proportions. In 1966, the Cuban military mission in Congo-Brazzaville numbered 1,000—half the size of the Congolese army. Three hundred Cubans made up the elite presidential guard. Not surprisingly, this presidential guard suppressed an army coup attempt.<sup>112</sup>

Following Castro's African tour in 1972, additional Cuban military missions sprang up. The Cuban-organized Internal Security Unit Two in Sierra Leone, trained security forces in Equatorial Guinea and sent 700 advisors to train the security forces in South Yemen.

Cuba's decision to send troops to Angola in 1975 came out of this tradition of intervention in Africa. In particular, Cuba had close ties with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Cuba had provided arms and advisors to the MPLA since 1965. The MPLA in turn attended the Tricontinental Conference. Cuba's consistent support contrasted sharply with Moscow's attitude. Moscow cut off its aid to the MPLA in 1963, following a diplomatic set back for the group. In 1972-74, Moscow again cut off aid. This

time the purpose was to help a dissident, more malleable MPLA leader unseat Agostino Neto.<sup>113</sup>

Khrushchev was committed to the policy of peaceful co-existence. He staked his prestige in the Communist Party elite on his ability to produce tangible concessions and agreements with Washington. Peaceful co-existence would allow Soviet power to grow because the Russian economy would supposedly surpass the U.S. economy in short order. The Soviet Union was already paying a price for the peaceful co-existence line. Relations with China deteriorated quickly. By 1960, the Russians and Chinese were exchanging semi-public attacks and the Russians withdrew their technicians from China. The Chinese political attack centered on peaceful co-existence as a sell-out to U.S. imperialism. Khrushchev had inherited a fairly intact Soviet-dominated bloc. Losing China without tangible gains from the U.S. would severely undercut Russia's world position and Khrushchev's personal standing. Embracing Cuba might easily alienate the U.S., and destroy the progress towards accommodation which Khrushchev had made by 1959. Moreover, who knew where commitments to Cuba might end up? How much would it cost financially? Would it drag the USSR into a war with the U.S.? What would Russia gain from close relations with Cuba?

For the first 14 months of the revolution, the Russians kept a very low profile. The first commercial treaty between the two countries was not signed until February, 1960. Diplomatic relations did not resume until May, 1960, after Eisenhower began his public attacks on Castro. This decision also followed the U-2 spy plane incident. The U.S. had been caught red-handed flying over Russian territory. Instead of apologizing, Eisenhower brazenly asserted the U.S.'s right to do this. Khrushchev now badly needed some way to recoup from the shambles of his peaceful co-existence policy. Closer relations with Cuba provided some protection against Chinese polemics. Moscow proceeded to buy the balance of Cuba's sugar quota, on which the U.S. had reneged, and to supply Cuba with oil.

The Bay of Pigs invasion (April, 1961) drove Castro to press for Soviet commitments. Castro's declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution on the eve of the Bay of Pigs is best explained as an attempt to force Khrushchev to defend Cuba.<sup>114</sup> Khrushchev, who was trying to assert his leadership of the "socialist" world, would have no choice but to defend "socialist" Cuba. Earlier, Castro had publicly distorted Khrushchev's statements so that they sounded like definite promises of Russian defense of Cuba. Castro now escalated his attempts to force a definite statement from the Soviet leader. Moscow well understood the purpose of Castro's declaration. It did not acknowledge Cuban "socialism" for a full year. Not until April, 1962 did *Pravda* term Cuba socialist. Meanwhile, Cuba paid for its attempts to deepen relations with Moscow. Castro's "I am a Marxist-Leninist" speech of December, 1961 (another attempt to insure Russian defense) facilitated the U.S.'s plan to expel Cuba from the OAS.

*Pravda's* recognition of Cuban socialism coincided with the decision to place Russian missiles there.<sup>115</sup> Khrushchev needed to gain leverage vis-a-vis the U.S. The missiles would strengthen Russia's anti-imperialist reputation and quiet the Chinese. Perhaps, they could be traded for Soviet gains on Berlin and East Germany. Missiles in Cuba might also provide an inexpensive short-cut to achieving nuclear parity. Given Khrushchev's obvious inability to deliver on his economic promises, expense would be a serious consideration. Finally, the missiles were to allow for Soviet defense of Cuba in a way designed to prevent war, commitment of ground troops and so on.

The story of the missile crisis is well known. The resolution of the crisis proved to Castro and the Cuban people how treacherous, arrogant and unreliable the Soviet leaders were. Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles without even consulting Castro, let alone securing his agreement. Worse, Khrushchev promised to allow international inspection of Cuba, again without Cuban consultation or permission. Castro's indignant refusal to allow inspection was the only thing Havana had to salvage some national pride from this disaster. Castro could not break with Moscow since the U.S. threat had not diminished. But, neither could he trust it.

These early years saw Cuba's first attempts to support revolution

in other countries. Havana's need for allies (which successful revolutions would produce) and Cuban idealism and sympathy for others fighting imperialism and dictatorship dovetailed. Caribbean revolutionaries have a long tradition of support for each others' struggles. Castro participated in an attempt to overthrow Trujillo, dictator of the Dominican Republic. Guevara was an Argentinian. As Castro's *Granma* expedition assembled and trained in Mexico, so many revolutionary expeditions departed from Cuba. Revolutionaries left for Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Haiti in 1959. Many of the freedom fighters were Cubans and some expeditions had Cuban commanders.<sup>117</sup> By the end of 1963, perhaps as many as several hundred Latin American revolutionaries had received training in Cuba.<sup>118</sup> Cuba's rousing anti-imperialist declarations inspired countless more revolutionaries throughout Latin America with their calls for armed struggle. One principle governing Cuba's support for revolutionary movements surfaced in these years: Havana never supported revolution against a regime friendly to Cuba, no matter how much that government oppressed and exploited its people. The first expedition to leave Cuba landed in Panama in April, 1959. Castro denounced this expedition as an act of "inconceivable irresponsibility by adventurers who possibly did nothing during the Revolution."<sup>119</sup> He went on to explain the harm done to his efforts to improve the revolution's international standing and to distinguish Panama from the dictatorships in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.<sup>120</sup>

Castro reiterated this theme clearly in his speech on July 26, 1963. Castro divided Latin America into those countries needing revolutions and those which did not. The first group (Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador) have "iron dictatorships over the exploited masses and where all [nonrevolutionary] roads for the people are blocked." These same countries are "precisely those that unconditionally supported imperialism in its aggressions against Cuba." The other countries (Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Bolivia) "respect the sovereignty of Cuba [and] have not been instruments of Yankee imperialism in its aggressions against Cuba."<sup>121</sup> The second group of countries includes many of the largest, most powerful and militant working classes in Latin America. Castro's guerrilla, anti-working class politics are as clear as his nationalism. The idea that every capitalist country needs a revolution nowhere enters the discussion by this self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist.

## 1963-66

**A**fter the missile crisis, Cuba entered a transitional phase, marked by experimentation and moderation. The economic crisis of 1962 and the imposition of economic sanctions by the OAS in 1964 made Soviet subsidies crucial. Castro toured the Soviet Union in 1963 and in 1964. Khrushchev could show him off as proof of Russia's anti-imperialist credentials. In return, Cuba issued a mild condemnation of China, a switch from its previous neutrality.

Havana also acceded to Soviet pressure by moderating its revolutionary stance and reaching an agreement with the Latin American Communist Parties. These parties were generally explicitly reformist and opposed to guerrilla struggle. The most ringing Cuban anti-imperialist statements such as the *Second Declaration of Havana* in 1962 implicitly condemned the pro-Moscow parties. In many countries, young revolutionaries, inspired by Cuba's example and words, organized guerrilla forces that competed with the Communist Parties. Moscow insisted on upholding the Latin American Communist Parties and did not want Cuba provoking a confrontation with the United States.

A conference in Havana in late 1964 concretized this compromise. The Communist Parties dominated this gathering, while Castroist and Maoist revolutionaries were excluded. The conference called for armed struggle in six countries (Venezuela, Colombia,



Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Haiti). This list, much shorter than the 1963 version, consisted of countries where the local pro-Moscow parties advocated armed struggle. Castro gave special mention to the struggles in Venezuela and Guatemala. Ironically, by 1966 Castro attacked the major Guatemalan guerrilla leader, Yon Sosa, as a "Trotskyite." Yon Sosa in turn accused Castro of being "at the service of the Russo-Yankee alliance."<sup>92</sup>

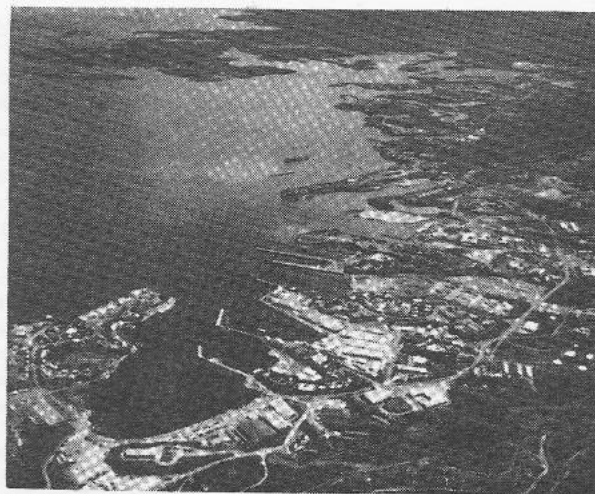
Castro sought an accommodation with the U.S. during these years. He signaled his willingness to make a deal in an interview with a French journalist in November, 1963, implying he'd stop supporting international revolution if the U.S. would "leave us in peace to better our country's economic situation." He added, "This doesn't mean we do not feel solidarity towards nations that are struggling and suffering, like the Venezuelan people. But it is up to those nations to decide what they want, and if they chose other regimes than ours, it isn't out business."<sup>93</sup>

## 1966-68

**T**he mid-'60s were years of heroic attempts to achieve national independence. Domestically, these were the years of the drive towards 10 million tons, with the tremendous political/economic mobilization of the Cuban people while consumption levels fell drastically. The drive for self-sufficiency coincided with the Cuban Revolution's period of most intense international isolation. The U.S. and the OAS remained hostile to Cuba. Castro had a bitter split with China in 1965. Castro discovered a pro-Chinese faction in the Cuban party, accused the Chinese embassy of plotting, and violently denounced the Chinese as "pirates" and "blackmailers" when China cut off its rice shipments.

Havana's confidence in Russia deteriorated sharply after 1965. The Soviets began establishing trade and diplomatic relations with vehemently reactionary, anti-Castro regimes in Latin America. The Russians began negotiations with and/or established agreements with Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Bolivia and Venezuela. Castro's fear grew as Moscow did nothing to counter the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. Nor did the Soviets respond to the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. U.S. military force crushed a revolution far more moderate than Cuba's, and the Russians did nothing. How could the Cubans have any confidence that the Soviet Union would take any risks to defend their island? Reliance on Russia had the added drawback of imposing an economic strategy that offered no hope of escaping dependence.

Castro and the Cuban leadership turned towards a new phase. They stepped up criticism of the Latin American CPs, openly criticized the Soviet Union and attempted to build a new, international revolutionary pole. The Cubans boasted that they were building communism in Cuba way ahead of the Soviet Union's hierarchical, egalitarian social order. Internationally, Castro sought to strengthen his hand among revolutionary forces, strengthen those forces against imperialism and use them to weaken and divert U.S. threats against Cuba. This approach was expressed in Guevara's famous slogan, calling for the creation of "two, three, many Vietnams." The Cuban Revolution named each year since 1959, denoting the principle task before the Cuban people. Thus 1966 was the year of solidarity; 1967 was the year of heroic Vietnam and 1968 was the year of the heroic guerrilla. The Cuban revolutionary line found expression in Regis Debray's book, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (1967), the Tricontinental Conference (1966), the Latin American Solidarity Organization Conference (1967) and the Culture Congress (1968). The Cuban leadership advocated guerrilla warfare as the only road to revolution in Latin America. Revolutionaries must immediately begin armed struggle, establishing guerrilla bases (*focos*) in remote parts of the country. Even small groups of fighters could electrify the masses and progress towards taking power. The guerrilla fighters should not be subordinated to a party. Parties inevitably mean complacent townspeople interfering with the militant



Stolen land: Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

guerrillas. Nor should the guerrillas subordinate themselves to any bloc with capitalist forces. They should fight on their own directly for power.

The Castroists rejected mass organizing. No excuse justified putting off armed struggle. Mass organizing was inherently reformist. Organizing militant strikes, peasant land seizures, or street-fighting and student demonstrations was dismissed as inviting repression on the masses and a diversion from the guerrilla struggle. The Castroists poured scorn on the electoral reformism of the Communist Parties, baited them for being "armchair revolutionaries" and virtually read them out of the movement.

Castro's political line at this point in some way resembles a state-capitalist, guerrilla-ist version of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Castro asserted the great difficulties in building socialism in a world dominated by imperialism, saying that true communism could not exist "in the midst of a world where misery still reigned."<sup>94</sup> Castro told the journalist K.S. Karol in a private conversation in 1976:

Yes, the more I think of it, the more I realize how right Marx was when he said that there can be no real revolution until there is a world revolution. We are not stupid enough to believe we can build a brave little communist state in splendid isolation.<sup>95</sup>

Castro tried to turn the Latin American Solidarity Organization into an international political tendency. Its conference in 1967 drew 27 delegations, only three of which were dominated by the Communist Parties. The rest were the young, revolutionary Castroists. The LASO conference was implicitly counterposed to the conference of Communist Parties held in Russia that year.

Castro and Guevara attacked Russia openly. Guevara condemned Russian trade policies in 1965, saying that "the socialist countries are, to a certain extent, accomplices in the imperialist exploitation." He also said that Soviet prices were "established on the basis of unequal exchange."<sup>96</sup> Castro echoed these sentiments, saying that some socialist countries "tend to maintain commercial policies with the underdeveloped world which are the same as those used by developed capitalist countries."<sup>97</sup> Castro implicitly counterposed Cuba's building true communism (intense political mobilization for the 10 million tons, striving towards social equality, but also drastically curtailed consumption and severe labor discipline) to the Soviet's grossly hierarchical society. Referring to the Soviet Union, Castro went so far as to say that "It may very well

happen that a country believes it is building communism, when in fact it is building capitalism.''"

The Cuban government did not confine itself to political statements and support. It put valuable resources into aiding guerrilla struggles. Che Guevara's expedition to Bolivia underlines both the heroism and the desperation of the Cuban strategy. Guevara's band consisted of about 50 people, little more than half of whom were Bolivian. Several Cuban Communist Party Central Committee members fought with Guevara. The guerrillas had no organized or active support in the countryside. They were isolated from the population, much of which was Indian and spoke indigenous languages, not Spanish. The repressive forces, backed by the U.S. with its much greater experience in counter-insurgency warfare, had little trouble destroying the guerrillas and assassinating Guevara. The total destruction of Guevara's expedition spelled the sure end to his strategy of creating "two, three, many Vietnams." The more indigenous, stronger guerrilla movements such as those in Peru and Venezuela had no real success either. Even during this most revolutionary period, the Cuban government stuck to its principles of not criticizing or embarrassing friendly governments. Mexico was the only Latin American country that did not enforce sanctions against Cuba. In 1968, the Mexican government machine-gunned hundreds of students to death in the Plaza de Tlatelolco. The Mexican Minister of the Interior, Echeverría, would stop at nothing to insure social peace for the upcoming Olympic Games. Neither the Cuban government nor the Cuban media said a word about this slaughter. Castro sent Cuban athletes to participate in the games. Later, when Echeverría became President of Mexico, Castro hailed this butcher as a great anti-imperialist stalwart.

## 1967-75

**B**y the summer of 1968, Cuba's policies were in crisis. The guerrillas had suffered defeat after defeat. The Cuban economy was sliding into a depression. Popular discontent grew because consumption fell so drastically. The death-blow for these policies came from two actions by the Soviet imperialists to maintain their power over their dependent states. Soviet economic pressure on Cuba tightened a choke-hold on the economy, and the Soviet tanks rolled in Czechoslovakia. Together, these actions led Castro back to dependence on the Soviet Union, and to accommodation with U.S. imperialism and Latin American reaction.

The Soviets first moved against Cuba's independence and criticism by cutting off any new credits in 1966. Since Soviet credits were such an important part of the economy, this move directly affected the level of consumption in Cuba. Yet, the Russians did not move to really damage the Cuban economy, as they could have. Moscow was leery about any drastic action in relation to Cuba. After all, the Cuban missile crisis played a major role in Khrushchev's downfall. No one in Moscow wanted to take a chance on another disaster. Crude economic threats had led to the decisive break with China; and this, too, was something that Moscow did not want repeated. Despite Cuba's criticisms of Russia, the Cuban-Russian alliance still gave the Soviets a "socialist showcase" and anti-imperialist prestige. Given Cuba's attempts to cultivate relations with North Vietnam and North Korea and the bitterness of the Sino-Soviet split, Moscow had much to lose by an open, total break with Havana.

For all these reasons, the Soviet Union moved slowly. Nonetheless, by 1967, it did move decisively. The Cubans requested an 8% increase in their oil allotment. The Russians offered only 2%, claiming that they had no more oil available. At the same time, the Soviet Union increased oil shipments to the fiercely anti-Castro Brazilian government. At first, Castro fought back. He imposed gasoline rationing to conserve scarce fuel. He accelerated the drive for the 10 million tons. He launched the "Revolutionary Offensive" in 1968 that nationalized the entire economy, down to the shoeshine boys



Che Guevara.

and hot dog vendors. He purged and arrested the leading ex-PSPers and friends of Russia in the government (the Escalante faction).

Castro's resistance collapsed and his rapprochement with Moscow began due to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. Castro's endorsement of the Soviet intervention, even in its qualified form, cost Castro a great deal politically. He sacrificed much of his pretensions to stand for a new form of socialism and his respect for the self-determination of nations. Why did he do it? Certainly the growing economic crisis and the great need for more oil and new credits played a major role. But more was involved.

The "Brezhnev Doctrine," the explanation for the Russian invasion, asserted that the existence of "socialism" was irreversible. Moscow would use its military might to insure that once a "socialist" government was in power, it would stay there. Millions around the world saw this as nothing but a thin cover to maintain the Soviet empire. To Castro, it was a most important statement that Moscow would ensure the survival of his regime. Since Castro's near-break with Moscow stemmed above all from his doubt of Moscow's commitment, the "Brezhnev Doctrine" was very attractive to him.

Castro also had no sympathy for the Czech upsurge. Especially as discontent grew in Cuba, Castro identified any resistance by the population in Czechoslovakia as anti-socialist. Pressure from the masses brought Dubcek to power. Dubcek sought to develop economic ties with the West, thereby weakening the Soviet bloc. On both counts, Castro was happy to see Dubcek disposed of, even if he would have preferred other methods than Russian tanks.

Havana's endorsement of the invasion was a major diplomatic achievement for the Russians. They could throw Castro's reputation as a militant anti-imperialist over the stench of their intervention. This had great importance as several Western European Communist Parties attacked Moscow's action. Castro's support for the Russian invasion began a process of rapprochement that took several years to complete.

Internally, Cuba eventually abandoned its attempts to escape dependency, and "institutionalized the revolution" (accepted the previously hated Soviet inequality, profit-loss accounting, rehabilitation of the ex-PSPers in the government, etc.). Internationally, Castro carried out the "counter-revolution in the revolution" by abandoning guerrilla struggle in Latin America and seeking accommodation with the U.S. Brezhnev wanted no conflict with the U.S. provoked by Cuban "adventurism." Nor did he want Cuba interfering with Russian relations with Latin American regimes.



Changes in Latin American governments facilitated this turn. Left-talking regimes came to power in several countries, which were willing to rebuild relations with Cuba. A major shift occurred from 1969 to 1970. In 1969, Castro still talked about revolution as the road to reintegrating Cuba with the rest of Latin America. He said he would never rejoin the OAS. By early 1970, he stated his willingness to resume relations with any country that acted independently of the United States.<sup>99</sup>

Peru provided a first opportunity for Castro's new line. In 1968 the Peruvian military seized the government. This was the same military that crushed Castroite guerrilla forces in 1965-68, forces to which Castro had claimed he sent material aid. Hugo Blanco, guerrilla leader often praised in the Cuban press, remained in the military's jails. However, the government of General Velasco revealed a nationalist/developmentalist orientation. It quickly nationalized U.S.-owned oil fields and refineries. The military junta restored diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and implemented agrarian reform. Despite these reforms, the government remained capitalist and viciously attacked popular struggles in the years that followed.

Castro embraced the new regime. He not only praised its anti-U.S. stand, but dressed up the murderers of his former comrades as true revolutionaries.

If there develops a genuine revolution in Peru, it doesn't matter if those who have promoted that revolution are a group of military leaders, many of them even having been educated in the United States, it is not important... if it continues to advance forward as an anti-imperialist revolution, as a revolution which promotes structural changes, as a revolution which defends the interests of the people of Peru...<sup>100</sup>

Later, he added:

It is worth pointing out that there is another Latin American country in which the armed forces are playing a revolutionary role. That country... is Peru. This fact, too, is very important as the armed forces are the same instruments which the imperialists use in those countries to maintain their privileges and hegemony. This is why we are watching with great interest the development of the political process in Peru, where without the slightest doubt, a new phenomenon has developed.<sup>101</sup>

When this "revolutionary government" finally released Hugo Blanco, it exiled him. Blanco expressed his demoralization and disgust at Castro's sell-out. "Castro, the guerrilla par excellence, believes it is possible that in Peru socialism will come about without destroying the present government by force of arms."<sup>102</sup> Blanco said it "disheartened" him to hear Radio Havana support a government "which represents the exploiters" instead of the true revolution.<sup>103</sup>

Castro also stabbed the Venezuelan revolution in the back. In the mid-60s, the Venezuelan Communist Party retreated from support to guerrilla struggle. It expelled Douglas Bravo, one of its leaders, for his continued guerrilla activities. At the time, Castro hurled denunciations at the Venezuelan Communists for their disgraceful behavior. In the mid-70s, though, Venezuelan guerrilla struggle interfered with Havana's patching up relations with Caracas. Castro broke with Bravo and cut off support to the guerrillas. He promised not to aid them, saying "We have no right to intervene in the internal affairs of Venezuela, but neither do the imperialists..."<sup>104</sup> Bravo knew what happened and why. "Early in 1970, Venezuelan guerrilla leader Douglas Bravo accused Castro of abandoning continental revolution for consolidating socialism in his own country, as Stalin had done in the USSR in the 1930s."<sup>105</sup> Havana received its 30 pieces of silver. In 1972 the process of reestablishing diplomatic relations began and was consummated in 1974. The guerrilla movements had not been able to win Cuba allies through victories. However, they sold for a decent price on the world market.

Castro's betrayal of revolution reached tragic depths in Chile. In 1966, when Castro was ever-so-revolutionary, he spoke prophetic words about Chile.

It [Unidad Popular, the reformist electoral coalition including the Socialist and Communist Parties] is not pointing a new path to the revolutionary masses, but [poses] more intensely than ever, to all revolutionaries on the continent, the question whether it is possible to win the revolution peacefully in the face of exploiting classes... the Chile experience will serve as even greater justification of the Cuban road for the revolutionaries on the continent.<sup>106</sup>

By 1970, Castro sang a different tune.

Right now in Chile I believe that it is possible to arrive at socialism through the polls, that is, by an election victory. Chile is one of the few Latin American countries where the constitutional political struggle is being waged through established channels. The only advantage the right has is greater economic means.<sup>107</sup>

It was precisely this question—can socialism be won peacefully or is armed revolution necessary?—on which the Chilean workers' movement stumbled. Its belief in a peaceful victory of socialism led to the successful military coup. It led to the deaths of thousands of working class militants and the crushing of the working class for ten years.

The story of the Chilean struggle and its tragic defeat in 1973 reveals Castro's responsibility for the catastrophe. In 1970, Salvador Allende came to power at the head of the Unidad Popular, a reformist electoral bloc. Allende claimed to be building socialism and fighting imperialism. He carried out a number of nationalist/developmentalist reforms. At the same time, he sought to hold back the struggles of workers, peasants and slum-dwellers, confining them to legal channels. When workers seized the factories, Allende sought to restore them to the capitalists. When the peasants seized the land, Allende sent the army to recover the landlords' property. Allende used every method available to prevent the workers from developing a militia to defend themselves against the right wing. He preached to the workers to rely on the democratic sentiments of the military as the best guarantee of his regime. Allende even brought the generals into his cabinet to preserve his alliance with them. Allende's restraining the masses and appeasing the military led directly to the coup of September, 1973.

In the years of the Allende government, the most pressing task before revolutionaries was to warn about the impossibility of a peaceful road to socialism. The threat of the army and the right wing was clear. Revolutionaries had to hammer away about this threat and organize the masses to defend themselves with arms. This required exposing Allende's role and exposing the myth of the peaceful road to socialism. Castro and the Castroites did the opposite. They helped Allende fool the masses and paved the way for disaster.

The MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) was the largest group on the far left in Chile. Its politics were Castroite, formed and shaped by the call for guerrilla focus and rejection of the peaceful road to socialism. In 1970, the MIR's revolutionary tradition led it to refuse to urge a vote for the Unidad Popular. As the Chilean workers, peasants and slum-dwellers radicalized, many joined the MIR, which clearly stood to the left of the Communist and Socialist Parties. The MIR organized and aided many of the popular struggles which Allende sought to curb. It criticized Allende. Yet, the MIR retreated under the reformist pressures. It did not take a clear line warning against the military and Allende's vacillations.

The armed forces have a truly patriotic and democratic role to play alongside the people, supporting the workers in their struggle against the exploitation of the bourgeoisie... In building a new state, a new society, the armed forces can really play a great role, protecting the workers and security of the country.<sup>107</sup>

Castro played a direct, personal role as well. He toured Chile in 1971. Allende accompanied Castro around the country, as the Cuban leader urged the workers to "win the battle of production," that is, to work harder and not strike. Castro lent his prestige as a revolutionary to Allende and did not criticize him. In his speech

when leaving Chile, Castro said:

We didn't come to teach [but] to learn, to see something extraordinary... taking place in Chile. Something more than unique: unusual! It is a revolutionary process, practically the first in human history... in which revolutionaries are trying to carry out changes peacefully.<sup>108</sup>

Castro went on in this speech to warn of dangers facing the Chilean masses, but he did not warn against the military or urge the Chileans to arm themselves.

The English-speaking Caribbean developed closer relations with Cuba in these years. Castro's closest friend in the Caribbean became Michael Manley, the reformist Prime Minister of Jamaica. Manley shared much of Castro's nationalist/developmentalist outlook. Manley took some measures which the U.S. opposed, such as raising the tax on bauxite. Manley also used his diplomatic leverage to pressure the U.S. to soften its stand against Cuba. Manley's capitalist regime was clearly anti-working class. Manley reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, and he implemented it. He raised prices on essential consumer goods, while imposing wage controls. He guaranteed 10% profit rates to the capitalists, while the workers' living standards fell. Manley's cops broke strikes. When inflation and shortages produced days of rioting, a popular slogan was "IMF—Is Manley's Fault."

Manley gained a large part of his left-wing reputation through his relations with Cuba. Manley brought in hundreds of Cuban technicians, while many young Jamaicans went to Cuba to study. The Jamaican and Cuban leaders patted each other on the back for being great anti-imperialist fighters. Castro gave Manley the José Martí National Order, an award for aiding the struggle against imperialism. Castro went on to single out Manley's domestic policies for praise. He said, "Our esteem for Comrade Manley stems not only from his friendly attitude towards our country, but also from recognition of his extraordinary efforts on behalf of his people," and "In a nutshell, we like the Government of Jamaica because we believe it is a progressive government."<sup>109</sup> The praise from Castro helped Manley sell his IMF-imposed measures to the most radical sections of the Jamaican people.

Castro also gave a José Martí award to Forbes Burnham. Burnham, the leader of Guyana, mouthed anti-imperialist rhetoric to cloak his domestic, anti-working class politics. Ironically, Burnham had taken power from Cheddi Jagan, a radical nationalist who had been Castro's closest ally for years. As Jagan's opposition gained strength in the late 1960s, Burnham embraced Castro to protect his left flank from Jagan. When Castro visited Guyana and was questioned about the appropriate forms of struggle for the Guyanese people, he answered, "It's for the people and not us to decide which form of struggle is necessary."<sup>110</sup>

This policy reaped real successes for Cuba's national interests. Its friendship with Russia—and the resulting ocean of subsidies—led to economic recovery. Many Latin American regimes established diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. The OAS sanctions fell apart by 1974. The U.S. and Cuba even began steps towards normalization of relations. After several ups and downs, this led to the establishment of interest sections in Washington and Havana by 1977.

## 1976-83

**T**he mid-1970s saw a much different world situation confronting the Cuban state. High sugar prices in 1974-75 and Russian aid made for a strong economic recovery. Cuba enjoyed solid relations with the Soviet Union. It had vastly improved relations with Latin America, and there was a thaw in its relations with the U.S. Castro's self-confidence soared after the horrible late 60s. Cuba launched a new stage of great aggressiveness internationally, beginning with sending the troops to Angola.

Major changes in the U.S.-USSR relationship of forces allowed space for Cuban assertiveness. The U.S., following its defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate political turmoil, was much weaker than previously. It had relatively little ability to intervene against Third World revolutions and little ability to orchestrate international public opinion. Around the world, U.S. imperialism was on the defensive, a policy expressed in Jimmy Carter's talk of human rights. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had undergone a major arms buildup since the missile crisis. In the early 60s, the Russians had little ability to project conventional force around the globe. By the mid-70s, the Soviets had the navy, air transport and other military means to carry out operations in, for instance, Africa or the Middle East. Moscow was looking for allies and clients in the Third World much more aggressively than previously.

Cuba's involvement in Africa began long before the troops landed in Angola. The Cubans sought allies among radical nationalist guerrillas and governments in Africa as they did in Latin America. Castro and Ben Bella, the radical Algerian leader, were close allies. A symbolic contingent of Cuban troops served with Algeria in its 1963 war against Morocco. Guevara and 200 volunteers fought in the Congo against Tshombe's pro-Belgian imperialist separatism. Cuban arms and advisors aided many guerrilla struggles.

In the summer and fall of 1975, Angola plunged into civil war. The Portuguese Revolution led to the end of European control. An agreement among the three Angolan organizations broke down into a civil war pitting the MPLA against the FNLA (Angolan National Liberation Front) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). The FNLA, aided with considerable U.S.-CIA resources, attacked the capital, Luanda. The FNLA drive was supported by Zairian troops. UNITA cooperated with South Africa. In October, 1975, South African troops started a drive from the south towards Luanda. Without immediate, strong support, the MPLA would have been destroyed. Angola would have become a satellite of the apartheid regime. Cuba responded to the MPLA's call for aid. Combat troops arrived in Luanda in November, 1975. Quickly they defeated the FNLA-Zairian assault. They then turned back the South African invasion. South Africa was forced to withdraw, leaving UNITA with a small guerrilla operation in the south.

The Cubans, not the Russians, made the decision to aid the MPLA.<sup>111</sup> The Cuban intervention won enormous political gains for the Castro regime. Castro secured a firm ally in Angola. He dramatically demonstrated the value of having an alliance with Cuba. The 19,000 Cuban troops won respect and admiration throughout



Cuban soldiers.



the continent for defeating South Africa. Anti-imperialist regimes and movements the world round applauded the Cuban action. This prestige quickly turned into tangible gains, as the Non-Aligned Movement decided in 1976 to have Castro chair the organization starting in 1979. Because of the South African invasion, Cuba received very little criticism. Even the United States had to temper its reaction.

Cuba's Angolan action increased its leverage with Moscow. The Soviet Union had a skeptical attitude towards Havana's operation. The first Cuban troops arrived in Luanda on Cuban air and sea transports, even though this cost vital time. After Moscow began supplying adequate air transport, it twice cut this off in response to U.S. protests.<sup>115</sup> Russia did not want a confrontation with the U.S. in an area in which the Soviets had little strategic interest. Moreover, the Soviets did not really trust Neto. Finally, it seems likely that the Russians had little confidence in the Cuban troops.

The Cuban-MPLA victory proved beyond any doubt the fighting capacity of the Cuban armed forces. It gave the Soviet Union an ally in Southern Africa, which has led to fishing and naval advantages for Russia. As well, the Cuban victory, won with Soviet heavy arms and transport, raised Moscow's anti-imperialist image. When Castro toured Africa again in 1977, the Russian leader Podgorny visited many of the same countries soon after, trying to cash in on Cuban prestige. Moscow showed its appreciation for Cuba's intervention with a serious increase in military aid (including more advanced weapons) and increased economic aid.

The Cuban aid in defeating the FNLA-Zairian invasion and the UNITA-South Africa thrust undoubtedly served as a blow against racism and imperialism and for national liberation. It secured the power of the radical nationalist MPLA. The MPLA's rule, however, is also a rule over and against the workers and peasants of Angola. Cuba has maintained its large troop presence in Angola, in part to secure the MPLA's leadership against internal threats.

Naturally, the Cubans helped train the security forces. They organized the Directorate of Internal Security. They provided bodyguards for President Neto and established the Peoples Defense Organization (ODP), a militia loyal to the President, as a defense against a coup. Cuban advisors staffed the police academy, teaching crowd control techniques among other things. The MPLA tops used this training very quickly. As early as 1975, the MPLA police disarmed the slum population of Luanda. They broke up Maoist organizations there. Dissident factions of the MPLA suffered arrests.<sup>116</sup> The dock workers in Luanda had their own organization and struck. The workers' committee wanted to "continue the revolution," according to documents of the suppressed Organization of Angolan Communists.<sup>117</sup> The police broke the strike and destroyed the workers' organization.

Blatant Cuban interference in Angolan internal affairs surfaced sharply in 1977. Nito Alves, a major MPLA leader, led a coup attempt. Alves supported a more radical nationalist line than Neto. Alves wanted more nationalization of industry, a closer alignment with Russia and more power for Blacks versus Neto's reliance on mulattoes and his multi-racial ideology. The Soviet Union supported Alves, at least passively. Cuban troops, however, played the key role in smashing the coup. The Cuban presidential guard did its job.<sup>118</sup> Havana, which had been gradually withdrawing troops, reinforced its Angolan contingent after this. Naturally, Angolan-Russian relations deteriorated, while Cuban-Angolan relations continued to be very close. Cuba profited politically for its support to Neto's relatively pro-Western policies.

Twenty-thousand Cuban troops remain in Angola to this day. They are propping up a regime which is losing popularity. They are fighting a war against UNITA, in which the UNITA guerrillas have been able to make dramatic gains in the recent period, capitalizing on ethnic tensions and dissatisfaction with the MPLA regime. Moreover, the Cuban influence has been a conservative one. Cuba and Angola have pressured the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO—the national liberation force in Namibia) to reach a negotiated settlement with South Africa, a settlement which SWAPO leaders resisted.<sup>119</sup> Castro encouraged Neto's at-

tempts to accommodate Western imperialism. With his allies in power, Castro's major concern became stabilizing the situation and avoiding conflicts with the United States or South Africa.

Castro was even supportive of the decision not to expropriate Gulf Oil properties and stationed troops in the oil-rich Cabinda enclave (which Zaire wanted to annex) to guard Gulf's facilities.<sup>120</sup>

Cuba claims much credit for sending 6-9,000 technicians to Angola to help with construction, education, health and other reconstruction efforts. Cuba proudly advertises this "internationalist aid." However, Angola must pay the Cuban government US\$600 a month for each worker. In fact, Cuba exports its workers abroad as a valuable source of foreign exchange.<sup>121</sup>

Ethiopia became the scene for the next Cuban troop intervention. In 1974, the Ethiopian Empire of Haile Selassie collapsed in the face of massive student and worker protests. The Dergue, a group of army officers, sought to take control of the revolution. Over the next few years, the Dergue underwent a series of bloody purges in which successively more radical officers rose to the top. The process culminated in February, 1977. A Dergue meeting turned into a shoot-out. Mengistu Haile-Mariam gained control over the dead bodies of eight Dergue members. All told, 80 of the original 120 Dergue members died in the purges.

The Dergue under Mengistu followed a radical nationalist course. It carried out agrarian and urban reforms, nationalizations and created block organizations and a peasant militia. However, the Dergue did not start and did not control the Ethiopian Revolution. To gain control, it executed thousands of workers to destroy the independent union movement. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, a student-based group, had real support in the urban areas and carried out assassinations against the Dergue. It too suffered repression. The Dergue's nationalism led it to continue the attempts to force the oppressed national minorities to remain under ethnic oppression. This meant vicious chauvinist wars against the Eritrean, Tigray, Somali and other peoples.

The Dergue allied itself with Russia. This alliance is of great importance to Russian strategists. It holds many advantages, especially for the Soviet navy. The Soviet Union was willing to pay a substantial price to maintain its power in the Horn of Africa. The Dergue's radical nationalism combined with Soviet strategic interests to produce Cuban support for Mengistu. Within 24 hours of the shoot-out that brought him to power, Mengistu received personal congratulations from Castro. Castro called him "an authentic revolutionary" and gave him the Order of Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs). A Cuban Central Committee member, Raúl Valdés Vivo, explained Cuban support for the throttling of the Ethiopian Revolution. "It had to be the army or no one. If not, Ethiopia would have become a society without any social order at all."

Cuban troops intervened in January, 1978. Tensions had grown between Ethiopia and Somalia. The Somalis feared the growing arms build-up of their traditional rival. They supported the attempts of ethnic Somalis to take the Ogaden region out of Ethiopia. In July, 1977, 40,000 Somali troops entered the fighting and rolled up substantial victories. Battered on many fronts (internal, Eritrea, the Ogaden), the Dergue asked for help. This time the Cuban response appears to have been much more directed by the Soviet Union. The Soviets transported the Cuban troops and provided their weapons. The Cubans fought under a Russian commander, General Petrov. Once again, Cuban troops succeeded.

The Ethiopian intervention was much more clearly a case of Cuban troops fighting and dying for Soviet strategic interests than the Angolan. Castro's cynicism is underlined by his previous involvement in the region. Previously, Somalia had been allied with Russia. Castro provided Somalia with military aid then, starting in 1974.

Cuba had long supported and trained the Somalis, knowing full well what Somalia's goals were. Fidel Castro had personally praised Siad Barre [the Somali head of state] for his commitment to revolution and socialism. Within a year,

the same Siad Barre was being denounced as a "chauvinist" when he used the training the Cubans had provided him.<sup>122</sup>

Cuba had also aided the Eritrean liberation forces since 1967. At that time, Castro had nothing but praise for this clearly legitimate national liberation struggle. When that struggle became directed against an ally of his, Castro stopped his support. Today, despite the pressure from Mengistu and Moscow, Castro refuses to send Cuban troops against the Eritreans. However, the Dergue would not be able to carry out its anti-popular, chauvinist war against the Eritreans without the continued presence of Cuban troops in Ethiopia (about 13,000 in 1980).<sup>123</sup> Unlike the Angolan intervention, this adventure cost the Cubans a great deal diplomatically. Many Third World regimes became alarmed at Cuban interventionism so obviously at the service of Russian great power interests. A Cuban invasion of Eritrea would do great harm to Cuba's reputation and standing in the Third World.

Cuba's role in the Non-Aligned Movement reflected its great aggressiveness after 1976. Since 1970, Cuba had been a strong pro-Russian voice in Third World diplomacy. In addition, Castro has argued vociferously for the demands of the Third World against the Western imperialist powers. Many Third World regimes have banded together to demand a New International Economic Order, a series of concessions from the West on trade, tariff, aid and debt policies. The payoff for Cuba's championing of these demands, its Angolan intervention and its renunciation of guerrilla struggles in Latin America came in 1976. In that year the Non-Aligned Movement chose Castro to chair the 1979 conference and preside over the organization from 1979-82. This decision remained in force, despite a reconsideration prompted by the Ethiopian intervention. Castro was able to prevent the 1979 conference, which included 93 full members and 40 observers, from dealing any major defeats to the Soviets. In particular, Cuba was able to force a postponement of any position on Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea. The Non-Aligned Movement had previously strongly condemned the Vietnamese invasion. Cuba spent much diplomatic capital when it endorsed the Vietnamese incursion.

The 1979 Havana meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement came after Cuba's greatest prestige in the Third World had begun to wane. The international situation had shifted in several crucial ways since the middle 1970s. The Soviet Union's imperialist ambitions were more obviously revealed by the Ethiopian adventure as well as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which horrified diplomatic public opinion. The Vietnamese seizure of Kampuchea also undermined the national liberation credentials of the Soviet bloc. Moreover, Soviet economic difficulties mounted. This began to have an impact on the Cuban economy, and contributed to the exodus from Mariel.

The United States discarded any talk of human rights in its foreign policy in 1979. The victories of the Nicaraguan and Iranian revolutions led Carter to abandon his fine phrases. Instead, the U.S. imperialists geared up for a new offensive against Third World revolution and against the Soviet Union. Carter created the Rapid Deployment Force, stepped up nuclear arms spending, resumed draft registration and began massive U.S. military aid to El Salvador. Threats and hostility to Cuba were part and parcel of this U.S. offensive. Reagan's policies have intensified the direction set by Carter in the second half of his term.

These factors combined with a renewed fear of revolution to produce hostility to Cuba in many Latin American regimes. Despite Cuba's best efforts, Latin American governments associated the Castro regime with threats to their power. In 1980, Peru broke diplomatic relations with Cuba because of the 10,000 Cubans who camped in the embassy seeking to leave Cuba. Jamaica's newly elected, fiercely anti-communist Prime Minister Edward Seaga also broke relations with Cuba. Venezuela and Ecuador both removed their ambassadors from Havana over the refugee issue. Colombia (claiming Cuban support to guerrillas) and Costa Rica lowered their diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1981. By the fall of 1982, Cuba enjoyed full relations with only Argentina, Panama, Mexico and Nicaragua of all Latin American governments.

## The Central American Revolution

Castro's relations with the Central American revolution are governed by the traditional considerations of Cuban foreign policy. The Nicaraguan Revolution gathered strength during the mid-1970s. Castro paid little attention to it, however, until the sustained revolutionary turmoil of 1978. When Havana realized the potential for a Sandinista victory, it provided sizable amounts of military aid. Cuba used its prestige to help reunite the three Sandinista factions. The newly reunified FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) was dominated by the Tercerista faction, the grouping closest to Castro.<sup>124</sup> The Terceristas stressed the all-class nature of the anti-Somoza struggle. They downplayed the class struggle and advocated alliances with liberal capitalist elements. For this reason, a variety of external forces gave financial or military aid to the Tercerista-dominated FSLN, including the Socialist International and the Venezuelan and Costa Rican governments. All these forces looked to a quick FSLN victory as the surest road to restoring stability in the area.

Castro's advice to the FSLN once they were in power was clearly conservative. Castro's primary concerns were the stability of FSLN rule (so that an ally of his would rule Nicaragua) and avoiding escalating conflict with the United States. He had no desire to work to spread the revolution; nor was he concerned about the power of the working class in the society. Castro and the FSLN agreed on a strategy of ensuring a FSLN monopoly on political and military power. They sought to reassure the Nicaraguan capitalists and the imperialists that their property and profits would be guaranteed.

Five no's should be followed to consolidate the victory he [Castro] is reported to have said: No executions. No alienation of the United States. No driving the middle class out of the country. No break with the international banking community, whose hard-currency credits are vital to economic life.<sup>125</sup>

This list represents a wholesale repudiation of the course of the Cuban Revolution. Cuba's much vaunted anti-imperialist and socialist credentials were built on the foundation of measures that alienated the middle class, the U.S., the OAS and the international bankers. Why did Castro implicitly disown his own history and accomplishments?

Most importantly, Castro's radical nationalism of 1959 had degenerated to fairly moderate nationalism by 1980. His own experience convinced him to abandon one dream after another, to accept "realistic" limits on Cuban development and national integrity. The idealism and hopes of the early years had died. In addition, Castro very much feared antagonizing the U.S. Nicaragua's following a moderate course would hold down U.S. reaction against Cuba. This coincided with the Soviet viewpoint. They had little to gain and much to lose if Nicaragua allied itself closely with Russia and alienated the U.S. The Russians cannot afford the subsidies, military aid or defense commitments to a second Cuba. The Soviets, with much more important fish to fry in Southeast Asia, the Mid-East, the Horn of Africa, Poland and Afghanistan, did not want to spend or risk much on Nicaragua. And Cuba, which has to compete with many other countries for shrinking amounts of Soviet funds, does not want Russian underwriting the Nicaraguan economy either.

Cuba has maintained very close relations with the FSLN government. Thousands of Cuban technicians provide reconstruction aid. Havana also plays its traditional role of training the security forces.

More ominously, they [the Cubans] have filled all the important military intelligence and advisory positions, leading Panama, which had provided Nicaragua with considerable military assistance, to withdraw its military advisors and to offer "friendly warnings" against overreliance on Cuba.<sup>126</sup>



The dual policy of FSLN military/political power monopolization and accommodating the bourgeoisie deprived the working class and peasantry of democratic control over either the state or the economy. To enforce this, the FSLN, trained and encouraged by the Cubans, suppressed all independent working class resistance. An avid supporter of the FSLN noted this:

The harshest aspect of the government's early social policy was its attempt to halt the occupation of farms and factories by the most radicalized sections of the population. Similarly, the Junta opposed wage increases even though inflation and unemployment had eroded the workers' purchasing power during the last few years of the dictatorship.<sup>127</sup>

The FSLN policy has been to force all the workers into its Sandinista union federation, the CST, and deny the right to strike. The CST did not exist before the revolution, and many radical workers have resisted this. In October, 1979, the FSLN arrested the head of the building trades union, SCAAS. He was freed when 4,000 workers demonstrated against the arrest. FSLN-organized crowds destroyed the offices of the Trade Union Unity and Action Federation, CAUS, which led a bitter strike at the privately owned Fabritex factory. In January, 1980, the Nicaraguan government banned the newspaper *El Pueblo* and imprisoned four leaders of the *Frente Obrero*, which published the paper. "The FSLN was then facing a wave of workers' strikes and illegal land occupations, both encouraged by *El Pueblo*, which jeopardized its national reconstruction policy."<sup>128</sup> In September, 1981, the FSLN settled the question of strikes with a State of Emergency which banned them. (This ban has since eased into a policy of discouraging strikes.) [And then it was reimposed in the fall of 1985, shortly before this booklet was printed.] To ensure compliance, leaders of the Communist Party of Nicaragua (PCN) were jailed for "attempt[ing] to disorient the workers and put them into direct conflict with the revolutionary government." Through all of this, over 60% of the economy remains in private hands. The Nicaraguan people are toiling to pay off the massive debt to the international bankers which Somoza accumulated.

The victory of the Nicaraguan Revolution in July, 1979 had great repercussions in El Salvador. A massive, militant movement among all layers of the population in El Salvador developed in the mid-70s. By 1979, strikes, factory occupations, militant street demonstrations and peasant struggles rocked the country. The U.S. feared a repetition of the FSLN victory. It engineered a coup in October, 1979 that brought a supposedly reform junta to power. The junta included young, progressive officers from *Juventud Militar* and brought the social democrats and communists into the government. In reality, the same old corrupt, reactionary generals held power. The day after the coup, for instance, the army crushed a number of factory occupations, killing 18 and jailing 78.<sup>129</sup>

The Salvadorean left is comprised of many different groups, with many different ideas on strategy and tactics. Cuba has consistently intervened in the debates in the Salvadorean left, certainly since 1979. It has applied pressure to pull the Salvadorean struggle to the right, to conservatize it and make it acceptable to the liberal elements in the armed forces. This was clear in 1979. The coup's purpose was to split the revolutionary movement and isolate it by building illusions in the good intentions of the junta. The Salvadorean left divided over its attitude toward the junta. The most farsighted elements denounced it. Others, including Guillermo Ungo and the Salvadorean Communist Party, joined it. Havana urged the Salvadorean left to support the junta.<sup>130</sup>

The reform junta disintegrated as the army and right-wing death squads escalated their terror. By the winter of 1980-81, the entire Salvadorean left united around a program of armed struggle against the government. Castro played a major role in uniting the five separate armed organizations. Cuba provided large amounts of military aid for the "Final Offensive" of 1980-81. A former FMLN guerrilla commander, Comandante Alejandro Montenegro, claims that Cuba drew up the plan for the offensive. The idea was to duplicate the guerrilla offensive that sparked a mass insurrection in Nicaragua. The guerrillas counted on a massive uprising to aid



them, and assumed active support from a wing of the officer corps. They hoped to come to power before the Reagan administration. One of the armed organizations, the Popular Forces for Liberation — Farabundo Martí (FPL), led by Cayetano Carpio, opposed the Final Offensive. The FPL advocated the strategy of prolonged peoples' war, which involved no alliance with any section of the officer corps and a long process of attrition, wearing down the army. Militarily the Final Offensive failed.

Castro then switched gears. Havana cut back or eliminated its arms shipments to El Salvador.<sup>131</sup> This was to entice the U.S. to negotiate. Two meetings were held—Alexander Haig met with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez in November, 1981 and Castro met with Vernon Walters in March, 1982. At this time, Wayne Smith, Chief of the U.S. interest section in Havana, reported Havana's peace offer. A Cuban official told Smith, "We want a peaceful solution in Central America. We understand your security concerns and are willing to address them."<sup>132</sup> Castro made no bones about his willingness to sell the Salvadorean revolution for an agreement with the U.S.

March, 1982 was a critical time in El Salvador. The U.S. and Salvadorean governments were running a propaganda offensive centered on the elections that month. The elections were designed to show popular support for the government, isolate the extreme left and possibly split the moderates away from the guerrillas. The entire Salvadorean left rejected the elections as a fraud. However, different groups wanted to ignore them, disrupt them, organize a boycott or launch an insurrection on election day. The U.S. worsened the disunity among the Salvadorean revolutionaries by putting out conciliatory diplomatic signals. This encouraged the moderates to prevent any militant action against the elections.

Both the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments thus joined the chorus urging restraint, pointing out that it was vital that nothing happen around the elections that might jeopardize these talks.<sup>133</sup>

The elections were a political victory for the government. Disunity in the FMLN-FDR, the Salvadorean revolutionary fronts, was partially responsible.

After the elections, the FMLN acknowledged the political setback. They noted the pressure from Nicaragua and Cuba not to cause a crisis, but admitted that internal disagreements over strategy had played a part.<sup>134</sup>

The political defeat made Castro more eager to make a deal, just as the military defeat had. In early April, 1982 a high official in the

Cuban foreign ministry made a clear statement to a group of visiting U.S. scholars. He indicated how badly Havana wanted an accommodation with the U.S., and how far it was willing to go in abandoning revolution. These are from the *New York Times* article on his speech:

He acknowledged that Cuba had been providing material aid [to the FMLN] . . . but that this had stopped 14 months ago. And he said that Cuba had also ceased transshipping arms from other countries to the guerrillas in recent months. "We do not renounce the right to send arms to the guerrillas in El Salvador, but we have not exercised this right for over a year."<sup>135</sup>

The official went on to say that Castro supported negotiated, democratic change in Latin America, not revolutionary socialism.

Latin America as a whole is not ripe for socialism and President Castro is therefore willing to promote "democratic change" and moderation in the region.<sup>136</sup>

The official affirmed Havana's close relations with Moscow, but said he did not want Cuba to be a casualty of the U.S.-USSR tensions. "He also distanced Havana from actions of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and Poland."<sup>137</sup>

Two weeks later, the *New York Times* reported further on Castro's thinking:

Mr. Castro told these officials that he had been solely a revolutionary for his first 20 years and now wanted to turn his attention to solving problems of poverty, hunger and economic development . . . He made it clear that he saw himself as a leader of the movement that calls itself non-aligned and that he understood that he could not readily attain this position if actively opposed by Washington.<sup>138</sup>

Other peace offerings from Castro surfaced in the summer of 1982.

The Cubans are said to have lowered their sights from an outright guerrilla victory in El Salvador. They are now thought to favor a negotiated settlement there between government and guerrillas, followed by UN-supervised elections.<sup>139</sup>

and

Last week it was revealed that Mr. Fidel Castro had offered to withdraw the 19,000 Cuban soldiers in Angola, and to cut off the flow of Cuban weapons to revolutionary movements in Central America if the U.S. would lift its 22-year old embargo on trade with his island.<sup>140</sup>

These series of offers — including the curious distancing from

Moscow — were sparked in part by the old question of the reliability of Soviet defense guarantees." More than a year ago [in early 1981], according to American intelligence, Mr. Castro went to the Soviet Union to try to obtain new Soviet commitments to Cuban defense. He failed."<sup>141</sup>

More evidence of Cuban (and Nicaraguan) pressure on the Salvadorean revolutionaries came in August, 1983. Castro continued his retreat in the face of U.S. provocations and threats such as sending the U.S. fleet and troops to the shores and borders of Nicaragua. The *New York Times* ran a story entitled "Salvador Rebels Urged by Allies to Seek Accord." It stated:

Cuba and Nicaragua are putting pressure on the Salvadoran guerrillas to seek a political settlement with the Government, foreign diplomats and sources close to the guerrillas here say.

Although Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders in recent days have publicly reiterated their support for the Salvadoran rebels, in private they have told them that urgent negotiations are needed to safeguard the survival of the Sandinista Government and even the safety of Cuba, the sources said.

A senior official [of the Nicaraguan government] who first emphasized his government's support for the Salvadoran guerrillas added, "We must also practice survival politics."

"We are responsible for our revolution," the official said, "and the Cubans are responsible first of all for their revolution."<sup>142</sup>

The article went on to note that "the Soviet Union would not be willing to commit more than some military supplies to Nicaragua." Salvadoreans reacted with dismay to the pressure.

"This is a heavy meal," a Salvadoran guerrilla leader said when asked for his reaction to the announcement. "It will take a while to digest."

and

Members of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement who consider their fight more important to them than Nicaragua or Cuba, leftist sources said, have already sent signals that they disagree with "any easy sellout" of their fight, such as participating in elections called by the Salvadoran Government.

The tragedy of the situation is that all of Castro's attempts to sell the Salvadorean Revolution have only encouraged Reagan to make greater threats against Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada and the Salvadorean revolutionaries. Every concession or offer from Havana makes Reagan feel stronger. He can claim that his policies are working. If Havana and Managua can hold back the Salvadorean struggle — Reagan would be right.

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In April, 1980, 10,000 Cubans invaded the Peruvian embassy in Havana demanding political asylum.

Reprinted from the *Torch/La Antorcha*,  
December 15, 1984. See the inside back  
cover for information on subscribing to  
the *Torch/La Antorcha*.

# Statement by the Revolutionary Socialist League

Cuba has long been a center of discussion on the left. Now with the release of *Improper Conduct*, a film by Néstor Almendros and Jiménez Leal, this discussion has returned to a place of prominence. On the following pages are a review of *Improper Conduct* and an interview with Ana María Simo (who appears in the film). To put them in a context, we would like to summarize our views on Cuba and its revolution:

- The Cuban Revolution of 1959 was, in our view, an anti-imperialist revolution for the national liberation of Cuba from the domination of the United States. We support that revolution as we support the struggle of all the peoples of Central America, the Caribbean and other parts of the world for self-determination.
- A number of reforms that followed the revolution represent definite advances for the Cuban population (particularly in the areas of literacy and health care). But the revolution did not place political power in the hands of the Cuban workers and peasants. Thus, socialism, as we define it, was not established by the revolution or the subsequent Russian-influenced policies of the Castro government.
- Cuba today is ruled by an elite grouping based in the top layers of the Cuban Communist Party. This grouping—a ruling class—holds power and enjoys numerous privileges. It maintains itself through the exploitation and oppression of the working class and peasantry. Political democracy does not exist in Cuba; dissent is forbidden. Further, evidence points to the oppression of Black people, women, and gays as a matter of government policy. The ruling Cuban elite is almost entirely white and male. Racism, sexism and heterosexism are fundamental to the functioning of the Cuban system. The Cuban system is a form of state-capitalism, like Russia, China, etc.
- Today, Cuba is economically, politically and militarily dependent on Russia. Thus, Russian imperialism has in many respects replaced U.S. imperialism in Cuba, substantially affecting Cuba's foreign policy and international economic standing.
- The right of the Cuban people to self-determination is today profoundly threatened by U.S. imperialism. Regardless of the nature of the Cuban government, it is our duty as revolutionaries in the United States to fight any attempt by the U.S. to bring Cuba back into its sphere of influence. As shown by the invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the machinations of the U.S. in Nicaragua, the military threat posed by the U.S. is real, and we must oppose it.
- We on the left have a responsibility to honestly discuss and evaluate the Cuban revolution and the current situation. Because so much of the left looks to Cuba as a model for revolution in the third world, this discussion is all the more relevant and important.
- In our view, real freedom, democracy and socialism is the solution in Cuba, as everywhere. Winning this freedom is the task of the working and oppressed people of Cuba; and winning this freedom means a revolution. To ensure that the Cuban people are able to make this revolution, we must, in turn, make a revolution here to eliminate once and for all U.S. domination of the Caribbean.

—Revolutionary Socialist League, December 1984.

# IMPROPER CONDUCT — A Review

By IAN DANIELS & JUDY GARSON

**Improper Conduct** is a film about the repression of sexual, social and political non-conformists in Cuba. It consists primarily of interviews with over 20 Cubans who left Cuba as long ago as the mid-1960s or as recently as the Mariel exodus of 1980.

**Improper Conduct** has caused quite a controversy among leftists and pro-Cuba intellectuals because the picture of Cuba that emerges from these interviews is one of a country in which dissent and non-conformity is systematically suppressed. Gays and lesbians, dissident writers and artists, long-haired hippies and anyone else whose lifestyle deviates from the rather puritanical and militarized social values of the Cuban government face harassment, persecution and jail.

The film implies that things didn't have to be this way. After the overthrow of U.S.-supported dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, there was widespread support for the revolution and its slogans of "bread without terror," "guns, who needs them!" and "neither Washington nor Moscow." But in 1961, when Cuban leader Fidel Castro adopted Russian-style "Marxism-Leninism" (actually state capitalism) and turned towards Moscow for aid, things began to tighten up.

**Improper Conduct** recounts how this tightening up centered around a series of attacks on lesbians and gay men. First came Operation P. Then, in 1965, came the Military Units to Augment Production, the infamous UMAP camps. Under the guise of military service, gays were sent to forced labor in concentration camps surrounded by electrified barbed wire. They were given work quotas to fulfill and punished if they didn't fulfill them. The purpose of these camps was not just to clear fields and plant crops, but to turn gay men into conforming heterosexuals. However, it was not just gay men who were put in these camps. Social, political and religious dissenters, like members of small opposition left parties and Jehovah's Witnesses, were sent as well.

The UMAP camps were closed in 1967 as a result of internal and international protest, but the Cuban government continued its repression in other ways. Another campaign was launched in 1971 to go along with the penal code passed that year. The new laws provided long prison terms and even death for those who "interfered with normal (i.e. heterosexual) development." Throughout the 1970s, people were jailed for having long hair, or wearing colorful clothes, or playing loud music, or for being gay. More recent laws, such as the "Law on Dangerousness" drop many explicit references to homosexuals. But they maintain and even strengthen the repressive capabilities of the government against so-called "deviant," "dangerous," or "potentially dangerous" behavior or attitudes.

## Sexism in Cuba

**Improper Conduct** also points out the ingrained sexism of the Cuban ruling class. In Cuba, usually only "feminine" gay men, are arrested. "Masculine" gay men, those who dress and talk in a macho manner, are generally not. In fact, many high members of the government, including police officials, are believed to be "masculine" gays. The government sees women who are arrested for being lesbians as less of a threat than gay men, because lesbians don't have any "weapons."

In addition, the film exposes the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), long touted by Castro supporters as proving the democratic nature of Cuban society. Testimony in the film makes clear that the CDRs are used to enforce sexual and social conformity. With a unit on every block, these committees know everyone's business and report any "improper conduct" to the police.

Perhaps most chilling in **Improper Conduct** are the clips from Cuban television which provide a remarkable insight into the kind of propaganda that the Cuban people are fed by the government: the worship of Fidel Castro, the exhortations to drive out the Marielitos, the constant hype and enthusiasm which must breed tremendous cynicism among the Cuban population.

Finally, though the film spends perhaps the most time on gays and political dissidents, a picture emerges of a country divided by

class, sex and race — with Black people, women and workers allowed something less than their share of participation in Cuban society.

## Weaknesses of the film

We would recommend seeing this film to anyone, but there is no denying its many weaknesses. For one thing, originally made for French television, it is largely a series of "talking heads."

More important, the film is essentially by and about middle class dissidents whose persecution by the Castro regime has paralleled, but has never been quite the same as, that suffered by non-conformists from lower classes and with fewer connections to the powerful.

Much of the film is devoted to the persecution of gay people. But at times the reason seems to be to show that Castro is so bad he even picks on the "poor, harmless, helpless sissies." We get a heavy, heavy dose of campy bitterness and "clowns smiling on the outside while crying on the inside," but not much of gay people in other states of mind. In fact, the more thoughtful and reasoned a person is in **Improper Conduct**, the more straight-like they are.

In addition, the film offers nearly no analysis of Cuban society. By not offering their own explanation of why Cuba is the way it is, the film makers abdicate, on some level, to the dominant views floating around the U.S. today: "Latin machismo" and "communist totalitarianism" are the villains. And, by implication, the USA is the rescuing hero.

Whatever its faults, however, **Improper Conduct** is not right-wing or (as some have said) CIA propaganda. The issues the movie raises — the oppression of gays, lesbians, women and social non-conformists — are not issues the right-wing or the CIA fights against. Of course, the right-wing will jump on anything that criticizes so-called communist regimes. But this doesn't mean films like **Improper Conduct** are counterrevolutionary.

**Improper Conduct** reveals a tiny bit about the reality of the Castro regime — its oppression of gays and other non-conformists. As such, it is a good thing it was made.

But to us, the importance of **Improper Conduct** goes beyond this. It shows that whatever the gains of the Cuban revolution, Cuba is not a socialist society; it is not a society run collectively and democratically by the working class and other oppressed people. It is not a society in which what Karl Marx called "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." Instead, Cuba is a form of state capitalism; the Cuban state owns and runs the Cuban economy, and a tiny elite, built around the Cuban Communist Party, runs the state.

The Revolutionary Socialist League believes that Cuba must be unconditionally defended against the United States. The U.S. ruling class has no business telling the Cubans or anybody else how to run their society. But defending Cuba from the United States does not mean defending the Castro regime from the Cuban people. The Cuban workers, peasants, the majority of Blacks, women, lesbians and gays do not run Cuba. But they have a right to. It is their job to overthrow Castro and his cronies and set up a truly democratic socialist society. And it is the left's job to support them in this struggle. □



Gay Cubans in U.S. processing center for Mariel refugees.



# Interview with Ana María Simo

**T**he following is an interview with Ana María Simo who appeared in the film *Improper Conduct*. In the film she recounts her interrogation by the Cuban police and subsequent imprisonment. A playwright now living in New York, Ms. Simo is a contributor to *Marlel*, a Cuban emigre cultural journal, and *The New York Native*, a gay newspaper. The interview was conducted by Ian Daniels for the *Torch/La Antorcha* on November 26, 1984.

**What do you see as the purpose of *Improper Conduct*? Why did you agree to participate in it, and what is its importance to you?**

I believe that the filmmakers' motivations were both personal and political. And the political motivation is so linked to the emotional motivation that it is hard to say which one comes first. It was a cathartic experience: people who were silent and isolated for 10, 15 or 20 years realizing one day, through the medium of the cinema that they can have an invisible dialogue (among themselves, in a cinematic community) and talk about the unthinkable and the unnameable. Most of the people in this film were extremely traumatized by the experience they went through, if not physically then morally — since there is nothing more traumatizing than having believed in something and then feeling that you have been deceived, especially when it is a social/political issue.

It is a burden to be silent. You might think for years that you shouldn't speak out, because it could be used by the right or be distorted. The same rationale that is being used against all critics of the Cuban system — we used it against ourselves to keep silent for many years. But I think that it was worth taking the risk even in the present political climate.

**So you think that the positive elements of the film are more important than appearing to be together with the right-wing critics of Castro and the supporters of the U.S. government?**

Because the film emphasizes the repression of gays, it is very difficult for the right to exploit and use it. Nationally, the *Wall Street Journal* has written about it and different conservative media have discussed it. But it is not the kind of thing that they can use as a banner for a long period of time.

**Why did you leave Cuba and when did you leave Cuba? What was your experience there?**

The most ominous experience I had, is in the film. I left at the end of 1967 after I was sent to jail and afterwards interned in a psychiatric institution, unfairly, without any process. I was jailed for no reason whatsoever except for my association with people who themselves had done nothing, except being suspected of being gay. I was devastated.

It was an eye-opening experience for me; everything was not as nearly perfect as I had thought. Although I was critical of the government's cultural policies before I was arrested, I did not have political differences with the regime. I was politically naive and ideologically blindfolded. I was going by the book.

After being in jail, I started seeing reality the way it was. The experience was like that of suddenly opening a sewer in a placid street. I slowly realized that mine was not an absurd and isolated case, that our society was full of arbitrariness. After being put in jail, which to me was totally unjustified and totally arrogant, it was like opening a sewer for me. I started seeing that it was not isolated, that our society was full of arbitrariness.

It was very instructive for me. It showed something that also applies to the American revolutionary tourists of today. When you are not affected in your daily life, in your material, practical, life at the most basic level by the way society works you can live your whole life and not realize how that social mechanism works. For example, here in this country if you happen not to have to work, if you happen not to be unemployed, if you happen not to belong to any of the categories of people who are affected, you might well spend your life and not see anything wrong with what surrounds you. In Cuba that can happen too.

That's one of the reasons why many people here who have been to Cuba for a week or two do not want to believe what we tell in the film. My advice to all of them is — go and live in Cuba for a year without any privileges. Try, if it is possible, to become an ordinary member of society, spend a year there and then make your assessment.

My decision to leave Cuba for France was taken because I felt that I couldn't do anything to change the situation and I did not want to conform. I did not want to say yes. I was afraid, very afraid, like the character in the novel *1984*, that I would lose the insight I had gained; and I was coward enough not to want to go to jail again.

I felt that for me there were three options: I could commit suicide. I could do something very rash. (A friend of mine, a painter, typed a manifesto and started handing it out in the middle of the street. He was sentenced to seven years in jail. I admire him for that.) The third thing I could do was to leave, and that's what I did... which was perhaps not the most honorable of the three options.

**You were originally a supporter of the revolution in Cuba?**

Absolutely. I was in my early teens when the revolution started. I was a member of the first generation of the revolution; I went to high school under the revolution. That first generation of young people was the one that suffered the most. The number of people of my generation who have gone to jail, who have committed suicide, is incredible.

paired. Nevertheless, most of them are managing to survive here and slowly reconstruct themselves.

I am now very happy that I decided to leave when I did because I think that if I am able to talk to you now it's because I left such a long time ago. Most of the newer people would not even want to talk to you, because they would see you probably as an enemy. Their world is also a very ideological world. The people that you see now are people who are typical products of the Cuban system that didn't teach them how to think. It will take them a while to learn to think by themselves.

A lot of them have fallen prey to the conservative or right-wing ideas. But I think when they stay here a little bit they will realize that they are members of a minority — that they are at the bottom of society, not at the top, and little by little the ideological blinders will start falling. It's already happening, slowly. But certainly the left accusing them is not going to help. I have constant fights with recent arrivals from Cuba who say the U.S. is paradise, and I try to open their eyes. But on the other hand I know where that illusion comes from. I know why they feel the way they feel.

**Most of the left, including people who admit some of the problems, say that Cuban society is a model of socialism and an example for leftists and revolutionaries in this country. How would you define Cuba? What in your opinion are the more valuable lessons from the Cuban revolution and from the subsequent events for people here?**

If tomorrow by some miracle, which I doubt would happen, the Cuban government decided that gay is good and gay is great, I would still be a critic. I think that those gays who only see their own interest are wrong. You have to see the entire political context of which gays in Cuba are a part. Criticism of Cuba must go beyond the gay issue, which is just part of a whole pattern of social and political control.

For me the fact that Cuba has defied American dominance is not enough, although in itself it's a major achievement. It's not enough because we expected more and more could have been done. It is a fallacy when the Cuban government says to some of its supporters, we couldn't do more because of the Americans, the blockade, the CIA, the war. The social revolution that was happening could have been more radical in relation to women, in relation to gays, in relation to Blacks, in relation to the participation of workers in their industries. Why does the American blockade mean that workers can not have a say in the factory? Why does the threat of a U.S. invasion mean Cuba cannot have a feminist movement? All of this is ridiculous. But this is the usual excuse.

The government applied a brake to the revolution in the early '60s because they didn't want to go further. They have the power and privileges and it's not in their nature to give them up. It is not America which applied the brake, it is the group that is in power and has privileges. I don't deny the fact that military defense is necessary. But it didn't have to be so pervasive. I don't believe American pressure is responsible for the militarization, the regimentation and the total lack of democracy in Cuba.

**What role do you think the left can play in righting the situation in Cuba or exploring what happened?**

I think the left has been very complacent. The attitude has been that Cuba cannot be criticized because that will be doing work for the enemy and will be counterproductive for the Cubans. There is also a pandering attitude which I think comes from the guilt that Americans feel for the third world, that is, you go there to learn, not to question anything or give an opinion. It's the opposite of being the "ugly American" who goes everywhere and gives advice nobody asks for. Instead they say, "Oh gosh you're wonderful, everything is perfect."

But a person on the left who's full of goodwill has every right to make a comment and to make a criticism. Don't be arrogant, but don't shut up either. By remaining silent such people have contributed to things going wrong and getting worse in Cuba. I think it's immoral to remain silent and say what's good for people here isn't good for people in the third world; for instance, saying that people here need a constitution, and democracy, but not there. If you don't accept this for you, you shouldn't accept this for the others.

This is all the more true regarding processes that are still developing, like that in Nicaragua. I don't like the Cuban influence in Nicaragua. I know that most people would emphasize the good side of it, that is, you have to arm yourself and so on, which I think is legitimate. But I am afraid of the state security machinery. I am not as concerned about the Soviet Union selling MIG-25s to Nicaragua, as I am about the Cuban advisors corrupting the Nicaraguan process through the establishment of a state security machinery. Unfortunately, I am sure that they are already trying to do this.

I think that if the left here had had an ongoing public discussion, like that aroused by *Improper Conduct*, for the past 20 years, if what's wrong with the Cuban revolution had been critically analyzed, then when something like Nicaragua happens, we would already have a way of knowing what's good and what's not good. But no one on the left here ever criticizes Cuba they are so concerned about the U.S. There is so much in Nicaragua that reminds me of Cuba — the songs, the uniforms. There is a feeling of *deja vu* that's very ominous. It worries me. It's wrong to say it couldn't have been any other way in Cuba. The means were there, the possibility was there. I think that the leadership of that revolution will have to answer to history.

When I was in Cuba, and the foreign visitors — the revolutionary tourists — came and left, I stayed. I know what we thought: They were a bunch of fools, or else opportunists. It's not going to improve your status with third world revolutions to pander to them, to cater to them. You have to get rid of some of the guilt and, without going back to the old colonial arrogance, have something to say. I think controversy and criticism is not going to hurt anybody.

I believe that the left, particularly that part of the left that has traveled to Cuba in the last 20 years and has participated in trips with government privileges — anyone who eats and drinks well while the population is on rations — is despised by the Cuban population and is collaborating. The Cuban population doesn't like it. They won't forgive it when things change. And things will change. Because nothing in this world is eternal. □







# Want to change the world?

The Torch/La Antorcha is the newspaper published by the Revolutionary Socialist League. The Torch is not written by "impartial" reporters or by academics from stuffy classrooms. It's written by activists and fighters; people who believe in changing the world because it's the only choice we've got. We have a special point of view, one that takes the side of people everywhere fighting for their freedom.

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