
9 | The Early Development of the Revolutionary Regime

THE DAWN OF 1959 brought forth a massive outpouring of popular joy over the fall of Batista and almost unanimous support for Fidel Castro. Those who had lived through the momentous events of 1933 or had heard or read about them could now see a repetition of the enthusiasm that had greeted the fall of Machado. This similarity was, however, accompanied by a variety of new features which provided significant contrasts with the events of 1933. Thus, while the general strike against the Machado dictatorship had played a crucial role in the latter's undoing, the general strike called by Castro after Batista's overthrow was almost superfluous. In fact, the completely successful 1959 strike was called to ensure the consolidation of the new revolutionary regime and was aimed against no one in particular, because Batista and his cohorts had already fled the country, and no one else dared to challenge Castro. It turned out to be a well-deserved revolutionary holiday for the Cuban working class rather than an instrument of struggle, properly speaking. The role and nature of this 1959 general strike were more than symbolic of the secondary role the Cuban working class had played in this new revolutionary situation which had not been brought about through its own actions.

The popular enthusiasm of 1933 had also expressed itself in such phenomena as widespread looting, and lynchings of well-known representatives and police agents of the Machado dictatorship. In many ways these excesses had provided a partial safety valve, diverting energy and attention from the more fundamental

business of social and political change. In 1959, it took only a few hours before this kind of "classic" Cuban revolutionism was brought under firm control by the militias temporarily organized by the 26th of July Movement and other revolutionary organizations.

At the same time, the new revolutionary government promptly meted out a variety of punishments to those responsible for atrocities under the Batista regime. As a result of this policy, several hundred Batistianos were executed under widely varying conditions of due process of law. These measures, which provoked the indignation of many North Americans — their consciences suddenly and unprecedentedly disturbed by the existence of a political struggle in Cuba and its bloody consequences — met overwhelming approval among Cubans of practically all political inclinations (a reaction that was perhaps similar to that aroused by the punishment of collaborators in France in 1945).

The quick introduction of organized revolutionary punishment was not an unexpected response on the part of Castro's revolutionary leadership. As far back as 1957, Castro's letter denouncing the Miami Pact and demanding, among other things, that the 26th of July Movement be the *sole* body responsible for the maintenance of postrevolutionary public order and security argued that postrevolutionary "anarchy" would be the worst enemy of the revolution.¹

Far more was involved in this issue than the mere question of which was the speediest and fairest way of administering punishment to the Batistiano criminals. Castro's choice of the method of punishment can be fully understood only within the wider context of Castro's whole ideology concerning the *control* of the revolutionary movement. Castro must have given considerable thought to the experiences of the frustrated 1933 Revolution and its aftermath in the forties and fifties, and to the lessons to be learned from these. He probably concluded that the aimless and disorganized violence of so much of recent Cuban history had not only been non-revolutionary but had in fact often diminished the possibilities for revolutionary change and had instead given further encourage-

ment to political shallowness, and to corruption and gangsterism. But, as I suggested in Chapter 8, he probably also decided that the only alternative to the endless fragmentation of Cuban revolutionary organizations was the creation of a monolithic center of power...

Castro's organizational ideas were put to an early test under what turned out to be extremely favorable circumstances for obtaining popular acquiescence and acceptance of his point of view. During the first days after the revolutionary victory, elements belonging to the Directorio Revolucionario, the only significant revolutionary organization outside the 26th of July Movement, had stolen some weapons from one of the military headquarters; their motives were unclear but may have included resentment and suspicions concerning the political and military monopoly of Castro and the 26th of July Movement.

It goes without saying that most Cubans reacted with great hostility toward this action of the Directorio. The specter of political gangsterism in the university was raised in the minds of the Cuban people even though that phenomenon had ceased to exist at least seven years before. Castro, then at the apex of his prestige and popularity, did not waste this opportunity to drive home the dangers of a multiplicity of "revolutionary" organizations. As he put it in his first triumphal speech in Havana, at Camp Columbia on January 8, 1959,

We are not that far from the epoch which followed the overthrow of Machado; perhaps one of the greatest evils of that struggle was the proliferation of revolutionary groups which did not take long in starting to shoot one another. And as a consequence what happened was that Batista came and stayed eleven years in power. . . . I am going to ask you a question. Weapons for what? To struggle against whom? Against the revolutionary government which has the support of the people. . . . Today when all liberties exist . . . when all the rights of citizens have been reestablished. When a call to elections is being thought of. Weapons for what? Hide arms for what? To blackmail the president of the Republic, to threaten peace, to create gangster organizations. Are we going to return to gangsterism, with daily shooting in the streets?²

Castro promptly rejected any suggestions that the 26th of July Movement share power with other revolutionary organizations. As Castro stated it on the popular television program "Ante la Prensa," on January 9, 1959: "We are remiss to enter into pacts in order to avoid certain problems. I have always thought that the revolution should be made by one movement alone. Our thesis is that one group should not make a revolution, but the people. A small engine gets a bigger engine started."³

Aside from the rhetoric about a revolution made by the people, the crucial phrase here is the "small engine." At this time, there was no doubt that the 26th of July Movement was supposed to be the "small engine" but, as we shall see, in the course of the revolutionary regime the 26th of July Movement never meant much as an organization, democratic or otherwise, and it was allowed to deteriorate until it was "merged" into the embryo of what eventually became a new and reconstituted Communist party working along the lines of the misnamed Communist party formula of "democratic centralism."

There was little doubt in the minds of most Cubans and foreign observers that Castro's "engine" was going somewhere; but nobody really seemed to know what the destination would be. During this early period of the political honeymoon, practically all groups and classes of Cubans were talking about the need for agrarian and a variety of other reforms. The terms used had quite different meanings to various groups of people in Cuba; and for the time being Castro was not helping to clarify any specifics. He had been saved from having to commit himself on controversial social issues by the rapid collapse of the Batista regime and the fact that the rebels had to administer liberated areas for only a few weeks before assuming full control. In a sense, he was temporarily prolonging the moderate anti-Batista coalition of 1958, a coalition whose members had little in common other than their intense dislike of the corrupt and brutal Batista dictatorship. Theodore Draper, before his invention of the theory of the "middle-class revolution betrayed," clearly perceived the composition of this coalition:

Long after the rebellion in the Sierra Maestra had taken hold, Castro did not head a homogeneous movement, and the larger it grew, the less homogeneous it became. It included those who merely wished to go back to the democratic constitution of 1940 and those who demanded "a real social revolution." It included some who were friendly to the United States and some who hated it. It included anti-Communists and fellow travelers. . . .

When Fidel Castro entered Havana a conquering hero on January 8 last year, no one knew what he was going to do. It is doubtful whether he himself knew, except in the most general terms.⁴

Some of the confusion among the revolution's adherents had its roots in the Constitution of 1940; contrary to Draper's otherwise penetrating observation, even the "social revolutionaries" paid homage to the majesty of the suppressed Constitution. Conservative Cubans could live with it because, although it emphatically promised agrarian reform, it no less emphatically established a proviso for preliminary compensation for any expropriated land. Furthermore, it is highly doubtful whether the kind of powerful social movement necessary to push for the implementation of the substantive reforms proposed by the Constitution could have coexisted with the procedural safeguards spelled out in that document, to say nothing about the high economic cost of pensioning off large sections of the landed classes.

Yet, despite their desire for land reform, not even the most extreme radical supporters of Castro's revolutionary government would have predicted the massive program of agricultural collectivization undertaken in Cuba in a matter of a very few years. There was no revolutionary social situation in Cuba in the early days of the revolutionary government. This does not mean that the country was not objectively in need of a radical social revolution; what it means is that the prevailing consciousness of even most of the more radical sectors of the population was still eminently reformist. A wave of strikes had broken out in early 1959, and numerous demands had been made by various sectors of the population; but all these expectations were still seen as compatible with a reformed and controlled Cuban capitalism.

This reformist attitude of the early days of the revolution expressed itself not only in the internal affairs of Cuban society but also in the government's relations with the United States. As I have pointed out, the widespread and explicit anti-imperialist sentiment of the early thirties had, for a variety of reasons, undergone a significant decline in Cuba. By the 1950s only members of the Communist party, and very few others, would publicly use the term "imperialism" in referring to the actions and policies of the United States government. Thus, for example, an official pamphlet of the 26th of July Movement published in 1957 discussed this whole issue in polite liberal terms:

In good political terminology, the term "imperialism" is already inappropriate to the American continent; but there still exist forms of economic penetration generally accompanied by political influence which are very similar to it and which cause irreparable harm to the moral and material welfare of the country which suffers it.

Fortunately, such a situation can be overcome without any legitimate interests being hurt. Through a new treatment of constructive friendship Cuba could truly be, as it is advised by many geographical, economic and even political reasons, a loyal ally of the great country of the North and at the same time safely preserve the capacity to orient its own destiny. Through new and just agreements, it can, without unnecessary sacrifices nor humiliating sellouts, multiply the advantages which derive from neighborliness.⁵

In spite of this change in mood and ideology, however, there was still a large reservoir of latent resentment and hostility toward the United States. The revolutionaries had strongly denounced the shipments of arms and ammunition to Batista which continued up to a few months before his overthrow; and the United States military mission, which had remained in the country until the very end of the Batista regime, was immediately ordered out of the country. But these protests and criticisms did not yet go beyond a moderate critique of the North American foreign policy of aiding military dictators. Obviously, although nationalist sentiment existed in the revolutionary ranks and among the Cuban people as a whole, it was not accompanied by a broader condemnation of political and economic imperialism as a system. With the exception of the Com-

munist party, no contemporary political group had developed a political world view that included an anti-imperialist critique, whether Leninist or of some other variety.

The provincialism of Cuban politics had maintained it in virtual isolation from the nationalist and anti-imperialist currents predominant in the Afro-Asian world. However, the situation was significantly different concerning Cuban identification with the rest of Latin America. Thus, the experience of Juan Perón in Argentina and that of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala had a significant impact among the most politically aware sections of the Cuban population, particularly among some students, and helped to add new strength to what was becoming a declining anti-United States ideology. It is significant that, after each friction-causing incident between Cuba and the United States, the daily *Revolución* warned that Cuba "will not be another Guatemala."

However, by and large, the opposition to the intervention in Guatemala in 1954 and the initial conflicts with the United States in 1959 were still perceived by most Cubans within the liberal and social-democratic framework of the "mistakes" that the Americans usually make in their dealings with Latin America. Castro's early outburst that any marines landing in Cuba would be shot (a statement he promptly modified) was, at this time, the exception rather than the rule. Still, anti-imperialism was brewing among the Cuban leadership and people and would eventually express itself openly.

In the meantime, domestic and external reformism had allowed the political honeymoon to continue relatively undisturbed. Even the reactionary newspaper *Diario de la Marina* was respectful of Castro's leadership, although it had started to make some politely phrased criticisms of this or that government action. Castro's installation of a very respectable cabinet under the nominal leadership of Manuel Urrutia contributed to a continuation of the 1958 honeymoon, although it was quite clear that the real and ultimate power was always in Castro's hands. Castro could afford to delay and time his actions precisely because he was not faced with an immediately socially explosive situation of the kind that had existed in 1933.

During his first few weeks in power, he consolidated his personal control; and in mid-February, he became prime minister, thus putting an end to the appearance of polycentric power.

Communism and Drift

The unique phenomenon of what eventually turned out to be a Communist revolution, led and sponsored not by a traditional Communist party or even by a leadership that had been associated with "classical" Marxist or socialist politics, has provoked a series of disputes and controversies. Perhaps the best example is the dispute as to whether Castro "was forced" into Communism by the pressures and blockades imposed by United States imperialism or whether he had been for some time a covert Communist or "Marxist-Leninist" and was simply waiting for the best opportunity to reveal his true self and implement his real program of government. Castro's own statements and confessions on this matter are highly ambiguous and can be interpreted variously as, for example, an attempt to establish his credentials vis-à-vis the international Communist movement, with little or no grounding in historical reality, or as a true description of his past. I am referring here in particular to Castro's speech of December 2, 1961, where he first openly announced his profession of "Marxism-Leninism," hinting that he had been a "Marxist-Leninist" or something close to that for some unspecified but significant length of time. Interestingly enough, right-wing Cuban exiles and North American professional anti-Communists who had always regarded Castro as a systematic liar decided that this time he had adhered to the truth and nothing but the truth, thus proving their previous charges of a longstanding Communist conspiracy. Actually, this and other statements by Castro and other revolutionary leaders should be considered as *partial* evidence, and no more than that, in the attempt to understand the Cuban Revolution's evolution toward Communism.

Interpretations of this evolution usually rest on one of two distinctly different assumptions: (1) unrestricted freedom of choice

on the part of the revolutionary leadership to establish whatever social system they might have desired for Cuba, or (2) a minimal amount of freedom of choice which led the Castro leadership to choose Communism as an almost purely defensive reaction against American imperialist pressures. Both of these interpretations seriously distort the contemporary Cuban historical record and, furthermore, lead to grave misunderstandings of the ways in which the consciousness of political leaders is formed, the way that consciousness relates to their present and potential followers, and how all of these factors affect the shape of historical developments in Cuba as well as in many other countries.

The evolution toward Cuban Communism can be better understood by making an analogy with a concept developed by David Matza in a very different context. In *Delinquency and Drift*,⁶ Matza pointed out that, contrary to those interpretations of delinquent behavior which see the delinquent as being either a completely free agent or a completely determined agent following the values of the delinquent "subculture," what happens to at least a very significant number of delinquents is that the periodic breaking of the bonds tying the delinquent to the society places him or her in a state of "drift" where the commission of a delinquent act is possible but not inevitable. In Matza's own words:

The periodic breaking of the moral bind to law arising from neutralization and resulting in drift does not assure the commission of a delinquent act. Drift makes delinquency possible or permissible by temporarily removing the restraints that ordinarily control members of society, but of itself it supplies no irreversible commitment or compulsion that would suffice to thrust the person into the act. . . . There is a missing element — an element in the nature of a thrust or an impetus — by which the possibility of delinquency is realized. . . . I wish to suggest that the missing element which provides the thrust or impetus by which the delinquent act is realized is will.

Matza would, of course, not deny that restraints on the delinquent still exist, if for no other reason than that he or she has to reckon with the courts, the police, and other agents of repression which restrict freedom of action in a very physical sense. By the same token, I would not deny that there were limits to Castro's

freedom of action, such as American imperialism, the rising expectations of the Cuban people themselves, and so on. But it can be stated that the Fidelista leadership was in a state of drift, partly as a result of the elimination of the traditional army and the extreme weakness of traditional conservative forces, such as traditional political parties. At the same time, there was no significant socialist tradition outside of the Communist party nor any new radical or revolutionary group that could fill the organizational vacuum and operate as a potential control on Castro's individual actions.

The available evidence seems to indicate that, at the time of Batista's overthrow on January 1, 1959, Castro himself was not sure of the future course of the Cuban Revolution (perhaps because he had never quite expected such a complete victory) and that he "drifted" for a short while until he *chose* the Communist road for Cuba, probably sometime in mid-1959.⁸ This, of course, does not in the least detract from the fact that United States imperialism bears a large share of the blame for the establishment of Cuban Communism; but neither does it prove that a Communist system was the inevitable choice, let alone that it was a choice, inevitable or otherwise, that deserves either admiration or apology. James O'Connor, a student of Cuban society and a supporter of the Castro regime, has aptly summarized and spelled out some of the crucial structural traits that produced a social context within which Castro was able to exercise his will and consolidate his power:

The liquidation of Cuba's private property system was invariably initiated by the ruling group. The peasantry did not spontaneously seize and cultivate idle lands; with a handful of exceptions, they failed to claim even the small fields in which they labored until the new government formally turned these tracts over to them. . . . Nor did the urban workers and sugar mill laborers independently occupy the factories (this was a sharp departure from the abortive social revolution of 1933); rebel army or militia units at the direction of the central government took possession of Cuba's farm land and industry.

. . . The social revolution was more or less orderly because the political revolution transferred power from one relatively small group of men to another, and because the masses of Cubans at the very least passively supported the social revolution. . . .

The fact that the Cuban farmworker and peasant never had the

political initiative made possible the immediate collectivization of the cattle, rice and sugar sectors of the rural economy.⁹

The Political Structure

A variety of more strictly organizational political factors reinforced the situation described by O'Connor. One of the most crucial factors in the 1959 situation was the virtual absence of political organizations, whether liberal, radical, or conservative. The old Communist party was discredited and was not a powerful political force until it forged close links with the Fidelista leadership. The organizational weakness of the 1933 Revolution had been largely the result of the fragmentation and rivalries of the existing organizations, rather than of the virtual absence of such organizations. As I have previously suggested, the 26th of July Movement was an amorphous group of followers rather than an organization, properly speaking. Many moderate supporters of the 26th of July Movement who had grouped themselves in the Movement of Civic Resistance had even less of an organizational power base, that group having been essentially an auxiliary of Castro's movement. In any event, the Movement of Civic Resistance formally dissolved itself into the 26th of July Movement in late February 1959. Moderate cabinet ministers were in office while Castro found it convenient for them to be there and were quietly and noiselessly replaced when they interfered with Castro's policies, and the Instituciones Cívicas many of them had represented in 1957 and 1958 turned out to be quite insignificant. Even the replacement of President Urrutia in July 1959 was a relatively easy task. The only real political structure was Fidel Castro himself. As C. Wright Mills, speaking as a typical Fidelista, said of him: "Had he not been *here*, and done and said what he did do and say, the history of Cuba would have been different. . . . Many times in those months and years and days just past, he *was* the revolution."¹⁰

While Mills's assessment of Castro's power may sound exaggerated, it is not. Often sociological conditions maximize the power of given individuals in certain historic situations; such a set of condi-

tions characterized Cuban society in 1959. Karl Marx, in his sociological analysis of Louis Bonaparte, described a similar situation of social and political weakness among the peasantry and deadlock among the bourgeoisie and other social classes in mid-nineteenth-century France. In Cuba, the social and political weaknesses of the middle and working classes, and the lack of a strong oligarchy, combined with the concrete events and developments of the fifties to complete the process of discrediting and disintegrating the pre-Castro political parties. This combination of an absence of political organization and a strong leadership produced an unusual situation in which the Cuban revolutionary leadership was free from most of the controls usually present in Latin American societies to restrict the freedom of action of officeholders, even those who are "revolutionary."

Robin Blackburn, a pro-Castro British analyst of the Cuban scene, has offered a sophisticated interpretation of this phenomenon. He attributes the swift success of so small a revolutionary army to the weakness of its enemy — to the fact that the only resistance came not from a coherent ruling class, not from powerful institutions or respected ideologies, but from "the isolated and opportunistic Batista machine." Blackburn concludes, "*The unprecedented hallmarks of the revolution — its lack of party or an ideology — were the logical product of a pre-revolutionary society which itself lacked any decisive institutional or ideological structures.*"¹¹

Blackburn's is an impressive analysis which exhibits much sociological insight into Cuban society. Yet it is somewhat schematic, and it ignores the content and varying shades of political life in early revolutionary Cuba. While there was no significant political organization in the Cuba of 1959, there was a significant political tradition of radical and democratic populism which was revived in the aftermath of the revolutionary victory by such important elements as the newspaper *Revolución*, the leadership of the new revolutionary trade-union movement, and others of a leftist but noncommunist "humanist" political tendency. One *Revolución* editorialist even raised the issue of the need for a democratically

controlled revolutionary organization at a time when this would have excluded the old Communist party from participation within it.¹² The Fidelista leadership did make organizational choices at given times and under specific circumstances. Thus, by 1961, two years after the victory of the revolution, the revolutionary leadership decided to create a one-party state; but by this time a whole series of objectionable political elements had been either purged, eliminated from political life, exiled, or simply relegated to political oblivion (the fate of the "humanists").

Blackburn's most penetrating insights into Cuban society were, by and large, as true for 1961 as they were for 1959, but they still did not prevent Castro from deciding to form a Communist one-party state in 1961. The explanation of *this* phenomenon lies primarily at a more immediate political level: in 1959, Castro could not have formed a Communist-type party but could have formed only a party of a much broader nature because of the wide diversity of views within the revolutionary ranks at that time. In such a situation it was far more advantageous for Castro to be a maximum leader who could manipulate and suppress various divergent viewpoints until an appropriate level of uniformity was achieved.

Not all tensions and potential divisions had been eliminated by the time the ORI (the embryo of the new Communist party) was established in 1961, but by this time the obstacles that caused Castro to let the 26th of July Movement fall apart had disappeared. Castro's main reason for allowing the movement to fade was explained by the Cuban leaders to Simone de Beauvoir: "The 26th of July Movement, from which the revolution issued, had an apparatus, but a petty-bourgeois one, which could not follow the revolution in the radicalization that has been proceeding since the taking of power; it was not capable of going along with the advance of the agrarian reform. So it was permitted to fall away."¹³ Of course, it is very difficult to determine the precise nature of such terms as "radicalization" and "petty bourgeois" in Mme de Beauvoir's or the Cuban leadership's vocabulary. Petty bourgeois could mean anything from hostility to the Communist party and to totalitarianism to

the very real phenomenon of middle-class reformism; but, regardless of the precise meaning intended there, the organizational logic of Castro's decision is perfectly clear.

Popular Support

The fact that the Fidelista leadership was in a state of drift where choices could be made relatively freely was the result not only of negative factors, such as the weakness of Cuba's social structure and the elimination of a traditional army, but also of Castro's overwhelming popularity and his considerable political skills. The rather puritanical attitude of the rebel soldiers and authorities in the early stages of the revolution bolstered the new government's widespread support among the masses of Cubans. The announcement made early in the Castro regime that serious cases of misappropriation of funds by public officials might be punished with the death penalty was favorably received in a country that had become extremely cynical about the possibility of public officials ever being honest. In measures like this, one could hear not-too-distant echoes of the climate of public opinion that had provided so much support for Eduardo Chibas and the Ortodoxo party. Cubans of all classes were also pleased by the nonabusive behavior of the brand-new revolutionary police force, many of whose members were former revolutionaries who had great political awareness and had had no time to develop the "professional deformations of character" common to members of all repressive institutions. This latter fact benefited poor people the most because the Cuban upper and middle classes had always been able to obtain greater consideration from the traditional national police in the cities and the Guardia Rural ("rural army police") in the countryside. So, without yet making an appeal to specific "class warfare" themes, Castro was able to obtain a very considerable amount of popular support. Of course, populist appeals in Cuban politics were naturally associated with Leftist politics, but this still meant, by and large, the kind of reform Leftism of favoring the underdog and improving the general public morals and

welfare of the country. It also implied that the rich would not fare particularly well under these new conditions but that most of the middle classes would benefit from a reformist program never, up to this point, spelled out in any kind of serious detail.

Eventually Castro started to take measures that had sharper teeth in terms of the way they affected the grand coalition of 1958, which survived into the political honeymoon of January and February 1959; but at no time during the first six months of 1959 did he implement policies that would make unavoidable a complete break with all the more conservative elements still supporting him. He proceeded with some caution and undertook a series of measures throughout 1959 and 1960 which successively alienated various sectors of his erstwhile conservative supporters, but in such a manner that they were not able to get together and present a common front against the Castro government. The fact that these various sectors were alienated one at a time rather than all at once, plus the traditional political weaknesses of the upper and middle classes in Cuba, made it relatively easy for Castro to get rid of his gradually increasing number of domestic opponents.

The first serious jolt to the political honeymoon in Cuba came in March 1959, when Castro ordered a radical reduction in rents of up to 50 per cent. This move alienated for the first time a significant section of the Cuban bourgeoisie, but it was nonetheless a very popular measure, and it was unopposed by the many middle-class people who benefited from it. This reform was not a "collectivist" measure in the Communist sense. Rather, it was a radical measure following both the spirit and letter of *History Will Absolve Me*, a document that had just been recalled from obscurity after the socially mellow years of 1956-58, and was part of a very radical populism then being vigorously revived, particularly by the newspaper *Revolución*, official organ of the 26th of July Movement. Interestingly enough, the drastic rent reductions, which had a great impact on the consciousness of the Cuban well-to-do classes, received little notice in the North American press. United States capital had never involved itself in any significant manner in Cuba's

housing industry, a very important and growing industry in an otherwise stagnant economy; thus it had remained the preserve of the essentially cautious Cuban capital. After the end of the executions in February 1959, the North American press lost interest in Cuban affairs, a situation that was reversed with the passing of the Agrarian Reform Law in May of 1959.

After the rent-reduction law was passed, Castro continued to reassure and encourage Cuban capitalists by asserting that the products of Cuban industries did contribute to national growth as distinct from the parasitic investors on the housing market.¹⁴ At the same time everybody was talking about the coming agrarian reform, but nobody really knew what it would be like. Until the moment when Castro virtually pulled the law out of a hat in May 1959, discussion about it was so unspecific that the most diverse sectors still supporting Castro could hope that their interests and views would not be hurt and might even be incorporated in the eventual agrarian legislation. This was particularly true of those moderate and conservative elements still supporting Castro, who, having been stunned by the rent law bombshell and having heard various inflammatory speeches, particularly by Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara, were apprehensive about what Castro might come up with next. In this new situation, these elements had relatively little political bargaining power, and they were in fact placing their faith in what they hoped was the relative moderation of Fidel Castro himself.

The radical Agrarian Reform Law enacted in May 1959, although by no means Communist (it emphasized land redistribution and referred vaguely to the creation of some form of cooperatives but did not even remotely hint that state farms would become the predominant form of agricultural organization) marked a turning point in the relationship between Castro and his domestic opposition, as well as between Castro and the United States imperialist system, which at this point reentered the anti-Castro fray with great vigor through its press, congressional committees, covert activities, and State Department diplomatic pressure. Domestically, the polit-

ical honeymoon had now come to an end. Castro continued to enjoy wide support, but now it was a "great majority" rather than "practically all" Cubans who were supporting him. Yet the domestic opposition was still weak and incapable of presenting a serious challenge to the regime. Although practically all upper-class and many middle-class Cubans were now opposed to Castro, significant sections of the middle classes still supported him enthusiastically. The Agrarian Reform Law had, in many ways, been a surprise to most conservative Cubans. Although they had many apprehensions about the regime, they were very much reassured by Castro's trip to the United States in April 1959 and by the anti-Communism Castro had toyed with briefly during the spring of 1959.

There was nothing inevitable about the course Castro chose to take. The assertion that he was driven to drastic action by the powerful pressure of class forces inside Cuba is no more than a myth. As already noted, there were practically no spontaneous land or factory seizures in Cuba. After playing around with various political possibilities (within the usual objective limits, of course), Castro turned to political measures far more drastic than anybody, including the Cuban Communist party, might have predicted. Until the spring of 1959, the Communist party had been to the left of Castro in its social and economic policies. Growing prosperity and the redistribution of wealth, plus other social and political events that took place in the aftermath of Batista's overthrow, had made the overwhelming majority of Cuba's workers and peasants very satisfied with the new regime. Their consciousness was anything but one of impatience and dissatisfaction with Castro's lack of sufficient radicalism during the first months of 1959. To try to read the experience of other revolutionary situations into the Cuban situation of 1959 (such as the problems of dual power, a leadership lagging behind the consciousness of the masses, and so on) is to do serious violence to the actual events.

Although there had been an undeniable move toward the Left in the actions and consciousness of the Cuban masses between January and May 1959, the direction of that shift had been from the

leaders to the masses rather than the other way around. The radicalism of the leadership had, in various forms, filtered down to the masses of Cubans, who always remained "behind" the various measures Castro periodically and unexpectedly produced after long night sessions of the revolutionary leadership. While prosperity and popular redistributive policies continued at least until the first shortages were seriously felt in 1961, the leadership was highly successful in selling its revolutionary fait accompli to the great majority of Cubans.

Aside from the mass support produced by the internal political and economic situation of 1959, there had also been a spontaneous growth of anti-imperialist sentiment among the Cuban people. The liberal explanations of well-intentioned American "mistakes" ceased to be accepted by great numbers of Cubans during 1959 and 1960. Whether or not Castro fabricated some accusations in order to exacerbate that sentiment,¹⁵ there was little need for Castro to create artificially a popular reaction among a people awakening and becoming more conscious of its subordination to American imperialism, the reality of which was constantly being proven by the actions of the American power structure itself. Boris Goldenberg, an anti-Castro writer, has described how Washington refused financial support to the Castro regime; demanded rapid and adequate compensation for lands confiscated as part of the agrarian reform; politically supported even the most reactionary Cuban refugees; failed to halt piratical air incursions into Cuban territory; suspended the Cuban sugar quota in reaction to the expropriation of oil companies; and summoned the Mexican ambassador to the State Department to explain the pro-Castro flavor of a prominent Mexican's speech. The autumn 1960 television debates between Kennedy and Nixon fanned the flames of the anti-imperialist fire: "Kennedy upheld the Monroe Doctrine and criticized the economic measures taken against Cuba as 'too little and too late,' recommending collective, direct OAS intervention. Nixon declared such proposals to be irresponsible, while secretly backing the coming invasion attempt."¹⁶

In the course of a few months, the anti-imperialist spirit of 1933 had regained full force after a long period of decline and the rise of pro-American sentiment in the forties and early fifties. But, unlike the 1933 situation, the Cuban leadership and people were now in a far better position to fight United States imperialism than practically any other country in the history of Latin America. The slate of old Cuban institutions, particularly the traditional army, had been swept clean; there had been relatively little destruction during the fight against Batista. Unlike the 1933 Revolution in Cuba, there was practically no political sectarianism (such as the Third Period policy of the Comintern) in the aftermath of the 1959 Revolution. Finally, and most importantly, there was no Platt Amendment to provide immediate legitimation for a direct military presence in Cuban territory, nor was there, in the absence of the Platt Amendment, a traditional Cuban army that could be used by the United States as they had used the Guatemalan army to overthrow the duly elected government of Jacobo Arbenz.

However, the United States still had a very powerful weapon: its economic ties with and control of crucial sectors of the Cuban economy. Unlike the disorganized and disoriented Cuban bourgeoisie, the United States was able to take the offensive with this powerful weapon and to escalate its economic punishments as Castro expropriated North American investments in the island. In this situation, Castro was not able to attack various North American financial interests one at a time as he had done with the Cuban bourgeoisie. The elimination of the Cuban sugar quota in the summer of 1960 began the American economic squeeze of Cuba, which was soon followed by a more general economic embargo. The Soviet Union stated its willingness to bail Cuba out of this situation of economic emergency. From this fact some have leaped to the conclusion that Castro had no choice but to "go Communist," a fallacious logic that ignores the fact that similar or worse economic crises took place in Sekou Touré's Guinea and Nasser's Egypt, neither of which became Communist in spite of the fact that Russia bailed them out too. As Guevara told the French weekly *L'Express* on July

25, 1963, "Our commitment to the eastern bloc was half the fruit of constraint and half the result of choice."

The first two years of the revolution marked what was in essence a consumers' revolution rather than a developmental revolution. The main subject of talk was *reivindicaciones* (material demands of a more or less immediate kind) rather than economic development as such, although everybody was for the latter as well; there was no serious discussion of how the two were related to each other. The agrarian reform was seen mostly along the lines of social justice and of the improvement of the living standards of agricultural wage workers and peasants. This does not contradict my earlier contention that political radicalization was indeed taking place among the Cuban people; but it was a distinct kind of radicalization which at this time had little, if anything, to do with the state-collectivist ideology and practice eventually established in the country. Castro had at least once expressed his concern with this kind of "redistributive radicalism":

One of the past epochs is still in the minds of the people. . . . I have found it in rallies, in working-class rallies, for example. I have seen that in these rallies banners and demands are put forward in the same tone that was used when there was a nonrevolutionary Council of Ministers, a nonrevolutionary government. . . . The masses don't realize that this is their government, that this is the government of the people, not at the service of vested interests, that for the first time in our history there is a government which is based on popular majorities. . . . One gets the sensation that they still have in mind the idea that government and people are two different things.¹⁷

It should be made clear that Castro is not talking here in the fashion of a Kerensky facing Bolshevik-type demonstrations demanding social revolution; rather, he speaks as a popular prime minister in a period of revolutionary change facing what might at times have been "exorbitant" but were still fundamentally trade-union-type demands which had resulted from a combination of the pent-up working-class aspirations held back by the repressive Batista regime and the very political climate Fidel Castro himself had stimulated through his various speeches and early redistributive measures.

In this context, it is easy to understand the complaints in later years of Communist trade-union officials (who were placed in office by Castro after most of the former "Humanista" leadership democratically elected in 1959 had been purged) about the Cuban working-class's low productivity, its absenteeism, and the like. Now, the trade unions had become not the defense organizations of the workers but state organizations, the main purpose of which was to help organize and stimulate higher production. When workers resisted the abolition of pay for Sundays and holidays, Lázaro Peña, a top Communist trade-union leader, complained:

Under capitalism we struggled for the opposite and we gained it from the employers as one of our then limited material gains. It was like an extra in a miserly salary.

Today we should see its elimination not as something essentially economic, but as [something] political, concerning the revolutionary morality of the working class. Now, no conscious worker should try to collect money unjustifiably without working for it, because, unlike before, it does not affect the profits of any employer but selfishly detracts from the welfare of the whole population.¹⁸

This was just the beginning of what later became increasing pressures from the official trade-union leaders, party members, and state administrators for "voluntary" work in the canefields, overtime work without pay, repeated "voluntary" collections for a variety of causes, and the imposition of the whole philosophy of "moral" as against "material" incentives about which workers had no choice and over which they exercised no control of any kind.

This is not to say that the revolutionary government had little to offer in the way of material gains to most sectors of the population. Without a doubt, the government scored some very significant successes in raising the standard of living of at least the poorest 25 percent of the population, improving public health, eliminating many racially discriminatory practices, in education and sports and athletics, and extending other social services. On the other side of the balance sheet we have to note important material failures: the inadequate supply of most consumer goods, both Cuban and foreign; the continuing and even increasing economic predomi-

nance of sugar; and the shortage and progressive deterioration of facilities, particularly transportation and housing in the urban areas, where more than half of the population resides. As a result, discontent has arisen; of course, this discontent is not necessarily expressed in articulate, organized opposition, but it has produced a situation different from the initial period of almost unanimous support for Castro.

Manipulation and Repression

To understand the Cuban Revolution as it evolved under the leadership of Fidel Castro it is crucial to be aware of the building of an initial fund of overwhelming popular support, but it is no less crucial to understand how that popular support was handled and indeed manipulated by the Fidelista leadership. For at least two years, Castro never offered, even to his most ardent followers, any specific program or long-range perspective explaining where he intended to go politically. His method was to make sudden decisions and then present them to the people as faits accomplis. Castro's personal control allowed him to do a considerable amount of political window-shopping during the early stages of the revolution without committing himself to any specific course of action. Thus, for some months after the overthrow of Batista, he did not nationalize the foreign public utilities,¹⁹ even though this had been a classic demand of the Cuban moderate Left dating back to at least the Ortodoxo party in the late forties. Interestingly enough, President Urrutia had shown much greater rigidity and intransigence than Castro on such matters as the abolition of *all* gambling (whether for tourists or for Cubans) and on the granting of safe-conducts to those Batistianos who had obtained asylum in various Latin American embassies. In all these decisions, Castro showed that he possessed a keen pragmatic sense of when and where it was worth making a fight, and that, as much as possible, he would choose the most advantageous issue and moment for each fight.

This personalistic modus operandi clearly had certain advan-

tages from the narrow, tactical perspective of defeating given enemies at a minimum cost, particularly when it was accompanied by the very shrewd tactic of taking one enemy at a time, a tactic Castro pursued during the period of revolutionary consolidation. But, if a political leader is engaged in the task not only of achieving power but of leading a social revolution from below, then such tactics also prevent his ranks and supporters from developing their own political consciousness in an autonomous fashion so that they will, as Marx would put it, cease being the objects and become the subjects of history.

Castro's manipulative philosophy sometimes involved direct misrepresentation, as is suggested by the agrarian reform legislated in 1959 and the quite different one eventually implemented. Whether Castro is or has been a *conscious* liar is of little interest and would in any event be impossible to determine; but misrepresentation, conscious or unconscious, has definitely been a part of his policy. As his staunch supporter Joseph P. Morray has commented:

The mark of a true revolutionary is that the content of his policy goes beyond his phrases. He must make it effective before it is understood by the guardians of the old order, lest it provoke an inconvenient prevention. . . . Castro has demonstrated this quality. Other Latin American leaders have condemned United States imperialism in phrase and then collaborated with it by seeking aid and loans that have as their principal function the creation of an attractive climate for private investment from the capital-exporting countries. By contrast, Castro's tone was moderate and conciliatory towards the United States. He had dropped the imperialism-baiting of his student days. He was not even identifying foreign private investment with imperialism. Many months would pass before Castro as Prime Minister would join the Communists in hurling the unforgivable epithet "imperialist," which is also a manifesto, at the United States.²⁰

This is not to suggest that leaders cannot or should not change policies, given a change in circumstances; but, to take an extreme example, it never would have occurred to V. I. Lenin to pretend he had established the New Economic Policy in the early twenties because he had suddenly been converted to social democracy or capitalism. So we are faced not merely with a question of changing

policies but with one of misrepresenting one's politics to both opponents and supporters, which means that the political leader ends up manipulating both.

Such manipulative methods, together with the spying functions of the CDR (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution), the activities of the secret police, the purging of many individuals and groups, and the elimination of all opposition or independent newspapers and magazines (in the summer of 1960, when there was no "clear and present danger" to the government at all), completed the tripod upon which Castro consolidated his power: popular support, manipulation of that support, and repression. When the first two could not be trusted to secure the government's power, the third took over.

At one point, many students of Cuban society (including this writer) underestimated the power of Castro and his immediate inner circle and assumed that the Old Communists, because of their organizational effectiveness and international connections, would eventually achieve a predominant role in the Cuban government. That this did not occur was partly the result of changes in the international situation, particularly the increasing divisions within the international Communist movement, which created more favorable conditions for Castro to increase his bargaining power and control the Old Guard. By the mid-sixties, most of the leading Old Communists had been displaced from the most important positions in the state apparatus. They had retained a declining but still significant representation on the Central Committee (which hardly ever met) and on the Secretariat of the Cuban Communist party (its new name after 1965), but *not* in the crucial Political Bureau which had remained completely Fidelista in composition.²¹ Castro did not become a façade or figurehead serving the Old Communist leadership. Castro did not have to follow the old recipes of the Moscow-controlled Communists in Cuba. Nor did he follow the road to power which "classical" Marxism assumed was necessary for victory. Morray has described Castro's revolution in terms that must shake Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky in their graves:

The proletariat took power in Cuba through the conversion to Marxism-Leninism of a government of lawyers. The initiative came from above, not by insurrection from below. . . . Blas Roca, the Secretary General of the Cuban Communist Party . . . declared on November 27, 1961, that the Ministers, despite their bourgeois backgrounds (and, he could have added, despite their non-Leninist pre-October salaries of 600 pesos per month) had become workers and trusted representatives of the working class. He and the other theoreticians of the dissolved Party, writing in *Hoy*, echo and approve Castro's characterization of Cuba as a "proletarian state." . . . One big task still uncompleted, is to convince workers to accept the proffered honor and burden. They are still diffident. They still expect to be told what to do. Through Castro, who is the Cuban-Soviet, the workers discover their own interest and participate in the direction of society by ratifying his initiatives.²²

The Role of Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara

To comprehend the process by which Castro chose the road of Cuban Communism, it is necessary to understand the role played by Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara, two very powerful figures in the revolution who undoubtedly had great influence on Castro's thoughts and actions. Both Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara had had relations with the international Communist movement and/or its peripheral individuals and organizations. Raúl Castro not only traveled with a student delegation to a "peace congress" in Prague but actually applied for admission to the youth section of the Partido Socialista Popular (Communist party) in June of 1953,²³ although it seems that the Communist party still knew nothing of the preparations for the July 1953 Moncada attack in which Raúl participated. Ernesto "Ché" Guevara was friendly with prominent members of the so-called Latin American democratic Left but also seems to have had the widest acquaintance with Marxist theory of all those in the revolutionary leadership. He participated in the Guatemalan events of 1954; however, he did not join the Argentinian, Guatemalan, or Cuban Communist parties but remained in the vague and often

misleading category of "independent Marxist." Guevara was politically more sophisticated than either of the Castro brothers, and his outlook was apparently less narrow than theirs. He seems to have impressed upon the revolutionary leadership the importance of the Guatemalan experience and the lessons to be derived from it in regard to the role of American imperialism and of traditional Latin American armies. In addition his ascetic views had a strong influence on an ideology that would eventually identify socialism with scarcity, not with abundance.

There is no question that although Fidel was and always remained the undisputed maximum leader and could not have been politically challenged by either Guevara or his brother, the latter two did play more than one crucial role. For a while they diverted the apprehensions of the moderates and bourgeois elements toward their own "extremism," particularly after Castro had appointed his brother as successor. But, more importantly, the drastic measures they proposed were always one step ahead of Castro's pronouncements and actions. Whether as a result of a conscious political agreement with Fidel or because of differences of opinion, both Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara remained aloof from Fidel Castro's friendlier approach to the United States in April and May of 1959 and from his short-lived encouragement of "humanism." Many have contended that Raúl Castro's trip to Houston in April of 1959 to speak to his brother on the latter's way to Buenos Aires was mostly the result of Raúl's anger at Fidel's conciliatory gestures toward the United States. Also, at a point when there was still considerable distrust between the Communist Old Guard and Fidel Castro, Raúl and Ché helped to provide a transmission belt of reconciliation and agreement between these two key elements of what would be the future political merger of Old and New Communists.

Murray has accurately described Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara as "the architects and champions of a conscious and proclaimed policy of 'unity' between Communists and non-Communists. . . . They served as a channel of Communist influence on Fidel, neutralizing the petty bourgeois prejudices stimulated by the civil-

ian leadership of the 26th of July Movement."²⁴ This does not mean that, during 1959 at least, either Guevara or Raúl Castro was making open pro-Communist statements. Even if they had felt like speaking openly on behalf of the PSP, Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara were, unlike the Old Communists, part and parcel of Fidel Castro's government, and at this point they would not have been able to afford or allow such excessive pro-Communism. What Ché and Raúl did was to provide the initial legitimation for the anti-anti-Communist stand initially taken by the PSP and eventually adopted by Fidel Castro himself. A somewhat paradoxical situation resulted in that, while neither Raúl nor Ché was making open pro-Communist statements, they were often in fact more drastic in their pronouncements than the PSP itself. Thus, the PSP would often denounce right-wing anti-Communists while mildly criticizing, without mentioning names, the harm created by leftist extremists who unduly frighten the petty bourgeoisie, and so on. They were referring mostly to Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara, particularly to the latter.²⁵

It is important to note that, although Raúl and Ché had a certain following of their own based on their more drastic proposals, neither of them was nearly as charismatic or popular with the Cuban people as was Fidel Castro; therefore, they were highly dependent on Fidel. In a strict technical sense, it could be said that they were much more *influential* than powerful. Also, although their pronouncements were usually more drastic than Fidel's, this was true only on a day-to-day basis. During the first two years of the revolution, Raúl and Ché did not offer a long-range political or programmatic perspective to the Cuban people or even to their own following any more than Fidel did, a fact that can probably best be explained by their dependence on Fidel Castro. The only group that was at this point providing a methodology and a perspective to a sizable number of Cubans who were moving in a revolutionary direction was the PSP, which was thus able to exert an influence way beyond its numbers.

The Role of the Old Communists

The leadership and rank and file of the largely discredited Partido Socialista Popular behaved rather cautiously during the early stages of the revolutionary regime. The contrast with the Communists' behavior during the Revolution of 1933 could not have been greater. By the time of Batista's overthrow, the Communists had become isolated and had dwindled in number,²⁶ which was sufficient reason for caution. More importantly, unlike 1933, they did not have to follow the sometimes almost suicidal policies of the Comintern's Third Period. In 1959, the policies of the international Communist movement left more elbow room for dealings with other sectors of the Left and with nationalist movements. In early 1959 the Communist press in Cuba followed the usual policy of praising the Soviet Union and the "socialist countries" and attacking the United States in the international field. Domestically it strongly denounced all members of the revolutionary regime, supporters and detractors, who openly expressed anti-Communist sentiment; at the same time it in fact gave the benefit of the doubt to those who might have been anti-Communists but did not make a point of saying so.

As far as Fidel Castro was concerned, at least during the first half of 1959, the Communist party operated as a sort of gentle pressure group trying to move him as far to the Left as possible while avoiding some of the more drastic pronouncements of Ché Guevara and Raúl Castro. This may come as a surprise to those who have accepted the unexamined myth that Castro had *always* been to the Left of the Old Communists, a myth based on a confusion of activism with stands on social questions. There is no doubt that the open and stated policies of the Communists, at least until May of 1959, were more drastic than those of Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement. Thus, the Communist party saw its task during this period as one of supporting the revolutionary leadership while pushing it to the Left. As Blas Roca put it: "The key task of this moment is to defend the revolution and to make it advance."²⁷

This Communist policy, while full of praise for Fidel Castro and particularly for the early anti-anti-Communist stance of Ché Guevara and Raúl Castro (although sometimes deploring some of their more extreme statements, which might alienate the "progressive" sectors of the middle classes), could not help but bring it into some friction with the revolutionary government. Thus, the Communists openly criticized the six months' no-strike pledge made by the trade-union leadership of the 26th of July Movement, which was fully committed to the revolutionary government, to assure the stability of the regime. As Blas Roca put it in an article in the daily Communist newspaper *Hoy* on February 10, 1959, "Strikes, when they are necessary and just, do not harm the revolution but help it."²⁸ Without doubt, Roca had scored an excellent point here. However, it was based on a methodology which dictated that, because industry was still owned by the capitalists and because the Communists were neither in control of nor participants in the government, strikes were in order; when the situation later changed so that all industries were nationalized and the Communists were in the government, they of course became the most vehement opponents of any form of strike or trade-union defense actions on the part of the workers (as did Castro and the rest of the revolutionary leadership). In the meantime, however, this Communist position was an irritant to the Fidelista leadership, which was thinking primarily in terms of the stability of a government that had been faced with a wave of strikes in its very early stages.

Along the same lines, more serious friction was caused when it appeared that some Communists had encouraged a few instances of "spontaneous" land seizure. This Communist action provoked Fidel Castro into making some of his strongest anti-Communist remarks of the 1959 period. He had unambiguously stated his position on the question of land distribution in a television interview on February 19, 1959:

We are opposed to anarchic land distribution. We have drafted a law which stipulates that [persons involved in] any land distribution which is made without waiting for the new agrarian law will lose their

rights to benefits from the new agrarian reform. Those who have appropriated lands from January 1 to the present date have no right to those lands. Any provocation to distribution of lands disregarding the revolutionaries and the agrarian law is criminal.²⁹

The Communist party quite cautiously backtracked on what may have been a political experiment on its part, and a few days after Castro's speech it endorsed Castro's land distribution policy. Andrés Suarez pointed out that the PSP had encouraged squatting. However, once Law 87 of February 20 was published in the official *Gazette*, the party nevertheless acknowledged in *Hoy* (February 22, 1959) "that it was necessary to put a stop to the anarchic seizures of land."³⁰

From January to May 1959, the Communists had reservations about a possible turn to the Right by the Castro government, reservations that were aggravated by Castro's trip to the United States in April 1959. Thus, the conclusions of the May Plenum of the PSP were even more guarded than previous ones and clearly showed some political pessimism. In spite of all these reservations, however, the Communists continued to support the Castro government. Their patience was rewarded in late 1959 and afterward, when Castro turned so far to the Left that the Old Communists started having serious reservations about his "extremist excesses."

A very important aspect of the activities of the PSP in the early stages of the revolution was the kinds of relationships developed between the party and a variety of non-anti-Communist revolutionaries. In the absence of any other political party (the Directorio had quickly submitted to Castro after the January incident) that could provide a world view to large numbers of militant revolutionaries, and particularly to younger people, there is no question that the PSP, despite its vulgar Marxism and traditional subservience to Russia, was able to exert political influence disproportionate to the number of party members. In a country that was in political motion in a decidedly leftward but diffuse direction, the existence of a political program, both for the long and the short run, and of systematic explanations for various problems facing the country and

the world, no matter how opportunistic, crude, and totalitarian, could not help but have significant influence on the minds of many revolutionaries who had not had the time or the inclination to form any crystallized negative attitudes toward Communism. Many of these revolutionaries would pick up the PSP's daily *Hoy* and find that its contents were somehow attractive to them, particularly when many of *Hoy's* positions were later taken by Castro himself. At the same time, because the Communists were supporting Castro, these revolutionaries were not put in a position of having to choose between Castro and the Communists. Had they been, they would certainly have chosen the former.

By and large, the Communists had adopted what was essentially an ideological and organizational permeationist policy vis-à-vis the revolutionary leadership and rank and file. In pursuit of this subtle policy, the Communist party did *not* engage in any kind of significant recruitment campaign although its membership probably increased during 1959. This policy was not adopted without disagreement within the party leadership itself, however. A minority, led by Aníbal Escalante, had analyzed the Cuban situation in terms of the "Chinese road" (as he called it) in which the party, while acknowledging the leadership and wisdom of Castro, would try to play a vanguard role on its own by vigorously recruiting to its own ranks the most "advanced sectors" of revolutionary opinion (presumably even people like Guevara, Raúl Castro, and/or their followers) and even try to obtain positions of leadership.³¹ The party instead adopted the position put forward by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (the Communist leader closest to Castro) and Blas Roca, which was far more cautious in its bid for influence and power. There is little question that the adoption of this line greatly encouraged Castro's eventual choice of the Communist road, because it was sufficiently flexible and subtle so as not to present an immediate threat to Castro's leadership, which might have made him turn in a quite different political direction. As it happened, the Escalante line retained sufficient strength within Communist circles and eventually presented a threat to Castro after the latter had firmly committed

himself to Communism. As we know, Escalante was first purged on March of 1962 when he tried to pack the various positions of state power with Old Communists to the detriment of the younger Communists who were of Fidelista background. Even the well-organized and Russian-backed Cuban Communists could not ignore or set aside the overwhelming power of Fidel Castro's leadership and personal control.

The International Communist Movement

The cautious policy of most of the PSP leadership toward Fidel Castro and their continued support for him, even in April and May of 1959 when they were being attacked by Fidelistas (including Fidel himself), left room for a possible merger of the two forces in a way that did not threaten the hegemony of the Fidelista leadership. At the same time, the development of "polycentrism" in the Communist world permitted the growth and development of the peculiar brand of Cuban Communism shaped and formed by Fidel Castro rather than by the Old Guard of the PSP. As Edward González has pointed out, even the leadership of the pro-Russian PSP was able to exert pressure on the Soviet Union in order to extract greater commitments to the Castro-led revolution.³² For example, at various times *Hoy* pointedly gave more prominence to the Chinese than to the Russians in their coverage of various international events; thus they were able to make use of techniques that would have been impossible a few years before. As time went by, the ever growing schisms in the international Communist movement provided a setting that helped Castro to become even more independent from the Cuban Communist Old Guard to the point of leaving them in a frankly subordinate position. Thus, from 1960 to 1962 the PSP leadership had been close to being at least an equal partner in the running of the Cuban state apparatus (part of which was undoubtedly the result of their having had more available organizational talents). The Escalante purge of March 1962, which was at least ostensibly supported by the rest of the PSP leadership, marked the

beginning of the PSP subordination to Castro and his inner circle of loyal Fidelistas. At the same time, the subordination of the PSP to Castro must have been a popular move which enhanced Castro's prestige with his followers because this move symbolized the fact that he was not going to be a mere puppet of Moscow.

Yet, while Castro could quite easily subordinate the Cuban Communist Old Guard to his wishes, his relations with Moscow were a much more delicate and difficult matter. While he would directly or indirectly criticize Moscow's policies, his great economic dependence on the Soviet Union placed limits on his freedom of action, particularly in the fields of foreign policy and internal economic planning. Castro's encouragement of guerrilla warfare throughout Latin America and his attacks on various Latin American Communist parties did not ingratiate him with Russia; however, it is likely that Castro would have engaged in an even more aggressive foreign policy, particularly in Latin America, if it had not been for Moscow's economic pressure. As far as the Cuban economy is concerned, Moscow's pressure must have been a very weighty factor in Castro's decision to reverse his and Guevara's earlier plans for rapid diversification and industrialization, a policy that had been very badly and irrationally administered by Guevara's Ministry of Industries. This waste infuriated the Russians, who already had other self-serving reasons not to be favorably inclined toward the creation of a diversified and relatively independent Cuban economy. In any event, Castro implemented a policy based, more than ever before in Cuban history, on sugar. He hoped that the production of sugar would bring quicker returns in terms of foreign exchange earnings with which he could start paying Cuba's ever mounting debts to the Soviet Bloc countries that had been virtually subsidizing the Cuban economy. Castro also eventually abandoned his support for guerrilla movements in Latin America and established a foreign policy of friendship with governments in the Western hemisphere that are even slightly independent of the United States State Department (e.g., Panamá, Peru, Venezuela, and most of the former British West Indies), while providing personnel for the implementation of Russian foreign policy goals in countries like Angola.

An Overview

The character of the movement that succeeded in overthrowing the Batista dictatorship was closely related to the character of Cuban society in the years after the Revolution of 1933, which was a watershed in Cuban history. Perhaps the most distinctive traits of this revolution were an active working class and mass participation; both were absent in 1959. Initially, political victories were achieved in the thirties against a weak oligarchy that collapsed in the face of a popular upsurge and the absence of American protection. Yet, this revolution was eventually frustrated, and it failed to resolve permanently any of Cuba's major social problems. It could be said that a half-baked oligarchy had provoked a half-baked social revolution. It was no accident that the 1933 Revolution produced no permanent resolution of any major social question but led first to open counter-revolution and then to a variety of state-capitalist compromises that established the basis for the unstable social and political *modus vivendi* of the next two decades of Cuban history. No class emerged completely hegemonic after this revolution, and, although capitalism and imperialism strongly consolidated themselves in Cuba, a capitalist ruling class of equal strength did not consolidate itself.

This apparent paradox is clarified when we appreciate the importance acquired by the state apparatus in the years after the 1933 upheaval. There was no strong and hegemonic capitalist class capable of dealing with the various crises of the country; rather, a group of powerful but politically inadequate capitalists and their middle-class allies accepted or supported a variety of Bonapartist and liberal political agents which then "faced" these crises on their behalf. It would be hopeless to try to explain all the striking and bizarre twists and turns of Cuban politics in this period only in terms of fundamental class analyses, for the state apparatus and the political system had become somewhat autonomous and separated from the most fundamental social classes. In this period, the Cuban political system deflected as well as reflected the fundamental problems of Cuban society.

This is why the 1933–59 period is primarily characterized by one or another form of Bonapartist rule. The relatively brief attempt

at constitutional politics was bound to fail, given the social structural conditions described above. The weaknesses of all social classes had set the framework within which all political parties, reformist as well as traditional, were totally discredited and collapsed not long after Batista's 1952 coup. There were no important and lasting moves toward the creation of an independent non-Communist revolutionary party; the weakness of the working class movement and Castro's opposition would have been decisive obstacles to any such attempts.

As I have pointed out, the opposition to Batista was not led either by any of the older parties or politicians or by working-class, peasant, or middle-class leaders and movements. Instead, an essentially declassé nontraditional leadership organized a heterogeneous coalition which included conservatives, reformists, and revolutionaries. After Batista's overthrow, Castro easily dissolved this coalition, with the eventual aim of creating a fundamentally different power base and social system.

From 1959 to 1960, under Fidel Castro's leadership, the Cuban Revolution turned sharply against capitalism, both native and foreign, and laid the basis for the establishment of a Communist system. These drastic changes were partly a reaction to the resistance offered to earlier revolutionary measures, and partly an act of choice. Native and foreign resistance created problems that had to be solved. Castro and his close associates chose one specific set or system of solutions. This choice was made possible because, while United States opposition to Castro was formidable, internal opposition was weak.

Domestically, Castro's freedom of action was considerable, for there was no important Cuban political alternative to Castro in 1959-60. Such groups as the Auténticos, the Ortodoxos, and the liberal elements of the anti-Batista underground had by this time been completely discredited and/or had organizationally disintegrated.

Bonapartism and populism were the predominant themes in Cuban politics during 1933-59: and both of these were in turn a reflection of weak social classes and weak political organization. In

the last analysis this is why the road to the establishment of Communism in Cuba was not through a revolution initially carried out with the active involvement of a workers' or peasants' movement. Cuban Communism was brought about by a unique movement fundamentally different from those that preceded the establishment of Communism in other countries.

Since then, Castro's revolutionary Bonapartism has gradually evolved into a less transitional and more institutionalized Cuban version of the bureaucratic collectivist class societies that currently exist in Eastern Europe and Asia. Whether the newly developing Cuban ruling class would and/or could completely dispense with Castro's revolutionary Bonapartism remains to be seen. This, like other questions concerning present-day Cuban society, is beyond the scope of this book.