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INTERPRETATIONS OF

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

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By

JANET ELAINE ROGERS, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Janet Elaine Rogers, B.A. (Queen's University)

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## Abstract

"Interpretations of the Cuban Revolution" is an attempt at comparing several major analyses of the causes and process of the Cuban revolution of 1959. Four authors were chosen to be considered: James O'Connor (The Origins of Socialism in Cuba); Boris Goldenberg (The Cuban Revolution and Latin America); Theodore Draper (Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities and Castroism: Theory and Practice); Samuel Farber ("Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba 1933-1959"). There is a summary and brief critique on each of these authors followed by a comparison of their views on the major issues surrounding the revolution. The concluding chapter is a personal synthesis and interpretation based on the material covered plus several other major works on Cuba.

The conclusion reached about Cuba prior to the revolution is that it was a fragmented society with weak social classes and organizations, and a political system that might be characterized as Bonapartist. The economy, social structure, and culture of the country had been greatly influenced in this direction by the American presence there. Fidel Castro was able to lead a revolution with a small group of declassed, activist revolutionaries, by conducting a successful campaign to gain the political support of the

Cuban population. The group came from outside the conventional political structure but was part of the Cuban nationalist-populist revolutionary tradition. Castro was able to convince a majority of Cubans that he was a trustworthy leader who would fulfill his promises, thus forcing the dictator, Batista, to concede defeat. After the revolutionary regime was in power, Castro had great freedom to act because of his great popularity. He chose to take a radical socialist position because of a series of factors, including the desire to assert Cuban sovereignty by confronting the United States, the activist political background, and the momentum created by early measures of the revolutionary regime.

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## 1. Introduction

The Cuban revolution of 1959 has been much examined and studied as a dramatically successful takeover of power by guerrilla revolutionaries, and later as the creation of the first overtly socialist state in the Western Hemisphere. Would this be a unique, isolated event or was it a sign for the future in Latin America and other developing nations? There are also comparisons to be made between the Cuban revolution and other revolutions of the twentieth century. Many books and articles have been written on the subject of the Cuban revolution; the intention here is to consider several of the most significant of these interpretations of the revolution, comparing and contrasting their analyses. In the process of examining the points of consensus and conflict, it is hoped that it will be possible to gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics of the Cuban revolution and of the social phenomenon "revolution" in general. To discuss the issues which will come up it is necessary to take account of Cuban history. A brief outline of that history from Independence to the present follows.



Cuba was originally discovered by Christopher Columbus in the late fifteenth century. Soon after that it became a Spanish colony used largely as a rest stop for Spanish ships travelling between Spain and the other Spanish colonies. In the nineteenth century, the cultivation of the sugar began, along with some other agricultural activities, especially tobacco and cattle. Under the Spaniards there was a clearly defined social structure, with an oligarchy of land-owners at the top. As sugar plantations grew, there was a need for more labour and a substantial number of black slaves were brought to Cuba to work on the plantations. There was less segregation of blacks and whites in Cuba than in most other areas in the Americas, and, though there was a definable Afro-Cuban culture, blacks were relatively integrated into lower class society (1). Blacks certainly played a significant role in the wars of independence, gaining a further sense of being Cubans.

The first revolt against Spanish rule lasted from 1868 to 1878, sparked by the desire for self-government combined with hopes for an end to slavery. By 1878, the Spanish were willing to free the slaves, but they would not relinquish control of the Cuban government. After seventeen years, the Cuban nationalists revolted again in 1895 in an all-out effort to create an independent Cuban republic. Jose Marti, a Cuban nationalist intellectual who had been living in the U.S. in

exile, was killed leading a group of guerrillas against the Spanish. He was to become a national hero whose ideas formed a basis for Cuban nationalism in the years to come.(2)

By 1898, after a bloody struggle against the Spanish soldiers, the Cuban rebels had come close to victory. It was at this point that the American government decided to intervene actively by sending troops to Cuba to defeat the Spanish (3). To this point, Americans had been providing arms and a covert base for operations for the Cuban rebels but they had refrained from active participation. When the war was over, the Americans virtually replaced the Spanish as the villains for Cuban nationalists, though they agreed to the founding of the Cuban republic, and eventually withdrew their troops. The Platt Amendment (1902), which allowed for further American intervention in Cuban affairs, was made part of the new constitution. Its presence reinforced the anti-American feelings of the nationalists (4), especially when it was used to bring U.S. troops back to Cuba several times between 1902 and 1920. The sense of subjection which resulted has been significant in Cuban politics ever since; as Ruiz points out:

"The Cubans saw themselves as a captive people...and the Platt Amendment as a limitation on their liberty. That, and not the actual loss of political rights was the crux of the problem." (5)

Even after the Platt Amendment was cancelled in 1934, the possibility of American interference was always a consideration.

From the time of independence to 1933, the Cuban government, nominally a democracy, was run by politicians from the Conservative or Liberal parties, which could scarcely be differentiated from each other in inefficiency and corruption. Each president depended on American support and advice to govern. By the mid-1920's, however, there were major changes in Cuban society, caused mostly by the tremendous growth of the sugar industry. Only vestiges of the land-owning oligarchy remained. The upper classes were men who had become rich coupled with foreign investments in the sugar industry. The rural labour force was becoming more proletarian than peasant, working for the big sugar companies. Some labour unions and a Communist party were formed. This produced a Cuban political configuration different from the one at the time of independence.

Machado, the president who came to power in 1926, did not know how to deal with the new political situation, especially in the severe economic depression of the 1930's.

His response to protest against his government was repression, giving the growing opposition further reasons to protest. By 1933, a loose alliance of labour leaders, students, intellectuals, and the junior military was able to force Machado out of office. The tactics of the middle class terrorist group, the ABC, were particularly effective in this step. However, the rebel group was not sufficiently united to form an effective government. Grau San Martin, a university professor

supported mainly by the students, attempted to govern for about a year, but his position was untenable without the other groups. Fulgencio Batista, who had led the military revolt in 1933, took control at this point, though he did not actually become president until 1940. The failure of this effort had a great impact on the groups involved (and eventually on the revolutionaries who opposed Batista in the 1950's). Some of the ABC, students, and intellectuals became involved with Grau's Autentico Party, which became the major legitimate opposition to Batista's regime. Others were co-opted by Batista, as was the Communist party by the end of the 1930's. Labour unions, realizing that they could gain more by political bargaining, were also tied in to the regime through the Department of Labour. By 1940, Batista felt safe in running for president and was elected, defeating Gran. A national assembly had also been elected and it formulated a new constitution for the republic filled with utopian goals for the country (6). The constitution never served to bring out significant social reform, but was always mentioned as the democratic ideal for Cuba.

In 1944, elections were held again and Gran won the presidency, with sweeping promises for social change. Batista simply left the country. The promises proved to be empty, however, as the Autenticos demonstrated that they had become as corrupt as the Bastistianos (7). Another Autentico, Prio Socarras, was elected in 1948, but his administration was no more effective. Dissatisfaction grew even within the Autenticos and a new party

(called the Ortodoxos), was formed, under the leadership of Eddie Chibas, a man with great popular appeal. The major concern of the Ortodoxos was corruption in the government. Chibas had a regular radio broadcast on which he would speak out against the government. In 1951, not long before the presidential elections, he shot himself in hopes of drawing further attention to his protests. Unfortunately, for the party, the main result of his death was confusion and disunity (8). By this time, Batista had returned and declared himself a candidate for the presidency in 1952. Knowing that he would not win the election, but sensing also that there would be little resistance to a military takeover, Batista led a coup in March, 1952, pre-empting the planned elections.

At the time of Batista's coup, the Cuban economy was still caught in its perennial problem of heavy dependence on the sugar industry. The depression of the 1930's brought cut-backs in exports and lower prices to the sugar market. This affected the whole economy and it did not recover to previous levels until the boom after World War II. There had been very little structural change during that period of time, nor had there been improvements in production technique. There was still a great deal of foreign capital invested in the country, so that many significant economic decisions were made outside Cuba, usually in the U.S. There was high unemployment most of the year and a substantial disparity between rural and urban living standards.

Cuban society in the 1950's had no clear class structure. There was not even much differentiation according to colour among Cubans, in contrast to other Latin American countries. The working class had continued to grow and the unions along with it, though they were only militant with regard to wage demands, not politics. There was also considerable growth in the civil service as the government became involved in more areas; government positions were always a convenient form of patronage, too. Cuba had, statistically, an expanding middle-class, people who were neither workers nor bourgeoisie - including professionals, small businessmen, and various white collar workers. The bourgeoisie continued to be linked with the American presence in Cuba both economically and culturally. The society was homogeneous in some ways, with its small land area, common language, and no major division among the people. Instead, there were many smaller groups divided by many smaller issues, in a constantly changing configuration.

In politics the main issue was always nationalism and the relations between Cuba and the U.S. It was an issue which naturally produced ambivalence, because of the strong feelings of resentment against American domination combined with a fear of the consequences of challenging American power. The Ortodoxos were the conventional group which most supported nationalist policies, but it is doubtful whether they would have ever carried them through once in power. There was a great

historical consciousness, too, of the efforts of the Cuban patriots of 1898 and the rebels of 1933. Because of the 1933 experience and the strong Communist party of the 1930's and 1940's, there was also some awareness of socialist ideas among Cubans (9). It was also a Cuban tradition, as in many other Latin American countries, to respect the strong leader; it was often more important to respect the man than his ideas. When Batista returned to power, all of these political streams were present, but relatively inactive. A catalyst was needed to bring them directly into play.

None of the established institutions of Cuba were able to play an independent role in the politics of the 1950's. Labour was politically quiescent because of deals with the government. The army was strictly under Batista's control, as riddled with corruption as the bureaucracy. The Church did not exercise much control over Cubans, in spite of the Spanish background of many of them. The Afro-Cuban community had many small sects which undermined the strength of the Roman Catholic Church. The university was the breeding ground for many activists, including Castro himself, but it was not formally involved in politics. The political parties were divided within themselves and largely discredited with the public. There was no basis for organizing resistance within this institutional framework (10).

The immediate sequence of events which led from Batista's 1952 coup to his downfall and the victory of Castro's revolutionaries by 1959 can be traced relatively easily. At the time of the coup, Fidel Castro had recently graduated from university. He was involved in the confused and often violent politics of opposition in Havana, as a member of the Ortodoxos. He was determined to try to oust Batista from power, and, on July 26th, 1953, he led an abortive attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, intending this to be the initial move in the struggle against Batista. Some of the attackers were killed; Castro and several others were captured and tried. After his conviction Castro was imprisoned on the Isle of Pines. During the time in prison Castro began to set up the July 26th Movement to further his aim of overthrowing Batista, through the revolutionaries still at large. In 1955, Batista declared a general amnesty for political prisoners and Castro was released. It was decided that the July 26th Movement would not be able to organize inside Cuba at the time. The group therefore moved to Mexico where a group of revolutionaries were trained. These men would be transported back to Cuba where they would establish a revolutionary base of operations in the Cuban countryside. Castro eventually left Mexico with a force of eighty-five at the end of November, 1956, landing in Cuba several days after an uprising that had been planned by the Movement still in



Cuba to coincide with the arrival of Castro.

Soon after the revolutionaries had landed in the Sierra Maestra in Oriente province they were betrayed and consequently ambushed by the army. Only a few men were able to escape the attack - the popular belief is that there were twelve - including Castro, his brother, Raul, and Ernesto (Che) Guevara. At first, then, the top priority was survival, finding enough to eat and staying away from the army. This experience became the basis for many of Guevara's ideas on guerrilla warfare. Gradually, they adjusted to the conditions, and began to take advantage of the difficult terrain to capture the equipment they needed to harass the army and police. Castro re-established contact with the urban opposition, so that the rebels attracted some recruits from the cities. By the end of 1957, the guerrillas could claim a certain area in the Sierra Maestra as their territory. In 1958, Batista's army made an all-out effort to destroy the guerrilla group but it was not successful and the rebel army continued to grow slowly, splitting into several separate columns. In May, Castro was reconfirmed as leader of the July 26th Movement, and, in essence, of the whole opposition effort. In the fall, the guerrillas were able to advance toward the more populated areas of the island without much resistance. Batista's regime began to look more and more shaky. He was advised to relinquish the presidency, and after much vacillating, he departed on

December 31, 1958. Castro's rebel army soon took control despite some conflict with the remnants of the old regime and with some other opposition groups (specifically the students). Guevara arrived in Havana on January 5, and Castro followed on January 8. Castro immediately appealed for the unity of all revolutionary groups, thus preventing the chaos which might have followed Batista's exit.

In the first months after the revolutionary success there was a feeling of great euphoria among the revolutionaries and most of the general public as well. But it soon became obvious that there were serious matters to deal with. It was many months before the revolutionary government was prepared to run the country, though they began to take action almost right away. Castro set the first agrarian reform law in motion in May, 1959. As time went on it became evident that the revolutionaries intended to carry through the ambitious programme of social reforms, though political reforms were not much considered.

During the first two years of the revolutionary government relations between Cuba and the United States became increasingly strained, especially over the issue of nationalization of American property in Cuba. By October, 1960, the Cuban government had taken over almost all American possessions and the United States had imposed a trade embargo on Cuba, refusing to buy any more Cuban sugar or to allow Cuba to import American products. Castro turned more

and more to socialist nations for support and assistance. Russia became even more friendly when diplomatic relations were cut with the United States and after the disastrous attempted invasion at Playa Giron by anti-Castroist supported by the U.S. In 1961, Castro moved rapidly in the direction of Marxism-Leninism as an ideological foundation for his regime. On December 2, 1961, Castro made this commitment openly, interpreting the revolution in terms of those ideas. At this time the Communist Part of Cuba appeared to be gaining a great deal of influence in the government.

Also, at this time, the Cuban economy began to be plagued by many problems. Shortages developed, especially in food, though most people in Cuba were now able to buy more than they had under Batista. There were not enough spare parts to keep machines and vehicles running. Sugar and other agricultural products were being neglected as the government made an effort to diversify the economy, hoping to reduce dependence on imports. But this approach created greater trade imbalances since new machinery and materials had to be imported for the new industries. As well, many skilled managers and technicians had left Cuba because they disliked the revolutionary regime, or because they feared Communism. There were gaps left by Americans who left when relations with the United States deteriorated. The revolutionaries were anxious to make as many changes as quickly

as possible, not foreseeing all the consequences of their actions.

After the establishment of strong ties with Russia and the acceptance of a socialist approach to all aspects of Cuban society, the directions of Castro's Cuba has remained relatively consistent. Cuba has never become an orthodox Communist state but has kept a certain independence in its interpretation of socialist thought. Castro himself has continued to be the supreme leader of the regime, despite the many problems which have occurred (11).

The four authors whose work is discussed here were chosen from among those who have written on the Cuban revolution with two main criteria in mind. First, they have all attempted to take a comprehensive overview of the revolution, its causes and consequences. The focus is on Cuba as a society and on the revolutionary process through which it has moved, rather than on the international repercussions of the revolution or on the development of Cuban communism. Second, these authors have presented significantly different viewpoints covering a relatively wide range of theoretical approaches. At the same time, they are well-researched accounts with coherent arguments to support their views. Draper's books fit into this definition least, perhaps, because they are collections of articles rather than a complete sequential account. However, Draper does have a comprehensive view and an overall theory of the revolution, a theory

which is considered to be a significant one by the other commentators on Cuba.

There are several other authors whose works could possibly have been included here. They were not included, either because their ideas were very similar to those expressed by one of the four authors chosen, or because the author concentrated largely on one or two facets of the revolution, or because their work was more political polemic than analysis. Some of these others have made major contributions to the literature on the Cuban revolution and their ideas will be of assistance in assessing the four analyses summarized here.

The most complete history of Cuba available to the present is Hugh Thomas' Cuba: the Pursuit of Freedom (12). It includes a detailed account of the events of the revolutionary period, carefully following the rise of Castro, the fall of Batista, the involvement of the U.S. government, and the development of the revolutionary regime. There is also a section, "Old Cuba at Sunset" (13), which provides a wealth of description and statistical material on Cuba as it was during the 1950's. Thomas' view of the revolution is close to that of Goldenberg, though Thomas does not adhere to Goldenberg's theory of the "revolution of the rootless". He feels that the Cuban people had completely lost faith in the established institutions and that Castro came to symbolize the end of those institutions and a release of

frustrated potential. Thomas would also agree in large part with O'Connor's assessment of the stagnation of the Cuban economy, but without the conclusion that revolution was the logical solution. He credits Castro with great ability, both in his political manoeuvring within the revolutionary movement and in his strategies to undermine the Batista regime (14). The weakness, and possibly the strength, of Thomas' book lies in the absorption in documenting every detail. He gives a picture of the complexity of the situation, but does not always succeed in providing the coherent overview which would knit the details together.

Cuba: The Making of a Revolution by Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, (15) though a rather brief study of the roots of the 1959 revolution, has some very good sections on specific topics. The chapters on nationalism and the analysis of the Cuban "middle sectors" (16), are both clear and instructive. He calls Cuba a "splintered society" (17), in spite of the strong nationalist sentiments of many Cubans, agreeing with the majority of other authors in this respect. A summary of the ideas in the book is presented in the final chapter. One fault of this work is Ruiz' emphasis on the part played by the Communists in Cuban social history up to the time of the revolution (18). The fact that the Communist Party had continued to exist as a unified political body through the years does not imply that they were a major political movement nor that they necessarily had the impact which Ruiz

suggests they had on the Cuban people. Other weaknesses are the brevity of the book and the fact that it does not deal with the development of the revolutionary regime once it took power.

In Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century Eric Wolf (19) has included a chapter on Cuba. He quickly summarizes the economic and social conditions, agreeing substantially with the idea that there was a deadlock in Cuban society which could only be broken by some group outside the deadlock. He quotes heavily from O'Connor in this regard. Wolf also discusses the "rural proletariat" of Cuba, since he is focussing on the peasant involvement in revolutions.

An excellent article on Cuban society and the revolution is Robin Blackburn's "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution" (20). Without going into detail, he effectively describes the state of the Cuban society, emphasizing "the debility of the bourgeoisie" and the weakness of social institutions. He says that to be successful the task of the revolutionaries was simply "to transform in the island as a whole resigned acceptance of the regime into positive hostility" (21). The only fault in this case is that this is really only the outline of a theory rather than a complete analysis.

There are some significant books on the Cuban revolution which treat only one aspect of the revolution. Guerrillas in Power by K.S. Karol (22) is an interesting study of the relationship between Castro and Communism at both the

national and international levels. Included is the best history of the Cuban Communist Party available. Along a somewhat related vein is Zeitlin's Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class (23), which makes a case for the existence of some revolutionary consciousness among the workers despite their lack of participation in the revolutionary process itself. Zeitlin's conclusions, based on interviews with a small number of workers, seem to be rather over-stated and have been seriously challenged by Farber (24). Nevertheless, the book is interesting reading, with a section on political generations in Cuba that breaks new ground. On Fidel Castro himself there are at least three useful books: Matthews' Castro: A Political Biography (25), Lockwood's Castro's Cuba: Cuba's Fidel, and Halperin's recent The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro. (27) A relevant article is Fagen's "Charismatic Authority and the Leadership of Fidel Castro". There are also some books concentrating on the economic development of the revolution such as Seers' collection Cuba, the economic and social revolution (28) and Boorstin's The Economic Transformation of Cuba (29). Among collections of a variety of articles on the revolution are: R.F. Smith's Background to Revolution (30), Horowitz' Cuban Communism (31), Mesa-Lago's Cuba: A Decade of Revolution (32), and Cuba in Revolution (33) edited by Valdes and Bonachea.

A number of books have been written on the Cuban



revolution to serve political purposes. Some of these include analysis but the obvious biases present make the conclusions suspect. Advocating the revolution are:

Huberman and Sweezy, Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution (34);

Sartre, Sartre on Cuba (35); Mills, Listen, Yankee (36).

The views of the opposition to the revolution can be found in Soares' Cuba: Castroism and Communism (37)

### Summary of issues

Although there is agreement on the basic outline of events in the Cuban revolution of 1959, there has been considerable debate over the nature of Cuban society before the revolution, the roots of the revolution, the reasons for Castro's sudden success, and the consequences the new regime has had for Cuba. A series of major issues can be seen in the literature of the revolution; the authors under discussion here take a position on most of these issues. The discussion can be divided generally into the three periods, pre-revolution, revolutionary process, and the revolutionary regime.

In looking at Cuba before Castro's advent, the major concern is determining what might have made it suitable for successful revolutionary activity. What were the conditions, economic, social and political, when Batista returned to power in 1952 and when Castro organized the July 26th Movement? The Cuban economy, after some upswing after the war, was much the same as it had been since the 1920's -

exporting a great deal of sugar and importing most other products. Much of the economy remained under American control or influence. How did the state of the economy affect politics? Could there have been other solutions to Cuba's economic problems? The social structure of Cuba is another significant area. What was the composition of the "classes"? What were their attitudes associated with each class and how did they behave? The relationships between them should also be examined. What configuration of social groups would allow Batista to take power in 1952 and then oust him so decisively in less than seven years? The Cuban middle class and its role is a key issue on which there are great differences. In the political field, the nature of Batista's regime and of its opposition are of interest. What was the position of the traditional political parties? What can be said of groups on the Left, students, unions, the Communists? The continuing theme of Cuban nationalism is also an important element in political life.

Once the background has been established with conditions in Cuba in the 1950's, attention turns to the development of the revolutionary movement. Who were the members of the movement, what were their origins, and how were they organized? How did Castro's July 26th Movement relate to other parts of the opposition to Batista? How did the movement quickly gather enough support that Batista could not hope to retain power in Cuba? Finally, there is the question

of ideology and its relationship to the revolutionary process which occurred. What were the ideas and beliefs of the revolutionaries and of the Cubans who supported them?

In assessing the period since the revolutionary takeover, one concern has been to determine what impact the revolution had on the economy, social relations, and politics. What led Castro to repudiate the United States completely, turning to the Soviet bloc for aid, and to adopt communism as an official ideology? Castro has been able to maintain his position of power through the succession of changes since 1959. How has this been possible? Which social groups have gained or lost since the revolution? The position of the "old" Communist party and its relationship with the revolutionary regime would be included here. Finally, there are the varying opinions on how successful the revolution has been, economically, politically, and socially.

The above summary covers the issues which will form the basis for comparison of the four interpretations of the Cuban revolution which follows.

## Notes to Chapter 1.

- (1) Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century; New York: Harper and Row, 1969, pp.252-4
- (2) Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, Cuba: The Making of a Revolution; New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1968, p.20
- (3) Wolf, op.cit., p.254
- (4) Ruiz, op.cit., pp.24-5 and 33
- (5) ibid., p.32
- (6) Boris Goldenberg, The Cuban Revolution and Latin America; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p.109
- (7) Ruiz, op.cit., p.109
- (8) Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom; New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p.737
- (9) Ruiz, op.cit., Chapter 7
- (10) Thomas, op.cit., "Old Cuba at Sunset"
- (11) For a detailed historical account see Thomas' lengthy history, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom. A chronology of events from the time of the wars of independence is included in Guerrillas in Power by K. S. Karol (Appendix A, p.553)
- (12) Thomas, op.cit.
- (13) ibid., pp.
- (14) ibid., p.1040
- (15) Ruiz, op.cit.
- (16) ibid., pp.143-6
- (17) ibid., Chapter 8
- (18) ibid., Chapter 7
- (19) Wolf, op.cit.
- (20) Robin Blackburn, "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution"; New Left Review, October, 1963

- (21) ibid., p.81
- (22) K. S. Karol, Guerrillas in Power; New York: Hill and Wang, 1970.
- (23) Maurice Zeitlin, Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class; New York: Harper & Row, 1970
- (24) Samuel Farber, "Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba, 1933-1959"; PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969.
- (25) Herbert Matthews, Castro: A Political Biography; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970
- (26) Lee Lockwood, Castro's Cuba: Cuba's Fidel; New York: MacMillan, 1969
- (27) Ernest Halperin, The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972
- (28) Dudley Seers (editor), Cuba, the economic and social revolution; Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1964
- (29) Edward Boorstin, The Economic Transformation of Cuba; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968
- (30) R. F. Smith, Background to Revolution: The Development of Modern Cuba; New York: Knopf, 1971
- (31) Irving L. Horowitz (editor), Cuban Communism; Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970
- (32) Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Cuba: A Decade of Revolution; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971
- (33) Nelson Valdes and Rolando E. Bonachea, Cuba in Revolution; Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1972
- (34) Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1960
- (35) Jean-Paul Sartre, Sartre on Cuba; New York: Ballantine Books, 1961
- (36) C. W. Mills, Listen, Yankee; the Revolution in Cuba; New York: Ballantine Books, 1960
- (37) Andres Suarez, Cuba: Castroism and Communism 1959-1966; Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967

## 2. The Inevitable Revolution

In The Origins of Socialism in Cuba, (a book researched and partly written in 1964 although not published until 1970), James O'Connor states his assessment of the Cuban revolution clearly and concisely several times. His introductory chapter is devoted almost completely to a careful explanation of the theses which he develops further through the book, showing how his viewpoint differs from other approaches to the revolution. And, despite the fact that the material for the book was collected in 1964, O'Connor believes that his view continues to be valid. The following gives one of his own statements of his ideas:

"The heart of the argument is that Cuban socialism was inevitable in the sense that it was necessary if the island was to be rescued from the permanent economic stagnation, social backwardness and degradation and political do-nothingism and corruption."

(1)

O'Connor therefore sees the whole period from 1952 to the present as a natural progression, growing from Cuba's particular conditions at that time. He basically divides that timespan into three sections, pre-revolution, political revolution, and social revolution.

The pre-revolutionary period he describes as characterized by economic stagnation caused by "cartelization and monopolization of Cuba's agricultural production", and reinforced by a corporatist government riddled with corruption.

He is convinced that conditions in Cuba in the 1950's could not be improved without revolutionary (or at least radical) change. Batista himself had pushed the Cuban economy as far as he could within the existing social limits and yet had accomplished no significant improvement. O'Connor states:

"Stagnation and underdevelopment were at root political, not economic, problems. They were the result of the interpenetration of political decisions made by organized economic classes and groups inside and outside Cuba, and by successive U.S. and Cuban governments." (2)

O'Connor takes the position that, in 1952, political, economic, and social conditions were all the results of the failure of Cuban capitalism to develop the resources of the island to their full potential.

Batista came to power for the second time in 1952 through a military coup which pre-empted the elections which were to have taken place that year. O'Connor portrays Batista as a power-broker who maintained his position by playing various groups off against each other, often using promises of personal gain as bait to entangle individuals or organizations in his regime. The Cuban state O'Connor describes as "bureaucratic, opportunistic, re-distributive, classless"(3); it had been more or less this way for twenty-five years, since soon after the 1933 revolution, which had failed to bring any concrete change for the better in Cuba. Since this system was based on involving members of almost every

class or group with the established regime, it was very difficult to organize any large-scale, unified opposition.

When Batista returned, then, in 1952, there was little overt protest except on the part of the members of political parties, many of whom were mainly interested in gaining power for their own ends. The majority of Cubans had come to have no faith in the government as a means of representing their interests anyway, as they were aware of the mismanagement and corruption which was occurring. Batista became a less and less popular leader, but in 1952 it seemed that there was no leader more appealing who could run the country. Thus it was, once Castro and the revolutionaries demonstrated that they were capable of ousting Batista most Cubans were relieved to be rid of him. O'Connor also mentions that Batista did not increase his popularity by meeting the revolutionary activities with terrorist tactics, "at times ignoring the moderates, at times not distinguishing them from the activists"(4) This kind of action undermined the precarious coalition on which Batista depended by further alienating moderates and liberals, thus actually reinforcing Castro.

In the 1950's Cuban nationalism was still alive among Cubans, but Batista's policies made nor more concrete progress toward Cuban independence than had most earlier efforts, in the 1930's and 1940's. "Cuban nationalism was frustrated, turned back, distorted, betrayed. Cuban industrialization, which aimed to reduce the island's dependence on sugar, was a



failure." (5) Nationalism remained in the rhetoric of politicians but Cubans no longer believed that the government could do anything about it, especially if American interests were threatened.

O'Connor relates many of Cuba's problems to its political and economic dependence on the United States, and to the domination of the sugar industry which came with this dependence, encouraged by American investors and the American government. The national bourgeoisie did little to resist the entrance of the foreign investors, and, in fact, many Cuban investors collaborated with Americans in developing Cuban resources, especially sugar (6). This meant that there was not clear-cut competition with United States capital, since the Cubans were often hoping to gain as much as they could from association with American money. Over the sixty years from their interference in the Cuban War of Independence of 1898 to 1958 Americans had gained considerable control over Cuba and its economy. O'Connor shows how Cuba was dependent on both investment and imports from the United States, with the American sugar quota as a constant means of U.S. control in the relationship. O'Connor again emphasizes the connections between this economic situation and Cuba's political problems. (7) There were narrow limits placed on Cuba's development as a consequence; by the mid-1950's these limits had created great contradictions between what was needed for continuing American profits and the

needs of the Cuban people, needs which could not be met within the existing system.(8)

The sugar industry was the key to Cuba's capitalist economy. It was developed and supported by American rights through till 1959, despite efforts toward "Cubanization" of the industry (9), encouraged by the growth of nationalism. Hoping to protect themselves from the instabilities of the sugar market, sugar growers and sugar mill owners had formed organizations which, along with the government's Sugar Stabilization Institute, created what O'Connor calls "an official cartel" (10). These groups allotted quotas to growers and mill owners for each harvest, penalizing those who did not meet them. The consequences of this monopolistic approach to sugar production led to a multitude of irrationalities in the economy, which in turn led to waste of the economic potential of the country.

Thus, although nationalism was a popular sentiment, it had never been supported strongly by anyone who could challenge the economic power of the United States. Without a healthy, independent national bourgeoisie a nationalist stance was almost impossible for Cuba: "The nationalist option was simply not open, because there was no powerful national middle class to employ state power for its own ends." (11) It was left to Castro, says O'Connor, to activate the latent nationalism both in his campaign against Batista and later in his confrontation with the United States.

Cuba was therefore in a position where benefits of Cuban production were going either into American hands or to those who were lucky enough to work for Americans or for the government. The variations of the sugar market affected almost everyone in Cuba, and Cubans had no means of controlling those variations: "The seasonal and cyclical ups and downs of the local economy and the main thrust of economic growth were determined by the world sugar market and U.S. sugar policy, factors not of Cuba's making." (12) From this grew the social conditions and class structure which O'Connor describes as part of prerevolutionary Cuba.

O'Connor's view of the "urban middle class" (13) has been mentioned above in relation to nationalism. He says that they lacked "a progressive, optimistic, creative ideology of their own making and, in fact, assumed a dependent status" (14). This group was not only economically dominated by the United States, but also accepted some of the social and cultural standards of their northern neighbours. Their major concern was maintaining the status quo, and thus their source of income, in many cases. But this urban middle class was weak and demoralized, so that it could not control the government effectively, or hope to deal with other more energetic groups, such as organized labour. O'Connor thus dismisses Cuba's national bourgeoisie as incapable of living up to the challenge of leading their nation.

Nor was there any significant rural middle class or aristocracy to protect the interests of Cuban agriculture or of the rural areas. The transformation of sugar production into a large-scale capitalist enterprise led to the elimination of the majority of middle-sized property owners in the countryside (15). By the 1950's most sugar cane fields belonged either to sugar companies (though often worked by tenants) or to farmers with relatively small holdings. This situation more or less assured the sugar companies that they could maintain their cartel. The "colonos" supported the system through their own organization.

The only middle class group which remained relatively independent of American influence, according to O'Connor, was the "non-business" middle class - professionals and students, mainly. Although some of their number were involved with Batista's regime, or to the various parties, these people were a consistent source of opposition and of desire for social change. O'Connor says that this was because:

"They were outside the consensus politics and the system of patronage. They perceived more clearly than other groups the structural malformations of the Cuban economy and society." (16)

Historically, students and professionals had been leaders in uprisings in Cuba - notably in 1898 for independence and in 1933 against Machado. But despite these efforts the country was still under United States domination and governed by corrupt politicians. They had not broken the hold of the

sugar industry or of the United States to create an independent nation.

Workers were also entrapped by the political and economic situation in Cuba. They were divided among themselves, with the threat of unemployment constantly hanging over them. Because of the irrationalities of the economy, stemming largely from sugar, the labour market and wage structure were irrational as well. There was no logical relationship between wages and productivity at all. Looking at the divisions within labour, O'Connor identifies three main groups within the industrial work force: the sugar mill workers, workers in "small-scale, high-cost manufacturing industries"(17), and privileged workers, found mostly in modern foreign firms. Those with jobs in the privileged sector and in the sugar mills were very anxious to protect them and the privileges that went with them; they had formed strong, exclusive unions (18). Over time these unions had built up a series of labour laws, which, combined with alliances with the Batista government, had assured their members of complete job security and a reasonably comfortable income. The laws applied to all workers, but were actually only applied where there was a strong union. Such unions were also able to prevent management from improving technology or production methods, since that might eliminate some jobs. This situation in labour contributed to the overall economic stagnation in Cuba (19). Outside of the powerful industrial unions,

especially in the rural areas; the workers simply existed as best they could. During the sugar harvest there would usually be work for everyone, but for the rest of the year many labourers could find no work of any kind. There were some efforts made to change this seasonal variation, but none were successful, and although wages might be adequate, annual incomes were often extremely low for agricultural workers.

When labour unions were first organized in Cuba on a large scale, early in this century, they were militant groups. They were part of the leftist alliance which took over briefly from Machado in 1933. The Communist Party, founded in the 1920's, was also influential in the 1930's as Cuba suffered the effects of the depression.(20) But, O'Connor says, the militancy of both Communists and labour generally faded after Batista took power in 1934. They were drawn into co-operation with the government, hoping that they might influence policies. By the 1950's: "The unions were pliable instruments of state policy as long as the government continued to deliver the goods."(21)

Because of the uneven development and stagnation of Cuba's economy, a large number of Cubans lived at subsistence levels, particularly in the countryside. Much of the national income went either out of the country or to the urban middle classes. The rural population, made up of agricultural workers, tenants, and small farmers, took the

brunt of the seasonal fluctuations of the economy. In the rural areas poor housing, poor nutrition, and inadequate educational and medical facilities were common (22). Batista tried to remedy this situation with various measures, such as diversification of crops to provide work outside sugar, but his efforts were almost useless. O'Connor emphasizes this inability to accomplish any significant changes:

"....despite all of the 'economic' solutions to the rural problem, despite the rhetoric of generations of ambitious Cuban politicians, public policy altogether failed to come to grips with the question of land reform, rural monopoly in its varied forms, political relations with the United States, and, indeed, the entire political structure of the island." (23)

This picture of Cuba in the 1950's supports O'Connor's first main thesis: that Cuba had a monopolistic capitalist economy which had developed largely from American interference and influence, and which made the whole society incapable of further development. But, political conditions were such that neither a peasant, nor working-class, nor a middle class democratic revolution could grow out of them (24). O'Connor then proceeds to show why the July 26th Movement and Fidel Castro were able to take advantage of these conditions to gain power and to effect widespread social change.

The Cuban revolution, as O'Connor sees it, was a two-part phenomenon, the first part a political revolution, the second, a social revolution. (25) Each was initiated and

and carried through by the small group of revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, but had sufficient support from the rest of the Cuban population to be successful. Castro is an astute politician as well as an effective guerrilla leader, so that he was able to make use of the situation which existed in 1959 to consolidate his political position, as he prepared to transform Cuba with his social revolution.

The political revolution was made in the name of the July 26th Movement, whose membership, by 1959, included almost everyone who actively opposed Batista. O'Connor says the political struggle was in terms of:

"....outgroups against ingroups, unorganized against organized, men who either did not want or could not acquire access to the public treasury against those who did, constitutionalists against anti-constitutionalists, youth against age, and, last but not least, idealists against pragmatists and opportunists." (26)

This diversity had grown out of the nature of Cuba's class structure and the nature of Batista's regime, which also took adherents from almost every class. As O'Connor shows, the working class was severely split, by unions and by the situation of the rural workers. There was neither a strong agricultural middle class, nor a united peasantry. No group had revolutionary potential on its own (27). It was left to that group of "revolutionary-minded intellectuals, students, and professionals" (28) to create a movement out of the discontented, wherever they were, socially or geographically.



They adapted their approach to the specific conditions where they were:

"In Havana the rebellion resembled a middle-class democratic revolution with the aim of restoring constitutional government. In Santiago de Cuba, the revolution seemed to be a working-class rising against a brutal state power and state administration. In the Sierra Maestra the rebellion appeared to be a peasant war against a combination of greedy landlords and corrupt state officials." (29)

O'Connor identifies Castro's Rebel Army as the "leading and decisive element in the struggle" (30), the men who really made the revolution possible by consistently eluding the efforts of Batista's Army to wipe them out, thus giving hope to the other opposition groups. The guerrillas projected an image which was appealing to Cubans who were tired of corruption and political manoeuvring. O'Connor says that Castro himself possesses "all the qualities and accomplishments required to endear him to the Cuban people as an authentic hero in the Cuban revolutionary tradition" (31). But, above all, Castro was able to take the initiative with full confidence that he was right and to keep the support of the majority of Cubans. (32) This ability gave him the power and momentum to carry through the social revolution, which began soon after Batista's fall.

At first, most Cubans, from all classes, applauded the revolution, partly because the Batista government had become extremely oppressive, and partly because the revolutionary programme was vague, filled with promises to please everyone. O'Connor feels that this was a reaction to Batista's

political strategy (33). However, it became clear, fairly quickly, that Castro did not intend to continue to be vague. The Agrarian Reform Law was the first major step, and it set off a chain reaction of change. O'Connor summarizes it thus:

"In brief, the original agrarian and urban reforms triggered a complex interplay between middle-class opinions and actions, U.S. attitudes and policies, and Cuban government policy toward private business, the middle classes, and the U.S." (34)

The result of the interplay was a radicalization of the revolution as Castro continued to act despite the resistance that was gathering. Thus, the social revolution was the period of class conflict in the revolution. Castro took action to correct what he saw as wrong with the country, often acting on behalf of groups who would not have done anything on their own initiative. O'Connor believes that the processes of radicalization and polarization were inevitable, "the logical consequences of a sincere, intelligent, and uncompromising attempt to bring to fruition the revolution's original, general aims." (35) He explicitly rejects theories which suggest that Castro had consciously deceived his followers with talk of democracy and the restoration of the 1940 Constitution. (36)

In O'Connor's view, Castro, Guevara, and the others who had fought as guerrillas in the mountains had experiences during the fighting, and after their victory, which had changed them, shaping them into practical, determined men. They therefore met the problems of Cuba convinced that they

could solve them through straightforward, practical action. "Their ideas, including their conception of their own role in the revolution, were shaped by their practical experience in the reconstruction of Cuban society." (37) And the programme of the July 26th Movement left so much leeway that it was possible initially to choose almost any course of action. It was only a few months before the opposition began to grow to the course chosen, but by that time the revolutionaries were deeply immersed in implementing the measures they had seen as necessary and in discovering how basic the changes would have to be.

There were several reasons why Castro was able to take this strong stand immediately on his economic and political decisions. Though it would have been feasible for the revolutionaries to avoid confrontation with the opposition for several years, they chose instead to "polarize opinion" (38). Castro was sure that he had a majority of Cubans on his side. O'Connor gives reasons for this support: the general feeling that "something had to be done"; the acceptance of interference by government, reinforced especially under Batista; the designing of policies to create minimum protest from penalized groups; and the nationalistic bias of the revolutionary government, which appealed to most Cubans (39). The nationalism made some people stay with the revolution who might otherwise have defected, not realizing the extent of the changes that were to come.

O'Connor devotes a great deal of space to a probe into agriculture and industry as they were affected by the revolution (40). The point that he emphasizes is that the revolutionary government really had to go to socialism to make the Cuban economy work. In industry this became clear much earlier than in agriculture, largely because of the hostile attitude of foreign companies toward the revolution. The conflict of 1960 with the oil companies led to the nationalization of all American property in Cuba in October of that year, soon after the imposition of a trade embargo by the United States. O'Connor says:

"The October decrees were the great turning points of the Cuban Revolution; they compelled the government to embark on the path of full-scale socialist economic planning.. From the standpoint of organizing and rationalizing the economic system, the revolution had to begin all over again." (41)

This series of events illustrates O'Connor's points about the weakness of the Cuban bourgeoisie and its dependence on the United States, as well as the inevitability of socialism for Cuba if its economic stagnation were to be ended. In agriculture, it was not until October, 1963 that "socialism replaced capitalism in rural Cuba"(42); it was more difficult to deal with the colonos and peasants than with the bourgeoisie, many of whom simply left Cuba, or with the workers, who were already under union control. The revolutionaries did not wish to alienate farmers, whom they envisaged as instrumental in the development of revolutionary Cuba, but their attitudes were ambiguous toward the "middle farmers" who tended to be

unfriendly to the revolution. Finally, agricultural problems, especially food shortages, became so severe that the government enacted the Second Agrarian Reform Law, giving the government control over "well over 70 per cent of Cuba's total farmland." (43)

In his chapters (44) on agricultural and industrial planning, O'Connor points out that there were many errors made by the revolutionaries during their first five years in power in Cuba. He feels that this was a natural result of a lack of experience combined with the terrible condition the country was in when Batista left it. As well, there were serious gaps opened by the American embargo, which made the economic situation even worse. But before any significant progress could be made, O'Connor suggested that:

"....any substantial improvement in economic planning would hinge on a redefinition of the island's administrative-political structure and the introduction of some form of workers; self-management. These steps would clarify the questions of political representation and power and economic decision-making." (45)

In his concluding chapter, O'Connor examines "the politics of Cuban socialism, the specific process by which a revolutionary guerrilla army and a broad-based, non-ideological movement were transformed into a Marxist-Leninist party" (46). The central theme is the same one O'Connor has stated before: that the revolutionaries were pragmatic men willing to deal with opposition as a necessary part of the

process of radical change which they must carry out for the good of Cuba. In the class conflict which developed during the social revolution, O'Connor identifies the issue of private property as the one which finally separated the supporters of the revolution from the reformers and the opposition. This conflict quickly destroyed the July 26th Movement, which had been a tenuous alliance at best. O'Connor believes that Castro was completely in control of the political evolution of the revolution during this period, using both middle-class reformers and Communists as he needed them. The revolutionaries were able to gain control of the army (built on the Rebel Army), the unions, economic institutions, and other important organizations by the end of 1959, placing them within Castro's influence (47). By the time of the speech in which Castro declared himself a Marxist, he was also able to manage the Cuban Communist Party and had developed "support from the lower socioeconomic classes" (48). At the same time, He had kept the support of moderates for long enough to prevent significant counter-revolutionary opposition from coalescing. O'Connor says: "Castro was the only sure source of power and authority" (49). Neither reformers nor Communists could hope to dislodge him.

As for ideology among the revolutionaries, O'Connor feels that "the revolutionaries finally put practice first and ideology second" (50). Initially this attitude led to many of the mistakes mentioned above, since the practical

approach sometimes lacked calculation of long term consequences for Cuba:

"Accumulating practical experience, maintaining a firmness of objective, and retaining close relationship with the people, the revolutionaries at first trained themselves to deal with effects-economic stagnation and underdevelopment, social backwardness, political ineptitude and corruption - not with causes. But remedying effects soon led them into causes: the land problem, low industrial productivity, and dependency on the United States, all were rooted in Cuban capitalist society. Thus, from concrete experiences, certain generalizations were made, and these in turn became the outline of a new ideology - Cuban socialism."(51)

This passage reflects O'Connor's whole view of the Cuban revolution, showing his faith in the sincerity and competence of the revolutionaries and his optimism about what the revolution will accomplish for Cuba. The shortcomings of the revolution and its leaders fit into his view as part of the natural process of change, necessary to break through the limits of old Cuba. To O'Connor the development of Castro's socialist regime "was both possible and suitable" and therefore it had "an air of inevitability"(52).

Critique

O'Connor has, in his analysis of the Cuban economy prior to 1959, created the impression that there was no solution to Cuba's economic difficulties other than a socialist revolution such as the one that Castro carried out. The political system did fail to allow for adequate economic development. But the weakness of that system does not necessarily point to the need for a socialist political and economic system as the only alternative. Some of the worst economic abuses could have been eliminated by an honest government with a consistent, progressive approach to social welfare, and a willingness to challenge the established economic interests in the country. Castro could have chosen this route to deal with the stagnation of the economy, but it would have implied a much slower, less radical transformation of society. O'Connor, in his concern over the inefficient, irrational Cuban economy, also neglects to mention that Cuba was actually relatively well-off in comparison with other South American and 'underdeveloped' countries (53), and was suffering more from great waste and inequities in the distribution of income and from the inability to implement progressive policies than from a lack of economic possibilities. Thus, in spite of the amount he has written about the Cuban economy both before and after the revolution, O'Connor has not



demonstrated that economic relationships were such that socialist methods such as total nationalization were the best choice.

O'Connor does not discuss at any length the actual revolutionary process by which the July 27th Movement gained power. The social revolution which followed Castro's victory has more significance for O'Connor than the means by which political power was attained. The fact that the victors were the guerrillas of the Rebel Army was important because they were pragmatic and "devoted to improving the economic and social condition of Cuba"(54). Their experiences, first as guerrillas and then as leaders of the revolutionary regime, made them able to see that socialism was the most effective means to achieve that improvement. Here again O'Connor's proposition that the revolutionaries were the group most capable of solving Cuba's problems is a doubtful one. The many errors of the first few years of the regime and the overall lack of economic improvement would both seem to indicate the contrary. O'Connor has not shown how Castro's determination to stay in power led him to rely heavily on his guerrilla comrades who were more loyal to him personally than to any fixed concept of what Cuba should be. Castro made all the significant decisions himself. O'Connor should have taken the negative aspects of this closed leadership into account. Also, the impact of this system, concentrating tremendous authority in one man, on the behaviour and political consciousness of

Cubans should be discussed more fully.

Similarly, O'Connor's assertion of the inevitability of Cuban socialism must be questioned. It is obvious that, as O'Connor says, socialism was possible in Cuba. But the statement that "given the goals of the revolution's leaders, the choices open to them at crucial moments were few"(55), makes Castro seem more clear on ideology and more consistent than he actually was. What has occurred in Cuba cannot be this simply explained without further supporting evidence.

## Notes to Chapter 2.

1. James O'Connor, The Origins of Socialism in Cuba;  
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970, p.6
2. *ibid.*, p.19
3. *ibid.*, p.31
4. *ibid.*, p.39
5. *ibid.*, p.31
6. *ibid.*, p.23
7. *ibid.*, p.25
8. *ibid.*, p.30
9. *ibid.*, p.27
10. *ibid.*, p.59
11. *ibid.*, p.33
12. *ibid.*, p.16
13. O'Connor appears to use this term synonymously  
with national bourgeoisie.
14. *ibid.*, p.24
15. *ibid.*, p.22
16. *ibid.*, p.44
17. *ibid.*, p.183
18. *ibid.*, p.184
19. *ibid.*, p.189
20. *ibid.*, p.179
21. *ibid.*, p.181
22. *ibid.*, p.58

23. *ibid.*, p.89
24. *ibid.*, p.42
25. *ibid.*, p.8
26. *ibid.*, pp.41-2
27. *ibid.*, p.42
28. *ibid.*, p.44
29. *ibid.*, p.42
30. *ibid.*, p.43
31. *ibid.*, p.37
32. *ibid.*, pp.37-41
33. *ibid.*, p.44
34. *ibid.*, p.47
35. *ibid.*, p.9
36. *ibid.*, p.4
37. *ibid.*, p.10
38. *ibid.*, p.49
39. *ibid.*, pp.50-2
40. *ibid.*, Chapters 5 and 6
41. *ibid.*, p.166
42. *ibid.*, p.130
43. *ibid.*, p.130
44. *ibid.*, Chapters 9 and 10
45. *ibid.*, p.275
46. *ibid.*, p.279
47. *ibid.*, p.281

48. *ibid.*, p.301
49. *ibid.*, p.307
50. *ibid.*, p.310
51. *ibid.*, pp.312-3
52. *ibid.*, p.280
53. Boris Goldenberg, The Cuban Revolution and Latin America; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p.120
54. O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p.9
55. *ibid.*, p.280

### 3. The Revolution of the Rootless

Boris Goldenberg, in The Cuban Revolution and Latin America, views the Cuban revolution from a rather special background, as a European who was very much involved in Marxist and socialist groups in Germany, and who then went to Cuba in 1941, continuing to live there until 1960. He frequently employs Marxian terms in the course of his account and analysis, but clearly states that he is writing from a non-Marxist position (1). It is also important to note that Goldenberg is concerned with the implications of the Cuban revolution for all of Latin American as well as with gaining an understanding of the revolution itself. He wished to show how conditions in Cuba were similar to and different from those elsewhere in Latin America and how the events in Cuba have affected politics throughout the area, especially in the area of attitudes towards the United States and towards revolutionary movements.

Goldenberg sees Castro's revolution as belonging to "the class of socialist totalitarian revolutions" (2), in company with Russia, Yugoslavia, Albania, China, and North Vietnam. Despite certain significant differences which distinguished Cuba from these other nations, Goldenberg believes that once Castro committed himself to a socialist system for Cuba: "the revolution inevitably developed

further in a totalitarian direction... In Cuba as elsewhere the road to socialism thus proved irreconcilable with an open society and representative democracy." (3) He feels that there were certain social and political conditions encouraging Castro to make such a decision, but does not see the conversion to socialism as inevitable or necessary for the solution of Cuba's economic, social, or political problems. He finds the growth of "totalitarian socialism" unfortunate and distasteful, since he feels that:

"Cuba was one of the few Latin American countries where further progress could have been achieved by means of a free struggle within the framework of representative democracy." (4)

In this context, how does Goldenberg see pre-revolutionary Cuba and the revolutionary process?

Goldenberg is eager to show that the "official legend" (5) of the revolution and its roots is not founded on reality, that Cuba was not "an impoverished agrarian country with a stagnating monoculture exploited and oppressed by a small oligarchy and by American imperialists." (6) He recognizes the same economic deficiencies in Cuba as most other commentators do - poor utilization of resources leading to stagnation, high unemployment, unsatisfactory investment outside the sugar industry, and heavy dependence on imports and international trade conditions. But the key characteristic of Goldenberg's assessment of the Cuban economy is his refusal to make the United States a "scapegoat" (7). He

accepts the domination of sugar and its detrimental consequences as very bad for Cuba, but feels that this grew out of a combination of geographical and economic factors rather than any intentional American exploitation. Cuba is naturally in a geographical position encouraging the problems listed above. The most that he would say about the United States is that the Americans took full advantage. He says:

"The main cause (of backwardness) was that on the world market this small island was at the mercy of external forces. Its soil and climate made it particularly suitable for the production of sugar. The absence of many industrial raw materials and sources of energy - neither coal, oil nor exploitable water power - the original lack of capital and of entrepreneurs, and the restricted size of the domestic market hindered industrial development. Most important, however, Cuba lay close to a highly developed country with a demand for sugar, wanting to export its industrial products and with plenty of capital." (8)

He supports this appraisal of the reasons for the vicious circle of the Cuban economy with a series of responses to common accusations made by anti-imperialists against the United States (9). Americans invested in Cuba because the economic opportunity was a logical one of which to take advantage; he attaches no blame to those who invested.

Goldenberg suggests that, in fact, American investment brought many benefits to Cuba, transforming an agricultural, backward economy into a capitalist one with a relatively high standard of living (compared with Latin America, particularly). This economy was gradually being reclaimed by Cubans, especially



in the sugar industry (10). The quota system, seen by nationalists as a restrictive means of assuring American influence, Goldenberg considers to have been initially to the advantage of Cuba, since it guaranteed a relative high income from sugar exports. He is aware of the negative long-term effects of the quota: "A doubtful blessing became an undoubted curse: as a result of quota restrictions on sugar production land was condemned to lie fallow and workers to unemployment." (11) But he remains unwilling to place the blame for these problems anywhere but on the "free play of market forces" (12), forces too great to have been resisted by Cuba. Goldenberg emphasizes that Cubans did not suffer as much as the people in many underdeveloped countries (13), that the "lower classes shared, though to an insufficient extent, in the gradual improvement in living standards." (14), that the rural population cultivating land was protected by property laws guaranteeing the use of its land, and that urban workers received relatively good wages. He qualifies this by saying that: "In spite of all this the majority of the agricultural population lived in extremely poor conditions, a part of it close to starvation." (15) But Goldenberg feels that the exploitation of these people has been spotlighted by the Cuban revolutionaries to the exclusion of the rest of pre-revolutionary social and economic conditions. He wishes to show that there were other possibilities within the Cuban framework, and that the United

States should not take the blame for the unfortunate state of the Cuban economy.

In the political realm, Goldenberg suggests that the Cuban government could have acted to make "structural changes in the economy" (16) but was too weak to do so. The corruption and incompetence of most government officials meant that the government "spared little thought to the long-term interests of the community" (17). They were incapable of or not interested in resisting the pressures of the business community and the trade unions, both of whom tended to preserve the status quo to protect their own interests. A stronger, more democratic government might have stood up for the long-term development of Cuba against these established forces, in Goldenberg's view. But the Castroist regime, though strengthening the government, went too far and destroyed the democracy that it had promised to restore.

Goldenberg's conception of the class structure of Cuba before 1959 is sketched in only briefly, probably because he rejects any class-based explanation of the revolution. He describes the upper classes as "based on wealth rather than status, and although to a big extent based on land ownership, it was essentially a 'capitalist' class" (18). Presumably, most of these people were pro-American, though Goldenberg does mention some nationalist sentiment among the bourgeoisie. Below this top layer he identifies a middle income group, hesitating to label it middle class, as do

most others. This group included a very heterogeneous cross-section, all of those who were gaining somewhat from the economy, despite its debility. Labour groups, at least the powerful sectors of labour, were mostly interested in assuring their own security, with very little long-range vision:

"The workers' main interest was to keep their jobs and they were opposed to any 'rationalization' which in turn made capital investment difficult. While the workers with the help of various governments obtained the advantages of a welfare state which threatened all profits, the employers exerted successful pressure on the government to obtain tax reliefs, subsidies, and protection." (19)

There was little the most exploited groups could do against this, especially in view of the fragmentation and lack of leadership from those in the middle sectors who wished to challenge the status quo. There was such an intertwining and confusion of the interest of various groups that the economy and society ended up "dead on centre" (20).

Goldenberg concludes that the crucial characteristics of pre-revolutionary Cuban society were its "rootlessness" and "parasitism" (21). There were not strong, traditional communities or classes in Cuba. The former had been undermined either by the extended war of independence in the late nineteenth century or by the rapid industrialization which followed it. The latter had not developed as distinct, conscious groups because of the economic and political deadlock combined with the residue of cynicism and factionalism from

the failed revolution of 1933. The great speed of development of the sugar industry had undermined the artisan and peasant classes. As well, the chronic unemployment put many Cubans outside the productive economic structure, and encouraged them to find other means of subsistence:

"Cuban society was, furthermore, to a certain extent, parasitical: not only did a substantial percentage of the population do no work and have to be kept by those who did, but a remarkably large part of the national income came from activities which can hardly be regarded as 'productive' or 'socially necessary'." (22)

He lists a great number of work situations which fit into this category, from extra government officials, to the tourist business, to union practices which paid two men for the work of one. These characteristics - rootlessness and parasitism - are vital to Goldenberg's analysis of the revolution, explaining why a small movement with a vague programme and no class roots could make a successful revolution in Cuba.

Goldenberg rejects all of the theories of the Cuban revolution which are class-based. He believes that neither bourgeoisie nor peasants nor a proletariat created the revolution; nor did any of these groups dominate the revolution. Goldenberg applies this conviction to both the political takeover of 1959 and the move to "totalitarian socialism" which followed. Castro came to power and continued in power with the support of the rootless of Cuba - the young intellectual radicals leading the underemployed. Why were these

the key groups? Goldenberg says:

"Neither group is a class in the Marxist sense because their position is not determined by their place within the labour market. On the contrary, their social character is the result of the fact that they stand outside the process of production. This accounts for their ultra-radicalism: the rootless have nothing to lose but their rootlessness and they lack practical experiences." (23)

These were the people who were able to break the deadlock which had been created within the system. Eventually, their goading of the dictator into greater and greater terrorism led the rest of the population to reject Batista and to accept Castro as a representative of a new order (24).

Though he does not go into detail, Goldenberg does mention several other significant factors which assisted the revolution of the rootless. One of these was the lack of "organized forces inside the country which could act as a brake" (25). The old government and conventional parties were in complete disarray. Most other institutions welcomed the revolution at first, and had little power with which to resist Castro later on. The unusually large number of rootless people, as well as many others, were captivated by the personalities and idealism of the young guerrillas. Goldenberg states:

"Many aspects of the revolution can only be explained by the character of their leader. If ever there has been a charismatic leader-figure blindly worshipped by the masses it was that of this young lawyer." (26)

These factors meant that the revolution could go forward without civil war, but it also meant that the picture looked so rosy that the revolutionaries were not fully aware of the deep problems they faced or of the tremendous responsibility which fell upon their shoulders.

The intellectuals who were the leaders of the Cuban revolution had much in common with young educated men in other Latin American countries (27). There is a strong emphasis on education in these nations, but there are not always enough good positions for the students when they graduate: "The overproduction of intellectuals explains both their desire for government jobs and their rebellious attitude, which is the result of frustration." (28) Since these educated people feel oppressed they tend to become sympathetic toward those who are more obviously oppressed. In Cuba, intellectuals had a long association with such attitudes.

The rootlessness and parasitism which Goldenberg saw in Cuba also help to explain the deterioration of Batista's forces as they attempted to subdue Castro and his allies. Batista had based his power on the corruption and greed of many people, so that neither he nor they had any interests but their own in mind. When Batista was threatened by the rebels the parasites became fearful for themselves and began to desert the regime. The army was especially dependent on Batista, and thus could be easily demoralized by the dedicated and tenacious rebels, though they were very small in numbers:

"Altogether there were up to October 1958 fewer than a thousand fighters in all (rebel) organizations but the army was full of corruption and intrigues and incapable of destroying these groups. Terror ruled the country." (29)

Since Batista did not even pretend to observe democratic forms, and since the army and police were driven to great brutality to suppress opposition, many Cubans of all classes were willing to give Castro a chance. There were minimal class or community allegiances to prevent people from giving their support to the revolutionaries in the beginning.

Because of the freedom of action which Castro had as a result of the classless nature of his support and the great faith which people put in him as an individual, he was able to move quickly to effect the changes he had described only vaguely during his campaign against Batista. Goldenberg sees Castro as a clever, idealistic, power-hungry man who "wanted to monopolize the revolution" (30). He considers the process by which Castro gained command of most of the revolutionary movement to be significant in illustrating his resourcefulness and his ability to stay in control, with the confidence of his followers, despite crises and challenges to his authority. This demonstration of leadership ability may have indicated that a later reluctance to relinquish power should be expected. Goldenberg believes that once Batista was defeated Castro decided himself that Cuba should become a socialist country:

"On January 1, 1959, Castro saw the opportunity for a quick transformation of the 'democratic' into a 'socialist' revolution. This was bound to lead to a further development of Fidel's Leninism, and to a fusion of the small organization of the young revolutionaries with the old Communist guard." (31)

In this interpretation, then Castro was conscious of the freedom of action that he had, at the moment of victory, and convinced that socialism was the ideological guide which he would use. Goldenberg does say, however, that initially Castro's actions to effect socialism were "led more by intuition and pragmatism than by any fixed conception" (32). As time went on the revolution was carried along on a tide created by some of these early decisions, to the point that Goldenberg feels the movement was beyond Castro's control:

"The overthrow of the old realities created new ones which began to dominate him. The stone began to roll with increasing speed towards a socialist, totalitarian solution." (33)

If there had been more organized opposition to Castro either from other revolutionary groups or from the traditional groups in Cuba there would have been greater restraint on the decisions made, but the mass support of the rootless was not effectively countered by any established opposition.

The role of the Communists in Cuba receives some attention from Goldenberg, as it related to Castro's move into socialism. He dismisses the significance of the party (Partido Socialista Popular) in the pre-revolutionary period:



"In fact, although the Communists exerted some influence on the organized workers and were able to maintain their leadership of the trade unions as long as they enjoyed official favour, the party was never very strong anywhere." (34)

In relation to Castro's revolutionary movement, the Communists were caught in the middle, opposing both the Batista regime and the young "putschist" revolutionaries who were beyond Communist control. But, in 1958, the Communists came to realize that they would be well-advised to support Castro, though they participated in revolutionary actions only in a very minimal way even after this decision. During the first year of the revolution there was "still no close collaboration between Castro and the Communists" (35). Goldenberg feels that the 26th of July Movement, a disorganized coalition with no coherent ideological programme, better served Castro's purposes at first, encouraging unfocussed revolutionary enthusiasm and allowing Castro to consolidate his control. But by late 1960, Castro began to favour the Communists and to speak out more clearly on socialism and Marxism.

This was part of what Goldenberg calls "normalization" of the revolution, and it implied more discipline and careful planning after the first two years of relative openness in Cuba. During this two years the revolution had brought greater justice and equality into the society, benefitting especially those who had suffered most before 1959:

"Unlike other 'socialist' revolutions the Cuban revolution immediately and without

worrying about the cost or economic consequences of such a policy, provided material improvements for most of the members of the lower classes." (36)

This first stage Goldenberg labels "totalitarian democracy", with support for Castro from the "vast majority" (37). It was only at the end of this time that the results of some of the earlier decisions came clear, and totalitarian socialism seemed the only possible solution. Goldenberg emphasizes that this direction came from the revolutionaries, with little consultation with the people:

"The radicalization of the Cuban revolution and its movement towards communism were not due to any insistence on the part of the masses. They were the result of the decisions and activities of the leaders. The ideology of the leaders demanded changes in the economy and social life, and these changes in turn led to a clarification of their views and to an indoctrination of the masses who believed in these leaders." (38)

Through the two-year humanist (totalitarian democracy) stage Castro had gradually subdued most of those people or groups who posed a serious threat to him. He also eliminated democratic forms and institutions he had said he would restore. Goldenberg describes how political parties were suppressed, open elections never considered, freedom of the press limited, judicial independence withdrawn, and students' and labour organizations strictly controlled through government agencies (39). Meanwhile, the means of coercion were strengthened, partly out of fear of U.S. aggression, and extensive efforts

were made to re-educate people along socialist lines (40). In 1961, the end of democracy became more evident as steps were taken to form a single revolutionary party, merging the 26th of July Movement, the Student Directorate, and the Communist party. This was a means of giving the Communists greater power:

"...the first two groups never had a programme of collective discipline and real organization, whereas the Communist Party had thousands of members and disciplined cadres. No wonder that old communists tended to become the head and backbone of the revolution." (41)

Organization and planning certainly were of top priority for Cuba, as the economy was beginning to deteriorate, partly because of the shortsighted view of inexperienced revolutionaries and partly because of the effects of the American blockade of the island, cutting off that natural economic relationship. It was necessary for Castro to start to exercise the power and means of coercion he had built up to enforce the new plans.

Soon after Castro had committed himself publicly to "Marxism-Leninism" (42), he had to deal with the increasing strength and influence of the old Communists he had elevated to power. The result of this confrontation was the discrediting of the leader of the old Communists, Escalante, and the postponement of the consolidation of the revolutionary party (43). Castro had used the Communists as organizers, and to legitimize his brand of socialism to the Soviet bloc. But

when this need no longer existed, he was able to discard them and use them as scapegoats as he had done with others who were threats to his authority.

Goldenberg wished to show, then, how the political vacuum and the rootlessness of a large part of the Cuban population allowed Castro to pursue his goal of socialism and the revolutionary government had to use totalitarian measures to overcome the difficulties and resistance which arose. Evaluating this process, Goldenberg weighs such favourable conditions as the need for a planned economy, the intact productive structure, proletarianized workers, and assistance from other socialist nations (44) against the continuing pressures of the world market, which had made Cuba as it was and the attitudes of the Cuban people, who are inclined to be individualistic and materialistic (45). The radical intellectuals who took power were eager to accomplish everything they wanted at once, to change what Cuba had become over many years into an ideal socialist society:

"Every step towards the realization of this socialism imposed from above ran counter to the spontaneous tendencies of the country and the wishes of an ever-increasing proportion of the population. The changes desired by the revolutionary leaders might be sensible and progressive, but they conflicted with the desires and modes of behaviour of most Cubans." (46)

Goldenberg is willing to concede that this forced socialism has brought many improvements over the previous Cuban society, especially in equalizing the distribution of wealth and opportunities (47). What bothers him is the cost at which these

improvements were purchased - the loss of democratic participation which had a potential of being effective in 1959. Now that totalitarian socialism has become established in Cuba, Goldenberg is pessimistic that this potential for citizen involvement in government will be tapped.

### Critique

One weakness in Goldenberg's account of the revolution is his position on American involvement in Cuban affairs. In attempting to correct the revolutionaries' views of the United States as scapegoat (48), he has erred in the opposite direction. Whether or not the American investment was a logical result of market conditions, it has had far-reaching consequences for Cuba socially and politically as well as economically. Until 1934, when the Platt Amendment was rescinded, the intervention of the American government was blatant and frequent. Such actions as the withholding of recognition of the 1933 Grau government had great significance for the course of Cuban history. After that time the intervention was less evident but continuous. The fact that the interests of the United States were usually at odds with the requirements of bringing about a more fully developed, independent economy in Cuba meant that Cuban governments were under pressure not to take steps which would encourage such development. Cuba's economic problems would certainly not have been solved by the withdrawal of the American presence but the Cuban government

might then have been able to start creating autonomous economic policies.

Goldenberg's theory regarding Castro's revolutionary success in 1959 is not completely satisfactory because of its vagueness. The symptoms of rootlessness and parasitism were present in Cuban society, as Goldenberg says, but there is little support for his assertion that it was a "revolution of the rootless" (49). Even assuming that Goldenberg's statement that "the unemployed and underemployed were numerous in Cuba and, together with the underpaid, formed a majority of the population" (50) is accurate, that would scarcely be a sufficient explanation for the revolution. Rootlessness, or lack of social or political commitment, was one of the characteristics of Cuban society which made it possible for the revolutionaries to build a following and to attain power quickly. But Goldenberg has not adequately explained the birth of the revolutionary movement or the relationship between the movement and the various sectors of the Cuban people. He does say that the revolutionary leaders were "recruited predominantly from the intelligentsia" (51), and the earlier chapter on Latin American intellectuals shows why this group has radical nationalist tendencies. Further exploration of this area might have produced a more complete analysis.

## Notes to Chapter 3

- (1) Boris Goldenberg, The Cuban Revolution and Latin America; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1970, pp.8-9
- (2) *ibid.*, p.292
- (3) *ibid.*, p.301
- (4) *ibid.*, p.301
- (5) *ibid.*, p.143
- (6) *ibid.*, p.136
- (7) *ibid.*, p.136
- (8) *ibid.*, p.127
- (9) *ibid.*, pp.136-142
- (10) *ibid.*, p.126
- (11) *ibid.*, p.139
- (12) *ibid.*, p.130
- (13) *ibid.*, p.121
- (14) *ibid.*, p.123
- (15) *ibid.*, p.125
- (16) *ibid.*, p.130
- (17) *ibid.*, p.130
- (18) *ibid.*, p.133
- (19) *ibid.*, p.130
- (20) *ibid.*, p.135
- (21) *ibid.*, p.134
- (22) *ibid.*, p.134
- (23) *ibid.*, p.296

- (24) Although most of Castro's ideas and suggestions for reform were not new to Cubans, his activist approach led them to believe that the ideas might become realities if Castro were allowed the chance.
- (25) *ibid.*, p.293
- (26) *ibid.*, p.148
- (27) *ibid.*, Part I, Chapter 8
- (28) *ibid.*, p.55
- (29) *ibid.*, p.159
- (30) *ibid.*, p.159
- (31) *ibid.*, p.170
- (32) *ibid.*, p.183
- (33) *ibid.*, p.297
- (34) *ibid.*, p.118
- (35) *ibid.*, p.183
- (36) *ibid.*, p.210
- (37) *ibid.*, p.210
- (38) *ibid.*, p.244
- (39) *ibid.*, pp.201-8
- (40) *ibid.*, pp.208-9
- (41) *ibid.*, p.245
- (42) The public commitment was made in a speech in December, 1961.
- (43) *ibid.*, p.266
- (44) *ibid.*, p.298
- (45) *ibid.*, p.299
- (46) *ibid.*, pp.300-301
- (47) *ibid.*, Part II, Chapter 9 and pp.211-2



(48) *ibid.*, p.136 .

(49) *ibid.*, p.296

(50) *ibid.*, p.296

(51) *ibid.*, p.292 .

#### 4. The Middle Class Betrayed

Theodore Draper has written two books on the Cuban revolution - Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities (1), and Castroism: Theory and Practice (2). There are some minor discrepancies between the two, but Draper's overall analysis of the revolution remains constant over time. Draper himself makes this clear in the foreword to the second book where he states: "I feel fortunate in that I have not needed to change my basic view of Castroism." (3) In most instances it is fruitless to separate the two works, and I have not done so in this account of his work.

There is little discussion of Cuban history in Draper's work, though he is evidently aware of the historical background to the revolution, as shown by occasional references to earlier periods. His main focus is on Castro and "Castroism" as it developed up to and after the revolution, on the middle class nature of the revolution, and on the transition to Communism of the revolutionary government. Draper supports a version of the "revolution betrayed" theory, depicting Castro as a man who consciously misled the Cuban people - especially the middle class - in order to gain their assistance, turning against them after he had secured power and no longer needed help. He thus has a rather low opinion of Castro, seeing the revolution more as a political manipulation than as an uprising rooted in the social and political

conditions in the country.

Draper feels that many people have distorted the state of the Cuban economy during the 1950's, exaggerating its "underdevelopment". The conception of Cuba as a sugar "mono-culture" he rejects as an overstatement of the facts: "Cuba has been, without a doubt, a mono-exporting country. But producing and exporting are far from the same thing, especially in their effects on the make-up of a society." (4) Most of the blame for this distorted description of pre-revolutionary conditions he lays at the feet of the revolutionaries:

"In Castroist propaganda and in the speeches of Castro himself one of the most complex and advanced Latin American countries has been flattened out into a one-dimensional, hopelessly backward, agrarian fantasy that "had not developed economically or technically" for dozens of years." (5)

He emphasizes that the majority of Cubans were not directly involved in the sugar industry, and that less than half the working population were in agriculture as a whole. This rejection of the popular revolutionary view of the Cuban situation ties in with Draper's ideas on the significance of the middle class in the revolution. He feels that Castro has not recognized the part the middle class played simply because such recognition would not serve his purposes. Thus, the whole picture of pre-revolutionary Cuba has been distorted, playing down the importance of the middle class.

In a discussion of the "tensions" present in Cuban society, Draper mentions two largely economic problems. The

first is the "sluggish rate of growth" (6) of the economy, despite a relatively high level of economic development in Cuba. The second factor is foreign (U.S.) investment in Cuba (7). Draper makes it clear that he does not blame the Americans for the situation, but he also realizes that:

"The main U.S. investment was situated at the sorest and most vulnerable point not only of the Cuban economy but of the Cuban national psyche, and whatever was or had ever been wrong with the sugar industry was linked in the most intimate and direct way with U.S. capital and trade." (8)

The Cuban scapegoating of imperialist investment was a natural outgrowth of this economic situation, though Draper feels that here again the revolutionaries have exaggerated the problems of the pre-revolutionary state. He also brings up the difficult issue of what might have happened to Cuba had the U.S. not invested in its development. Draper suggests that these economic problems were not faced by the governments of Cuba, and that "...the chief obstacles were political and social rather than economic." (9) Despite the general frustration at Cuba's low rate of growth after the 1920's, governments did little to assist the economy in any fundamental way.

The position Draper takes on social conditions during the Batista regime is similar to his position on the economy. He is eager to refute the theories of the revolutionaries which attribute it to the oppression of the peasantry or the working class. He wishes to show the importance of the

middle class in Cuban politics and in the revolution:

"In short, a social interpretation of the Cuban revolution must begin with a view of Cuban society that is far more urban, far less agrarian, far more middle class, far less backward, than it has been made to appear..In Cuba the middle class, the working class, the peasantry were roughly coordinate components of the society. Of the three, the middle class had long been the political class "par excellence", and it was sociologically unlikely that either of the other two classes could muster enough strength by themselves to overthrow the Batista regime."(10)

Having made this point, Draper goes on to look at the social tensions he thinks existed in Cuban society. He discusses the disparities between city and countryside which had been created by uneven development (11). People living outside the cities had a relatively low standard of living, and conditions were worsening rather than improving. Similar discrepancies existed within the working class, with a small workers' elite earning a substantial income and possessing job security, while the great mass of unemployed or underemployed barely subsisted at the bottom of the scale. But, though these tensions, both economic and social, existed, Draper says that for a revolution to occur "A catalytic agent was needed" (12). This agent he identifies as Batista's 1952 coup. It was this event, followed by the dictatorial rule which resulted, that pushed many Cuban toward opposition to the status quo and eventually to revolutionary actions.

When Draper examines the revolutionary movement, which

he seems to view mainly as the July 26th Movement, eventually supported by other groups, he distinguishes it somewhat from the middle class itself. He uses the term "déclassé" to describe the political state of the revolutionaries. Their origins were, however, for the most part in the middle class, and most of them were young: "The revolution was made and always controlled by declassed sons and daughters of the middle class." (13) The leadership of Castro's Rebel Army was entirely middle-class (14) and Draper describes the urban resistance as "largely middle class" (15). The revolutionaries did not conceive of themselves as fighting for the interests of the middle class but against the dictator on behalf of all Cubans. In the beginning they were working against Batista and against a great majority of their parents' generation, who hesitated to get involved in revolutionary action. This "déclassé" bourgeois revolutionary" (16) element Draper recognizes as common to most revolutions, presenting problems for Marxist analysis, especially where it leads the revolution rather than simply supporting a revolutionary class.

What concerns Draper is how this relatively small group of declassé revolutionaries, who had repudiated their ties to the middle class to turn to revolution, was able to bring almost all Cubans, particularly the middle class, into opposition to Batista. This participation of the middle class, says Draper, was absolutely essential to Castro's success:

"If there is some dispute which class was most instrumental in the victory, there is no question but that the anti-Batista struggle was initiated by middle-class elements and, for four or five years, was largely limited to them. It was throughout financed by middle-class supporters and even by some sympathizers among the very rich." (17)

By 1958, the Batista regime was discredited among most Cubans, and considered to be corrupt, inefficient, and brutally repressive. Many in the middle class had been forced into a position where they "if forced to choose between Batista and Castro, would choose Castro, at least in his pre-1959 guise." (18) This broad-based disenchantment with the government placed a popular victory within reach for the July 26th Movement and its allies.

Castro was able to take full advantage of this revolution toward Batista, Draper feels, by covering up his real intentions or inclinations, and by projecting an ideological stance congruent with middle class wishes for a democratic government and moderate social reform. This ideology, then, would only be as important to Castro as its contribution to the success of the revolution; he was willing to accept the format which gained him the greatest number of supporters: "Castroism was the creation of Fidel Castro, but he created it and re-created it, partly in his own image and partly in the image of those whom he wished to win over." (19) Draper even suggests that Castro was fundamentally incapable of formulating any coherent ideology for the revolutionary movement: "Castro

himself did not have an ideological mind, and so long as he was almost the sole authoritative spokesman of his movement, it had to live on borrowed ideologies or none at all." (20) Looking at Castro's ideological statements during the revolutionary period, Draper feels that the approach actually became progressively more moderate to appeal to the middle class (21). Cubans heard from Castro even prior to 1956, a program "well within the framework of traditional Cuban left-wing politics" (22): later statements stressed the intention of the revolutionaries to restore the 1940 Constitution, a widely accepted symbol for democratic practices. But, Draper notes, in the last months of the struggle, when success was imminent, Castro "made very few programmatic statements" (23), since he already had the power within his grasp. Draper sees the special appeal to the middle class as a well-chosen strategy for Castro, "far more successful than his later disdain for the middle class would lead one to believe" (24).

The question of whether this 'playing up' to the middle class was deception on Castro's part is very significant to Draper (25). The fact that Castro did not fulfil such "promises" as he had made is beyond dispute, and, as Draper shows, Castro has said many times since 1959 that his personal ideological commitment was more radical than the public statements he made during the revolutionary days:

"Thus Castro has suggested that he did not privately believe in principles and programmes which he had publicly espoused,



and he has suggested that he could not afford to espouse principles and programmes which he privately believed in... On the whole, he has been far more convincing in his efforts to show that he was not what he pretended to be than what he actually had been." (26)

For Draper there is little doubt that Castro was minimally concerned with the fulfilment of the ideology which he had published or stated even at the time when these statements were being made. (This should be distinguished from believing that Castro changed his mind about ideology after taking power.)

For Draper's analysis, it is important to understand Draper's conception of Castro as a shrewd politician with an ability to capture the imagination of the people, and more than that, a huge ambition for personal power. He recognizes how central Castro as an individual is to the revolution, putting it this way: "an inherently unstable but hitherto indispensable element in an inherently unstable conjunction of forces" (27). Several times Draper suggests that Castroism is closer to facism and Peronism than to Communism which Castro has adopted (28). Castro's careful cultivation of his personal power, his charismatic relationship with his followers, his tendency to de-emphasize ideology, and his lack of total dependence on one class or group are all factors which contribute to this view (29). Draper sums up his view of the progress of the movement thus: "Historically, then, Castroism is a leader in search of a movement, a movement in search of power, and power in search of an ideology." (30) The deception of the middle class must

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be viewed within this context, then, with the realization that Castro saw ideology and program more as a revolutionary tactic to pursue the goal of his own supremacy than as a goal in itself.

"Before taking power, he could put his name to fine democratic aims and principles, admittedly without believing in them, not because he was profoundly committed to other beliefs but because he did not believe in anything profoundly."  
(31)

Cubans of the middle class were deceived when they thought the program was more important to Castro than the attainment and retention of power.

The only characteristic of Castroism which has remained constant, to Draper's mind, is the belief in the correctness of "armed struggle" as the means of gaining power for the revolution. This road to power (32) was fundamental to the revolutionary movement and upon it Guevara based his more elaborate theory of guerrilla warfare, a "modification" of the traditional approach of Marxism (33). The key principles set out by Guevara follow closely the concrete experiences of the Cuban revolutionaries: a popular movement can defeat the regular army; revolutionaries can create the conditions necessary for a revolution; the revolution must be based in the countryside (34). For Draper, this is the closest to a unique theory or ideology that Castroism has come, though it does have much in common with the Chinese and Vietnamese models. Castro has found it more effective or expedient to maintain faith in

guerrilla warfare than to promote any more abstract ideology over the long run.

Draper does not accept the accounts of the revolution which credit peasants or workers with creating or sustaining the revolution, despite the designation of both groups by the revolutionary government as sources of the revolution. With the ideological shifting of Castroism over time there were varying explanations of the revolution and its success, but Draper has no doubt that his explanation is the correct one, that the middle class was the real base:

"The revolution was made and always controlled by declassed sons and daughters of the middle class, first in the name of the entire people, then of the peasants, and finally of the workers and peasants. At most the revolution may be doing things for and to the peasant and workers. The good and evil in these things may be open to debate, but who decides these things and to which class they belong are not." (35)

The shifting of ideological stances was a result of what Draper has called "power in search of an ideology" (36), Castro looking for an adequate justification for his actions. The revolutionaries heeded ways of explaining their policies - agrarian reform, the nationalization of industry, antagonism with the U.S., and so on. Initially, then, it was the "agrarian revolution", an idea which made sense in the context of the revolution based in the countryside (37). There is no doubt that Castro was very dependent on some co-operation from the peasants of the Sierra Maestra when he was establishing his base of operations for the guerrilla fighting. But Draper emphasizes

the limited significance of this in view of the fact that the revolution was always under the control of those with a middle-class background (38). The workers, who were to have become a radical force in the nationalization and industrialization period in the early 1960's, are also shown to have had very little to do with revolutionary activities, though they constituted a relatively high proportion of the Cuban population. (39) "The proletariat was promoted to the role of the leading class, and the peasantry was demoted to the role of its chief ally" (40) This promotion of the working class coincided roughly with the growing friendliness between the revolutionaries and the Cuban Communists.

Draper feels that Marxism finally provided Castro with "an ideological sanction for the unrestricted and unlimited use of the state to change the social order", while Leninism provided "a sanction for their unrestricted and unlimited power over the state" (41). This, as Draper points out, is not genuine Marxism: it is an adaptation of the ideology to suit conditions that neither Marx or Lenin would have considered revolutionary. But it seemed that the Cuban Communists (P.S.P.) realized that their only route to power was through Castro rather than against him (42). Because Castro did not have a strong attachment to any particular ideology outside of "armed struggle", the Communists were able to conclude an alliance with him making very few major concessions to Castro in respect to their own ideology. Draper sees this as a trade-off between Castro and

the Communists: "In effect Castroism gave Communism total power in Cuba, and Communism gave Castroism an ideology of total power." (43)

Naturally, as Castro turned to the Communists, the middle class became less and less certain that its interest and desires would be upheld by the revolutionary government. After having provided the most support for the revolution in terms of men and financial assistance, most middle-class Cubans thought that their future would be secure under the new regime. But once he no longer required that support, Castro became concerned with and allied with other groups who could help him in new endeavours. Draper portrays this break with "the traditional aspirations of the socially-conscious, democratically-minded Cuban middle and working classes" (44) as a betrayal following on the earlier deception (though, as stated above, Draper shows the roots of the deception as partly Castro's approach to politics). Draper implies that since the majority of Cubans had supported Castro when he expressed democratic ideas, his later shift to other ideologies denied the wishes of the Cuban people. (45) But the strength of Castro's charisma and his political shrewdness made those who were being betrayed slow to fight back:

"In retrospect, what is most striking about the months of transition from what was supposed to have been a democratic revolution to what was soon to become a certified Communist revolution was the relative paucity, rather than the magnitude of the internal opposition." (46)

The reaction, when it did occur, was more often expressed by going into exile than by attempts to oppose Castro at home, so that there were no major domestic obstacles in the way of the changes in policy.

In his later book Draper shows, though in less detail, how the Communists went through a somewhat similar progression with with Castro as the middle class and the July 26th Movement had, from alliance and seeming commitment on Castro's part to eventual conflict and disfavour. Again the strength of Castro's instinct for protecting his own position led him to back away from the Communists who were beginning to challenge his authority:

"The P.S.P., then, has suffered the fate of all those who helped Fidel Castro to power, who tried to use him, or who believed in his professions of faith, whether in 'constitutional democracy' or 'orthodox Communism'. It has paid the same heavy price for the lesson that Fidel Castro does not, in the end share power. All who have tried to harness his 'charisma' to their own purposes have merely enhanced it by giving him material and other assistance which he would otherwise not have had." (47)

Through all the alliances and ideological switches Castro's personal power has remained relatively intact, though his public image may have changed somewhat. This power Draper says, is based on: "those - in the leadership as well as among the masses - who have supported him unconditionally" (48). The accent placed by Castro and his government on the heroism of the guerrillas and their struggle against Batista in the

Sierra Maestra reflects Castro's wish for the people to trust the revolutionary heroes, especially he himself, rather than any ideological designations.

Looking at conditions in Cuba in the years following Castro's takeover, Draper runs through the series of blunders and miscalculations which led to the economic problems which started in 1961. He blames the revolutionary leadership, especially Guevara, for the shortsightedness in economic planning: "To a large extent, the Cuban leaders deceived themselves before they deceived others." (49) The return of sugar as the major item of production in Cuba struck Draper as an interesting event: "there have been few ironies in recent history greater than the comeback of 'monoculture' in Cuba." (50) He believes that Cuba, though no longer dependent on the U.S., is just as dependent now on the Communist world for economic survival as they once were on the Americans. (51) The use of compulsory military service to create "a cheap militarized labor corps" (52) and the institution of labour camps Draper sees as the tactics Castro has had to take to counteract the chaos of the economy which his government caused. Despite discussions of social economics and moral incentives for workers, the system cannot operate without coercion: "Thus, Castro's economic policy has been increasingly marked by apparent contradiction - an appeal to the most idealistic sentiments and a resort to the basest means." (53) This necessity for compulsion in the economic realm Draper sees as being reinforced by the

totalitarian proclivities of the revolutionary government.

This totalitarian tendency Draper deplores, especially as it is justified by Castro. He is very critical of Castro as a mass leader who claims to have popular support for his regime but who is unwilling to conduct elections to prove it. He rejects the idea:

"...that anyone who claims to possess the true idea of the revolution confers on himself a more democratic mandate than any that the people, even in the freest of free elections, can give him." (54)

This kind of attitude, asserts Draper, leads to tyranny and the oppression of personalistic dictatorship (55). He has contempt for those intellectuals who admire and support Castro, since they do not see these implications for Cuba in the Castro regime (56). To Draper it is obvious that Cubans have had to accept "forced industrialization, revolutionary terror, and a totalitarian machine" (57) when they accepted Castro, and that they were wrong to do so.

In summary, Draper disputes much of the official Cuban account of the reasons for the victory of Castro. He sees Cuba as a partially developed nation with some social and economic tensions, and as "one of the most middle-class countries in Latin America" (58). Batista's "cynical usurpation of power" (59) in 1952 alienated a large part of the middle class, who eventually came to support Castro. Castro, leading a band of "declassed sons and daughters of the middle class" (60), was able to take advantage of this dislike of the dictator by putting forward a programme appealing to the more progressive



sectors of the middle class, and eventually to all of it. The only originality which Draper concedes to Castro was in his adoption of guerrilla warfare as a revolutionary tactic. By 1958, most of the Cuban population supported the revolutionary movement, and Castro claimed to be acting on behalf of all Cubans. "A quite universal revulsion against Batista's rule took hold of Cuba in 1958 and gave the revolution a truly popular character." (61) Less than a year after taking power, however, Castro had turned his back on most of the middle class and their democratic ideals, moving quickly to assure his own authority and adopting a new ideology - Marxism-Leninism. The middle class, believing in Castro's earlier statements and attracted to him as a strong, charismatic figure, did not move to prevent him from implementing measures to convert Cuba to "socialism". Draper wished to make the contradiction between pre-revolutionary public statements and post-revolutionary actions clear. He avoids saying that Castro definitely betrayed his supporters (62), but does feel that Castro was unable to formulate his own ideology, or to commit himself to one unless it was temporary and suited his immediate purposes. The result of this has been a collaboration with the Communists in which Castro has found Marxism a convenient ideology, while at the same time preventing the Communists from taking any power away from him.

Critique

The initial difficulty with Draper's work is that, because it is a series of articles, it lacks the depth and organization of the other books. However, the chapter "The Déclassé Revolution" (63) covers most of the major issues that the others consider, though briefly. At the same time, despite Draper's assertion to the contrary (64), there are some differences between the first and second books.

The key fault in both volumes is Draper's determined support for the theory that Castro had betrayed the revolution by repudiating the moderates of the 'middle class' who hopes for the revival of democracy. In "The Déclassé Revolution" Draper admits that the middle class was divided, but suggests that it was still largely responsible for the success of the July 26th Movement in 1959. Farber points out that Draper and others have supported their views on the origins of the revolution with "the varying policies of the revolutionary leadership as their main criticism for determining the social character of the revolution" (65). Thus, the fact that Castro's policy statements appealed to the moderates does not satisfactorily explain the success of the Movement. Why, if Castro was as dependent on the middle class as Draper says, was he easily able to take measures which threatened the interests of these people soon after gaining power. Here, Draper does not deal adequately with the influences of Cuban nationalism or with the role of leaders in Cuban politics. He is carried away with

showing that Castro was always a political opportunist, without any real ideological commitments, who purposely deceived people into believing him a moderate. In the final analysis, this issue of betrayal or bad faith matters very little, since Castro was evidently capable of retaining his control over Cuba without the continuing support of those he "betrayed". And, if Draper had been less concerned about this issue he might have produced a more complete theory of the revolution.

Draper's description of social and economic "tensions" (66) in Cuba is accurate, perhaps, but it is also superficial. As Draper himself says, every society has tensions within it, and, hitherto it has proved impossible to determine whether any particular configuration of tensions is more conducive than others to revolutionary activity. The idea that Batista's "cynical usurpation of power" (67) was the catalyst which made Cuba's tensions seem unbearable to a significant part of the population does not seem plausible. Draper does not take into account the time from 1952 until 1957 when there was almost no effective opposition to the Batista regime. At the time of the amnesty in which Castro was released in 1955, the regime was evidently secure enough to feel that it was safe to set free political prisoners. As well, it seems unlikely that Castro's supporters in 1958 were totally unaware of his earlier political actions. Those actions, along with Castro's willingness to take violent action against the regime, should have indicated that Castro was not a conventional moderate politician. Nor

has Draper shown conclusively that the middle class was as strongly committed to the democratic process as he suggests; this commitment would have been a contributing factor to the revulsion against Batista. Therefore, the contention that Batista and his illegal taking of power were the key agent of the revolution in Cuba must be seriously questioned.

## Notes to Chapter 4

- (1) Theodore Draper, Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities; New York; Frederick A. Praeger, 1962 (to be denoted CR)
- (2) Theodore Draper, Castroism: Theory and Practice; New York; Frederick A. Praeger, 1965 (to be denoted C)
- (3) *ibid.*, p.xi
- (4) *ibid.*, p.101
- (5) *ibid.*, p.103
- (6) *ibid.*, p.107
- (7) *ibid.*, p.108
- (8) *ibid.*, p.108
- (9) *ibid.*, p.115
- (10) *ibid.*, p.103
- (11) *ibid.*, p.105
- (12) *ibid.*, p.116
- (13) Draper, CR, p.44
- (14) *ibid.*, p.13
- (15) *ibid.*, p.14
- (16) Draper, C, pp.128-134
- (17) *ibid.*, p.111
- (18) *ibid.*, p.116
- (19) *ibid.*, p.16
- (20) *ibid.*, p.58
- (21) *ibid.*, p.15
- (22) *ibid.*, p.6
- (23) *ibid.*, p.16

- (24) *ibid.*, p.78
- (25) *ibid.*, p.122
- (26) *ibid.*, p.21
- (27) Draper, CR, p.170
- (28) *ibid.*, p.30, p.113; Draper, C, p.9, p.127
- (29) Draper, C, p.133
- (30) *ibid.*, p.48
- (31) *ibid.*, p.50
- (32) *ibid.*, p.57
- (33) *ibid.*, p.64
- (34) *ibid.*, p.65
- (35) Draper, CR, p.44
- (36) Draper, C, p.48
- (37) *ibid.*, p.67
- (38) *ibid.*, p.74
- (39) *ibid.*, p.76
- (40) *ibid.*, p.88
- (41) Draper, CR, p.49
- (42) *ibid.*, p.155
- (43) Draper, C, p.50
- (44) Draper, CR, p.75
- (45) *ibid.*, p.77
- (46) Draper, C, p.126
- (47) *ibid.*, p.205
- (48) *ibid.*, p.216
- (49) *ibid.*, p.165

- (50) *ibid.*, p.171
- (51) *ibid.*, p.127
- (52) *ibid.*, p.175
- (53) *ibid.*, p.189
- (54) Draper, CR, p.34
- (55) *ibid.*, p.113
- (56) *ibid.*, pp.164-72
- (57) *ibid.*, p.171
- (58) *ibid.*, p.23
- (59) Draper, C, p.116
- (60) Draper, CR, p.44
- (61) Draper, C, p.120
- (62) Draper, CR, p.31
- (63) Draper, C, pp.57-134
- (64) *ibid.*, p.xi
- (65) Samuel Farber "Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba 1933-1959"; PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969, p.513
- (66) Draper, C, p.103
- (67) *ibid.*, p.116

## 5. Bonapartism and Populism

Farber's dissertation, "Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba, 1933-1959" (1), takes a careful look at the development of Cuban politics and society from the abortive 1933 revolt up to the first few years of Castro's government. Farber considers himself a "revolutionary democratic socialist" (2), an ideological position which, he feels, places him in opposition to the Castro regime, which has created "a totalitarian one-party state" (3) in Cuba. The focus of the study is on the conditions which allowed for:

"...the development of two distinct but related phenomena: (1) a significant 'populist' political movement which although disorganized was often quite alive, and (2) 'Bonapartism' in the figures of the conservative and at various times reactionary Fulgencio Batista and the revolutionary Fidel Castro." (4)

Though Farber views the revolution of 1959 as one which does not follow any of the stock theories of revolution, emphasizing the uniqueness of Cuban society, he also feels that the rise of Castro is comprehensible as one of several possible outcomes from the Cuba of the previous decades (5). His application of the Marxist concept of Bonapartism is a particularly interesting approach, with potential for studies of authoritarianism, especially in the Third World.

Farber spends most of his time on the political sociology of Cuba with only minimal discussion of economic



conditions: the economy is discussed mostly when it has had direct bearing on politics. He is concerned about the development of the sugar industry, with the heavy U.S. investment, and its consequences for the social structure and political development of the various groups within the structure. He feels that the events of the War of Independence and soon after were very significant in determining the course of Cuban history through the twentieth century. The destruction of the Cuban landowning class by the Spanish (6) followed by enthusiastic American investment in sugar, brought a whole new kind of structure to Cuban agriculture. The consequent weakness of the "oligarchy" left the middle class adrift in terms of ideology as it grew in later years and the new economic situation:

"...contributed to the creation of capitalist latifundia with the consequent displacement of independent farmers, weakening of the rural middle classes, elimination of subsistence cultivation, creation of total dependence on cash for landless employees, and stimulation of political consciousness on a class basis." (7)

In connection with the sugar industry, then, the transformation of the countryside, with the appearance of a rural proletariat twice the size of the traditional peasantry, was very significant in the long-term development of Cuba. Farber also mentions the "sugar mentality" of Cubans which grew out of the vacillations of the sugar market (8). Before 1933, the

economy was more or less allowed to proceed largely under American influence. During that revolutionary period, the Grau government was unable to ameliorate economic conditions and Batista had no interest in doing so. The uneven economy continued to blight Cuba:

"For the next twenty-five years Cuba would maintain an overall pattern of economic stagnation which was mainly due to a distorted and anarchic capitalist economic development which was largely an appendage of the dominant U.S. imperial economy." (9)

To Farber, the most important part of this economic stagnation is its interconnections with the political deadlock of those twenty-five years.

The major point made in Farber's political and social analysis of Cuba is that, despite a generally high level of political consciousness, no effective class-based organizations developed; in fact, Farber implies that there were no political groups able to act effectively in Cuba. This was partly because of the debility of the ruling class, but also because of the situation resulting from the revolutionary period of the early 1930's. Farber feels that it: "...produced a weakening of all social classes and a society in a state of social and economic stagnation." (10) During the years before 1933 there were several newly-formed groups working together to overthrow the dictator, Machado, but once that goal was accomplished, there was the difficult task of forming a government to face. This issue soon divided the

revolutionaries so that there was no clear leadership or direction in the movement. The various groups - students, labour, the Communist party, the middle-class ABC movement, and Batista's army - were mostly not solidly established as the defenders of their class interests (except perhaps the Communists, who construed class interests in a rather peculiar way); they tended to vacillate, uncertain of what should be done. When the Grau, student-supported, government was formed there were still serious splits, so that Grau had little dependable support, plus the liability of no U.S. recognition. Farber believes that the lack of purposeful, united action at this point was crucial in determining Cuba's political future:

"Thus, a situation with almost all the elements of 'classical' revolution did not lead to a victory of the revolutionary forces; instead, it lead to an impasse where the new revolutionary forces were not strong and united enough to take power, and the older conservative forces had been sufficiently weakened and prevented from maintaining their power in the old terms." (11)

This setback for the Left, rather than bringing a realization of the need for co-operative efforts and clearer planning, engendered hostility and long-term divisions among the groups involved. This provided a political "vacuum" perfectly suited to Batista and his Bonapartist politics. Farber tries to show how the vacuum came to exist by looking at the development of the groups.

In 1933, Cuban labour was just gaining its first strength. The prosperity of the 1920's, resulting largely from the sugar industry, followed by the sudden economic crisis of the depression, helped to form a militant and united working class. Their feelings were further accentuated by the incompetence and corruption of the Machado government (12). But the new unions were not adept at organizing against the government on their own. The Communist party had gained the allegiance of many militant workers, and gave them a direction. Unfortunately, the policies of the Communists, especially their aversion for populists at the time, were more destructive than constructive to the revolutionary cause, despite great organizational success:

"The massive popular upheavals of the revolution against Machado and its aftermath greatly increased the membership and power of the Communists, and particularly in the working-class movement. Yet the sectarianism of the Communist Party hurt the chances of success of the Revolution." (13)

Here were the seeds of the isolation of the Communist party from the rest of the Left, and their eventual collaboration with Batista.

More than any other group Farber blames the ABC, the middle-class based terrorist group which was initially very important in the revolutionary thrust, for the eventual failure of the revolution. Farber emphasizes that the ABC exhibited ideas characteristic of the whole Cuban middle class who were "humiliated and resentful but also fearful of major

social upheavals" (14). Thus, although the ABC had a clear analysis of the problems of Cuba, there was a great fear of radical change which could threaten the middle class. Many leaders of the groups were intellectuals, very idealistic but inconsistent when faced with real situations. After the fall of Machado, the ABC soon showed that its commitments did not extend to full co-operation with workers and students:

"In many ways, what the ABC did could have been predicted. Although the organization went through a definitely 'populistic' period during the struggle against Machado, eventually it expressed itself as a faithful representative of the politics of substantial middle class sectors...its caution, vacillation and fear of a rebellious working class led the ABC to prefer an alliance with conservatism and even reaction in order to stop revolution in its tracks." (15)

Farber does not claim that a great number of middle class people supported the ABC but that it fits well into the Marxist picture of middle classes unable to commit themselves to either the status quo or to the forces of change on a collective basis.

The students, though more persistent than the ABC, in pursuing the revolution, were handicapped by their lack of well-constructed programmes and by their inexperience. They had less stake in the status quo than the ABC and the rest of the middle class, as they were "outside the regular hierarchies of society" (16), but had difficulty in establishing a viable programme or solid alliances with other groups,

especially labour, even after Grau was in the Presidency:

"In fact, the students and Grau had no organic relations to any group in society...Although social reforms, legislation and chauvinistic appeals allowed them to retain sympathetic support, without organized popular mobilization this was not sufficient to maintain them in the face of the onslaught of the Army-native conservatives-U.S. government alliance." (17)

The students, despite a continuing dedication to revolution, only contributed further to the confusion which gave the conservatives a chance to regroup behind Batista.

The Cuban army had not been very influential prior to 1933, having been weakened by American intervention early in the century (18). When Machado fell, some officers departed with him and the rest were eventually defeated by Batista after his "sergeants' revolt" of September, 1933. Once in command, Batista began to build up the military and to court American support, meanwhile trading an alliance with the Grau government for the time and money he needed to strengthen his army power base. Soon he was strong enough to repudiate his allies, isolated as they were, and to wrest power from them. The army thus came to play a "new and very special role" (19) in Cuban politics.

These were the major factions involved in creating the impasse which spelt the end of the revolution, according to Farber. Few of the revolutionaries were able to see beyond narrow short-term interests to take advantage of the great

revolutionary enthusiasm throughout the country. Fragmentation and the lack of strong leadership from any group or individual left the revolutionary movement disorganized and stalled even though there was a revolutionary government in existence:

"While it had been relatively easy to shake up Cuban society and politics to its very roots, it proved to be quite difficult to go beyond them and smash it completely in order to rebuild it along new lines. The very weaknesses in Cuban society which had allowed it to be shaken with such ease, by the same token also prevented the formation of alternative political structures which could bring about its wholesale replacement and renewal." (20)

After the years of struggle the society was in very poor shape, and the revolutionaries were left discouraged by the little headway they had made. Batista took over in this situation with what Farber labels "Bonapartism", exploiting the fact that there were no groups to replace the old ones which had been totally discredited. Since that time Bonapartism has become one of the striking features of Cuban political life for Farber, perpetuating the problems of disorganization as well as the problems of a economic and social nature which had made it open to revolution.

Farber spends considerable time elaborating on the concept of Bonapartism, as it was employed by Marx, and as it has been interpreted and applied since then. Marx used the concept to explain, in terms of class relations, how Louis Napoleon had risen to power in France. He demonstrated that:

"Louis Napoleon's regime rested on the support of the peasantry and on the stalemate of all the remaining classes" (21). The regime retained its power by reinforcing the stalemate and creating support wherever it could, in such groups as its large bureaucracy and even the 'lumpenproletariat'. The bourgeoisie, threatened by the growing strength of the lower classes, was willing to concede power to Louis Napoleon; it actually allowed the state to slip out of its control, to become a more or less autonomous agent (22). Farber believes that Bonapartism has become an increasingly important political phenomenon since Marx first identified it:

"... given the developments of the last hundred years with the increasing importance of monopoly capitalism, imperialism, war, totalitarianism, and the rise of authoritarian regimes in the 'Third World', 'Bonapartist'- type regimes have become more and more common and traditional bourgeois liberal regimes less and less frequent." (23)

He applies the Bonapartist model to Cuba after 1933, using it to explain "the striking and sometimes bizarre twists and turns of Cuban politics in the period between 1933 and 1959 (24), and to trace the roots of Castro's revolution, leading to the totalitarian, one-party regime of the present.

Batista gained power after the Grau-student government fell with the co-operation of the bourgeoisie and much of the 'middle class', making Carlos Mendieta, an anti-Machado conservative his puppet president. Immediately, there was an



"extreme shift to the Right" (25) as new alignments were forming and Batista was consolidating his position. He dealt with labour and the students during 1934 and 1935, ruthlessly repressing the large-scale strike of March, 1935, assuring his control of the country and room for political manoeuvring. The strike was the last attempt by the revolutionary groups to work together, demonstrating their problems again:

"This strike, like others that would take place in Cuba, did not fail because of any structural weakness of the working class as a class, but rather because of serious organizational weaknesses." (26)

However, the bourgeoisie was not strong enough to dominate Batista, though they continued, by and large, to support him anyway out of fear of the available alternatives (27).

Batista was well established as ruler of Cuba without real ties to any group but the army, creating the separation of the state and society typical of the Bonapartist regime. Having the political vacuum created by the impasse after 1933-35, Batista could work to perpetuate that impasse and to find more support for himself.

Thus, the Bonapartist leader follows an opportunistic course rather than one determined by association with any one class and its interests. Batista did this, allying with the Communists, controlling labour through them and the Ministry of Labour, and depending on the middle sectors to remain no more than reformist (demonstrated by the role of the

Autenticos). Farber comments:

"... the history of the second half of the decade of the Thirties in Cuba would be the history of the accommodations and political soundings that would take place in order to reestablish a political equilibrium which had been lost in 1933-35." (28)

Having reinforced the stalemate, Batista governed with the balance of forces his main concern - "leaving untouched the fundamental social and political structure of the country" (29). And a certain amount of participation and protest was eventually allowed for all opposition groups, once they had ceased to present any real challenge to the new system. The state bureaucracy and the army both grew under Batista (another Bonapartist trait) as did corruption. There was a major change in the rhetoric of politicians, who adopted the language of the revolutionaries, but there was little change in their actions or attitudes. The revolution had made more Cubans familiar with the vocabulary of socialism, if not its practice. Batista and those around him were well aware of this and used it to maintain a somewhat progressive image.

Farber's second theme, Cuban populism, is less carefully explained, since populism "is a familiar phenomenon to the scholar and political observer" (30). The Cuban variety has its roots in the nationalist struggles of the late nineteenth century in Cuba. The view that commonly came from populists was one of "the Cuban people in general rather than of given organized classes or strata as the agents of change" (31).

This view is important in relation to the development of Bonapartism through Batista. Farber states: "Populism and Bonapartism were like two sides of a political coin in context of class, party, and institutional weaknesses" (32). Populist groups such as the ABC and later the Ortodoxos, then, indirectly helped to keep Cuba from developing the kind of organizations which could break through the Bonapartist political stalemate.

Farber also connects the populist theme with middle class politics in Cuba. In 1933, the two were combined in the ABC and student organizations, both of which were militant but lacking ideological definition and direction. Later the Autenticos continued the tradition to some extent, though the Ortodoxos eventually broke with the Autenticos to oppose them, taking a stronger populist stand. It is difficult to find any consistent commitment to specific issues by the populists, with the possible exception of nationalism. This trait is one which Farber identifies with the middle sectors as well. He says:

"Cuban populist politics were a heterogeneous mixture of political currents which at various times included muck-raking, demands for civil service reform and administrative honesty, support for practically all trade-union demands, and a variety of reformist proposals around which quite militant struggles were often conducted." (33)

There is also a tendency to use populist appeals in political campaigning, whether or not the group actually intended to

implement such ideas if they came to power. This tactic was used by the Autenticos when they were elected to power in 1944. Despite this, there was a strong genuine populist feeling on the Left in Cuba, especially among students and intellectuals. The Ortodoxos were demonstrating that this populist tradition was still strong when Batista took power again in 1952.

During that period from Batista's "normalization" (34) until the beginning of the new revolutionary struggle in 1956, Farber indicates that there was relatively little political or social change in Cuba. The Autenticos had not lived up to their extravagant promises; their governments, from 1944 to 1952, says Farber, were "an inadequate substitute for Batista's authoritarian Bonapartist rule" (35). In the 1940's, the Left was at a low point in terms of influence and organization, fragmented and cynical. The idealistic 1940 Constitution had become "a banner for the Left" but:

"At the same time this helped to obscure the economic and political realities of Cuban society since it encouraged the belief that all that was needed was simply to enforce the laws of the Constitution and all would be well." (36)

The Communists were as much a part of this failing on the Left as any other group, with their alliance with Batista contracted in the late 1930's. The Communists lost credibility with the populist Left because of this, leaving them isolated when the Autenticos took over and very weak by 1952.

The labour movement, partly through the weakness of the

Communists, had been drawn into a dependence on the government under Batista, becoming at the same time bureaucratized and corrupt. Unions remained "relatively strong if we compare them to those of other Latin American countries" (37). There was widespread political consciousness among workers, but at a low level of ideological development. Workers' efforts were directed into "militant reformism rather than revolutionism" (38). The possibilities of Cuban workers, so evident in the 1930's, were not being fulfilled: "In spite of its actual and potential strength and militancy, the Cuban working-class failed to develop any kind of crystallized ideology or large mass-based Party." (39). Unionized workers were able to make considerable material gains by bargaining with the Ministry of Labour. When the Communists lost control over most unions with the election of the Autenticos, the new union leadership emphasized this kind of "class-conscious pragmatism" (40). Again the weakness was, according to Farber, more organizational than structural, in that the unions had not been strong enough to resist the advances of the government or to provide the kind of political education that would lead to effective political action by workers. Here Farber disagrees with Zeitlin's work on the Cuban working class. He rejects Zeitlin's assertion that pro-Communist attitudes prior to 1959 indicated real revolutionary commitment on the part of the workers. Communists were often respected as individuals, as honest, hard-working men, while their ideas were not respected at all; and the Communists had lost much of their

revolutionary orientation as well as their credibility over the years of alliance with Batista:

"The reliance (of Communists) on government favours and the consequent bureaucratization of Cuban trade-unions had strengthened the bread-and-butter reformist approach at the expense of a more serious ideological and political training of the working-class" (41)

The working class was not ready for a revolt against Batista when he returned as dictator in 1952, nor, in fact, thereafter, when Castro was leading his revolution.

Farber shows an interesting facet of this period in his examination of the contradictory position of the working class. He feels, that although the workers did not act as a class, "the great majority of the working class was hostile and opposed to the Batista regime" (42). But, since union officials usually co-operated with the Batista government, it was almost impossible for workers to organize any mass action in support of the opposition. The weakness and hesitation of the Communists in giving their support to the revolutionaries further inhibited worker participation.

Farber calls the period of Autentico rule the time when the middle sectors were "at the pinnacle of their power and prosperity" (43), growing in numbers as time went on. There had been a swing to conservatism with Batista, bolstered by post-war prosperity. But, without a strong "oligarchic tradition" (44), even this conservatism lacked conviction. There was no united "middle class", and the middle sectors did not

exercise control over the government. This resulted from the "relative separation of state and society which had greatly increased under the Bonapartist rule of Batista" (45). If the Autenticos are considered as having connections with the middle sectors, it is evident that there was little chance of successful middle class "liberal, reformist regime" in Cuba.

Among the most reformist elements of the middle class, especially the intelligentsia, there was great disappointment at the failure of constitutional government. Some of these disillusioned people were drawn by the populist appeals of Eduardo Chibas' Ortodoxo Party, splintered off from the Autenticos in 1947, mostly over the issue of corruption. By 1952, this party was strong enough to run a presidential candidate with a good chance of success, showing, states Farber: "...that there were extensive moral and political resources in the Cuban populist tradition which had failed to acquire an appropriate level of political organization and ideological homogeneity" (46). But the Ortodoxos had brought together a coalition of individuals whose interests in common were simply making Cuban politics honest and "democratic" again; this was not enough to break the stalemate:

"They were unable to provide a substantial and decisive political alternative because of their own social roots and interests and lack of significant organized allies such as the working class movement." (47)

Thus, when Batista returned to power in 1952 by means

of any army coup, the political situation was still an impasse. Though much frustration had been generated during the Autentico years, there was still no effective organization which could have opposed the takeover. There seemed to be no other possibilities for the country. For the first part of Batista's second regime: "... a somewhat dormant dislike for the dictatorship was the predominant popular response" (48). No one was able to activate this discontent until the July 26th Movement appeared. Despite the lack of protest, however, Batista was "not able to implement a successful long-term Bonapartist policy" (49). He depended very heavily on the army and police, with acquiescence rather than real support from most other groups in Cuban society. The experience of the Cuban people had made them very cynical about their government. With increased pressure from revolutionaries later in the 1950's, his reliance on force became more and more evident. This brought more people into active opposition:

"Batista remained in power in the manner of what soon became a veritable gangster and militarist regime, where systematic brutality and corruption were the order of the day." (50)

The revolutionary movement was able to take advantage of this narrow and unstable base. But in the early 1950's, the revolutionaries had yet to appear, and all the traditional groups, political parties particularly, seemed to be paralysed.



What kind of base did Batista have in the Cuban Army? Farber says the army was "an essentially mercenary sect" (52) which had been cultivated originally during Batista's first regime and reinforced when he returned, though there was some reaction against Batista which was crushed in 1956 (53). The army had little real loyalty to Batista, most seeing him as a source of privilege and protection, a factor helpful to the revolutionaries:

"... a unity based on corruption and and opportunism is essentially weak and will last only as long as the sacrifices which are demanded from the soldiers and officers do not offset the benefits enjoyed in exchange." (53)

The revolutionaries were first able to force the army into acts of great brutality, and then to gain several military victories, so that the soldiers began to believe that Batista would not hold power much longer, effectively undermining morale.

The revolutionaries of the July 26th Movement emerged from this confusing political milieu of the early 1950's. They took the general disillusionment one step further, rejecting the whole established political process (55). While they were developing, gathering strength, "various other political alternative had to be exhausted and eliminated in the course of a very short period of time" (56). After Chibas' death the Ortodoxos were unable to hold the many factions of the party together; the Autenticos still were tainted from

their stint in government; the military men who opposed Batista were caught and tried (57); efforts on the part of a group of middle class organizations (Society of Friends of the Republic) to mediate between Batista and the opposition only indicated that Batista was not willing to make concessions (58). This process of elimination illustrated to Cubans:

"...the fact that the various existing institutions of Cuban society failed to provide a visible and credible alternative which could lead the Cuban people in a struggle against the military regime." (59)

Farber emphasizes that this did not make the revolutionary movement a negative response, but that it put the movement "on the centre of the political stage rather than its left wing" (60).

For Farber, Castro and the July 26th Movement clearly fit into the Cuban populist tradition. Castro had been a member of the Ortodoxo Party and often referred to both Chibas and Marti, Cuba's national hero, in speeches and statements. The 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks and the style of the July 26th Movement organized afterwards were reminiscent of the ABC in the 1933 revolution, though Castro displayed none of the uncertainty characteristic of the ABC. Farber feels that the leaders of the revolution are best characterized as "activists" rather than intellectuals (61). As for the ABC, an important trait of the Movement was the "personal commitment of the populist militants who often saw themselves

as engaging in heroic actions which would set an example and arouse the masses to militancy" (62). There are negative consequences from this kind of militancy, such as a tendency to neglect ideological development, but it did sustain hope of overturning the government. Farber states that:

"...one of the most important elements of Cuban politics which encouraged revolutionary action in the Fifties was the very existence of a tradition that showed that Cubans had acquired a high degree of historical and national self-consciousness." (63)

Castro was able to use this populist legitimation of revolutionary activities to help him create broad-based support for the July 26th Movement. When other alternatives had clearly proved fruitless, the Movement gained adherents from all classes, particularly the middle sectors.

From the time he organized the revolutionary expedition from Mexico in 1956, Castro followed a purposeful course which in the end brought him victory. He always remained vague in terms of programme, in the way of most Cuban populists, placing more weight on taking action to overthrow the dictator than on what would follow. Whatever ideological statements were made emphasized "the essentially moderate populist and democratic character of the movement" (64). Castro did not risk alienating the support which came from his coalition with moderates who had turned against Batista. He avoided confrontation with the issues which could have

shattered the revolutionary movement into factions, as in 1933:

"Fidel Castro had obviously made a clear choice of strategy in his efforts at building a revolutionary movement against Batista. He accommodated his middle-and even upper-class supporters by adopting a social programme which would not frighten them into indifference or opposition." (65)

Farber feels that Castro, from the start, had a great desire to assure himself political control over the whole revolution, and that this desire took priority over everything else. Despite this, he has a grudging respect for Castro's shrewdness in pursuing the goal of supremacy throughout the revolutionary struggle:

"We submit that Castro's originality consisted in his unusual ability to seize and understand the psychological dimensions of the political situation at a given moment and to elicit action in his desired direction." (66)

Castro understood the mood of Cubans at the time of his return to the island as a guerrilla, and was able to use this understanding in the battle to gain the allegiance of the people. This ability, in the context of Batista's relatively weak regime and his reliance on repression to control the opposition, gave Castro broad popularity and a great deal of influence despite the fact that he led only a very small group of revolutionaries.

Castro was so adroit in managing the course of the revolution that he consolidated his position as "the leader of the revolutionary struggle" (67) early in 1958, as eventual

success was looking increasingly likely. He continued the policies of maintaining wide support through making coalitions and moderate statements, while consistently undermining Batista' regime, forcing the dictator into extremes of repression, until an overwhelming proportion of the population came over to the revolutionary side. (68) The Cuban Army, which had initially attacked both guerrillas and urban revolutionaries savagely, soon lost what morale it had in defeats in the Sierra Maestra. The army virtually fell apart in the end, so that Batista decided to flee the country.

In a sense, then, Castro was able to capitalize on a situation of stalemate in Cuba similar to the one in which Batista had been in 1933-34. But Castro chose to ally himself, naturally, with those on the left rather than with the more conservative forces. To Farber, Castro is as much a Bonapartist ruler as Batista was; in fact, Castro had even greater freedom to act and to move in any direction than Batista had had. In 1933 there was a fragmentation of political groups, but they were all fairly strong in themselves. The 1959 regime came to power in a milieu where there was "a virtual absence of political organizations whether liberal, radical, or conservative" (69). The various revolutionary groups, besides the July 26th Movement itself, were also under Castro's control. What he did, then, during his first two years in power, was to lean on the tradition of populism, to maintain his own great popularity, meanwhile searching for

a suitable programme and ways to deal with the middle and upper class people who were bound to object to some of the measures he intended to implement. Fortunately for him, the economy did not run into any serious difficulties for those two years (70), allowing Castro to control the rate at which he alienated the conservatives and moderates in the country (71).

Farber feels that Castro never intended to lead a real social revolution in Cuba, that he wished simply to take over the country and change it to suit himself. This does not mean that he did not intend to make living conditions better for Cubans, especially those who had been most exploited prior to the revolution, but that he did not plan to give these people control over their government:

"Castro's politics have always been plebiscitarian at best and violently repressive at worst, but never concerned with the development of autonomous political consciousness among the masses of Cubans." (72)

Farber shows Castro as carefully using a combination of "popular support, manipulation of that support, and repression" (73), aware that:

"the establishment of strong political organizations of any kind would restrict his freedom of action,...during the period of time when he had not yet permanently committed himself to the establishment of any given socio-political system in Cuba" (74)

This is a typical Bonapartist tactic: the prevention of any one group from breaking out of the political deadlock. Cuban

society actually offered very few threats of this kind to Castro at first, but he continued to follow his pre-revolutionary pattern of giving the highest priority to his personal power in all cases. It would have been necessary for the revolutionaries to vigorously encourage active participation by the Cuban people to make a beginning at democratic government. Instead, says Farber:

"In the absence of some form of democratic organization or system during the formative stages of the revolution, it was left to the leadership to decide on the direction and then get as many people behind it as possible." (75)

Cubans had been accustomed to more or less undemocratic government for several decades, which had deteriorated into a repressive dictatorship in the final years before 1959. They were delighted to be rid of Batista, but, out of the habit of undemocratic one-man government, by and large did not demand the immediate implementation of democratic practices.

The acquiescence of the bourgeoisie and middle sectors to the revolutionary regime grew out of their continuing weakness and willingness to allow someone else - a Bonapartist figure - to govern the country. They thought, or at least hoped, that Castro would adhere to the moderate ideological statements which he had made during the revolutionary struggle:

"...large sections of the liberal middle and petty bourgeoisie and other

politically moderate elements... wanted nothing more than the establishment of some greatly enlarged welfare-state in Cuba, accompanied by a few structural reforms such as a not too drastic Agrarian Reform." (76)

Therefore, at first, the middle class moderates were anxious to support Castro hoping that this would encourage him to adopt such a moderate course. This hope blinded them to the developing power of Castro (they felt that they could tolerate a certain amount of authoritarianism) and he was eventually able to repudiate the liberals and moderates, choosing to make Cuba a Communist state. Thus, Farber emphasizes that, despite the protests of exiles: "...liberalism itself was an important force in consolidating the Bonapartist power and hero-worship of Castro" (77). Just as they had been incapable of controlling Batista, they were unable to determine the course of Castro's revolution, even though a great number of the original supporters of the revolution came from the liberal middle sectors of the population.

There was, Farber notes, some inclination toward humanist democracy very early in the revolutionary regime, expressed mostly through the newspaper "Revolution" and in the trade union movement. The latter was the only part of Cuban society which was swiftly "re-organized and democratically restructured" (78) right after the revolutionary takeover. The July 26th Movement carried out a complete set of



elections, ridding the unions of the corrupt, reformist officials they had left from the Batista regime, and initiating "a kind of experiment in popular democracy" (70). This process, however, was soon counteracted when Castro realized the implications of the experiment for his own control. This is crucial to Farber, who feels that in crushing this spontaneous participation from workers, Castro was destroying the chance of real social revolution in Cuba:

"There is nothing less involved here than the development of autonomous revolutionary consciousness among the masses of the Cuban people as opposed to the dictates of an elite political party which has a complete monopoly of the press and other means of communications." (80)

Castro, by curtailing this original "Humanismo" tendency, showed his complete commitment to "basic authoritarianism" (81), which Farber sees as the main determinant in post-revolutionary Cuban society.

The movement to totalitarian Communism as a political system after several years of avoiding such a decision fits into Farber's conception of Castro, too. He describes the period 1959-61 as one of "drift" (82), rejecting both the notion that the revolutionaries had complete freedom of choice in the matter, and the idea that Communism was "an almost purely defensive reaction against American imperialist pressures" (83). While Castro "drifted" because of the weakness of the political pressures in Cuba there were eventually several components in the Cuban situation which helped to

bring Castro to his choice: "...the economic situation facing Castro after 1960" combined with "Castro's basically authoritarian conception of leadership which long preceded his choice of the Communist road", "the character of the struggle" by which Castro arrived to power" (84), and "a basic preference for what he considers to be a desirable system of social, economic, and political relations even when compared to other forms of non-capitalist organization." (85), an opinion which had been somewhat reinforced by the influence of the Cuban Communists on the revolutionaries (86). Farber sees this as the process by which Castro, the Bonapartist leader, charted the course which he evaluated as best for the country, with minimal input from anyone but his closest advisers in addition to his own instincts about the people.

In his conclusion, Farber reviews some of the theories of the Cuban revolution, showing why he rejects them. Farber criticizes those who try to locate the impetus for the revolution in one class for their practice of selecting the policies of a certain period, favouring one class, to prove that class the creator of the revolution. These analysts tend to assert their theory:

"without investigating the kind of participation of the class in those policies and the kind of relations existing between the class and the leadership, as well as the kind and degree of class consciousness underlying the whole revolutionary process." (87)

He discusses several other theories - especially the sierra-llano theory(88) - showing that they, too, lack a complete understanding of conditions in Cuba, in his view.

Farber clearly summarizes his own theory again in the final chapter. He emphasizes:

"... the crucial question of the nature of the relations among the leadership, their followers and the people in general... which in our view can begin to be best understood by the use of the Marxist concept of Bonapartism as applied to a Cuban situation where the political weakness of all social classes and the existence of a veritable vacuum of political organization (but not of political struggle and awareness) facilitated the consolidation of a leadership which did not have to be responsible to organized class or group demands" (89)

This consistent feature of Cuban society from 1933 onward serves as the basis for Farber's view of Castro's ascent to power, with the theme of populism contributing as well. Castro utilized all the special social conditions of Cuba with great skill - the weak bourgeoisie, the latent hostility of the workers toward Batista, the tradition of populist activism and violence, the corruption of the army - for "the creation of a Communist state under a very strong one-man political leadership" (90). For Farber, Castro's revolution, although it was unlike many others in history, follows logically in the development of Cuban society, as one of the alternatives which was open. (91)

### Critique

Farber's investigation of the development of Cuban society and politics from the 1933 revolt against Machado to Castro's 1959 revolution against Batista gives a very complete insight into the dynamics of political behaviour in Cuba. Farber's theory about the relationship between the nature of political leadership, forms of political intercourse, and social structure provides a coherent framework for analysing recent Cuban history. It has proven to be a more effective tool for exposing the roots of the 1959 revolution than the general description of conditions prior to 1959 which other authors have largely used. Although the concept of Bonapartism is derived from Marxist theory Farber is not dogmatically attached to Marxism. It may have somewhat biased the presentation of some parts of the dissertation, such as the discussion of the behaviour of the middle class, but, overall, the statements Farber makes are well substantiated. The conclusion at which Farber arrives, that Batista and Castro can both be labelled Bonapartist leaders, should not be interpreted to imply that the two regimes were based on the same social and political configurations. Farber would have done well to make this distinction more clear.

An area where Farber's work might be criticized is in consideration of the Cuban economy, a subject which he

mentions only as it influences the social and political structure. Despite the lack of a separate economic analysis, however, Farber seems to be well-versed on economic conditions in Cuba. But it might have been useful for the reader to have a summary of Farber's view on the economy since it has become a controversial issue in the discussion of the revolution.

## Notes to Chapter 5.

- (1) Samuel Farber, "Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba, 1933-1959"; PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969.
- (2) *ibid.*, p.27
- (3) *ibid.*, p.28
- (4) *ibid.*, p.7
- (5) *ibid.*, p.537
- (6) *ibid.*, p.45
- (7) *ibid.*, p.47
- (8) *ibid.*, p.50
- (9) *ibid.*, p.121
- (10) *ibid.*, p.6
- (11) *ibid.*, p.129
- (12) *ibid.*, pp.106-7
- (13) *ibid.*, p.111
- (14) *ibid.*, p.91
- (15) *ibid.*, p.95
- (16) *ibid.*, p.96
- (17) *ibid.*, p.99
- (18) *ibid.*, p.122
- (19) *ibid.*, p.128
- (20) *ibid.*, pp.74-5
- (21) *ibid.*, p.14
- (22) *ibid.*, p.9
- (23) *ibid.*, p.22

- (24) *ibid.*, p.503
- (25) *ibid.*, p.138
- (26) *ibid.*, p.72
- (27) *ibid.*, p.142
- (28) *ibid.*, p.145
- (29) *ibid.*, p.148
- (30) *ibid.*, p.8
- (31) *ibid.*, p.8
- (32) *ibid.*, p.7
- (33) *ibid.*, p.84
- (34) *ibid.*, p.146
- (35) *ibid.*, p.195
- (36) *ibid.*, p.175
- (37) *ibid.*, p.242
- (38) *ibid.*, p.244
- (39) *ibid.*, p.243
- (40) *ibid.*, p.244
- (41) *ibid.*, p.254
- (42) *ibid.*, p.293
- (43) *ibid.*, p.198
- (44) *ibid.*, p.178
- (45) *ibid.*, p.200
- (46) *ibid.*, p.236
- (47) *ibid.*, p.237
- (48) *ibid.*, p.304
- (49) *ibid.*, p.275

- (50) *ibid.*, p.275
- (51) *ibid.*, p.281
- (52) *ibid.*, p.315
- (53) *ibid.*, p.308
- (54) *ibid.*, p.317
- (55) *ibid.*, p.329
- (56) *ibid.*, p.304
- (57) *ibid.*, p.308
- (58) *ibid.*, p.305
- (59) *ibid.*, p.320
- (60) *ibid.*, p.320
- (61) *ibid.*, p.530
- (62) *ibid.*, p.324
- (63) *ibid.*, p.336
- (64) *ibid.*, p.354
- (65) *ibid.*, p.356
- (66) *ibid.*, p.362
- (67) *ibid.*, p.350
- (68) *ibid.*, p.372
- (69) *ibid.*, p.398
- (70) *ibid.*, p.432
- (71) *ibid.*, p.421
- (72) *ibid.*, p.432
- (73) *ibid.*, p.436
- (74) *ibid.*, p.401
- (75) *ibid.*, p.402



- (76) *ibid.*, p.442
- (77) *ibid.*, p.445
- (78) *ibid.*, p.479
- (79) *ibid.*, p.485
- (80) *ibid.*, p.487
- (81) *ibid.*, p.453
- (82) *ibid.*, p.394
- (83) *ibid.*, p.393
- (84) *ibid.*, p.452
- (85) *ibid.*, p.456
- (86) *ibid.*, p.466
- (87) *ibid.*, p.513
- (88) *ibid.*, pp.517-526
- (89) *ibid.*, p.516
- (90) *ibid.*, p.498
- (91) *ibid.*, p.537

## 6. Comparison of Interpretations

The four authors whose work is considered here -

O'Connor, Goldenberg, Farber, and Draper - have areas of both consensus and conflict in their interpretations of the Cuban revolution. They all approach the revolution with a relatively comprehensive viewpoint, taking account of the background of Cuban history and development as it related to the 1959 revolution, and to the events which followed. Thus, it is possible to make a useful comparison based on the series of major issues which were summarized in the introduction.

All four authors concur with the general outline of the situation in Cuba after Batista's return in 1952: Batista ruling as an increasingly ineffective dictator without broad popular support. There is, however, considerable difference in the specific accounts of Cuba's problems and their severity.

In the area of the economy, there is some disagreement over the extent of Cuban economic problems in the 1950's. O'Connor, who spends the most time on this area, feels that the various groups involved in the sugar industry "perpetuated rural underdevelopment and economic stagnation by promoting policies that systematically underutilized and misused investments, labor, and land" (1). The weak Batista government could not afford to alienate these sugar interests (including the sugar workers) and therefore could not make the political changes required to break through into a more productive

economy. O'Connor takes the position that "the subordination of the Cuban economy to the United States economy" (2) combined with the monopolistic organization of the economy kept Cuba in a state of stagnation.

In contrast, both Goldenberg and Draper feel that Cuba's economy was not as badly off as O'Connor suggests, and that its problems could not be solved by political means.

Goldenberg is more willing than Draper to acknowledge that there were major deficiencies in Cuba's economy, especially in the operations of the sugar industry. Draper mentions only the "sluggish rate of growth" (3) and foreign investment as economic tensions. Draper emphasizes that Cuba was a far more "complex and advanced" country than many others in Latin America (4) and that it was not a monoculture. Goldenberg agrees that Cuba was not underdeveloped, but goes on to show that; "In view of the general position of the country rapid economic progress was hardly possible. It was astonishing that even the existing low rate of development was attained." (5) But both Draper and Goldenberg question whether Cuba could have reached even partial development without assistance from foreign sources of capital. Goldenberg carefully refutes the usual arguments blaming the United States for Cuba's economic predicament, saying that the "free play of market forces" (6) would have created an unbalanced one-crop economy with or without U.S. investments in the industry. He sees Cuba as a small country capable of producing only sugar and a few other commodities

efficiently, so that it would always have to depend on trade to supply its needs. Such improvements as could have been made within these limits were not accomplished because of weakness and corruption of the government.

There are divergent views on the social structure of pre-revolutionary Cuba, both in identifying significant social groupings and in assessing their relationships to each other. That there was no one obviously predominant group is generally accepted. The rural aristocracy had been largely smashed in the War of Independence, after which Cuba became a more or less capitalist society, with some aberrations resulting from the nature of the sugar industry and high American involvement in the society. Beyond this point, each of the authors has different social analyses.

The Cuban "middle class" has been one of the main issues in this discussion of the structure of Cuban society. There was a substantial group of people in Cuba who were not in the working class nor in the small elite of the very rich who were mostly associated with American interests in Cuba. Both O'Connor and Farber see these people as an artificial grouping without any unifying ideas or perceived common interests. O'Connor traces this to "economic, social, and cultural dependency...on the United States" (8). For Farber, this middle class (bourgeois) weakness resulted from the contradiction between feelings of humiliation because of subservience to the United States and a desire to protect the status quo. Such a

contradiction had been demonstrated in the rebellion of 1933 when the ABC, the terrorist revolutionary party drawn mostly from the middle sectors, eventually backed away from supporting other revolutionary groups, co-operating with Batista in the formation of his regime (9). Even when Batista left in 1944 and the Autenticos, ostensibly a "middle class" party, took power the "middle class" was unable to exert significant influence over the government. The "relative separation of state and society" (10) in the regime continued, and, although politicians might originate in the middle class, they did not serve any middle class interests. The middle sectors could not be labelled a class at all, but more a conglomeration of groups, economically or occupationally distinct from the workers, living largely in the cities, with each group protecting its own narrow interests.

This description is rejected by Draper. He feels that the middle sectors had been the "political class 'par excellence'" in Cuba (11), (though he also says that "the middle class, the working class, and the peasantry were roughly co-ordinate components of the society" (12).) Since a strong middle class is a necessary factor in the rest of Draper's account, he is emphatic that the position of the middle class has been misinterpreted by other authors and distorted by the revolutionaries since the radicalization of their regime.

Goldenberg does not discuss the middle class at any length except to say that it was a relatively large stratum for a Latin

American country. He sees the middle groups as involved in many of the parasitical activities which characterized the Cuban economy - especially in government, the communications industry, and in advertising (13). This characteristic, he feels, applies to the whole society.

One part of the Cuban middle sectors which had a continuing and active role in politics was the intellectual and professional community. They had been leaders in dissent and in the 1933 overthrow of Machado, but seemed to share to some extent in the middle sectors' uncertainty about radical change. O'Connor and Goldenberg both see Cuban intellectuals as being "outside the consensus politics and the system of patronage" (14). (14). Goldenberg suggests that the frustrated intellectual is typical of Latin America, where there are most often not enough jobs for the educated people graduated by the universities (15). The intelligentsia in Cuba were clearly unfavourable to Batista, and many of them joined the newly-formed Ortodoxos as the only alternative open to them. Farber sees this as the beginning of a "powerful revival of the Cuban populist political tradition" (16). But the Ortodoxos displayed the same weakness of purpose and organization as earlier groupings - "the result of a political leadership which proceeded from the politically inchoate middle sectors" (17). It was in this milieu that Fidel Castro had his political training.

The state of the Cuban working class has been much discussed in the context of the revolution. In the pre-revolution-

ary period the labour movement, especially through its leaders, was undoubtedly deeply involved with the Batista government. Over the years after 1933, union militancy gradually moderated as the government made concessions to improve the material conditions for workers in the strong unions. (18)

"The unions were pliable instruments of state policy as long as the government continued to deliver the goods." (19) And the possibility of unemployment made the unions unwilling to accept changes in productive techniques which seemed to threaten their job security. With the great mass of seasonally unemployed workers in the country, workers who had good jobs saw themselves as somewhat separated from the rest of the working class (20). Thus, in spite of a relatively widespread anarcho-syndicalist and Communist ideads, there was little working class consciousness reflected in the actions of the workers or their unions. To O'Connor the unions' approach was a symptom of socioeconomic stagnation while at the same time it placed further limits on the Cuban economy (21). For Goldenberg, their practices were another form of parasitism (22). Draper says that the division between the workers' elite and the mass of underemployed created one of the social tensions which Batista's regime exacerbated (23). Farber views the divisions among workers as a manifestation of general organizational weakness. Union leaders were collaborating with Batista even though the workers were increasingly hostile toward the regime. Farber emphasizes that the behaviour of the union

officials should not be taken to indicate the political position of all workers (24). It is generally agreed that in spite of considerable political awareness, the working class played only "a relatively minor role" (25) in the opposition against Batista.

Rural workers in Cuba were the victims of the sugar industry. They benefitted little from the labour legislation which brought the urban industrial unions good incomes and job security. These workers were not peasants or farmers; they did not own land, but worked for wages for the sugar producers, when there was work available. This group in the countryside has been called a "rural proletariat" (26), who, despite living in rural areas, had basically the same goals as other workers. O'Connor and Farber both appear to consider the rural workers as simply the most disadvantaged of workers, powerless, and at the mercy of the fluctuations of the sugar market (27). Draper mentions the "peasantry" (28) as a group "roughly co-ordinate" to the middle class and workers. This is misleading, since there were really relatively few peasants left in Cuba. The rural proletariat should be clearly distinguished from peasants (29).

Goldenberg sees the unemployed or underemployed people of Cuba as a rootless group. They had no traditions or strong commitments. "There was an absence of cohesive local and regional communities, as well as a lack of security of work and there were no firmly anchored political institutions." (30) These



people, like the young intellectuals, had very little to lose, since they were not really involved in the economic or political process.

Overall, O'Connor, Goldenberg and Farber agree that Cuban society before 1959 was fragmentated into a multitude of small groups defending their own interests. There were no established classes or institutions to polarize political opinion and activity. O'Connor feels that this is the result of the economic and political stagnation imposed on Cuba through the development of the sugar industry and American intervention in Cuban affairs (31). Each class was divided within itself, a condition which Batista encouraged. Farber agrees, but also traces the lack of class-based organizations back to the failure of the 1933 revolution when the revolutionaries were unable to carry through on the social change they hoped to effect. By 1935 there was a political vacuum where no one group was capable of gaining and maintaining control. The stage had been set for Batista's coup - which Farber calls a Bonapartist takeover (32). During the following years the weakness of class affiliations was accentuated by Batista as he manoeuvred to perpetuate the stalemate. Goldenberg's view is somewhat similar, but he places the emphasis on the existence of an unusually high number of rootless and parasitic elements in Cuban society, people who had virtually no stake in the perpetuation of the system (33).

Draper's approach varies considerably from the other

three, as he simply points out certain social tensions, between urban and rural people, and between well-paid workers and the underemployed. He feels that Batista's second coup was the "catalytic agent" (34) which brought a revolutionary situation, forcing the middle class into the arms of Castro. Draper says that Cuba did not differ very greatly from many other countries in its social structure, but that the dislocation of Batista's takeover made the social tensions in that structure reach a breaking point (35). What Draper says seems to be a rather superficial view of Cuban society. He says that the middle class was "never a coherent body" (36) and soon after calls it "the political class" (37). He does not see that Batista's regime was a logical part of the political process in Cuba as it had been developing since 1935.

The Cuban state, though it was a large apparatus with broad powers, seemed unable to deal with the economic and social problems plaguing Cuba. O'Connor calls the state "bureaucratic, opportunistic, redistributive, classless" (38). It simply mediated the deadlock which Batista wished to maintain. Batista was "caught in an enormous contradiction" (39) in his administration; he could not take the action necessary to create development in Cuba without destroying the political balance on which his power rested. Farber agrees, as a Bonapartist leader would always be more concerned about keeping power than about policy matters - "leaving untouched the fundamental social and political structure of the country" (40).

Goldenberg calls the Cuban government a "strange 'welfare state'... which exercised considerable control over the economy - without encouraging development" (41). The government was also a major means by which jobs were provided in Cuba; it was a huge patronage system which contributed to fragmentation and demoralization of the Cuban people.

All authors agree that the various political parties in Cuba were incapable of taking any effective opposition role against Batista after his coup. There was little public confidence in politicians as a group - a result of the twenty years of inefficient and corrupt government by Batista or the Autenticos. The Ortodoxos quickly became popular when they broke away from the Autenticos, but their approach to politics was not basically different from that of the other groups. And with the death of Eduardo Chibas, the popular Ortodoxos leader, the party was beset by internal conflicts. The Communists, who had been strong in 1933, were at a low ebb in 1952 as well, having compromised themselves through an alliance with Batista in the late 1930's (42). There is no indication that the Communists were in a position to mobilize any significant movement against the regime. However, it is important to note that the Communists always had a well-disciplined, unified party, whatever their numbers or influence. (43) Unfortunately, for the opposition, the Communists often took positions that were unacceptable to others on the Left, alienating themselves from potential allies. (44)

Nationalism was a constant theme in Cuban politics from the days of the War of Independence and the Platt Amendment onward. It naturally became as much anti-Americanism as Cuban nationalism. O'Connor and Farber both discuss nationalism at length, while Goldenberg and Draper, who are inclined to play down the impact of American interference in Cuba, scarcely mention it at all. O'Connor feels that nationalism was "originally a powerful and positive political force" but that over the years of dependency and stagnation it was "frustrated, turned back, distorted, betrayed" (45). The weak middle sectors and the corrupt, opportunistic government were not about to challenge the United States by adopting aggressive nationalist policies. Farber, too, sees nationalism as an important Cuban political tradition tied in with his concept of Cuban populism. Populism seems to be effective where people feel no class commitments, and appeals particularly to the middle class. This kind of populist appeal to "the Cuban people in general" (46) served to reinforce the Bonapartist regime by ignoring class differences: "Populism and Bonapartism were like two sides of a political coin in a context of class, party, and institutional weaknesses" (47). O'Connor has shown only the positive side of nationalism, not indicating that it also was an inextricable part of the fragmented Cuban society. The feelings of being exploited by the United States also tended to obscure the class conflicts which finally emerged after the revolution. But there is no doubt

that the nationalist-populist ideological approach was the one which would attract a great many Cubans, especially when it was proposed by a strong leader.

Thus, although there was minimal protest when Batista took power in 1952, it is clear that he did not have much popular support, certainly not as much as he had had earlier as president. He was forced, more than ever, to buy support with favours and to rely on the police and army as sources of control. When the opposition did start to grow and pose a threat, Batista had to deal with it violently since he had few political resources remaining. These methods isolated him more than ever from the population. (48)

When it comes to discussing the development of the revolutionary movement which toppled Batista, the focus is on Fidel Castro and the July 26th Movement. The four writers all start with Castro and relate other parts of the opposition to his movement.

The guerrillas of the July 26th Movement undeniably had their origins in the Cuban middle sectors, specifically in what O'Connor calls the "non-business" grouping - intellectuals, professionals, students. (49) No one, except possibly the revolutionary government on occasion, has asserted that the working class, urban or rural, had an active role in the revolutionary movement. Nor was there active participation by the people of Oriente province where the revolutionary base was located, though it seems that eventually the

guerrillas were able to depend on some local people to bring them supplies and to protect them from discovery by the police. Goldenberg and Draper both see the leadership of the July 26th Movement as composed of young people whose background was middle class, but who had become rootless (50) or declassed (51). They were outside the conventional economic and social structure and their goal was to bring down that structure. Goldenberg says: "This accounts for their ultra-radicalism: the rootless have nothing to lose but their rootlessness and they lack practical experience." (52)

Draper suggests that this group is common to most revolutions, and that its presence creates problems for Marxist analysts. (53)

Farber recognizes that the July 26th Movement went further away from the conventional political process than had earlier Cuban rebels but he also points out that the Movement fits very neatly into the populist and activist traditions of Cuba (54). Castro had been steeped in these traditions as a student and as an Ortodoxo, as was obvious from his ideological statements. What Castro accomplished was minimizing hesitation in the face of social change, partly through strategy and partly through the sheer force of personality. After the more conservative part of the middle sectors had failed to make any headway against the increasingly militarist Batista regime, it was possible for the July 26th Movement to be on "the centre of the political stage rather than its left wing" (55). The few alternatives available had been exhausted, and Castro

represented the only escape from the dictator. Farber thus provides a more complete view of the revolutionaries, taking into consideration both the historical roots of the movement and its essential difference from other middle class activist groups.

Beyond the revolutionary nucleus of the Rebel Army there were several other activist opposition groups operating in Cuba. Some were originally part of the July 26th Movement, while others, such as the Directorio Estudiantil developed on their own. There was an urban resistance in both Havana and Santiago which suffered heavily in the repression carried out by Batista's forces. From the time of Castro's landing in Cuba he was generally perceived as the revolutionary leader, and he dealt with any serious threats to this leadership by careful political manoeuvring. There is relatively little material written on these groups, except in relation to their eventual relationships to the July 26th Movement (56).

If Castro overthrew Batista with a small army of guerrillas, supported by a few other revolutionary groups in the rest of the country, what was going on among the rest of the society? All evidence indicates that most Cubans had been won over to sympathy with the revolution. As Goldenberg says: "The Batista dictatorship was overthrown by the activities of small groups helped by the growing hatred of the mass of the people." (57) Farber feels that Castro's "unique ability to seize and understand the psychological dimensions of the political situation

at a given moment and to elicit action in his desired direction" (58) combined with Batista's political bungling brought about this great surge of popular support which came to Castro from all classes. Draper agrees about Batista: "Batista made revolutionaries out of hundreds and thousands... who could not reconcile themselves to a cynical usurpation of power and who, if forced to choose between Batista and Castro, would choose Castro, at least in his pre-1959 guise." (59) Draper sees Batista's actions as the key to Castro's success. Though it is certainly true that Batista was an unpopular leader and that he over-reacted to the threat posed by Castro, Draper has not taken account of the demonstrations of strength and ability by Castro, his political astuteness, the general mood of the Cuban people, and the revolutionary connection to the populist tradition which all appear to be significant factors in the battle for control of Cuba as well.

Among the accounts of the Cuban revolution there is a general lack of explanation of the actual process by which the Batista regime collapsed to give the revolutionaries power at the end of 1958. Was it simply the weakness of Batista's power base and his incompetence assailed by Castro's shrewd strategy that led to the rapid growth of support for the July 26th Movement and the withdrawal of Batista? As Farber says: "a situation where all social classes were politically weak might have also produced conditions where Batista remained in power for a very long time even though his regime did not have



deep roots in the social structure of Cuba." (60) Farber feels that this did not happen because of the high level of politicization among Cubans which resulted from the homogeneity of the society combined with historical experiences (61); these factors created a political atmosphere which could not tolerate a continuation of Batista's regime. Other authors have not probed even this deeply into this issue, accepting the popularity of Castro as a more or less natural phenomenon in view of his personal magnetism and the broad appeal of his ideological position.

It seems that there was virtually no mobilization in support of the Batista government outside of the army. The army itself was "increasingly demoralized, having been full of corruption and internal intrigues" (62). Evidently, the long period of submission to the patronage of Batista and others made the army unwilling to fight when they were not guaranteed victory. Castro's guerrilla tactics were well-suited to further undermining of the military morale, while at the same time exposing Batista's violent repression of the opposition. But all of this remains an unsatisfying explanation of the demise of Batista's regime though it may be the only available one. What kind of response did the revolution elicit in the various sectors of the Cuban population? Was the political takeover really a revolution at all?

There is also relatively little attention paid to American involvement in the last months before the revolutionary

takeover. The fact that the U. S. imposed an arms embargo on Cuba in March, 1958, affected not only the concrete effectiveness of the army but disheartened the regime who had probably expected that American assistance would be forthcoming if the opposition became unmanageable.

The Cuban Communists, though not involved to any significant extent in the revolutionary struggle, were eager to support Castro when he became successful and to become participants in the revolutionary regime. The Communists were hard-working and efficient, in general, making them great assets to the revolutionaries in the reorganization of the government. At one point, soon after Castro had officially adopted Marxism-Leninism, it appeared that the Communists were gaining control over the regime. However, Castro then criticized the sectarianism of some people, meaning the Communists, and prevented them from gaining any further strength.

Goldenberg sees Castro's collaboration with the Communists in very simple terms: "The growing rôle of the Communists was due to the radicalization of the revolution and the fact that they alone possessed a disciplined organization" (63). This seems to be a reasonable explanation of the situation; the alliance was to the mutual benefit of both the revolutionaries and the Communists. The July 26th Movement was a heterogeneous group encompassing a wide range of political opinions. Once Committed to a radical ideological choice, Castro needed a more radical, better organized group to assist

him in policy formation and implementation. Some moderates had been lost to the revolutionary regime and their place was taken by "truly revolutionary" allies in the P.S.P." (64) O'Connor and Draper both suggest that Castro was consciously using the P.S.P. as a means of consolidating the revolutionary regime. After that had been accomplished, Castro made it clear that the Communists would not be permitted to dominate the government (65). O'Connor sees this as a logical move on Castro's part to further the revolution, while Draper compares the relationship between Castro and the P.S.P. to the alliance which Castro had with the middle class groups during the revolutionary war - which ended after the revolutionaries had gained power. Farber also sees some calculation on the part of the Communists, who, he feels "had adopted what was essentially an ideological and organizational permeationist policy vis-a-vis the revolutionary leadership and rank-and-file." (66) Castro had basically accepted this as long as he was not threatened. The 'purge' in 1962 was caused by a group of Communists who did not follow this policy and tried to "pack the various positions of state power" (67). What is accepted by all authors is that, though they are significant as members of the revolutionary regime, the Communists have not undermined Castro's authority.

This great personal power which Fidel Castro has had from his days as a guerrilla fighter through to the present is an essential feature of the Cuban revolution. Castro has been

a great revolutionary figure in the tradition of the hero, Marti, who fought in the War of Independence. Populist politics tended to be partly based on the appeal of a strong leader, as in the case of Chibas, the Ortodoxo chief. O'Connor says: "Castro has all the qualities and accomplishments required to endear him to the Cuban people as an authentic hero in the Cuban revolutionary tradition." (68) Farber points out that Castro's connection to this tradition has encouraged in him a "basic authoritarianism" (69) which was common in activist groups. As a result, policies which assured him of retaining power appealed to him. The extreme weakness of social classes and of political organizations and the appeal of populist politics made a strong leader such as Castro very attractive, especially to the young or disaffected. The general willingness to make Castro leader "allowed for the creation of a Communist state under the original sponsorship of a very strong one-man leadership" (70).

The question of whether Fidel Castro is a "charismatic leader" seems to be answered in the affirmative by all four authors considered, though they do not all discuss charisma as such. Says Goldenberg: "If ever there has been a charismatic leader-figure blindly worshipped by the masses it was that of this young lawyer." (71) In Weber's original definition of the concept of charismatic authority the key feature was the special relationship between the leader and his followers: "For the charismatic leader derives his authority solely from the demonstration of this power and from his disciples' faith in that

power, whatever that power is conceived to be." (72) Both Castro's 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks and his audacity in leading the Sierra Maestra guerrillas were illustrations of that exceptional quality which appealed to his followers. Because he was conscious of the importance of maintaining this kind of strong image, Castro would try to reinforce the image with actions which Cubans would associate with a revolutionary hero (73). One of the most effective tactics which Castro used in this battle for the support of Cubans was arranging for the American journalist, Herbert Matthews, to visit the guerrilla encampment in the Sierra Maestra in February, 1957. The subsequent publication of the interview in the New York Times served to make Castro more popular within Cuba and to bring him some recognition in the United States. This kind of publicity built up the legitimacy of the July 26th Movement. (74) Draper sees the growing legitimacy as a part of Castro's deception, but acknowledges that Castro was tremendously successful in attracting support, especially in the middle sectors and among the young. The differences among authors are about evaluating the results of the charismatic leadership which Castro developed.

The evolution of Castro's political ideology is another major topic which has created controversy, particularly in relation to his eventual declaration of commitment to Marxism-Leninism. The controversy is complicated by the comments Castro and other revolutionaries have made about their ideas since that time. Right up until 1959 whatever statements the July

26th Movement made were vague and somewhat moderate in tone. These statements were drafted by the intellectuals in the movement (with Castro's approval), who naturally tended to use the nationalist-populist rhetoric and ideas with which they were familiar: "They stood for national independence, social justice, and quick modernization of the country" (75). It was politically expedient for Castro to support this position, and he probably agreed with its idealistic principles in general, but it was also undoubtedly "a postponement of potentially thorny and divisive political and social issues" (76). Draper construes this strategy as a deliberate deception of the Cuban middle classes on Castro's part. He says that Castro created the ideology of "Castroism" partly in his own image and partly in the image of those whom he wished to win over" (77). Draper finds Castro's apparent lack of concern over ideological commitment deplorable, suggesting that "he (Castro) did not believe in anything profoundly" (78). Thus, through his talk of restoring Cuban democracy, Castro captured the support of most "middle class" people who, according to Draper, were eager to have "deep-going social and political reforms to make impossible another Prio Socarras and another Batista" (79). An important assumption made by Draper about the middle sectors is that they were largely committed to the democratic process, and that, as a consequence, they supported Castro's revolution mostly because of his promise to return to the democratic ideas expressed in the 1940 Constitution.

Earlier behaviour on the part of the middle sectors indicates that this was not necessarily the case. At least as strong were the tradition of nationalism, the commitment to revolutionary heroism and violence (80), and the feeling that some major change was needed (81), all of which Castro represented both before and after the victory of January 1, 1959. Draper has emphasized the role of the middle class and the role of democratic ideas in the revolution to the exclusion of some other influential factors. He has especially not taken sufficient account of the socio-political vacuum in which the revolution occurred, of which O'Connor, Farber, and Goldenberg are very conscious.

It is obvious that the programme of the revolutionary government did not, in the end, conform to the expectations of many Cubans who had politically supported Castro as he took power. In 1959, those hopes could only be for a general improvement of social and economic conditions and a more nationalist approach, based on what Castro had said during the revolutionary campaign. Castro was tremendously powerful at this time and Cubans looked to him for direction. The question of why he chose, as he did, a Communist model for Cuba is discussed by all four writers.

O'Connor interprets the development of the political attitudes of the revolutionaries as a natural outgrowth of their revolutionary experience and of their efforts at governing: "Thorough-going reform, political polarization and the deepening and widening of the revolutionary process were the logical conse-

consequences of a sincere, intelligent, and uncompromising attempt to bring to fruition the revolution's original general aims." (82) The idea of any calculated ideological deception is rejected by O'Connor (83), though he does recognize that the support of the "moderate" middle class assisted the revolutionaries initially. Meanwhile, the revolutionary government was creating "a firm worker-peasant alliance, a large-scale militia, and, in general, a solid base in the masses." (84) O'Connor lists a series of reasons for the surprisingly long-lived support of the moderate group, including their agreement with many of Castro's early actions, their inability to determine whether Castro's intervention in the economy would be permanent, as well as a feeling of "class guilt" about the stagnation of the country (85). O'Connor believes that it became clear to the revolutionaries as they worked that socialist policies were the only practical ones to deal with Cuban social and economic backwardness. Thus, "Socialism was both possible and suitable" (86) for Cuba. The revolutionaries could understand and accept this because they "put practice first and ideology second" (87) when making decisions. As they learned more about the concrete problems, they adapted. The original ideas of the July 26th Movement were left behind: "The revolution was a process that followed its own internal logic and ultimately stamped out its own ideology." (88) Once the 'political revolution' had been successful, the 'social revolution' was faced as a separate process, requiring new ideas and policies (89).



Both Goldenberg and Farber are less inclined to see socialism, and eventually totalitarianism, as the inevitable course for the revolutionary government, though they acknowledge factors which would encourage this. (90) They feel that other alternatives were available, especially in the form of political organization accompanying socialism. Goldenberg suggests that: "Any far-reaching revolution tends to betray its original aims." (91) Castro's position of freedom in the political vacuum allowed him to make changes so quickly that the new realities "began to dominate him" (92). Goldenberg agrees with O'Connor that Castro had started out "led more by intuition and pragmatism than by any fixed conception." (93) What Goldenberg does see as inevitable is the conflict which arose between the revolutionary government and some sectors of the population once the path to socialism had been taken. To O'Connor, this was a stage of class warfare over the changes in relation which Castro made during the first few years of the revolutionary regime; but to Goldenberg it was simply people reacting against the government imposing socialist policies on them because they had not participated in the making of the decisions: "The changes desired by the revolutionary leaders might be sensible and progressive but they conflicted with the desires and modes of behaviour of most Cubans." (94) Goldenberg feels that the regime made a decision to enforce their ideas on the rest of the country. Since socialism could not have been attained spontaneously in a partially developed

country like Cuba, it had to be dictated from above (95). Goldenberg feels that in Cuba "further progress could have been achieved by means of a free struggle within the framework of representative democracy" (96) and regrets that the radicalization of the revolution appears to have made democratic process a thing of the past.

Farber's view on the development of the revolutionary regime is similar to that of Goldenberg. He thinks that Castro did not know at first which direction the revolution would take and that Castro "drifted" ideologically for some time before deciding on "the Communist road for Cuba" (97). In this choice, Castro was influenced by his background in middle class activist politics (98), by his attitudes toward the United States (99), by "the character of the struggle" (100) and by the opinions of his brother Raul and of Che Guevara, his closest lieutenant (101). All of these factors acted to make "totalitarian Communism" (102) a desirable choice for him. Farber also points out that, despite the lack of effective political organizations in Cuba, "the country was very politicized and had developed great unsatisfied expectations since 1933" (103). This awareness of politics contributed to the great revulsion against Batista, and to Castro's popularity as a representative of change. It also led them to look for wholesale change when Castro took power: "In 1959 the great majority of people in Cuba were moving in an undefined but decidedly Leftward direction" (104). The fact that so many

people were sympathetic with a revolutionary coalition "under the leadership of the more militant and non-traditional elements" (105) supports the hypothesis. Castro, of course, was aware of this and tried to take advantage of the willingness to accept new things and ideas. The decision to espouse Marxism-Leninism also fits in with Farber's image of Castro as a Bonapartist leader and therefore most likely to adopt policies which would contribute to the maintenance of his own power. This motivation caused Castro to hesitate to allow the formation of any new autonomous political groups which might have threatened his leadership. With this continuing lack of organized sources, any potential for public participation in the regime was never tapped: "In the absence of some form of democratic organization or system during the formative stages of the revolution, it was left to the leadership to decide on the direction and then get as many people behind it as possible." (106) When the opposition did start to rise, Castro used his considerable political skills again, going through a process of "defeating given enemies at a minimum cost" (107) as he moved into totalitarianism. Farber, along with Goldenberg sees this evolution as a manipulation of popular support through which Castro has prevented Cubans from reaching a higher level of political consciousness and from participating more fully in their own government.

Draper's viewpoint in this matter is actually not entirely unlike those of Farber and Goldenberg, except that

Draper has placed such a heavy emphasis on Castro's lack of concern for the middle class. Draper recognizes that Castro did not really have an ideology in 1959 (108), and suggests that he chose as he did only to assure retention of his personal power: "In effect, Castroism gave Communism total power in Cuba, and Communism gave Castro an ideology of total power." (109) Farber and Goldenberg have a more complex view of Castro's motivations, but both feel that Castro's drive for power had an important part in it.

## Notes to Chapter 6

- (1) James O'Connor, *The Origins of Socialism in Cuba*; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970, p.55
- (2) *ibid.*, p.279
- (3) Theodore Draper, *Castroism: Theory and Practice*; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965 (to be denoted C), p.107
- (4) *ibid.*, p.103
- (5) Boris Goldenberg, *The Cuban Revolution and Latin America*; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p.131
- (6) *ibid.*, p.137
- (7) Draper, C, p.115 and Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.130
- (8) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.25
- (9) Samuel Farber, "Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba 1933-1959"; PhD dissertation, University of California, 1969, p.95
- (10) *ibid.*, p.200
- (11) Draper, C., p.103
- (12) *ibid.*, p.103
- (13) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.134
- (14) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.44
- (15) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.52
- (16) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.234
- (17) *ibid.*, p.237
- (18) This position is supported by all authors: see O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.185; Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.130; Farber, *op.cit.*, p.246; Draper, C, p.106
- (19) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.181
- (20) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.182; Farber, *op.cit.*, p.246; Draper, C, p.106

- (21) O'Connor, op.cit., p.188
- (22) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.134 (see Chapter 3)
- (23) Draper, C, p.116
- (24) Farber, op.cit., p.294
- (25) ibid., p. 297
- (26) Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century;  
New York: Harper and Row, 1969
- (27) O'Connor, op.cit., p.182; Farber, op.cit., p.242
- (28) Draper, C, p.103
- (29) Wolf, op.cit., p.257
- (30) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.134
- (31) see Chapter 2 (p. ) discussing O'Connor's view of  
the Cuban economy.
- (32) see Chapter 5 (p. ) on Bonapartism
- (33) see Chapter 3 (p. 0 with definitions of Goldenberg's  
terms.
- (34) Draper, c, p.116
- (35) ibid., p.104
- (36) ibid., p.116
- (37) ibid., p.117
- (38) O'Connor, op.cit., p.31
- (39) ibid., p.30
- (40) Farber, op.cit., p.148
- (41) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.131
- (42) O'Connor, op.cit. pp.181-2; Goldenberg, op.cit., p.118;  
Farber, op.cit., p.254; Draper, C, p.28
- (43) O'Connor, op.cit., p.192; Goldenberg, op.cit.,p.298;  
Farber, op.cit., p.466
- (44) There was much manoeuvring and bargaining among these  
groups but very little mutual trust.

- (45) O'Connor, op.cit., p.31
- (46) Farber, op.cit., p.8
- (47) ibid., p.7
- (48) O'Connor, op.cit., p.39; Goldenberg, op.cit., p.159;  
Farber, op.cit., p.275; Draper, C, p.116
- (49) O'Connor, op.cit., p.44
- (50) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.296
- (51) Theodore Draper, Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities;  
New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962 (to be denoted CR),  
p.44
- (52) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.296
- (53) Draper, C, p.129. Many theories of revolution other than  
the Marxist one do consider the presence of a revolution-  
ary elite.
- (54) Farber, op.cit., p.336
- (55) ibid., p.320
- (56) What information is available on the other opposition  
groups tends to be from members of Castro's group,  
which continues the bias toward looking at them only in  
relation to Castro.
- (57) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.293
- (58) Farber, op.cit., p.362
- (59) Draper, C, p.116
- (60) Farber, op.cit., p.504
- (61) ibid., p.505
- (62) Goldenberg, op.cit., p.46
- (63) ibid., p.298
- (64) O'Connor, op.cit., p.290
- (65) ibid., p.292
- (66) Farber, op.cit., p.467

- (67) *ibid.*, p.468
- (68) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.37
- (69) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.453
- (70) *ibid.*, p.498
- (71) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.148
- (72) Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait;  
Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1962
- (73) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.37
- (74) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.156; Farber, *op.cit.*, p.352
- (75) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.297
- (76) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.358
- (77) Draper, C, p.16
- (78) *ibid.*, p.50
- (79) Draper, CR, p.20
- (80) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.334
- (81) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.295; Farber, *op.cit.*, p.232
- (82) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.9
- (83) *ibid.*, p.4
- (84) *ibid.*, p.283
- (85) *ibid.*, pp.298-6. O'Connor has explained all of the  
factors he considers significant there.
- (86) *ibid.*, p.280
- (87) *ibid.*, p.310
- (88) *ibid.*, p.305
- (89) *ibid.*, p.8
- (90) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.298; Farber, *op.cit.*, pp.392-6
- (91) Goldenberg, *op.cit.*, p.297
- (92) *ibid.*, p.297



- (93) *ibid.*, p.183
- (94) *ibid.*, p.301
- (95) *ibid.*, p.300
- (96) *ibid.*, p.301
- (97) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.396
- (98) *ibid.*, p.452
- (99) *ibid.*, p.455
- (100) *ibid.*, p.452
- (101) *ibid.*, p.460
- (102) *ibid.*, p.455
- (103) *ibid.*, p.504
- (104) *ibid.*, p.472
- (105) *ibid.*, p.504
- (106) *ibid.*, p.402
- (107) *ibid.*, p.107
- (108) Draper, C, p.51
- (109) *ibid.*, p.50

## 7. Conclusion

Having compared and contrasted these four accounts of the Cuban revolution of 1959, I wish to draw a few conclusions in a tentative synthesis of the material presented. Although some of the characteristics of the Cuban experience have been shown to be similar to those of other societies undergoing revolutionary change, the course of events in Cuba up to 1959 was strikingly unique in some ways. It becomes evident that Cuba's geographical, economic, and cultural position, suspended between the very difference societies of North and South America, has had a profound effect on Cuban history. Cuba remained under Spanish rule longer than any other colony and always had a relatively large number of Spanish residents. The original development of the society was much along the lines of the rest of Latin American and the Caribbean, with a group of wealth landowners administering an agricultural economy. However, during the long period of conflict between Cuba and Spain in the last part of the nineteenth century, this social structure was severely damaged and the landowning class largely destroyed. By the time the United States intervened in 1898, the Cubans had virtually won the struggle against Spain but did not have the resources to resist the Americans when they arrived on the scene. Thus, although there were remnants of

the original social structure, Cuba was drawn into an economic and cultural dependency on the United States. The society became a hybrid, not like countries such as Mexico or Chile where national independence was well-established before the era of American imperialism began, nor like Puerto Rico, which was annexed by the U.S. The U.S. decision at the turn of the century, after they had defeated the Spanish, not to annex Cuba, but to allow Cubans to form their own state, has had great long-term significance. The society of Cuba had not actually formed its own distinctive patterns at the time of the arrival of the Americans (the earlier patterns had been virtually destroyed in the wars with Spain), so that no coherent society ever emerged. The continuing presence of a strong American influence in Cuba sustained this social incoherence right through to the 1950's. (1)

It seems clear that the Cuban economy prior to 1959 was not underdeveloped, but that any progress which had been made was mainly in growth instead of full development (2). The type of development which had occurred, particularly in the sugar industry, was more in the interests of American investors than for the long-term benefit of the Cuban economy. In the early twentieth century, Cuba was set up as a sugar supply source for the United States. This was accomplished in such a manner that it was difficult for the sugar industry to be more technologically sophisticated or efficient (3).

The Cuban government exchanged chances to have more control over its economy for a guaranteed U.S. sugar quota. In economic negotiations with the Americans, the Cubans seldom pushed for greater autonomy since there was a perceived connection for the government between American approval and remaining in power. The country was caught in what the World Bank called a "master circle" (4), without the political means to break out of it. Any efforts by the government to change the situation were conducted within the limits created by Cuban dependence on or fear of the United States. Besides, only ninety miles off the coast, Cuba was an obvious and convenient market for American goods, from food and machinery to luxury consumer products. Cuba was forced to make tariff concessions on many of these products so that sugar quotas would not be jeopardized.

Thus, Cuba had reached a certain level of economic growth and development through sugar, and then stagnated, paying the price of allowing heavy foreign investments. In some ways it is true that Cuba, because of limited resources, was bound to be heavily dependent on trade for economic survival (Goldenberg's argument) (5), but it was certainly more than the free play of market forces which brought Cuba to be heavily dependent on trade (almost exclusively) with the United States. American economic policies in relation to Cuba were directed at protecting and maintaining that dependent relationship so that the American economy would get

exactly what it needed out of the Cuban economy (6). There were some concessions made to the feelings of resentment toward American control which surfaced in Cuba from time to time, but until Castro arrived on the scene, there was never any strong nationalist pressure from the government of the island. The question of whether to "blame" the Americans for their actions in Cuba is not really very important. What was important was that someone recognize that there would be no further scope for the development of the Cuban economy without challenging the continuation of dependency.

The economic mistakes of the first few years of Castro's regime were results of the inexperience of the new administration combined with the difficulties which were part of the old system. There was a common misinterpretation that, because per capita income was relatively high, and because the productive base was intact, economic transformation could occur with minimal pain and dislocation. In fact, both of these factors were more hindrance than help to the revolutionaries, who hoped to make a major overhaul of the economy. The revolutionary government was soon faced with the constraints created by the structure of the economy, but they ignored them and proceeded, anyway, with changes. Before long, there was a drop in productivity and general confusion over what was going on, such as the agrarian reform, diversification of agriculture, and setting up state

co-operatives(7). The government then had to deal with the fundamental issues of the economics of creating a socialist state, issues with which they are still grappling at present - industrial management and efficiency, workers' participation, diversification of production to be more self-sufficient, and trade relations.

Cuba in the 1950's was truly a "splintered society" (8), with no coherent classes or strong institutions to which Cubans would feel attached. There was a clear distinction only between rich and poor, with the collection of ambiguous middle sectors in between. There was no landed, traditional upper class of any significance. The rich and the middle groups involved in business and industry were inevitably oriented toward the United States, the major source of capital, income, and imports. They had little sense of themselves as a class or as leaders of Cuba: "The Cuban bourgeoisie was too compromised: it was never able to achieve real confidence and combativity." (9) This weakness in the bourgeoisie was a contributing factor to the lack of unity in the working class, too. Without a well-defined national bourgeoisie above them, labour became more concerned with safeguarding their money and security than with the class struggle. (10) Those of the middle groups not directly involved in this dependence on the United States, such as small businessmen, professionals, intellectuals, and students, tended to occupy

a more ambivalent position, with a greater attraction to nationalism.

The application of the term "middle class" to Cuban society is a confusing practice. Some authors use the term even as they describe the great lack of organization and defined classes in the society. The sectors of society which might have formed a Cuban middle class had no common ideas or ways of acting; they existed as separate social strata. In the business world: "The distinction between rich and middle class was a difference in standard of living and not one of attitudes: the rich simply had more than the less affluent." (11) In a sense, this business middle group was only an extension of the economically and politically dependent "plutocracy" (12). These businessmen wished to ignore politics as much as possible, attempting only to ensure that their companies' profits were secure (13). There was annoyance among this group and among foreign investors at the high cost and low productivity of Cuban labour, a condition which had come with stagnation and continual high unemployment. But American and Cuban business interests were willing to tolerate this problem as long as they were allowed to have a relatively free hand in other areas.

The non-business elements in the middle sectors were more politically active. They had been very much involved in the revolt against the dictator, Machado, largely through the ABC and the Directoria Estudiantil. After the failure of the

Grau-student government in 1934, students and intellectuals formed a basis for the Autentico party. The ABC was led by a group of idealistic intellectuals (14) who were outraged at Machado's repression and used terrorist tactics to attack his regime. They built a great reputation for daring and courage, but, as Farber says: "It did not take very long for the ABC to show that it was able to combine heroism with a very great ability to compromise, particularly if the alternative was to face a radical confrontation with either the U.S. government or with the native upper classes" (15). It was the ABC which caved in at the prospect of U.S. disapproval of the Grau government, turning to Batista as the man acceptable to the Americans. Though they later joined in opposition to Batista (16), the inability to carry through on revolutionary goals in 1934 helped to create the twenty-five years of political chaos and corruption in Cuba which followed. Throughout that period, the non-business middle sectors only continued to prove their confusion and lack of understanding of the political realities of their nation. Many of them became involved in the Batista regimes, as individuals saw that co-operation was the way to best get ahead. Others were Autentico supporters; their choice proved to be only marginally different from that of those who worked for the Batista regime.

Cuban workers, through their unions, were also brought



into Batista's "consensus" deadlock after the failed revolution of 1933-4. There had been a build-up of militancy and commitment in the unions with the leadership of the Communists who dominated the labour movement at that time, but when conflicts between labour, students, and the ABC led to confusion and defeat, that militancy subsided. In the following years, the labour movement continued to grow in numbers and strength, but it became absorbed in protecting its economic interests by negotiations with the government. While Batista was in control, the government was willing to make concessions which would keep labour quiet and to tolerate Communists being prominent in the leadership of labour. However, once the Autenticos were in power, they determined to gain control of the unions through their own party. They succeeded in this goal in the late 1940's when they were able to oust most Communists from their union posts. (17) After Batista's 1952 coup, the union officials, from Mugal at the top, down, were only interested in preserving their own positions. These officials collaborated with the Batista regime through till Batista's fall.

What was the impact of this political progression on the workers' attitudes? This is a key question in the prelude to the 1959 revolution. Zeitlin's claim that there was a high level of political awareness and some commitment to socialism on the part of a high proportion of workers seems far-fetched, especially in the light of the sketchy nature of

his study (18). But the importance of political generations and the existence of an active relatively competent Communist party are both significant influences which Zeitlin points out (19). As Farber has said, it seems that many workers, perhaps as a result of these factors, were sympathetic to Castro's efforts. Though they did not actively support the revolutionary movement, neither did they resist it. Again, the picture of a paralysed society into which Castro injected a new unbalancing element, acting on dormant nationalist-revolutionary sentiments to gain support.

The rural workers were in somewhat less of a contradictory situation than the privileged unionized workers, but they also had very little power or resources. Most of them, as Goldenberg says, had little to lose in the struggle to overthrow Batista. They were, however, dependent on the large sugar companies for the small income they did receive; this created barriers against active participation. Castro gained active support and participation from them only in the final stage of the struggle, when the columns of the Rebel Army were advancing through the countryside toward Havana.

The lack of clear definition of political positions and interests created confusion for many Cubans from the 1930's onward. Such chaos contributed to the sense of insecurity which Cubans already felt because of the instability

of the sugar market's fluctuations and the distrust of conventional politics. As Farber suggests, such disorganization and inconsistency relates to the popularity of populist-nationalist ideas; people found it easier to define themselves as Cubans than to identify themselves with a social class. This emotional political approach simplifies political decisions: "Populism conceived of the Cuban people in general rather than of given organized classes or strata as the agents of change." (20) This sort of political activity reinforced the continuing weakness of the classes and organizations in Cuba. The continuing possibility of U.S. interference made the nationalist-populist stance attractive outside the business community. But the fear of interference also led to hesitation to take actions which might actually provoke American action. The contention that what was needed was some group from outside the deadlock to challenge it rings true. All the established groups from the various sectors of the society were weak and divided. Therefore, there had to be a new group with an aggressive approach to break the vicious circle.

The pattern of formal political activities in Cuba from 1935 to 1959 reflected this lack of class identity and poor organization. The legacy of distrust from the 1930's divided those groups which had overthrown Machado, Grau and his supporters who formed the Autenticos taking a very

different path from the Communists or the remnants of the ABC. Over that period of time, Batista was able, at one time or another, to manipulate all the significant groups in Cuba to his advantage. The result of this political power-broking was the stagnation of the economy and the dis-association of politics from social realities. Governmental decisions were made almost entirely on the criteria of avoiding conflict, maintaining power, and maximizing personal gain.

This corrupt attitude was adopted by the Autenticos when they took power in 1944. There was some public outcry against the corruption, such as that of Chibas, leader of the Ortodoxos. But the criticisms of the Ortodoxos, and their nationalist stance looked very little different from the line of the Autenticos when they were out of power. The rhetoric was similar to that of most Cuban politicians since 1933 - all radical talk and no action. Cubans no longer believed the promises of great progressive social change they heard from politicians, but that did not deter them from making the promises. This appears to have been a factor in the creation of a consciousness that such major changes were needed.

All political parties, by the 1950's, were almost completely out of touch with anything that really mattered in Cuba. As Ruiz says: "The parties functioned in a world of their own, independent of public demands and aspirations,

where loyalty to the party, its members, and its leadership dictated decisions and the outline of political philosophy."

(21) The Communists, though better organized and more dedicated than the others, had been discredited by their alliance with Batista, then pushed out of power in the unions by the Autentico government. They were also hampered by their connections with the Russians whose positions were often not relevant to Cuban conditions. Such organizations only served to make Cubans "cynical and/or discontented with political events" (22). They further prevented a clear delineation of political positions since they were willing to try to attract support from groups with contradictory interests. The only truly clear difference was "government" and "opposition".

The question of whether the prerevolutionary regime was 'Bonapartist' as Farber claims, is difficult to determine. The concept is one which has not been clearly defined or differentiated from other concepts in the same general area, such as 'authoritarianism' and 'dictatorship'. Based on Farber's explanation, my interpretation of Bonapartism is as follows: a leader with some popular appeal gains power in a social vacuum, created by a social stalemate in which either all classes are strong but equally balanced, or all classes are weak and incapable of governing (23). Once in power, the Bonapartist leader ret ns it by manipulation and reinforcement of the deadlock. Though the class which might have been

expected to rule would try to influence the government, the successful Bonapartist would not be bound to adhere to the wishes of that class. Over time, a gap appears between the regime and the realities of the society it governs. Farber describes this in relation to Cuba between 1934 and 1952:

"The State and consequently politics became somewhat separated and autonomous from the business of 'civil society' and its conflicting groups and classes." (24) The Bonapartist regime would always act to protect itself from being overthrown, allying with any group willing to bolster its strength.

One problem with the concept of Bonapartism is that it is vague, a drawback which Farber has recognized (25). The potential scope of applicability is so broad that a great many contemporary societies could be classified as Bonapartist. This vagueness is accentuated by the lack of delineation of the specific groups and ideologies which might be involved. Therefore, the concept more describes the structure of a social configuration than any of its content. This makes Farber's idea that both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary regimes are Bonapartist more workable, but it also takes meaning away from the concept.

If the definition outlined above is applied to the two regimes, before and after 1959, it does bring out some of the similarities and differences between them. Batista's original rise to power seems to be a classic case of

Bonapartism with the added factor of American power in Cuba (26). In Cuba, it is undoubtedly the weakness of social classes and organizations which allowed Batista to take power. There was the beginning of a strong working class movement in the early 1930's, but it foundered with the indecision of the non-business middle sectors and the dogmatism of the Communists. Though the business community might have appeared overwhelmed by the revolutionary groups in 1934, their connection to U.S. interests brought more political weight. After taking control, Batista conformed to the Bonapartist pattern of seeking support wherever he could find it at a reasonable cost. His relations with the Communists is a good example of this. Meanwhile, he expanded the army and the bureaucracy as personal reservoirs of strength. Batista's return in 1952 was largely dependent on the latter groups and the debility of the other political groups for its success. This second Batista regime can be characterized as unsuccessful Bonapartism. Unable to marshal sufficient support from the groups he had manipulated previously: "Batista remained in power in the manner of what soon became a veritable gangster and militarist regime where systematic brutality and corruption were the order of the day." (27) Farber ascribes this failure to the political consciousness of the Cuban people, who were unwilling to endure continued economic and political stagnation (28).

The Castro regime is more difficult to compare with the model of Bonapartism, partly because it varies more in specifics from the original Bonaparte regime on which the concept is based. There is no question that Castro took power with heterogenous support which he had adeptly won and manipulated. And he has continued to engage in political manipulations throughout the revolutionary regime, sometimes making hair-raising ideological turnabouts to justify his actions. In spite of this similarity, the revolutionary government had varied from the pattern by initiating and carrying out major alterations in the Cuban economy and social structure. This kind of purposeful leadership seems inconsistent with Bonapartism, especially since it did leave Castro open to some risk of polarizing the country. During the transition period, Castro did not associate himself consistently with any particular class or group except the revolutionaries, but allied himself with the peasants, rural workers, and industrial workers in succession. His desire to cut the ties of Cuban dependency on the United States and to provide social equality for Cubans have been far more consistent. And Farber's argument that Castro has not allowed potential mass participation to develop, especially in the labour movement, is based on fact. But the overall case for classifying the revolutionary regime as Bonapartist is much weaker than that presented for the Batista era. There are more extra factors in the Castro



regime which cannot be adequately explained by Bonapartism alone.

The growth of a revolutionary movement in Cuba, though perhaps not inevitable, as O'Connor believes, was made a definite possibility by a series of factors. These factors contributed to creating a social situation in which a group such as the July 26th Movement could make considerable impact. All the conventional political groups had proved their inadequacy, including Batista on his second try. After five years, it was clear that nothing had really changed in spite of massive injections of capital into the economy. Even some of the business sector was beginning to feel that Cuban economic and social development was unlikely to go further without more aggressive national policies. Some of these people also had feelings of guilt over allowing the corrupt government of the Batistianos and Autenticos, and were open to suggestions of a new start. At the same time, the 'have-nots' - the 'rootless' of Cuba - were coming to realize that their position would not improve under the existing system, that the hopes raised by the 1933 revolution or the 1940 Constitution would remain unfulfilled. Outside Cuba, there was the American wish to create a more friendly relationship with Latin American countries, leading to a greater reluctance to intervene directly in their affairs. The coincidence of these conditions made Cuban society unusually receptive to suggestions of change, if

those suggestions came from outside the conventional political context.

Castro, having had his political training as a student and as an Ortodoxo, seems to have developed an increasing understanding of what it would take to break the stalemated Cuban society open. After his release from prison in 1955, he broke from the Ortodoxos and began to build a tight group of committed revolutionaries. Ideological statements were made, but the first priority was action - action that would prove Castro's willingness to fulfil any promises he did make. The whole first part of the revolutionary campaign focussed on providing this proof. Castro said when he left for Mexico to prepare the guerrillas, that he would return to Cuba in 1956, and he did so. Castro said that he would harrass Batista's army and the police, but that he would not torture or murder prisoner: this policy was carefully followed by the guerrillas all through the struggle. By building a reputation for accomplishing what he said he would put Castro in a different category from other Cuban politicians and gave him a heroic image which called to mind the best of the Cuban revolutionary tradition.

Thus, the revolutionary struggle was carried on as a battle for political support from the Cuban people more than as a military conflict (29). The great success of Castro's campaign to create a popular image for the movement soon

effected the confrontation with the military. The knowledge that Castro constituted a major threat to Batista undermined the confidence of the soldiers, since the army was particularly attached to the president. The phenomenon of passivity of the population during the actual revolutionary struggle can be partially explained by looking at it this way: it was more like awaiting the results of an election than being involved in a revolution or civil war. The separation between government and real political conditions had alienated most Cubans from political participation. The fragmentation of the social structure, exaggerated by Batista's tactics of division and manipulation of social groups discouraged the growth of effective organizations within conventional politics. There had been no mass mobilization in Cuba since 1934, and Castro's campaign was no exception, at least not prior to 1959. There was widespread political awareness and interest, but the outcome itself would be worked out in the politicians' arena. The kind of armed violence which accompanied the campaign of the July 26th Movement was more intense than any which had occurred since Batista first came to power, but it must be recognized that violence was an integral part of Cuban political life. Castro organized this unfocused violence and directed it toward the Batista regime as an effective tactic. There were many lives lost during the revolutionary period (estimates vary widely), but

it was a tiny number compared to the number who might have died in a mass revolution. There was a mass response to Castro during that time, but it was the passive level of the voter. It was a battle between two declassed political factions for the right to govern Cuba with legitimacy.

One of the most significant processes in the campaign was Castro's negotiation with the conventional opposition parties and the other rebel groups. Castro was shrewd enough to know that it was good to be separate from the parties, but that their endorsement would be helpful to gain material support and the sympathy of moderates. Castro was able to manoeuvre the July 26th Movement into a position of leadership in spite of the small numbers of the Rebel Army, the amorphous organization, and meagre resources. His consciousness of the importance of positive media coverage in Cuba and his astute bargaining gave him the control of the new government when it was formed. Cubans were eager to accept a leader who had proved himself an effective commander, decisive, and honest. (30) Because of the fragmentation and paralysis of organizations in the country, as discussed above, active participation was minimal, but the mood was increasingly on Castro's side.

To make it possible to negotiate with other opposition groups and to avoid offending moderates, Castro was willing to modify some of the programmes proposed by the July 26th Movement in their original statements. The intention to act

and to make positive changes was what Castro held to throughout. This gave him the flexibility he needed, but it also led to a much greater faith in his own intuitions than in the wishes or demands of his followers. It is always difficult to bring the charismatic leader into a structured organization without continuing the absolute authority he possesses.

The actual group which came to power in 1959, which might be loosely defined as the leadership of the July 26th Movement, was accurately identified by all authors as 'de-classed' and loyal directly to Fidel Castro. They were from a variety of backgrounds, but generally from what Goldenberg labelled the 'rootless' sectors of the society (31). The revolutionary elite, which later became the leadership of the state and the new Communist party with very few personnel changes, was largely from the activist background which Farber mentions (32). The relationship of Castro and his close associates with their followers was dependent on charismatic authority; the follower put trust in the individual himself rather than in his ideology or the collective strength of the movement. This relationship still exists between Castro and the Cuban people in general, though some efforts have been made sporadically by the revolutionary government to create new mass organizations to routinize the relationship into a more reciprocal one. However, Castro's appeal was always in his decisiveness and his trust for his

own instincts. These factors continue to play a large role in the determination of policies for the revolutionary regime.

On the issue of the evolution of the ideology of the revolutionaries it seems clear that when Castro won power he had not decided on any specific ideology or on the methods he would employ to change Cuba. (33) The ideas contained in the programmes of the July 26th Movement did not give more than general objectives for the regime. Having won the political revolution, the Movement was faced with the new challenge of translating the objectives into action and actually transforming a society. They began, in a very practical way, to remedy some of the obvious injustices which existed (cutting rents, agrarian reforms). These were very popular measures, especially with the lower classes and helped to consolidate the revolutionaries' power in these classes. But, the revolutionaries soon came to realize that their goals would require them to make more radical changes (34), while at the same time, the initial measures they had taken created a momentum leading to further change. Though Castro did not, in fact, decide to move to 'totalitarian socialism' right away, there was the potential for substantial social change in even his vague ideas about Cuban development and in his actions before choosing socialism.

The continuing lack of strength in any political group

outside the revolutionaries themselves (the July 26th Movement was only an amorphous coalition with nothing concrete to unite it except Castro's leadership) meant that Castro was not forced to immediately take an ideological stand. It was thought, in the first part of 1959, that he might adopt a "humanist" ideology. It would have been congruent with the early benevolent policies of the regime. But, as Farber says, 'Humanismo': "only remained as an incipient tendency without any programmatic or ideological clarity."

(35) The humanist or democratic phase led very quickly into socialist, and totalitarian phase because, as Goldenberg says, there were "no organized forces inside the country to act as a brake" (36). There was no group to take up a strong position of opposition to the revolutionary regime or even to question the long-term consequences of the actions of the regime (37). The Batista government had discouraged the development of such groups through its divisive policies; the revolutionaries had won power on the basis of a mass sympathetic response which had little to do with organized politics; and once in control, Castro was not willing to tolerate the formation of independent political organizations which might have restricted his freedom of action. Even if Castro had allowed some room for the development of such organizations, it is doubtful whether they could have prevented the movement to totalitarian socialism once Castro chose

that route.

The actual process of choice seems to have been well summarized by Farber and Goldenberg, who attempt to show the dimensions of the milieu in which Castro was acting. Before deciding on "Marxism-Leninism", Castro spent some 'drifting' and 'window-shopping' among various ideologies that might have been available to him. The claim that there was "an air of inevitability" (38) about Cuban socialism is an exaggeration of the factors predisposing Castro and the Cuban society to the socialist model. Castro was certainly influenced by the tendencies toward authoritarianism in the revolutionary movement, by his wishes for rapid and visible change, by the availability of support and assistance from the Communists, and by the nationalist sentiments of Cuban which encouraged a confrontation with the United States. But, it was evidently very much a personal decision, more than one based on objective assessment of Cuban social and economic conditions. Castro had been politically wise in his earlier decisions and probably felt that he was making the right choice at the time. Once the decision was made (in a relatively brief period of time, just under two years), the revolutionary government determinedly imposed its interpretation of socialism on Cuba (with help from Communists, both Cuban and Russian), becoming unavoidably more and more dependent on authoritarian measures to enforce its policies. O'Connor seems to feel that this was a necessary period of



adjustment, that the revolutionaries were those best suited to lead the country by virtue of their revolutionary experiences, and that Cubans were continuing to support the revolution. This may be so, but it is still very difficult to judge whether or not as much might have been accomplished in Cuban social and economic development by choosing some other ideological path.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 had its roots in the events of 1933-4 in Cuba. At that time a failed revolution led to government by the Batista regime which could be called Bonapartist. This regime did little to change the economic stagnation which plagued Cuba and it exacerbated the socio-political fragmentation which had characterized the 1933 experience. The period of Autentico party rule was basically no different in its methods. Batista came back to power in 1952 in a society so paralysed that there was almost no resistance to the coup. Several years after 1952, however, there was a gradual build-up of general discontent, tied in somewhat with the continuing thread of nationalist-populist ideas in the country. Batista was, in the long run, unable to re-form the alliance he required to survive. He was reduced to using more and more repressive measures to maintain control.

The declassified July 26th Movement drew its core membership out of the substantial rootless sectors of society, the young non-business middle sectors and the underemployed.

Fidel Castro, the charismatic leader, conducted a shrewd political campaign over a period of three years to win the sympathy of the majority of the Cuban people. He was able to reach even the moderates, since there were no viable alternatives to Batista except Castro. The ideological position of the Movement was intended to be congruent with a broad range of political positions. When Batista conceded defeat and the revolutionaries took power, Castro had manoeuvred himself into almost undisputed leadership of the opposition. He was able to be bold, to make major changes right away, such as the agrarian reform law, because there were still no organized groups to challenge what he did. The magnitude of the initial reforms and the momentum created by the revolutionary elite led to the confrontation with the United States and the radical re-organization of Cuban society into a totalitarian socialist state.

## Notes to Chapter 7

- (1) It is surprising that there was not more overt American interference in Cuba between World War II and the 1959 revolution. Castro would not have been able to gain power without at least some acquiescence from the American government. It has become obvious that this one external factor - the absence of active American support for Batista against Castro - was a key to the success of the revolution.
- (2) James O'Connor, The Origins of Socialism in Cuba; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970, p.30
- (3) *ibid.*, pp.19-25
- (4) Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom; New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp.1180-1
- (5) see Chapter 3 (p.49)
- (6) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.21
- (7) O'Connor provides a complete analysis of the attempts of the revolutionary government to create a more efficient, growing economy for Cuba. (Chapters 5, 6, 8, and 9).
- (8) Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, Cuba: The Making of a Revolution; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., p.141
- (9) Robin Blackburn, "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution"; *New Left Review* (October, 1963), p.63
- (10) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, Chapter 7. A strong bourgeoisie would have created more polarization in the society between employers and workers.
- (11) Ruiz, *op.cit.*, p.144
- (12) *ibid.*, p.143
- (13) Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.1114
- (14) Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.594; Samuel Farber, Revolution and Social Structure in Cuba, 1933-1959; PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969, p.91
- (15) Farber, *op.cit.*, p.87

- (16) Thomas, op.cit., p.718
- (17) Farber, op.cit., p.244
- (18) see Chapter 5 (p.102)
- (19) Maurice Zeitlin, Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class; New York: Harper and Row, 1970
- (20) Farber, op.cit., p.8
- (21) Ruiz, op.cit., p.154
- (22) Farber, op.cit., p.505
- (23) ibid., pp.8-26
- (24) ibid., p.503
- (25) ibid., p.22
- (26) The presence of an outside influence such as this is not explicitly considered in the concept of Bonapartism and probably should have been to make Farber's analysis more complete.
- (27) ibid., p.275
- (28) ibid., pp.504-5
- (29) O'Connor supports this view in general, discussing the political and social revolutions separately (see p.7 and p.54)
- (30) ibid., p.37
- (31) see Chapter 3 (p.52 )
- (32) Farber, op.cit., p.530
- (33) O'Connor, op.cit., p.310; Farber, op.cit., p.396
- (34) O'Connor, op.cit., p. 9 and pp.312-3
- (35) Farber, op.cit., p.473
- (36) Boris Goldenberg, The Cuban Revolution and Latin America; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p.293

(37) *ibid.*, p.178

(38) O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.280

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A Research-Study Guide (1959-1969);  
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Press, 1971

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