

How Castro Failed

Norman Gall

You call yourself, if I am not mistaken, a revolutionist. But you err in holding that future revolutions will issue in freedom. In the past five hundred years, the principle of freedom has outlived its usefulness. An educational system which still conceives itself as a child of the age of enlightenment, with criticism as its chosen medium of instruction, the liberation and cult of the ego, the solvent forms of life which are absolutely fixed—such a system may still, for a time, reap an empty rhetorical advantage; but its reactionary character is, to the initiated, clearly beyond any doubt. All educational organizations worthy of the name have always recognized what must be the ultimate and significant principle of pedagogy: namely the absolute mandate, the iron bond, discipline, sacrifice, the renunciation of the ego, the curbing of the personality. And lastly, it is an unloving miscomprehension of youth to believe that it finds pleasure in freedom: its deepest pleasure lies in obedience. . . . Liberation and development of the individual are not the key to our age, they are not what our age demands. What it needs, what it wrestles after, what it will create—is Terror.

—Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

I

A SPANISH colonial governor of Cuba once said, in the midst of a series of 19th-century slave revolts, that the island could be easily governed *con un violin y un gallo*: with a fiddle and a fighting cock. No Cuban ruler of the past century has borne out this old aphorism more fully than Fidel Castro Ruz—Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government, First Secretary of the Cuban Communist party, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and President of INRA (*Instituto Nacional de la Reforma Agraria*). For the past thirteen years Fidel Castro, with his genius for propaganda and psychological reward, has dominated his island and conducted its diplomacy with the art and authority of a Renaissance prince, while leading his countrymen through the most drastic social revolution Latin America has seen in this century. At the age of

forty-four Castro has more seniority in power than any major world figure except Tito, Franco, and Mao Tse-tung (all now approaching eighty) and has confirmed the old rule of Caribbean politics that these islands are small enough to be kept in the pocket of a shrewd and tenacious dictator for a very long time. No dictator within memory has combined Fidel Castro's prodigious personal powers: great physical stamina and audacity; a memory of near-total recall; an amazing virtuosity at intrigue and maneuver; an imposing platform presence and an overpowering oratorical style drawing with equal effectiveness on comic and sentimental histrionics. These gifts have enabled Fidel Castro to obtain great sacrifices from the Cuban people while retaining a degree of popularity that has been extremely rare among Latin American governments of comparable longevity. Indeed, it is hard to see how the Cuban Revolution could have survived at all under the leadership of a lesser man. The reach of Fidel's powers of persuasion is shown in this account by the French agronomist René Dumont from his otherwise critical book, *Cuba: Est-Il Socialiste?* ("Cuba: Is It Socialist?"):¹

During the first few days I was in Cuba in late June 1969, I believed that an imminent transition to a Communism without marked privations was feasible. I did continue to register very explicit reservations about the projected 15 per cent annual increase in agricultural products, which was to be spread over a 12-year period. Yet in the course of the six-and-a-half-hour tour I made with Fidel Castro . . . his assurances were rather convincing. . . . With Fidel I had the impression of visiting the island guided by its proprietor, who was showing me his fields and pastures and cattle, if not also his men.

Dumont's *Cuba: Est-Il Socialiste?*, written by a veteran French Marxist with an international reputation as an expert in tropical agriculture,²

¹ Editions de Seuil, Paris. No English translation of this book has yet appeared, but excerpts were published in the September 1970 issue of *Dissent*.

² Dumont's writings on tropical agriculture go back nearly four decades to his first book (1935) on rice culture in the Tonkin delta. His books in English translations are: *False Start in Africa* (Praeger), *Cuba: Socialism and Development* (Grove Press), and *Lands Alive* (Monthly Review Press).

NORMAN GALL, whose most recent article in COMMENTARY was "Latin America: The Church Militant" (April 1970), is now an associate of the American Universities Field Staff in Latin America.

is one of three major books on Cuba to appear recently which, taken together, constitute an important political event that has seriously undermined what might be called the literary reputation of the Cuban Revolution. The two other books are Hugh Thomas's great history of Cuba from the British capture of Havana in 1762 to the October missile crisis two hundred years later,³ and K. S. Karol's *Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution*,⁴ a disillusioned left-wing critique of the Castro regime by an uprooted Polish Marxist who writes in French and worships at the throne of Mao Tse-tung.

The impact of these books helps to explain Fidel Castro's furious quarrel earlier this year with a large group of intellectuals in Paris and New York, including several Latin Americans residing abroad, who in effect withdrew their longstanding support for the regime in protest against the arrest of the poet Heberto Padilla and his subsequent "confession" of guilt for having made false and deprecatory statements about the Revolution to foreigners (among them Karol and Dumont, both of whom have been branded as CIA agents by the Castro regime). It might seem strange that people who in their past fervor for the Cuban Revolution were generously willing to overlook the fact that Castro was, by his own admission, holding 20,000 political prisoners,⁵ would now march like penguins in the opposite direction because of the arrest of a single poet (who "confessed" after only a month, placing his wife and his best friends in the dock, while others like the guerrilla *comandante* Hubert Matos and the labor leader David Salvador have spent more than a decade in prison without accepting "re-education"). It might also seem that the loss of some of these people to the Cuban revolutionary cause is a slight loss indeed; for example, Jean-Paul Sartre's uncritical enthusiasm after a few weeks' visit to Cuba in 1960 was at best very premature and evoked a Voltairean image of Dr. Pangloss in the tropics. Nevertheless the Padilla case did point to something greater than itself. What it pointed to was the destruction of even the limited degree of freedom of discussion and criticism which Castro had once seemed to accept and the complete and open rupture this entailed with the Western intellectual tradition.

Until these literary-political events occurred, the Cuban Revolution had been winning more and more admiration for its feat of survival in a hostile sea and for its announced intention of creating an agrarian socialism that would realize the Guevarist ideal of a "New Man" free of egoism and avarice and joyfully dedicated to laboring for the common good. However fanciful these intentions may have been, they were given a certain plausibility by the heightened tenor of public life in Cuba as compared with the gangsterism and corruption of previous decades. Moreover, despite recurrent economic failures, the Castro re-

gime had delivered two dramatic and immediate benefits to the poorest Cubans—education and full employment—while providing more pervasive and sophisticated attention to the peasantry than that class enjoys in any other country of the region.

BEFORE the Revolution, the ethnographer Fernando Ortiz wrote in his classic *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*:

A large part of the working class of Cuba has to live all year on the wages earned during two or three months, and the whole lower class suffers from this seasonal work system, being reduced to a state of poverty with an inadequate, vitamin-deficient diet consisting principally of rice, beans, and tubers, which leave it undernourished and the ready prey of hookworm, tuberculosis, malaria, and other diseases.

This contrasts dramatically with the description of the Argentine-born journalist Carlos Widmann⁶ of his visit to a sugar mill in Oriente Province on the eve of the 1970 harvest:

From the commercial point of view, the Revolution is bad business. In the 1950's production costs per pound of sugar were between 3.8 and four cents. Since the Revolution the cost of Cuban sugar has more than doubled. Above the noise of the Urbino Noris mill in Oriente, a young and good-natured foreman explained the situation to me: Before Castro, 960 mill laborers worked here three or four months per year at \$3.85 daily; in the nearby town there was just one doctor and a private school for the children of white-collar employees and a few year-round laborers. Today 1,200 men work in the mill all year at \$5.20 per day, and have free lunches, housing and schools for their children. Now there are eight doctors, and all the children go to school. It is easy to calculate that the production costs at the mill have doubled at least only through salary increases and giving the men year-round work. Production, meanwhile, has declined at the mill from 7,000 tons per day in 1957 to 6,500 now. "But on the other hand, we have doubled the capacity of our machinery," the radiant foreman added. "Next year we will produce 15,000 tons daily." Let God hear his words. In all of Cuba's 152 sugar mills the situation is the same.

But God did not hear his words, and this was the scene of economic disintegration in Cuba described by Fidel Castro in his "self-critical" speech of July 26, 1970:

Industrial goods pile up in the provincial warehouse of the Ministry of Domestic Trade in Havana. The plan for transportation of raw

³ *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, Harper & Row, 1696 pp., \$20.00.

⁴ Hill & Wang, 624 pp., \$12.50.

⁵ See the interview with Castro in Lee Lockwood, *Fidel's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel* (Macmillan, 1967), p. 205.

⁶ *Report aus Cuba* (Munich, 1970).

materials used for soaps and detergents, as well as the finished product, was not fulfilled. The transportation of silica sand for the production of cement and bottles, the transportation of steel bars, the transportation of fodder for the animals on state farms and the transportation of bagasse for the paper factories in Las Villas were insufficient. There was a work stoppage in the nail factory in Santiago de Cuba due to a lack in the transportation of raw materials; and the national fertilizer production plan was not met because of low extraction of the finished product. There was a 36 per cent drop in the number of railroad passengers, compared with 1969 in the January-May period, caused by the transfer of locomotives to the sugar harvest and the withdrawal of coaches from circulation due to lack of spare parts. . . . Our enemies are jubilant and base their hopes on our problems. We said they were right in this, that, and the other. They are only wrong in one point: in thinking that the people have other alternatives than the Revolution; in thinking that the people, seeing the difficulties of the Revolution . . . would choose the road of counterrevolution. [*Shouts of "No!"*] That is where they go wrong! That is where nobody will concede them the slightest grain of truth! That is their mistake!

Dumont's book is full of sad spectacles, viewed through a specialist's eye, like that in the Cauto Valley of Oriente where "some hundreds of hectares of banana tress were dying because they had been planted in a much too wet locale with very poor drainage. Any ordinary peasant would have avoided this gross mistake; in a state enterprise that justifies its existence only on the grounds of its technical superiority, such an error is inadmissible." Later on he writes:

The Castro regime first eliminated a capitalist agricultural system that had many defects—both men and land were underemployed—but was quite efficiently organized. The new socialist agriculture, of cooperatives and state farms, mobilized all available resources and was mechanized, even overmechanized, but it could not develop the same abilities for organizing work. Its failure is implicitly recognized in the present reorientation—the Special Plans⁷. . . .

⁷ The Special Plans are the pet projects of Castro and his closest associates. Albán Lataste, a Chilean who spent six years in Cuba and rose to Vice-Minister of the Central Planning Agency, says the Special Plans "tend to place the party in the role of being directly responsible for operational economic administration, displacing the regular organs of the state." While other ruling Communist parties confine themselves to a leading role of "political orientation, coordination, and control," the idea in Cuba "is to eliminate the separation between government and party, so the latter becomes the government itself." The Special Plans "follow budgetary methods, but without subjecting themselves to budgetary discipline like other state enterprises," thus diluting the scarce resources allotted to regular economic operations. (*Cuba: ¿Hacia Una Nueva Economía Política del Socialismo?*—"Cuba: Toward a New Socialist Political Economy?")

A PART from analyzing the familiar but surprisingly persistent economic failures, the three books by Thomas, Dumont, and Karol agree on two important conclusions: that Cuban society has been increasingly militarized, and that one-man rule has had a destructive impact on all efforts to develop civilian institutions that would consolidate a Marxist "dictatorship of the proletariat." Indeed, with each passing year Cuba appears less a socialist republic than a classic Latin American military dictatorship with Marxist-Leninist trappings. To the extent that a large portion of the Cuban people still support the Revolution, their loyalty is not to the system but to Fidel. After thirteen years in power, Fidel's governing style is still that of the *guerrillero*: he maintains no office and is constantly in hiding or on the run, with only a few intimates knowing his whereabouts at any given time and with no need to account to anyone. According to Karol, "most ministers have adopted Fidel's peripatetic style of life, so that it is extremely difficult to catch any of them in their offices." Political power remains so personalized that the ten-year-old Cuban socialist state is still without a constitution and its Communist party has still to hold its first congress, which was announced for 1967 and then mysteriously cancelled. The "party" is really Castro and his train of courtiers, most of whom hold party and government posts simultaneously.

Thomas calls Cuba's 200,000-man armed force "by far the largest military undertaking in Latin America." Both the party and the economy have been so militarized that most of the hundred members of the party's central committee are military officers, while the army's increasingly prominent role in the economy has made it responsible for the bulk of mechanized agriculture. In the cabinet shift that followed the failure of the "Ten-Million-Ton" harvest of 1970—only 8.5 million tons were produced, at the cost of great hardship and dislocation—an army officer was named Minister of Education. Following the Padilla affair earlier this year, another army officer, from the political section of the Defense Ministry—who was editor of the magazine which made the first major attack on Padilla—was named head of the National Culture Council. Dumont writes of

a takeover by the army of a faltering socialized agriculture, for the army directs all motorized activities. . . . As of March-April 1969, the men in charge of the machinery on the state farms were replaced by lieutenants and the militarized tractor drivers were assigned fixed wages (thereby eliminating overtime pay), military schedules, 25 days of continuous work with no Sundays off, and a five-day leave once a month—work permitting. . . . Militarization was pushed forward to cope with the general disorder, such as the passive resistance of a growing percentage of unwilling workers. The Cuban people were made increasingly subservient to the party and the army, and it was

becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between the two inasmuch as both groups wore uniforms and carried revolvers.

As a journalist who has just completed his first decade of reporting from Latin America, I have read Thomas, Dumont, and Karol with apprehension and dismay. If the bleak picture they draw, writing from three distinct points of view, is as accurate in its general outlines as I think it is—and as both the internal evidence of Castro's own speeches and the testimony of such other writers of Marxist persuasion as Albán Lataste and Michel Gutelman⁸ seems to suggest it is—then the rest of the hemisphere will once again have to suffer a loss of hope in the possibility of a revolutionary solution to its terrible social and political problems and may have to confront, as a general condition, the recurrent and expanding counterrevolutionary terror and violence that have been appearing in Latin America during the past few years.⁹

II

WHATEVER the long-range factors, the immediate cause of the crisis in Cuba was the *zafra* (sugar harvest) of 1970, with its goal of ten million tons. The Ten-Million-Ton *zafra* involved the most dramatic and important political mobilization in Cuba since the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. But this fevered mobilization in 1970 had a rather lyric and speculative quality, like that of the long-delayed movement for Cuban national independence that began a century ago as Cuba was becoming thoroughly integrated into the U.S. economy. And the same quality could be found in the boom-and-bust sugar cycles which were the only gamble possible in a one-crop economy that was always in debt to its foreign suppliers, whether of slaves or of machinery, when the sugar industry was not owned outright by foreigners. Of these cycles Thomas writes:

The sugar production of Cuba between 1850 and 1925 mounted by an average of 8 per cent a year, even though the country had suffered two serious civil wars, one of them ruinous. This advance could be maintained if the world's buying power increased; and it did not. Hence the origin of a whole series of fantasies which Fidel Castro, Cuba's first international political figure, would eventually satisfy.

Emerging as a national goal after the failure of Che Guevara's Bolivian expedition to replace the receding goal of continental revolution as Cuba's great political objective, the Ten-Million-Ton *zafra* represented, in Castro's words, "far more than tons of sugar, far more than an economic victory; it is a test, a moral commitment for the country. And precisely because it is a test and a moral commitment we cannot fall short by even

a single gram of these ten millions. . . ." To maximize the accumulation of sugar for the great harvest, cutting and grinding for 1970 actually began in July, then was suspended a few weeks later to start again in October, a most unusual procedure on an island whose traditional *zafra* season is in the dry months from January to April.¹⁰ Throughout Cuba, men were summoned to battle in the canefields as if the country were at war. Before sunrise each day hundreds of thousands of men and women with machetes filed quietly along country roads strewn with wasted scraps of cane that filled the air with a pungent molasses-sweetness. Beneath the towering chimneys of the great sugar mills, built by the Americans but now renamed for revolutionary heroes, the engines ground day and night like great magnets polarizing all the energies of people in towns and fields for miles around. Huge trucks moved slowly like elephants in tandem along the fringes of the fields, dropping off students, office workers, prisoners, and soldiers to cut cane among the great phalanxes of uncut stalks, and picking up the cut stalks to deliver them to the mills. Throughout Cuba, at mills and schools and government ministries and army barracks, signs and posters proliferated bearing this simple legend: *Palabra de cubano: van: los diez millones de toneladas van* ("A Cuban's word: they're coming: the ten million tons are coming").

The urge to maximize sugar production becomes understandable if we look back to a 1955 study in which the Cuban National Bank estimated that to give the Cuban people in 1965 the standard of living attained in 1947 a sugar crop of more than nine million tons, worth nearly \$800 million, would be needed. However, while the Cuban population figure in 1965 was one million higher than the estimate of 6.5 million projected by the National Bank a decade earlier, sugar production in the 1960's averaged roughly 5 per cent per year below that of the previous decade. For the Castro regime, in a vain effort to break the tyranny of sugar monoculture, undertook a program of industrialization and agricultural diversification which, among other things, involved the uprooting of some 350,000 acres of cane. Thus, as Thomas notes, "the Cuban Revolution neglected in fact the only crop which, like it or

⁸ Gutelman is a Belgian economist who spent three years in Cuba drafting production programs for state farms, and he is also the author of *La Agricultura Socializada en Cuba* ("Socialized Agriculture in Cuba").

⁹ For detailed accounts of this new right-wing paramilitary terror in Latin America, see my "Slaughter in Guatemala" and "Santo Domingo: The Politics of Terror," *New York Review of Books*, May 20 and July 22, 1971 respectively.

¹⁰ The rains that normally come before January and after May sharply dilute the sugar content in the cane. Dumont reports that this unseasonable harvest produced only 200,000 tons of sugar with yields from the cane of 5.5 per cent sucrose, compared with 11 or 12 per cent in the regular harvest season.

not, they could live on in totalitarian conditions; for sugar can be cut by an army or by machines and it is ground by an industrial proletariat." Yet, as Thomas also notes, "even if the ten million tons had been achieved, Cuba would still have been producing less sugar per head of population than she was in 1925, while the long-term costs of this grand Potemkin-type harvest cannot easily be measured."

The strategy for the Ten-Million-Ton *zafra* was drafted at a meeting of the Cuban leadership in Santa Clara on November 26 and 27, 1966. The regime's technicians pored over every aspect of Cuba's previous record harvest—7.3 million tons during 110 days of grinding in 1952—the way military academy classes study one of Napoleon's great battles. Since two-thirds of Cuba's 152 mills were built in the 19th century, the newest of them in 1927, and since maintenance of this equipment in the early years of the Revolution had been poor, a task of enormous proportions was at hand. To expand the acreage, grinding, and transport capacity of the mills so as to put them within reach of producing ten million tons, the regime in 1965 had programmed investments adding up to more than one billion dollars, a sum greater than the total assets of the sugar industry in 1965.¹¹ New machinery was installed in scores of mills, and sugar-cane acreage was to be expanded by 40 per cent, or an additional 3.5 million acres, with new cane varieties and fertilizers introduced to prolong the *zafra* into the rainy season. In the old U.S.-built mills, the cane was washed in new French filters, the sugar crystals separated in East German centrifugal machines, loaded by Czech cranes onto Rumanian railroad cars which took them to the ports where new Japanese suction-loading equipment poured them directly into the hulls of Soviet ships. Even with these improvements, nearly 20 per cent of the harvest still had to be hauled to the mills in oxcarts. All in all, the great harvest mobilized 36,000 oxcarts, 6,000 tractors, 6,000 trucks, 80 locomotives, and 29,000 railroad cars.¹²

THROUGHOUT the history of the Cuban sugar industry, labor was always the scarcest factor of production, and many experts doubted for that reason that the Castro regime would be able to mobilize enough labor to bring in a harvest of ten million tons. Thomas writes that during the sugar boom of the early 19th century, "slaves were the biggest single investment on all Cuban sugar plantations," constituting roughly one-third of the cost. Karol explains the scarcity and low productivity of manpower in the *zafras* under Castro in this way:

Cuba no longer has the old professional *macheteros* who can cut 400 to 500 *arobas* [units of 25 pounds] of cane per day. These men have now become independent thanks to the agricultural reforms or else they have moved to town

in search of more regular and less strenuous employment. . . . In the past, whenever a particularly good harvest was expected, Cuba would recruit seasonal workers from Haiti or from Jamaica; her own labor force could not cope with any *zafra* greater than four to five million tons. It goes without saying that since the Revolution the import of foreign semi-slaves has completely stopped. Who then cuts the cane? Much of the work is done by volunteers—soldiers and students . . . [and] every factory or department is expected to send part of its labor force or staff into the fields on a rotational system. . . . The norm (per volunteer) is now fixed at 100 *arobas* per day—i.e., at less than 25 per cent of the alleged output of a good *machetero* before the Revolution. And yet, most of the casual laborers from the town seem to find it difficult to reach even that goal—Havana puts their average output at 60 to 80 *arobas* per day. These figures (from official sources) set a problem in elementary arithmetic: if a five-million-ton *zafra* called for 400,000 *macheteros* cutting some 400 *arobas* per day before the Revolution, how many nonprofessional *macheteros*, cutting between 60 and 80 *arobas* per day, are needed to bring in a ten-million-ton *zafra*? The result is clearly beyond the capacity of a country with a mere seven million inhabitants. . . . It should be noted that, because the volunteers are paid their normal wages no matter how low their sugar output, the *zafra* is a major generator of inflation, and so helps to depress real wages.

Nevertheless, in Fidel Castro's detailed public accounts of the failure of the Ten-Million-Ton *zafra*, a manpower shortage was not given as one of the reasons. In his speech of July 26, 1971, Castro recalled that some 360,000 *macheteros* were mobilized at the peak of the 1970 harvest, and that most of Cuba's 315,000 secondary, technical, and university students had been spending from four to five months annually cutting cane.¹³ If one adds to these some 130,000 professional canecutters, 100,000 army troops, and an undetermined number of prisoners and detainees awaiting expatriation to the United States, one could conservatively calculate a work force of more than 700,000 for the 1970 *zafra*, apart from the industrial workers of the sugar mills. In his televised speech of May 20, 1970, when he first explained why the ten million-ton goal would not be reached, Castro said:

What very often happened was this: In Oriente

¹¹ Gutelman observes that the ten million tons would have been much more feasible in 1972 than in 1970, since new milling capacity could be installed and surrounding lands shifted into sugar without causing massive dislocations in the economy. As it turned out, some mills had high milling capacity but insufficient cane, while others were swamped with cane they could not process.

¹² James Kutas, "La realidad del azúcar" ("The Reality of Sugar"), in *Vision*, September 12, 1969. Also Michel Torguy, "La Gran Zafra" ("The Great Harvest"), *El Universal*, Caracas, March 24, 1970.

¹³ From *Granma*, Havana, July 27, 1971, p. 3.

Province, for example, all those giant sugar mills had all the necessary manpower, trucks, cane loaders, everything, waiting for the mills to reach their scheduled levels of grinding capacity. The result? Constant breakdowns and stoppages. Therefore, in order not to have an accumulation of cut cane lying on the ground, it was necessary time and again to paralyze 40,000 or 50,000 workers. Farmers mobilized from the mountains of Baracoa or the Sierra Maestra, from all over, who had gone to these canefields moved by tremendous enthusiasm, were asked to stop cutting. And this had a tremendous demoralizing effect. . . . We—we alone—are the ones who have lost the battle. The administrative apparatus and the leaders of the Revolution are the ones who lost the battle. The people have measured up to the ten million—and to eleven million as well.¹⁴

It seems, then, that the headlong rush to produce ten million tons generated two major miscalculations. First, the Castro regime's planners were, as usual, grossly over-optimistic in what their sugar yields were to be; indeed, the yields in 1970 seemed the lowest in thirty years. Second, large amounts of new equipment had been installed in the mills without being properly tested, and so broke down at first use. When, said Castro, this began happening repeatedly in Oriente province, which contains the largest amount of cane and grinding capacity,

it was decided to call a halt on all road construction work on highways and mountain roads that was not directly related to the harvest, all the road-building equipment was concentrated on the building of roads for hauling cane in that province. This concentration of building equipment included the equipment which was getting ready to start the building of several dams. . . . The situation remained unchanged in January and, therefore, things were getting worse. The railroad line in the Guiteras sugar mills was insufficient to handle the problem. Now it was not a matter of 7.5 million hundredweight but almost 17.5 million hundredweight of cane left over, and no solution in sight.

The frantic building of feeder roads and the laying of railroad track in the midst of the great harvest to save huge expanses of ripe sugar cane, taxing even further the overworked labor brigades of volunteers and soldiers and prisoners, gave the Ten-Million-Ton *zafra* an epic quality worthy of the battle on the ice in *Alexander Nevsky* or Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*. The consequences of this cinematic spectacle were described in Castro's speech of July 26, 1970:

In reality we have some debts pending with irony, with the illusion we have indulged in at times. We have some debts pending with our

needs. We have debts pending with poverty. We have debts pending with underdevelopment. And we have debts unpaid with the suffering of our people. . . . One of the many tragic things in our country . . . is our lack of cadres, of men with a high enough level of training and intelligence who are carrying out the complex tasks of production. These tasks are apparently easy. Most of the time we make the mistake of minimizing the difficulties . . . and we have seen this happen to a number of well-trained comrades, comrades well-known for their iron will and their desire to do a good job . . . we have seen them, in a specific task, going through what is practically an apprenticeship that lasts one, two, or even three years before they begin to do an efficient job. If only we could solve our problems by simply replacing these men! We have to make changes. There is no question that many comrades have worn themselves out. . . . I am in no way trying to pin the blame on anyone not in the revolutionary leadership and myself. [*Applause*] Unfortunately, this self-criticism cannot be accompanied by other logical solutions. It would be better to tell the people to look for somebody else. [*Shouts of "No!"*] . . . I believe that we, the leaders of this Revolution, have cost the people too much in our process of learning. The people can replace us whenever they wish—right now if you so desire! [*Shouts of "No!" and "Fidel! Fidel! Fidel!"*] One of our most difficult problems—and we are paying for it dearly—is our heritage of ignorance. . . . And if the enemy makes use of some of the things we say and causes us deep shame, let us welcome it! [*Applause*] The embarrassment will be welcome if we know how to turn the shame into strength, if we know how to turn the shame into a will to work, if we know how to turn the shame into dignity, and if we know how to turn it into morale! [*Applause and shouts of "Fidel, Fidel, Fidel!"*]

However, Castro rehabilitated himself within two months. He fired his Sugar Industry Minister, and in September 1970 he told a provincial assembly of the Cuban Workers Confederation: "Those technocrats, geniuses, super-scientists assured me that they knew what to do in order to produce the ten million tons. But it was proven, first, that they did not know how to do it and, second, that they exploited the rest of the economy by receiving large amounts of resources . . . while there are factories that could have improved with a better distribution of those resources that were allocated to the Ten-Million-Ton plan." This is what several of Castro's economic advisers had been saying all the time.

III

HUGH THOMAS's *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* is surely one of the finest histories to be written in English in this century; it is the product of ten years of labor by a prodigious talent who in 1961, at the age of twenty-

¹⁴ Fidel Castro, speech of May 20, 1970 (official translation), Ediciones COR, Havana.

nine, had already published a 900-page classic, *The Spanish Civil War*. Not only does Thomas's *Cuba* give us the island's history in rich and voluminous detail; it also makes Cuba a kind of microcosm of the struggle of tropical peoples, issuing from the poisoned womb of slavery, to achieve a political economy that would transform and dignify traditional modes of labor.

The detonator of this social struggle was the great slave revolt in neighboring Haiti in the 1790's (the first fully successful slave revolution in modern history and an event to which the response in the rest of the Americas uncannily resembled the response to the Cuban Revolution nearly two centuries later).

After the Haitian revolt was organized, under the leadership of a black coachman named Toussaint L'Ouverture, by means of voodoo drums transmitting messages between the plantations, roughly 1,000 estates were destroyed and 2,000 whites were killed (more victims, Thomas says, than under the guillotine of the French Revolution). "The savagery and completeness of the revolution," Thomas writes, "was a revelation, though it would not have occurred in a colony less filled with feverish hatreds, itself deriving from the recent import of a huge mass of new slaves and the arrival of new and anxious money-grubbing proprietors." In the ensuing years all of the slave economies of the New World felt themselves threatened with an extension of the Haitian revolt which, on a lesser scale, was a recurrent experience in their own lands. Six decades after the Haitian uprising, U.S. diplomats in Europe attempting to negotiate the purchase of Cuba from Spain reported back to the Secretary of State in Washington:

We should be unworthy of our gallant forefathers and commit base treason against our posterity if Cuba were to be "Africanized" and become another Santo Domingo [Haiti], with all its attendant horrors to the white race, and suffer the flames to extend to our neighboring shores, seriously to endanger or actually destroy the fabric of our Union.

In view of the ever-present danger of a slave uprising, Cuba refrained from participating in the national independence movement led by Simón Bolívar in Spanish America in which former slaves played a critical role. The possibilities thus remaining to Cuba in the early 19th century were three: being ravaged by the kind of slave uprising that had just occurred in neighboring Haiti, outright annexation by the United States, or the immediately easier course of remaining nominally within the Spanish empire while becoming integrated into the U.S. economy. These economic ties had become so strong that in 1826—before the destruction of the Spanish empire in South America had been completed—783 of the 964 ships that entered Havana harbor were American. Throughout the 19th and early 20th cen-

turies there were powerful annexationist parties in both Cuba and the mainland. Typical of this attitude was Secretary of State John Quincy Adams's letter to the U.S. minister in Spain:

Cuba . . . has become an object of transcendent importance to the commercial and political interests of our Union. Its commanding position . . . its safe and capacious harbor of the Havana . . . the nature of its productions and of its wants . . . give it an importance in the sum of our national interests with which that of no other foreign territory can be compared and little inferior to that which binds the different members of the Union together.

Thomas concludes, and I agree, that annexation would have been preferable to the ambiguous condition of total economic dependence on the U.S. and fig-leaf political sovereignty that existed from the departure of the Spanish in 1898 until Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959. Several attempts at annexation by purchase nearly succeeded, but all foundered on questions of race and slavery. In 1868, after the U.S. Civil War ended the prospects of Cuba's being annexed as a slave territory and after a new revolution occurred in Spain, an insurrection seeking Cuban independence and led mainly by white planters broke out in Oriente province. The independence revolt soon developed social-revolutionary overtones as fugitive slaves from Oriente proclaimed themselves rebels. Among conservative financial backers of the independence movement the fear became so strong that a "black republic" would be founded by Antonio Maceo, the leading mulatto general, that Maceo wrote in 1876 to Cuba's provisional President: ". . . I must protest energetically with all my strength that neither now nor at any time am I to be regarded as an advocate of a Negro Republic."

THE 1868 revolt finally was put down ten years after it started, but as a result of it slavery was ended in Cuba and the economy of the island became more and more closely tied to the United States. American merchants and engineers arrived, bringing with them new mill machinery that dramatically expanded grinding capacity. American consortiums voraciously absorbed Cuban mills and plantations; the United Fruit Co. was incorporated in 1899—the year after President McKinley sent troops to Cuba to support the second Cuban independence uprising—and immediately bought 200,000 acres of cheap land in Oriente. A U.S. military government was organized the same year, which brought in money and machines, civil servants, missionaries, and schoolteachers. One of the finest passages in Thomas's long history is this vignette on the childhood of dictator Fulgencio Batista, which gives so vivid a sense of how the Cuban people lived from that time until the 1959 Revolution:

Batista's birth had been during the year (1901)

that the *Boston* mill had been built by the United Fruit Co. so that it is reasonable to suppose that his father (a sugar port laborer) had gone there to seek work. Both Batista's parents appear to have been mulatto. . . . The young Fulgencio had had a childhood both varied and disorganized. He went to a public school at Banes and afterwards to a Quaker school at night: in the day he was already cutting cane. He left home at the age of 14 when his mother, Carmela, died, and worked on a sugar plantation at Holguín. Then he became water-boy at a plantation in San Germán, and afterwards the timekeeper of a workgang. Thereafter, he went back to Banes and worked as a cane cutter. After that, he lingered around the railway station at Dumois doing odd jobs for some time, and then went to the sugar port of Antilla. There a contingent of the army was posted, because of a threatened strike, real or suspected. Batista then began to work for the army, washing bridles and again doing odd jobs. He was known as the *mulato lindo* (the pretty mulatto). He went on to Alto Cedro, working again as a cane cutter, and then returned to Holguín where he became first a tailor's, then a carpenter's apprentice, and after that a hand boy at a barber's. He also for a time found work as a brakeman on the Consolidated Railways. This shiftless and feckless career was unusual only in that most Cubans did not have such good fortune at finding new work as soon as they had lost their old employment.

THE so-called Sergeants' Revolt of 1933, which Batista led while serving as an army stenographer in Camp Columbia outside Havana, was the most important political event in Cuba during the 20th century until Fidel Castro's rise to power. Sergeant Stenographer Batista, whose "knowledge of all parts of Cuba and all sections of society would make him when he gained revolutionary power a most formidable opponent," brilliantly channeled to his own ends the student and popular agitation that led to the fall of Dictator Gerardo Machado, who was closely linked to U.S. sugar and financial interests. After Machado's fall, U.S. Ambassador Sumner Welles, Franklin Roosevelt's old school chum from Groton, became so frightened of a Communist takeover that he got on the phone to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in Washington the day after the Sergeants' Revolt to ask for the landing of U.S. Marines.¹⁵ Although this request was refused, Washington steadfastly denied diplomatic recognition to the government of Grau

¹⁵ Thomas reproduces the transcript of this remarkable telephone conversation, which is strikingly similar to President Johnson's version of his phone talk with Ambassador William T. Bennett in Santo Domingo before dispatching U.S. troops there in 1965. A moderating influence on Roosevelt was exercised by Josephus Daniels, his Ambassador to Mexico, who later labored so effectively to avoid an open rupture with Mexico over the expropriation of foreign oil firms.

San Martín (which had taken over in the wake of the revolt) while U.S. banks refused to finance harvesting of the 1934 sugar crop. Grau retained the support of radical politicians and student leaders like Carlos Prío, but he was ultimately forced to resign, clearing the way for a decade of rule by Batista: six of these years manipulating puppets from behind the scenes at Camp Columbia and the rest in his glory as constitutional President.

By the final year of Batista's first Presidential term (1940-44), amid the cordiality generated by the Allied effort in World War II, the political relations among the United States, Batista, and the Communists who supported him had become so cozy that Blas Roca, then the Communists' Secretary-General and today a member of Cuba's Politburo, could write that "the imperialist era has ended, as Sumner Welles has pointed out." Thomas observes that, although he enriched himself greatly,

Batista's national regime left behind a state where, it seemed, in the shadow of the New Deal, the most overt and outrageous side of U.S. involvement in Cuba had been removed and where the state had made an apparently decisive step towards a form at least of socialism. There were few countries in the Americas where the trade unions were so well established and exercised such a powerful role.

Batista had respected his own 1940 constitution—one of the landmark democratic charters in Latin America—and thus could not put across his own candidate to succeed him. Back came the old popular idol Grau San Martín, and that was the beginning of the end. Thomas writes:

The trust which the people of Cuba had in [Grau] was wasted in a revel of corrupt government which . . . exceeded that of Batista. Already a rich man because of an extensive private [medical] practice and the fortune which he inherited from his father, Grau turned his presidency into an orgy of theft ill-disguised by emotional nationalistic speeches. He did more than any other single man to kill the hope of democratic practice in Cuba.

Thus, for example, Grau's Education Minister arrived in Miami in 1948 with \$20 million in his suitcase after just two years in Grau's cabinet. And when Grau himself was accused of corruption by his successor, Carlos Prío, he demanded a public investigation to clear his name, but as soon as the hearing had begun six masked men broke into the courtroom with guns and stole thirty-five files of evidence. Throughout the Grau and Prío Presidencies gangsterism and political assassination were rife, especially in the labor movement and the universities. Rolando Masferrer, the ex-Communist who was then a pro-government Senator and later, with his private army of "Tigers," a pillar of Batista's second dictatorship, "rode around Cuba in his Cadillac like a pirate king,

surrounded by bodyguards." When a friend objected to him that his prospective 1952 Presidential candidate was a gangster, Masferrer replied: "Yes, *chico*, but we're all gangsters. What do you expect? This isn't Europe. Only Chibás is not a gangster and he's mad."

Senator Eduardo Chibás, a wealthy former student leader, was the most brilliant orator of the time and yet another Cuban messiah; he was leader of the opposition to Prío, and his great theme was corruption. But unable to prove some charges he had made against the Education Minister, he delivered a hysterical radio speech and seconds later shot himself in the stomach. Chibás's suicide hastened the fall of Prío in much the same way as the self-immolation of the *bonzes* in Saigon a dozen years later led to the collapse of the Diem regime. Batista had already announced his Presidential candidacy for the 1952 elections, but under pressure from friends he decided to stage a coup a few months before the election. Thomas concludes:

Batista had always been popular outside educated circles in the past and something remained of that popularity; and then, who cared about the fall of Prío outside the constitutional middle class? Chibás had done his work of destruction too well: no one believed in Prío's system. Most indeed settled to accept Batista with relief.

A year after Batista's coup of March 1952, the Cuban historian Herminio Portell Vilá met a former student of his, Fidel Castro, in a Havana bar and was told by the young man that he planned to strike a spectacular psychological blow at Batista by attacking the Moncada army barracks at Santiago. The professor tried to discourage Castro, but the attack was carried out on July 26, 1953 as the kind of operatic gesture worthy of Chibás and Martí. But Fidel Castro survived, and this has always been the difference. Of the 111 men participating in the attack, 68 were killed, but Castro's political career was launched.

FIDEL CASTRO was the kind of young man that Latin American Communists like to speak of as having "a low political culture." His father, like Batista's, had been a laborer for the United Fruit Co. in Oriente, but Angel Castro was white—a veteran of the 200,000-man Spanish army that had come to suppress the Cuban insurrection of 1895—and as a United Fruit caretaker "hacked his farm out of forest, perhaps sometimes on moonless nights, perhaps by stealing title deeds." Fidel was the second of five children born to Angel Castro's cook, whom he later married after his first wife died. Angel Castro grew rich and sent Fidel to the aristocratic *Colegio Belén*, run by the Jesuits in Havana, where he obtained high marks without

much effort and won a prize in 1943-44 as Cuba's best all-around schoolboy athlete.

When Castro entered the University of Havana he plunged at once into the gangsterized student politics of the time. Within a week he got himself elected president of his first-year class in the Law Faculty after challenging the student body president to a fight, then tried to form a cabal among the other class presidents to oust the older leader. In 1947 he participated in an abortive invasion of the Dominican Republic by Dominican exiles and Cuban "action groups." Several months later he was arrested, but then released, in connection with the gangland-style murder of Manolo Castro (no relation) who was State Secretary of Sports and virtual dictator of the University of Havana. Shortly thereafter, in April 1948, he was in Bogotá with a student delegation protesting the Pan American ministerial conference there to organize the Organization of American States when the Colombian liberal idol Jorge Eliecer Gaitán was fatally shot, leading to the terrible *Bogotazo*, a long orgy of looting and shooting that cost an estimated 3,000 lives.¹⁶

Summing up Castro's career in student politics, Thomas says:

The revolutionary violence which had characterized the students who had overthrown Machado [in 1933] never lost its fundamentally romantic appeal. The future leader of the Cuban socialist revolution was bloodied in politics during the machine-gun and big-car era in the time of Grau and, whatever part he personally played, it is evident that he learned much about the nature of Cuban political institutions, their feebleness, their susceptibility to violence and their corruption.

Nevertheless, neither this nor any other book has undertaken to explain why the pervasive gangsterism and corruption of traditional Cuban politics disappeared so suddenly following Castro's rise to power in 1959.

Given this background, it is indeed remarkable that in succeeding years Fidel Castro was able to generate a mystique about himself as the revolutionary savior of Cuba. Yet while there is still about him something of the style of the student leader writ-large, the charisma of his public personality was created with the Moncada attack in 1953, his spectacular trial defense and year in jail, his exile in Mexico and the two-year guerrilla insurrection in the Sierra Maestra that led to his triumphant march across the island and into Havana in January 1959. Thanks to Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* who secretly

¹⁶ Castro's presence in Bogotá at the time has often been cited as "proof" that he was always a Communist. However, after reviewing the evidence, Thomas concludes, "It is true that Castro did get involved in the riots, but obscure how much fighting he did; it is evidently incorrect to suppose that Castro was an agent of the riots. . . ."

went to the mountains of Oriente in February 1957—barely two months after Castro had established himself in the Sierra Maestra!—the young rebel was transformed in the public mind from a hunted *guerrillero* whose survival was doubted even by his own followers to an “invincible” prophet on a mountaintop, “an educated, dedicated fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership.” Matthews’s exaggeration of the size of Castro’s force, an error hard to avoid in this kind of situation, helped draw more city people into the revolutionary cause. By mid-1957 the heads of the CIA station in Havana were supporting Castro, and explicitly encouraged the September 1957 naval mutiny in Cienfuegos that was organized by Castro’s July 26th Movement.

The apogee of Castro’s popularity with the CIA came during his April 1959 visit to Washington, when he was prevailed upon to meet the agency’s chief expert on Communism in Latin America, a Central European named Droller, who was later to appear in Miami as the famous “Mr. Bender,” the CIA’s operational chief directing the preparations for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. However, when Mr. Bender emerged from his three-hour meeting with Castro in 1959, he told the Cuban Finance Minister: “Castro is not only not a Communist, he is a strong anti-Communist fighter.”

Castro seems to have realized very early that to consolidate his personal power two steps were needed: the delivery of dramatic and immediate benefits to Cuba’s poorer classes, and a disengagement from the political influence of the United States. So house rents and installment payments were cut in half, loan-sharks were arrested, racially-segregated clubs and beaches were opened to all, army barracks were turned into schools, popular militias were organized, and expropriated haciendas became workers’ cooperatives. All this was accompanied by guerrilla-like skirmishing, featuring both blandishments and recriminations, with U.S. business and diplomatic interests in Cuba, until a complete break occurred in 1961. But the program never worked. According to Thomas:

The political revolution following the capture of power in 1959 was to have been accompanied by, first, an immediate increase in standards of living; second, a rapid industrialization; and third, a switch away from that emphasis on sugar which had played for so long such a large and, as many thought, destructive part in Cuban society. None of these things occurred.

Instead, the prophecy made thirty years before by Cuba’s leading historian was being fulfilled: “The day that Cuba finally becomes one huge cane plantation, the republic and its sovereignty will vanish, and we are embarked on this course.”¹⁷

IV

K. S. KAROL is one of those true believers who worships Revolution like a distant star but finds great difficulty in coming to terms with its tarnished, earthly realities. Although Karol’s book, *Guerrillas in Power*, is seriously flawed by prejudice and errors of fact that are wrought by his livid hatred for the Soviet Union, it is of considerable value as a chronicle of the changes in the Cuban Revolution since Che Guevara’s death in Bolivia in October 1967.

Karol, having just published a book praising the Chinese Cultural Revolution, returned to Cuba in mid-1967 for the first time in six years to discover that a “Cuban heresy” was being brashly advanced by Fidel Castro under the noses of his Soviet benefactors. In the almost giddy atmosphere of the founding conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS)—a kind of Castroite Comintern for guerrilla insurrections—under huge portraits of Che, who was still fighting in Bolivia, Castro told Karol: “I wonder whether Lenin did not make a mistake in signing the peace of Brest-Litovsk. Who knows what might not have happened, had the young Soviet Republic taken the risk of waging a revolutionary war, thus helping the Western proletariat to free itself.” President Osvaldo Dorticós, a Communist in his youth and later a wealthy lawyer and commodore of the Cienfuegos Yacht Club, and yet described by Karol as “a man of very great simplicity who has taken Che Guevara’s place as the top theorist of Cuban Communism,” also told him:

We are about to build Communism. The aim of our revolution is not to build a socialist state, but to move with minimum delay toward full Communism. It is pure illusion to think that Communism will come automatically, just as soon as the conditions are right. We have to prepare for it here and now, by partial transformations of our society.

When Karol asked him if that meant there were fundamental differences between the Cuban and Russian views, Dorticós replied: “Well, yes. We have our little heresy.”

This “Cuban heresy” meant, in essence, “armed struggle” throughout Latin America and simultaneous construction of socialism and Communism at home. The move toward Communism meant attempts at eradicating the last vestiges of capitalism in Cuba, shifting from “material” to “moral” production incentives, espousing Guevara’s ideal of the “New Man” (as best expounded in his last essay “On Man and Socialism in Cuba”), and eliminating the use of

¹⁷ From Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez, *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean: An Economic History of Cuban Agriculture*. Originally published, Havana, 1927; English edition: Yale University Press, 1964.

money for such public services as water, electricity, phones, sports events, movies, and housing. Said Castro to Karol:

Listen to me. The Chinese may be doing interesting experiments but we are trying to go much farther than they have. Money remains at the core of their social program, even though its sights are set on equality while the Russians deliberately encourage differences in income. We intend to get rid of the whole money myth, rather than tamper with it. We want to abolish money altogether.

REFLECTING upon this "Cuban heresy," Cuba's Soviet allies might well have found echoes of their own recent past. Guevara's "New Man" after all was not very different from Khrushchev's "New Soviet Man" as described in the Soviet Communist party's 1962 program, which also promised the abolition of money as part of a rapid march toward Communism. The ascendancy of moral over material incentives was a major feature of the Soviet experience in the late 1920's and 1930's, symbolized by the Stakhanovite superworkers glorified during Stalin's first great industrialization drive. The Cuban Stakhanovites are the "millionaire cane-cutters,"¹⁸ as well as the special brigades of labor heroes such as the 24,000-member Centennial Youth Column of Camaguey and the Mariana Grajales Feminine Brigade of *Macheteras*.¹⁹ However, even though moral incentives operate through a romanticization of work, they tend to breed feelings of resentment and degradation among the workers themselves. Soviet workers in the 1930's occasionally smashed machines and murdered Stakhanovite labor heroes; Dumont reports a similar reaction from Cuban workers when

84 Soviet tractors arrived in Oriente in the spring of 1969 equipped with headlights for night work. Tractor-drivers working at night generally live in overcrowded barracks with bad ventilation, very hot during the day, making it very hard to sleep well. To avoid night work, some of them unscrewed the headlights and tossed them into the canals. This was not the CIA at work, or counterrevolutionary sabotage, but a simple reaction of self-defense by exhausted people, of resistance against efforts demanded of them which, if they are not labor heroes, were felt by some to be excessive and badly compensated.

Be all that as it may, the rhetoric of "the Cuban heresy" quickly receded into the background following Che's death in Bolivia just two months after the OLAS conference. At the same time *Pravda* published an article by the Argentine Communist theoretician Rodolfo Ghioldi attacking "petit-bourgeois nationalists" for their "extreme adventurism" and for "creating the concept of local or continental exception in order to justify deviations from Marxist-Leninist teach-

ings."²⁰ Karol says the Russians later apologized to the Cubans for the article. Nevertheless, a move toward Soviet orthodoxy seems to have begun with Guevara's death and to have gained momentum with Castro's very qualified endorsement of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia ten months later.²¹

In January 1968, soon after Karol's return to Havana, there occurred the so-called "microfaction" trial of Anibal Escalante and other leaders of the old *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP), Cuba's pre-revolutionary Communist party. Karol's account of this sensational political trial is very sketchy, but the documents published in the party newspaper *Granma* at the time are extremely revealing. Escalante, who organized the Castro regime's first revolutionary political apparatus before he was purged in 1962 for "sectarianism" and power-grabbing,²² was accused before the Central Committee by Defense Minister Raul Castro of leading a pathetic corridor conspiracy of ex-PSP cadres who met secretly at wakes and funerals and at the farm Escalante was managing. The conspirators agreed that the Cuban Revolution was being run by "petit-bour-

¹⁸ A millionaire cane-cutter has cut one million *arobas* (one *aroba*=25 lbs.) of cane; Cuba has its double and triple millionaire *macheteros*.

¹⁹ See, for example, "Tres Años de CJC," in *Bohemia*, Havana, July 9, 1971, p. 34. The Centennial Youth Column was one of Castro's astute political maneuvers, sending many thousands of working-class youth to study trades, cut cane, and clear lands in Camaguey Province, a naturally rich but underpopulated and traditionally conservative area. The earlier mass mobilizations of the Cuban Revolution have been analyzed in Richard Fagen's *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford University Press, 1969).

²⁰ This article is quoted more fully in my "The Legacy of Che Guevara," COMMENTARY, December 1967.

²¹ In that speech, while supporting the invasion, Castro audaciously censured the Soviet Union with the question: "Could it be imagined that at the end of 20 years of Communism in our country—of Socialist revolution—a group of honest revolutionaries in this country, terrified at the prospects of a retrogression toward counterrevolutionary positions and imperialism, would see the need of asking the aid of friendly armies to prevent such a situation from occurring? Cuban visitors and scholarship students have many times returned [from Eastern Europe] saturated with dissatisfaction. They have said the youth there are highly influenced by all the ideas and all the tastes of the Western European countries; in many places there they only speak about money; in many places all they talk about is material incentives of all sorts, about profits and wages; and really an internationalist, a Communist awareness is not being developed."

²² An excellent analysis of the 1962 "Escalante Affair" is given by Theodore Draper in his "Five Years of Castro's Cuba," COMMENTARY, January 1964, and in his books, *Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities* and *Castroism: Theory and Practice* (Praeger, 1962 and 1965). Escalante had served a long apprenticeship in Russia during the 1930's; he was the PSP's Organizational Secretary and the editor of its newspaper *Hoy* from its founding in 1938 until 1959. He was also, at the beginning, one of the few PSP leaders to urge party support for Castro's guerrilla insurrection.

geois elements," that Che Guevara was a "Trotskyite" whose departure from Cuba was "a salutary event for the Revolution," that promotion of guerrilla activities in Venezuela was "an adventure." They allegedly had said: "No one understands Fidel: he is mad." But much more important was Escalante's prediction that Cuba would fail to reach its 1970 harvest goal of ten million tons, and thus would be driven decisively under the influence of the Soviet Union. According to the published statement attributed to Octavio Fernandez, a key "microfaction" member:

Aníbal explained that from 1970 on the difficulties will increase because economically we won't be able to reach the ten million tons of sugar, since the measures needed to achieve this are not being taken and the rhythm of present *zafras* shows that we will have to increase by four million tons in two years. The scarcity of both food and industrial products will not be relieved as planned, and for all this the offers made to the people will not be realized, such as the freedom from rents in 1970. Politically, the Latin American Communist parties will be stronger . . . and they will be in condition to direct more fully the struggle in their respective countries. . . . With respect to the Soviet Union, we will become much closer in all policy, eliminating a series of discrepancies that we presently have. . . .²³

It is fairly clear that Castro used the "microfaction" trial to get rid of his pro-Soviet opposition inside Cuba and show himself again as absolute master of the island while, at the same time, yielding to irresistible pressures to reach a closer understanding with the Soviet Union. But it also appears that poor Escalante was right. Not only did the 1970 harvest fail and not only do the acute shortages of consumer goods continue, but the position of the pro-Soviet Communist parties in Latin America has been greatly strengthened by the Chilean Communists' key role in the 1970 election victory and the *Unidad Popular* government of Salvador Allende in Chile. Moreover, the second fall of Escalante has been followed by both a militarization of the Cuban economy and society and an open break with Western intellectual tradition, which means that the libertarian pretensions of the Cuban Revolution are at an end.

V

THE "pursuit of freedom," in Thomas's phrase, is over, then, but the question of survival remains. Survival in itself has been the greatest achievement of the Cuban Revolution which, despite many errors and privations, apparently has conserved the consent of the governed to an appreciable degree without any external coercive force, such as the presence of foreign troops. Cuba under Castro—like the Soviet Union—has been spared the internal convulsions

suffered by the Western democracies, and especially the United States, in the past ten years. One reason for this relative stability is that the regime enjoys a monopoly of propaganda, political organization, and armed force, which makes any alternative to what already exists almost inconceivable. But the social fabric of Soviet-style regimes is also tightened—intentionally or not—by restricted personal consumption, excesses of which have seriously undermined the cohesion of Western societies through the exaggerated individualism of its members. While Soviet-type societies, including Cuba, have characteristically failed to attract or generate enough technology to compensate for their burdensome social overhead costs and deficient human motivation, they do seem to be equipped with the internal controls to deal with the declining ration of goods that must come with the projected doubling of world population in the next three decades. Such controls will become more important as mankind's political economy is governed increasingly by the ethos of stability instead of growth.

These longer-range considerations, of course, cannot begin to justify the fact that the Cuban family of today is rationed to one roll of toilet paper, 2.5 cakes of soap, and one package of detergent per month. Moreover, despite the fact that in this decade Cuba has received more economic aid per capita than any nation on earth, with an incredibly high investment rate of nearly 30 per cent of GNP, mainly in agriculture, the island's food production has declined in per-capita, and perhaps also in absolute, terms since 1958.²⁴

It is true that the incapacity to absorb new capital resources rationally is not confined to Cuba alone among the Latin American countries. It is also true that great social revolutions, left to themselves, tend to revert initially to simpler social forms. Thus Cuba's shift back from an urbanized, commercial society to a plantation economy resembles the return to African-style subsistence agriculture after the Haitian slave revolt, the revival of pre-industrial forms of mineral exploitation after the tin mines were nationalized in Bolivia, and the peasant *ejido* (or communal land-ownership) after the civil war and agrarian reform in Mexico. Cuba, however, is in the unique and especially difficult position of being the first of the traditional export economies of Latin America to become part of the socialist

²³ *Granma*, January 31, 1968, p. 2.

²⁴ Cuban economic statistics are often ambiguous and contradictory. The most careful scholarly studies of Cuba's revolutionary economy are by Professor Carmelo Mesa Lago of the University of Pittsburgh's Center for International Studies. See his "Availability and Reliability of Statistics in Socialist Cuba," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. IV, Nos. 1 & 2 (1968), and his essays on central planning and production in an anthology edited by him, *Revolutionary Change in Cuba: Polity, Economy and Society* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

system, divorced from its neighbors and natural markets, a hardship that the new socialist government of Chile is trying to avoid.

Economically, the Cuban Revolution seems now to be doubly cursed. On the one hand, the elimination of businessmen, technicians, and foreign capital has deprived Cuba of the very respectable growth of manufacturing that has been achieved by other Latin American export economies like Chile, Peru, and Venezuela. On the other hand, although the Ten-Million-Ton *zafra* of 1970 was undertaken in the same spirit as other great surges of socialist nation-building like China's Great Leap Forward, Stalin's industrialization drive of the 1930's, and Khrushchev's New Lands and petrochemical production campaigns of the 1950's, and although they too failed to reach their stated goals, the difference is that they were part of an extraordinary process of capital accumulation and industrialization in large nations that were historically self-sufficient in supplying their internal markets, while Cuba's conversion to sugar socialism has involved a process of decapitalization of the economy as a whole. The island has been left with an over-specialized, under-productive export economy that shows a declining capacity to pay for the imported supplies on which Cuba has always depended, and on which it depends even more today.

As a result of the growing discontent stemming out of this economic disaster, Fidel Castro has had no choice but to expand his repressive apparatus. The recent penetration of the "Rebel Army" into key positions of economic, governmental, and party control is strikingly similar to

the increasing military-political power in China of Lin Piao and the "Party Soldiers" which began in the disarray following the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950's and which was consummated by the Cultural Revolution.²⁵ Indeed, Fidel and Mao share an affinity for militarism and populism that characteristically leads them to trust more in the army or in great popular mobilizations than in an entrenched party apparatus. In China the deification of Mao in combination with the spread of much real power among provincial military commanders has overtones of traditional Confucianism and warlordism; in Cuba the absolutism of Castro and his military retainers suggests the traditional cultural form of the Latin American *caudillo*.

For the Cuban Revolution, however, the assignment of the military to production tasks is a desperate and dangerous move that could severely test the army's loyalty if the economic mess continues. This underlines the fact that Fidel Castro has survived in power so far by personal political brilliance, while neglecting the work of institutionalization that might have given the Cuban Revolution a life of its own, and that might in addition have prevented the squandering of the good will and economic resources both of its own people and of its friends abroad. This may in the end constitute the real tragedy of the Castro regime.

²⁵ The militarization of the Chinese Communist party is ably described by Ralph L. Powell in his "The Increasing Power of Lin Piao and the Party Soldiers 1959-66," *China Quarterly*, No. 34, April-June 1968.