

How Did Cuba Become a Communist Stronghold?

For more than half a century, the United States exercised a tremendous influence over Cuba. "The American Ambassador," former Ambassador to Cuba Earl Smith told a congressional committee in 1960, "was the second most important man in Cuba; sometimes even more important than the President." The United States was Cuba's best customer, and Americans invested heavily in the island's economy.

Because of this influence, and because Cuba has had a succession of dictators who were apparently American supported, the United States came to represent—in the eyes of many Cubans—the power behind the old order. Cuba received heavy American military aid in the 1950's, and a good deal of Cuban resentment against the dictatorial government of Fulgencio Batista rubbed off on the United States.

Between 1957 and 1959, Americans watched with interest the campaign of Fidel Castro to unseat dictator Batista. By and large, most Americans were sympathetic with what appeared to be a democratic revolution.

On New Year's Day, 1959, Batista fled, and Castro took over the government. Announcements of a program of social and economic reforms found a sympathetic audience among the American public. A series of one-day trials and public executions, followed by an apparent drift towards communism, however, soon antagonized many Americans. Relations between the two countries steadily deteriorated. Americans frowned at Castro's radical land program (which would mean the loss of much American-owned land), and Castro resented growing American

criticism. During 1960, most American property in Cuba was seized by Castro without compensation. Increasing repression in Cuba drove many moderate Cubans into exile. The United States, in retaliation for the seizure of American property and in anger at Castro's increasing Communist tendencies, cut the quota of Cuban sugar to be imported. In January, 1961, Castro demanded that the United States reduce its embassy staff to an inoperable level, and as a result the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Cuba.

In April, 1961, a group of Cuban exiles, supported by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, attempted an invasion of Cuba that turned out to be a disastrous failure. A barrage of criticism arose in the attempt to determine who was to blame for the fiasco.

Within three months of the invasion attempt, Castro announced the merger of his "26th of July" movement and the Communist Party. On October, 22, 1962, President Kennedy announced that the Soviet Union had established nuclear missile bases in Cuba. The U.S. instituted a blockade of the island. A week of international tension ended with Soviet withdrawal of the weapons in return for an American promise not to invade Cuba.

Through an examination of the documentary evidence, some of the speeches, and some of the conflicting interpretations, this study will investigate the course of Castro's Communist regime. Because we are still so close to the events, it may be difficult for you to determine the rights and wrongs in American policy with regard to Cuba.

In 1962, the Soviet Union supplied Castro's Cuba with missiles capable of raining destruction on half of the hemisphere. In this action photo, U. S. sea and air power turns back a Soviet ship headed for communism's Caribbean beachhead.

How did Castro come to power in Cuba?

1. *Following an unsuccessful attack on July 26, 1953, against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro, at his trial, justifies his actions.*

85% of the small farmers in Cuba pay rent and live under the constant threat of being dispossessed from the land that they cultivate. More than half the best cultivated land belongs to foreigners. In *Oriente*, the largest province, the lands of the United Fruit Company and West Indian Company join the north coast to the southern one. There are two hundred thousand peasant families who do not have a single acre of land to cultivate to provide food for their starving children. On the other hand, nearly three hundred thousand *caballerías** of productive land owned by powerful interests remain uncultivated. . . .

With the exception of a few food, lumber and textile industries, Cuba continues to be a producer of raw materials. We export sugar to import candy, we export hides to import shoes, we export iron to import plows. Everybody agrees that the need to industrialize the country is urgent, that we need steel industries, paper and chemical industries; . . . But the capitalists insist that the workers remain under a . . . yoke; the State folds its arms and industrialization can wait. . . .

There are two hundred thousand huts and hovels in Cuba; four hundred thousand families in the country and in the cities live cramped into barracks and tenements without even the minimum sanitary re-

quirements; two million two hundred thousand of our urban population pay rents which absorb between one fifth and one third of their income; and two million eight hundred thousand of our rural and suburban population lack electricity. If the State proposes lowering rents, landlords threaten to freeze all construction; if the State does not interfere, construction goes on so long as the landlords get high rents. . . .

The little rural schools are attended by only half the school-age children—bare-foot, half-naked and undernourished—and frequently the teacher must buy necessary materials from his own salary. . . .

Only death can liberate one from so much misery. In this, however,—early death—the state is most helpful. 90% of rural children are consumed by parasites which filter through their bare feet from the earth. Society is moved to compassion upon hearing of the kidnapping or murder of one child, but they are criminally indifferent to the mass murder of so many thousands of children who die every year from lack of facilities, agonizing with pain . . . When the head of a family works only four months a year, with what can he purchase clothing and medicine for his children? They will grow up with rickets, with not a single good tooth in their mouths by the time they reach thirty; they will have heard ten million speeches and will finally die of misery and deception. . . .

It is not by statesmen . . . whose statesmanship consists of preserving the status quo and mouthing phrases like the “absolute freedom of enterprise,” “guarantees to investment capital” and “the law of supply and demand,” that we will solve these problems. . . .

A revolutionary government with the backing of the people . . . would proceed immediately to industrialize the country. . . .

After settling the one hundred thousand small farmers as owners on land which

*Stemming from the Spanish word for horse—*caballo*—a *caballería* is the area of ground a working horse can plough in one day—roughly three and one-third acres.

they previously rented, a revolutionary government would proceed immediately to settle the land problem . . . [by] expropriation, recovery of the lands stolen from the State, improvements of swamp-land, planting of large nurseries and reserving of zones for reforestation. Secondly we should distribute the remaining land among peasant families . . . and would promote agricultural cooperatives. . . .

There is plenty of building material and more than enough manpower to make a decent home for every Cuban. . . .

Cuba could easily provide for a population three times as great as it now has, so there is no excuse for the abject poverty of a single one of its present inhabitants. The markets should be overflowing with produce, pantries should be full, all hands should be working. This is not an inconceivable thought. What is inconceivable is that anyone should go to bed hungry, that children should die for lack of medical attention; what is inconceivable is that 30% of our farm people cannot write their names and that 99% of them know nothing of Cuba's history. What is inconceivable is that the majority of our rural people are now living in worse circumstances than were the Indians Columbus discovered living in the fairest land that human eyes had ever seen. . . .

Only when we understand that such high ideals inspired them, can we conceive of the heroism of the young men who fell in Santiago.

Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*. Translated by Lyle Stuart. New York. Fair Play for Cuba Committee, 1961, 37-39, 41-43.



QUESTION: Summarize Castro's stated goals for his revolutionary movement. To what groups should it have appealed?

2. And, he accuses the Cuban government of torturing and murdering the captured revolutionists.

Our men were killed not in the course of a minute, an hour or a day. Throughout a whole week the blows, the torture, and the shots continued, ceasing not for an instant—as methods of grisly amusement—wielded by well-practiced artisans of crime. Camp Moncada was converted into a workshop of torture and death. And some base individuals exchanged their uniforms for butchers aprons. The walls were splattered with blood. The bullets imbedded in the walls were encrusted with singed bits of skin, brains and human hair—the grisly reminders of rifle shots full in the face. The grass around the barracks was dark and sticky with human blood. The criminal hands that are guiding the destiny of Cuba had written for the prisoners at the entrance of that den of death the very description of Hell: “Abandon all hope.” . . .

My appearance before this court may be a pure farce to give the semblance of legality to arbitrary decisions, but I am determined to tear down with a firm hand the infamous veil that hides so much shamelessness. . . .

Sentence me. I don't mind. History will absolve me.

Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*, 48, 60, 79.

3. New York Times reporter Herbert Matthews describes Castro's revolutionary army in 1957. Castro, freed from prison in 1955, had landed with a small group of revolutionaries on the southern tip of Cuba. He had been reported killed by the government troops.

Fidel Castro, the rebel leader of Cuba's youth, is alive and fighting hard and successfully in the rugged, almost impenetrable fastnesses of the Sierra Maestra, at the southern tip of the island.

President Fulgencio Batista has the cream of his Army around the area, but the Army men are fighting a thus-far losing

battle to destroy the most dangerous enemy General Batista has yet faced in a long and adventurous career as a Cuban leader and dictator. . . .

This account, among other things, will break the tightest censorship in the history of the Cuban Republic. The Province of Oriente . . . is shut off from Havana as surely as if it were another country. Havana does not and cannot know that thousands of men and women are heart and soul with Fidel Castro and the new deal for which they think he stands. It does not know that hundreds of highly respected citizens are helping Señor Castro, that bombs and sabotage are constant . . . that a fierce Government counter-terrorism has aroused the people even more against President Batista. . . .

Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement are the flaming symbol of the opposition to the regime. The organization . . . is formed of youths of all kinds. It is a revolutionary movement that calls itself socialistic. It is also nationalistic, which generally in Latin America means anti-Yankee.

The program is vague and couched in generalities, but it amounts to a new deal for Cuba, radical, democratic and therefore anti-Communist. The real core of its strength is that it is fighting against the military dictatorship of President Batista. . . .

The Government, he [Castro] said with some bitterness, is using arms furnished by the United States, not only against him but "against all the Cuban people."

The 26th of July Movement talks of nationalism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism. I asked Señor Castro about that. He answered, "You can be sure we have no animosity toward the United States and the American people."

"Above all," he said, "we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to the dictatorship. We are not anti-military; that is why we let the soldier prisoners go. There is no hatred of the Army as such, for we

know the men are good and so are many of the officers. . . ."

New York Times, February 24, 1957. © 1957 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

4. *The Cuban Minister of National Defense insists that Matthews' interview with Castro could not have taken place.*

Before anything else, let me assure you that the opinion of the Government, and I am sure, of the Cuban public also, is that the interview and the adventures described by Correspondent Matthews can be considered as a chapter in a fantastic novel. Mr. Matthews has not interviewed the pro-Communist insurgent, Fidel Castro, and the information came from certain opposition sources.

It is noted that Matthews published a photograph saying that it was of Castro. It seems strange that, having had an opportunity to penetrate the mountains and having had such an interview, Matthews did not have a photograph taken of himself with the pro-Communist insurgent in order to provide proof of what he wrote.

The Government does not know whether Fidel Castro is alive or dead, but if he is alive, the Government takes the full responsibility for stating that no such supporting forces as Matthews describes actually exist and, with the same responsibility, the Government reiterates that at no time did the said correspondent have an interview with the individual to whom he ascribes so much force and so many non-existent followers.

Even the political opposition to the regime [of President Batista], in almost its entirety, repudiates the methods followed by the pro-Communist Castro and at no time has he been able to build a popular organization to win public support for his unsuccessful terroristic attempts.

New York Times, February 28, 1957. © 1957 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.



QUESTION: On what basis did the Cuban government deny the truth of the *Times* article? In a conflict between an official statement by Batista's government and a newspaper account, which is more likely to be accurate? Defend your position.

5. Nathaniel Weyl attacks Matthews as "a veteran in the game of making Communist-dominated movements appear as crusades for democracy and freedom."

... this was not reporting, but propaganda and moral exhortation of the most skillful sort. A veteran in the game of making Communist-dominated movements appear as crusades for democracy and freedom—as, for example, in Spain at the time of the Civil War—Herbert Matthews built up Castro as a hero, pleaded for him as a downtrodden underdog. . . .

If there was any single American who could be held responsible for the Cuban tragedy, it was Herbert L. Matthews of the *New York Times* . . . a man who had always preferred choosing sides to dispassionate reporting. At first, there were no indications of Communist sympathies. . . .

The Spanish Civil War was a turning point. Matthews "was outspokenly partisan for the Communist-backed Loyalist forces" and would later be branded as a Red by the Spanish Government [of Francisco Franco]. . . .

Nathaniel Weyl, *Red Star Over Cuba*. New York. Devin-Adair, 1960.



QUESTION: Do you find any similarities or areas of agreement in the last two selections? Explain. Can you find any evidence of bias in either selection? Distortion? Omission of significant information? Explain.

6. Teresa Casuso, appointed Cuban delegate to the United Nations by Castro, and later to defect to the United States, complains that the United States helped to support Batista's dictatorship.

From the beginning of the fighting, civilian resistance and aid to the rebels brought increasingly violent reprisals by the military in the rural areas and by the police in the cities. The army bombed the peasants' huts, using napalm bombs. Their purpose was to clear the Sierra Maestra area and its surroundings so that the rebels would lose all hope of sustenance and aid. Neither the bombings nor the daily hanging of peasants and burning of their huts succeeded in cutting the rebels off from aid, whereupon Batista resorted to the same terrible measure that General Valeriano Weyler had used in the War of Independence [against Spain]: reconcentration. Sick, starving, barefoot *guajiros* and their families, representing almost half the peasant population of Oriente Province, were forced off the land and into the nearby cities and towns to squat on the sidewalks. Such was the revulsion inspired inside and outside Cuba that a few weeks later Batista was forced to countermand the order; but once back in their huts, the peasants continued to be harassed and bombed. Batista obtained those napalm bombs, as well as almost all the rest of his military equipment, from the United States—in the interest of "hemispheric defense." We protested in vain. We presented proof—and even published a photograph of a Cuban army plane being loaded with bombs on the American base at Guantánamo—to no avail. It was only a few months before the fall of Batista, when the cost in human lives of the struggle against the dictator amounted to approximately twenty thousand, that the U.S. government was finally prevailed upon to discontinue selling him war materials.

In the cities, barbarism flourished. . . . Every sunrise revealed dozens of corpses

447

hanging from lampposts or lying crumpled on the pavement. Two girls innocent of any political activity, the Giralto sisters, were ferociously murdered in their home in Havana, their screams sounding through the neighborhood as they were battered to death. The most barbaric methods of torture . . . were daily incidents in the police stations. . . .

Every social class, every occupational group participated in the revolutionary movement. . . . If the middle and professional classes contributed the most, many of the rich also helped, with money and with shelter for revolutionists wanted by the police. Individually the workers too contributed a great deal . . . The struggle could have been considerably shortened if the Communists had co-operated on the two occasions that Fidel called for a general strike. But they did not, and both strikes failed.

Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*. Translated by Elmer Grossberg. New York. Random House, 1961, 133-35.

7. Former Ambassador Arthur Gardner tells a Senate subcommittee that we "pulled the rug out from under" Batista.

Mr. Gardner. Well, during the time that I was there, the last year, Castro had landed, and was hiding in the hills. And there had been an endless number of shipments of arms and other things to Castro, which could only come from the United States. Every once in a while we were able to catch such a shipment, and stop it. But we were not very active about it. And one factor which I think was one of the most serious was that the former President named Prío [from whom Batista had seized power], was living in Miami. I don't know whether you know it or not, but he was arrested, convicted and paid a fine of \$5,000 for gunrunning. And he was also indicted a second time. And yet no action was ever taken on it. My personal reason for thinking it was serious was that many

times Batista would send for me and ask me why this was . . . The 2 years were 2 years of gradually making Batista feel we were pulling the rug out from under him. . . .

I mean that Batista had always leaned toward the United States. I don't think we ever had a better friend. It was regrettable, like all South Americans, that he was known . . . to be getting a cut . . . in almost all the things that were done. But . . . he was doing an amazing job. . . .

Senator Dodd. Mr. Gardner, you have been quoted as saying that while you were Ambassador to Cuba . . . you fought all the time with the State Department over whether Castro merited the support of friendship of the United States. Would you explain this for us . . . ?

Mr. Gardner. . . . I felt that Batista had proved a good friend to this country, and his administration had proved a great ability to develop the country itself . . . And I feel it very strongly, that the State Department was influenced, first, by those stories by Herbert Matthews, and then it became kind of a fetish with them. . . .

United States Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act. Washington, D.C. Hearings: *Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean*. Part IX, Aug. 27, 1960, 665-67.



QUESTION: Should the United States support a dictator if he is pro-United States? Why or why not?

8. An American writer objects to the "demand that the United States actively support 'democracies' against 'dictatorships'."

The demand that the United States actively support "democracies" against "dictatorships" is frequently voiced as a smokescreen by philo-Communist groups [those that "love" the Communists]. The

word “democracy” often assumes its Soviet connotations as in the so-called “people’s democracies” and deluded American liberals find they are being inveigled into backing pro-Soviet, hate-America regimes which are considerably more savage, inhuman and totalitarian than the old-fashioned . . . dictatorships that they supplant. . . .

The demand that the United States deny “bread and salt” to the dictatorships implies intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American nations to impose those forms of government which we have found suited to our own national character. . . .

In recent years, most of the rightwing dictators have supported U.S. policies. In Central America, according to an intelligent and authoritative study by Martz, the dictatorships have tended to be more orderly, more constructive in the economic field and perhaps more popular than the real and pseudo democracies.

The concept of democracy *vs.* dictatorship is objectionable because it reveals a narrow conception of American institutions and ideals. . . .

Weyl, *Red Star Over Cuba*, 212–13.



QUESTION: Do you agree that denying support to dictatorships is interfering in the internal affairs of foreign countries? If so, do you think such intervention is justified? Should your answer apply equally to the Castro dictatorship? Explain.

9. *The New York Times describes how Castro gained power in Cuba.*

Havana, Friday, Jan. 2—Fulgencio Batista resigned as President of rebellion-torn Cuba yesterday and fled to exile in the Dominican Republic. The rebel forces of Fidel Castro moved swiftly to seize power throughout the island.

. . . The rebel leader and his forces had entered Santiago de Cuba late yesterday

and had taken over the Moncado army post without firing a shot. About 5,000 soldiers there surrendered.

Truckloads of soldiers moved into Havana last night to maintain order in conjunction with militia of Señor Castro’s 26th of July Movement. . . .

General Batista led an exodus from Cuba that reached a total of perhaps 400 persons fleeing by ship and plane to the United States and the Dominican Republic. They included key political and military leaders and their families.

Calling his military chiefs together early yesterday at Camp Columbia, army headquarters, General Batista, strong man of Cuban politics for most of the period since 1933, declared he was resigning “to prevent further bloodshed”. . . .

A mob set fire to the plant of El Tiempo, a newspaper owned by Senator Rolando Masferrer. Senator Masferrer, an intimate friend of General Batista, had a private army of some 2,000 operating in Oriente Province. They were accused by the inhabitants of many killings and tortures. . . .

As the news of the fall of the Government spread early yesterday, the public poured into the streets. The black and red flag of the 26th of July Movement, headed by Señor Castro, appeared on automobiles and buildings. Cars raced through the streets with horns blowing. . . .

New York Times, January 2, 1959. © 1959 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted with permission.

10. Robert Taber tells of Castro’s “revolutionary justice.”

Almost before Fidel had reached Havana, the crash of revolutionary rifles sounded the fulfillment of the *barbudos*’ [the bearded ones]’ first commitment to the people: the relentless execution of the pistoleros, the killers and torturers in and out of uniform who had kept Batista in power for so long. Swift justice overtook fifty such men in Santiago in a single day; bulldozers covered over their mass grave.

A great manhunt was in progress, combining the island for the *esbirros* responsible for the torture and murder of twenty thousand Cuban men, women and children. One after another, they were brought in, confronted with their accusers, and taken to the *paredon*, the big wall from which no one returns.

Robert Taber, *M-26, Biography of a Revolution*. New York. Lyle Stuart, 1961.



QUESTION: Does Taber approve or disapprove of the "revolutionary justice?" How can you tell?

11. Nicolas Rivero, a former head of the Department of Information under Castro, describes the executions.

In the very early days of Castro's takeover, some of the Batista assassins were even executed without benefit of trial. Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother and commander of one of the most important segments of the rebel army, ordered the execution of more than seventy-five notorious Batista assassins who were rounded up in Santiago de Cuba . . . They were taken in trucks to Campo de Tiro firing range near Santiago. It was a mass execution and they fell back into a trench forty feet wide, and fifty feet deep, which had been dug for them by bulldozers.

This brought a storm of protest from abroad. . . . The Argentine Congress went so far as to approve a resolution calling for a halt to the executions. Old hemisphere friends of the Cuban revolution, like former President José Figueres of Costa Rica, . . . protested.

Castro was angered and puzzled by the reaction to his revolutionary justice. He invited more than five hundred newspapermen to come to Cuba. . . .

But Operation Truth backfired. The first trial to be held . . . was that of Captain Jesús Sosa Blanco, . . . a brutal killer . . . It

was held in a style reminiscent of the Coliseum. The people yelled "Kill him, kill him." The president of the court was compelled to admonish the crowd several times and once requested them not to throw pop bottles. . . .

Nicolas Rivero, *Castro's Cuba: An American Dilemma*. Washington. Robert B. Luce, Inc. 1962, 11-12.



QUESTION: What differences can you find in the two accounts? Which is more critical of Castro? Why?

12. Castro angrily asks the foreign correspondents, "Did you not hold your Nuremberg trials?"

Yes, gentlemen, we are determined to exterminate the killers. They will not live on to murder again. And you, ladies and gentlemen, where were your voices when Batista was ruling here like Himmler's Gestapo? Where? I didn't hear your voices when they were torturing and murdering twenty thousand of our finest sons and daughters. You were silent then. And, yes, I will ask you again: where were your voices when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after the war was in the bag for the Allied cause? You were silent then . . . What have you come to sit in judgment on? The execution of mankind's enemies—torturers, killers, war criminals. Did you not hold your Nuremberg trials? Why do you interfere with us when we try our mass killers?

Joseph North, *Cuba: Hope of a Hemisphere*. New York. International Publishers, 1961, 39.



QUESTION: To what extent do you think Castro's comparisons were justified? Unjustified? Why?

Did Castro "betray the revolution"?

13. Senator John F. Kennedy thinks that United States' policy may have pushed Castro to extremes.

The wild, angry, passionate course of the revolution in Cuba demonstrates that the shores of the American Hemisphere and the Caribbean islands are not immune to the ideas and forces causing similar storms on other continents. Just as we must recall our own revolutionary past in order to understand the spirit and the significance of the anticolonial uprisings in Asia and Africa, we should now reread the life of Simón Bolívar, the great "Liberator" and sometimes "Dictator" of South America, in order to comprehend the new contagion for liberty and reform now spreading south of our borders. . . .

Fidel Castro is part of the legacy of Bolívar . . . Castro is also part of the frustration of that earlier revolution which won its war against Spain but left largely untouched the indigenous [native] feudal order. . . .

Whether Castro would have taken a more rational course after his victory had the United States Government not backed the dictator Batista so long and so uncritically, and had it given the fiery young rebel a warmer welcome in his hour of triumph . . . we cannot be sure. . . .

Unfortunately, in no other area has the work of anti-American agitators been made more easy by inconsistent, inconsiderate, and inadequate U.S. economic and diplomatic policies. As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Special Subcommittee on Latin American Affairs, I have studied our recent sorry performance firsthand. . . .

John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*. Allen Nevins, ed. New York. Popular Library Edition, 1961, 167-69.

14. Jules Dubois claims that the Communists jumped on the Castro bandwagon.

. . . The Communists knew . . . that Castro enjoyed nation-wide support and they jumped on the bandwagon. They ordered their partisans to enlist in the rebel army and, as Raúl Castro said in a speech, "Nobody was asked what his religion was or what his creed might be or what was the color of his skin. . . ."

Castro has repeatedly and categorically stated: "I am not a Communist." Raúl Castro has said that if he were a Communist he would belong to that party and not the 26th of July Movement. There are those who entertain misgivings about one of Castro's most trusted men, Che Guevara, because Communists claim they have found in . . . [him] a friend . . . and because he made public statements in the early days of victory that were derogatory to the FBI and advocated the burning of all security files. In those files were the names of Cubans accused of being Communists, although many might not have been. . . .

General Alberto Bayo . . . asserts that he had not found any Communists among the men he trained for Castro. . . .

The Communists would like to capture Fidel Castro but he has shown that nobody will be able to capture him. They won't be able to capture him because the people of Cuba will not stomach Communism and because they recall that the Communists made their greatest gains under Batista. Two leaders of the Communist Party were ministers . . . in Batista's government from 1940 to 1944. . . .

The people of Cuba know that dictatorships are the breeding ground of Communism and that while the Communists profess to be champions of democracy their overlords in the Kremlin order the massacre of the freedom fighters in Hungary and elsewhere.

From *Fidel Castro*, copyright © 1959, by Jules Dubois, reprinted by permission of the publishers, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 373-74.

15. *The United States State Department, in its "White Paper" of April, 1961, thinks that Castro betrayed the Cuban Revolution.*

The present situation in Cuba confronts the Western Hemisphere . . . with a grave and urgent challenge.

This challenge does not result from the fact that the Castro government in Cuba was established by revolution. The hemisphere rejoiced at the overthrow of the Batista tyranny, looked with sympathy on the new regime, and welcomed its promises of political freedom and social justice for the Cuban people. The challenge results from the fact that the leaders of the revolutionary regime betrayed their own revolution, delivered that revolution into the hands of powers alien to the hemisphere, and transformed it into an instrument employed with calculated effect to suppress the rekindled hopes of the Cuban people for democracy and to intervene in the internal affairs of other American Republics.

What began as a movement to enlarge Cuban democracy and freedom has been perverted, in short, into a mechanism for the destruction of free institutions in Cuba, for the seizure by international communism of a base and bridgehead in the Americas, and for the disruption of the inter-American system. . . .

For a moment the Castro regime seemed determined to make good on at least its social promises. The positive programs initiated in the first months of the Castro regime—the schools built, the medical clinics established, the new housing, the early projects of land reform, the opening up of beaches and resorts to the people, the elimination of graft in government—were impressive . . .

[But] the history of the Castro Revolution has been the history of the disillusion, persecution, imprisonment, exile, and execution of men and women who supported Dr. Castro—in many cases fought by his side—and thereafter doomed themselves by trying to make his regime live up to his own promises. . . .

452

In place of the democratic spontaneity of the Cuban Revolution, Dr. Castro placed his confidence in the ruthless discipline of the Cuban Communist Party. Today that party is the *only* political party permitted to operate in Cuba. . . .

It is not clear whether Dr. Castro intended from the start to betray his pledges of a free and democratic Cuba, to deliver his country to the Sino-Soviet bloc, and to mount an attack on the inter-American system; or whether he made his original pledges in all sincerity but, on assuming his new responsibilities, found himself increasingly dependent on ruthless men around him . . . What is important is not the motive but the result.

The first result has been the institution of a repressive dictatorship in Cuba. . . .

But Dr. Castro has done more than establish a dictatorship in Cuba; he has committed that dictatorship to a totalitarian movement outside the hemisphere. . . .

United States Department of State, *Cuba*.
Washington, D.C. Inter-American Series
No. 66, 1961, 1-26, *passim*.

16. *Castro admits that he believed in Marxism in 1953.*

Do I believe absolutely in Marxism? I believe absolutely in Marxism! Did I believe in it on the first of January? I believed on the first of January! Did I believe on the 26th of July [1953]? I believed on the 26th of July! Did I understand it as I understand it today, after almost ten years of struggle? No, I did not understand it as I understand it today. Comparing how I understand it today, there is a great difference. Did I have prejudices? Yes, I had prejudices; yes, I had them on the 26th of July. Could I call myself a full-fledged revolutionary on the 26th of July? No, I could not call myself a full-fledged revolutionary. . . .

Did I have prejudices with respect to the Communists? Yes. Was I influenced by the propaganda of imperialism and at

any time by the reaction against the Communists? Yes. What did I believe of the Communists? . . . Did I have the idea that they were sectarian? Yes. Why did I have these opinions about the Communists? Simply because, I am absolutely convinced, the ideas I had about the Communists—not about Marxism, about the Communist Party—were, like the ideas of many people, a product of propaganda. . . .

I am a Marxist-Leninist, and I will be one until the last day of my life.

Quoted in Theodore Draper, *Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities*. New York. Praeger, 1962. London. Thames and Hudson International, Ltd. 147–48.



QUESTION: Was Castro a Communist from the beginning of his revolution? How did you arrive at your conclusion? Why is it so difficult to answer this, even on the basis of his own words?

17. Former Ambassador to Cuba Spruille Braden attacks the State Department White Paper.

The State Department . . . repeats the old fantasy about Fidel being a 'traitor to the revolution.' His revolution was Communist-planned and inspired from the beginning; he was a traitor to God and country, but never to his Communist bosses and beliefs. It damns Batista as a tyrant and impugns the honor and reputation of anyone and everyone who even remotely had been connected with him. . . .

Quoted in Fulgencio Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic*. New York. Devin-Adair, 1964, 268.

18. But Manuel Urrutia Lleó, President of Cuba for a brief period at the beginning of the Castro regime, thinks that the Cuban revolution was kidnapped by the Communists.

Cuba is the latest victim of Communist piracy.

The great Cuban *democratic* revolution was kidnapped by Communists led by Castro; but Cuban democrats—and by that I mean the entire Cuban people—are fighting on against this vile betrayal which has cost the heroic people of my country so much in blood and sorrow.

Manuel Urrutia Lleó, *Fidel Castro and Company, Inc.: Communist Tyranny in Cuba*. New York. Praeger, 1964, vii.



QUESTION: How can you explain the argument over whether Castro "betrayed" the revolution? What assumptions are made on each side about the original nature of the Cuban revolution?

19. Theodore Draper thinks that Castro seized upon Communism as a ready-made program once he had come to power.

The inner history of Castro's regime remains to be told. Its main lines, however, have become increasingly clear. Fidel Castro—as much demagogue as idealist, as much adventurer as revolutionary, as much anarchist as Communist or anything else—was suddenly and unexpectedly catapulted into power without a real party, a real army, or a real program. In the struggle for power, he had put forth no original economic or political ideas and had stayed well within the limits of traditional democratic reform and idiom in Cuba. . . . But once power came into his hands, he refused to permit anything that might lessen or restrict it. He would not tolerate the functioning of a government that was not the facade of his personal rule or of a party that might develop a life of its own. His power and his promises [of free elections] were from the first incompatible, and this contradiction forced him to seek a basis for his regime wholly at variance with that of the anti-Batista revolution. He did not have the disciplined and experienced cadres, the ideology, and the international support to switch revolutions

453

in full view of the audience. Only the Cuban and Russian Communists could make them available to him. Having formerly collaborated with Batista . . . the Cuban Communists were easily capable of collaborating with Castro. The "united front" of Communists and *Fidelistas* has been heading, as [Castro's Minister of Industries] Guevara intimated in Moscow in December, 1960, toward a "united party" . . .

Draper, *Castro's Revolution*, 56-57.



QUESTION: Why does Draper suggest that Castro needed to "switch revolutions" after he came to power? According to Draper, why were his earlier promises now embarrassing to him? Why had he made them before?

Who was responsible for the Bay of Pigs failure?

20. *The Soviet Government announces an invasion of Cuba "under the cover of U.S. aircraft and warships," April 18, 1961.*

The Government of the Republic of Cuba has announced that in the morning of 15 April airplanes of the U.S. B-26 bomber type subjected separate districts of the capital of Cuba . . . to barbarous bombing. There were many killed and injured. . . .

Following the bombing, early in the morning of 17 April armed forces of the interventionists landed at various places on the Cuban coast. The landing took place under the cover of U.S. aircraft and warships.

Cuban Government troops and the People's Militia are engaged in fighting the invading gangs. . . .

The attack on Cuba is an open challenge to all freedom-loving peoples. . . .

Can small Cuba with its population of 6

million threaten anyone—and such a big state as the United States at that? . . .

It is clear . . . that it is precisely the United States which is the inspirer and organizer of the present bandit-like attack on Cuba. Why did the United States organize this criminal attack . . . ? Because . . . they fear that Cuba, building its independent life, will become an example for other countries of Latin America. . . .

But every nation has the right to live as it wishes, and no one, no state, has the right to impose its own way of life on other nations. . . .

Quoted in United States Department of State Bulletin, Washington, D.C., XLIV, No. 1141, May 8, 1961, 662-63.

21. *And Soviet Premier Khrushchev writes to President Kennedy.*

MR. PRESIDENT: I address this message to you at an alarming hour which is fraught with danger against universal peace. An armed aggression has been started against Cuba. It is an open secret that the armed bands which have invaded that country have been prepared, equipped, and armed in the United States. The planes which bomb Cuban towns belong to the United States of America, the bombs which they drop have been put at their disposal by the American Government. . . .

I earnestly appeal to you, Mr. President, to call a halt to the aggression against the Republic of Cuba. The military techniques and the world political situation now are such that any so-called "small war" can produce a chain reaction in all parts of the world. . . .

Department of State Bulletin, May 8, 1961, 662.

22. *President Kennedy replies.*

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are under a serious misapprehension in regard to events in Cuba. For months there has been evident