
THE CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

THE Third National Assembly of the Communist Party of Cuba was held from January 10 to 15, in Santa Clara. This city, two hundred miles from Havana, is in almost the exact center of the island and was chosen largely because nearby took place the famous battle of Mal Tiempo in December, 1895, during the war of liberation. Representing the 23,300 Party members were 347 regular delegates (of whom 259 were workers and 25 peasants, and 221 were white and 83 Negro) to which should be added 72 fraternal delegates from various mass organizations. Representatives were also present from the Communist Parties of Mexico (Carillo), Canada (Morris), Venezuela (Silva) and the United States (Trachtenberg, Foster). Many prominent trade union and political leaders, artists, writers, etc., were in attendance.

The congress was extremely colorful. The local population greeted the delegates with open arms. At the entrance to the city a welcome arch spanned the roadway, banners were strung across many streets, and every telephone pole in the city bore a Communist poster. Official greetings were extended by the Mayor and also by the local military commandant. Chickens, fish, bread, cheese and even

three cows were donated by workers, peasants and small business men to help feed the delegates. During the week of the convention its thirteen-hour workday was broken up by a round of sports, shows, fireworks, etc. It all wound up with a rousing meeting of 10,000 people at the baseball stadium. Santa Clara, a city of only about 25,000 people, will not soon forget this Communist gathering.

THE FRUITS OF AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

For forty years American capitalism has dominated Cuba and as a result this glorious island, which could be an arthly paradise, is an abode of poverty and misery for the masses. I was amazed, riding to Santa Clara and back, to note the destitution of the people and the undeveloped state of the country. Many workers and peasants were obviously underfed; beggars swarmed about our automobile at every stop, and—a monument to American imperialism—I was informed that about 40 per cent of the people are still illiterate.

Cuba is now in the midst of a severe economic crisis. Sugar, the basic crop, is at only about 50 per cent of normal production, and tobacco and coffee, the other two main crops, are also in deep depression. Consequently, the econo-

my of the whole island is crippled. Unemployment is rife—400,000 jobless out of a population of 4,500,000. The unemployed receive no insurance or government relief whatever. The workers who have jobs receive miserable wages—about 40 cents a day for agricultural laborers and a dollar to a dollar and a half for city workers. The cost of living is very high and is steadily mounting. With his present wages a worker can buy only about 75 per cent of what he could buy in 1935. Among the small farmers actual destitution prevails. They suffer from the usual evils of low prices for what they sell; high prices for what they buy; high rents, high taxes and high interest on mortgages—all in very exaggerated and brutal forms.

THE PEOPLE ON THE MARCH

Bad economic conditions, following long years of imperialist super-exploitation and savage political oppression, plus the stimulating effect of the democratic upsurge in Mexico and the United States, have set the Cuban people politically in motion. All the popular mass organizations, including those of the youth, Negroes and farmers, are growing and increasing their activity. The masses are moving on towards a great Constituent Assembly, in order to introduce deep economic, political and social betterments.

There is an especially strong renaissance among the trade unions. During the last week of January there took place in Havana the huge convention of the Confederation of Cuban Workers to unify and reorganize the trade union movement. Among the outstanding leaders is the young Negro cigarmaker, Lazaro Pena. The dele-

gates represented almost 800,000 workers—exceeding by far the number of trade unionists before the general strike of March, 1935. The numerical strength of the Havana gathering was equivalent, considering the difference in the populations, to a convention of some 19,000,000 organized workers in the United States.

Among the many political organizations there is also a great ferment, with the several parties of the Center and Left growing rapidly. Most spectacular is the expansion of the Communist Party. Illegal for the thirteen years of its existence until September 25, 1938, our Party, under the brilliant leadership of the shoe worker, Blas Roca (Francisco Caldiero), is now advancing with remarkable rapidity. During the past four months, since its legalization, it has increased its membership from 4,000 to 23,300. It has set itself the goal of 50,000 members by next June, which it will by all indications realize. As evidence of the vitality and activity of the Party it is only necessary to point out that it publishes a twelve-page daily, *Hoy*, proposes to circulate 50,000 copies of Blas Roca's congress report, and is campaigning for a fund of \$100,000. These are very big achievements and objectives in a small and poor country like Cuba and for a party which only a few months ago was illegal.

The Communist Party's mass influence is also large and is growing rapidly. No party in Cuba is increasing its prestige so fast among the people. The Party is a real power in the trade union movement and in all other economic, political and cultural organizations of the masses. In the coming elections the Party counts on

securing a minimum of about one-eighth of the total vote. It is a vital if not decisive factor in the struggle for the Constituent Assembly, which the reactionaries are resisting desperately. The Party congress attracted wide attention nationally; Roca's speeches were broadcast over several stations, and many of the most prominent people in the nation listened in to hear this rising young leader and to learn the message of his Party. A member of the Santa Clara City Council, a conservative, paid the Communist Party the tribute of saying it is the best organized and best led of any party in Cuba.

The young Communist Party of Cuba has many shortcomings, of course—lack of a solid dues-collecting basis, need of a Party school system to develop cadres, organizational weakness among the farmers, women and youth, etc. But it is conscious of these shortcomings and is working diligently to eliminate them. One thing that surprised me was the way the Party, so newly emerged from illegality, is taking hold of its tasks of broad mass agitation and organization. This, the Cuban comrades pointed out, is because even under conditions of harsh repression the Party gained experience in leading real mass struggles.

THE OFFENSIVE OF REACTION

While the Cuban workers, peasants and other democratic forces unite and become more active politically, the reactionary elements do not fail to take the offensive. There are several groups of reactionaries, but more and more they tend to unite and to become fascist.

First, there are the Cuban openly fascist groups, such as the A.B.C. Party, supported by the big banks and Spanish merchants. Along with these are active German and Italian fascist organizations, which have their own press services, newspapers, espionage, etc. These fascist elements carry on a ferocious campaign against Roosevelt and Cardenas as "Communists" and, by implication, against Batista also. They hold up the Communist Party as the main enemy and they denounce democracy as "half Communism"; they are fomenting a Jew-baiting and anti-Negro campaign, and doubtless they would also discriminate against the Indians if these had not long been exterminated by the Spanish exploiters.

Second, there are the rich bourgeois elements, including big American interests, that tend to group themselves around Menocal's Republican-Democratic Party. They are constantly more open in opposition to Batista and their line is to sabotage his government by a sit-down strike of capital, by resisting and persecuting the trade unions and by a fierce campaign of wholesale evictions of farmers.

Third, there are some pseudo-liberal, or former liberal groups, such as Grau San Martin's Cuban Revolutionary Party, whose policy is to put Roosevelt and Batista in the same pot with Hitler and Mussolini. Here the Trotskyites play their counter-revolutionary role; their demagogy dovetailing with that of the open reactionaries.

The foregoing groups of reactionaries are strong in the Congress of Cuba, forming a definite majority in the Senate and also having a large

degree of control in the House. They sabotage Batista's progressive legislation, such as the legalization of the Communist Party, the formation of trade union federations, the coordination of transportation and the revaluation of farm mortgages. They control most of the daily press and they also have some grip on the army—Batista's stronghold.

The bogey of all these reactionary cliques is the proposed Constituent Assembly. They are sure that if this gathering takes place it will result in a big victory for democracy; they use all tricks of demagoguery and maneuvering to prevent its convocation. Just recently some of the main reactionary groups (A.B.C., Republican Democrats, Republican Action, and Cuban Revolutionary), formed a pact to fight against the Constituent Assembly. They are prepared to use desperate means.

In Havana, during our stay, there was open talk of some sort of putsch on their part. The recently increased forces of reaction in the United States Congress stimulate all these Cuban fascist and near-fascist elements; for political events in this country always produce strong repercussions in Cuba.

Batista, increasingly supported by the popular masses, on the one hand, and facing an aggressive capitalist reaction, on the other, continues to develop his progressive line. He encourages the formation of trade unions, as well as organizations of farmers, students and Negroes; he favors the Constituent Assembly and although he proposes no definite program for it, he declares it will cure Cuba's ills. He hopes for a progressive democracy and says that unity of the

workers, farmers and soldiers will liberate Cuba. Batista has recently denounced the fascist totalitarian states, has taken a more friendly attitude towards Loyalist Spain, and has opposed racial discrimination. Batista's policy has been much influenced by Roosevelt and Cardenas. He has, however, been criticized for failing on numerous occasions to champion aggressively his own program in the face of the attacks of reaction.

THE POLICY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The main slogan of the Santa Clara Congress was, "For Democracy, the People's Welfare and Defense of the National Economy." To realize this, the Communist Party called for a united national front of all democratic and progressive elements and for the holding of the long-talked of Constituent Assembly. Comrade Blas Roca summarized its general policy briefly as follows:

"We fight for the unity of the people of Cuba, for the unity of the revolutionaries, and for a great united national front to realize immediately an urgent practical program: to achieve a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly, to establish democracy with equal rights for Negroes and women; to aid the unemployed, to protect the peasants against evictions; to apply the social laws, to extend culture, to save the thousands of Cuban debtors by means of a law for the revaluation of mortgages, to work for the defense of the national economy, for the defense of our country from Nazi-fascist invasion, for help to Spain and China, for collaboration with the democratic countries."

On the basis of this general program the Party is leading a militant struggle for the immediate demands of the masses, especially for relief for the unemployed and against the evic-

tion of debtor peasants. It is also vigorously fighting for the convening of the Constituent Assembly. The Revolutionary Union, a Left party of some 100,000 members headed by Marinello, has outlined a project for the Constituent Assembly which, if adopted even in the main, would make Cuba one of the leading bourgeois-democratic countries in the world. The Communist Party supports this outline of demands.

Towards Batista the Communist Party maintains a general attitude of support, while criticizing him for his failures to fight for his own projects. Roca declared that, Trotskyites and phrasemongering pseudo-liberals to the contrary notwithstanding, the continued trend of Batista towards democratic reform has fully justified the Party's "positive attitude" towards him.

The Communist Party places fascism as public enemy number one, and fights militantly for Cuban national liberation. It proposes close collaboration between the Caribbean countries against the fascist menace and it likewise demands world concerted action of the democracies to check the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo aggressions and to aid their victims. The Party supports Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, urging at the same time intensification of the struggle against the great American imperialist interests which dominate the island. Roca estimated Roosevelt and the New Deal as follows:

"The Roosevelt Administration does not represent, as previous governments have done, the interests of Wall Street, the interests of the most reactionary sections of finance capital in the United States. The Roose-

velt administration . . . represents the growing democratic, progressive movement in the United States, the mobilization, the forward march of the millions of workers who in the United States, as we in Cuba, have suffered the oppression of the imperialists, the great financiers, and the powerful monopolist companies."

THE GENERAL POLITICAL LINE-UP

The present political struggle in Cuba turns around the question of the Constituent Assembly. The masses see in the Assembly an effective means to democratize the government and to realize their urgent economic and social demands. They feel assured that despite reactionary opposition the Assembly will eventually be held and that the prospects are excellent for registering a real advance for Cuban democracy.

The present line-up of the many political parties is confused and shifting. The main mass trend is towards democracy. In the Constituent Assembly and the preceding elections there will be three definite blocs of parties. From appearances now the Right bloc will probably consist of the A.B.C.'s, the Cuban Revolutionary Party (San Martin), the Republican-Democrats, and the Republican Action; the Center bloc will be made up of the Liberal and National Union Parties; the Left will include the Revolutionary Cuban Party (C.A.R.B.O.), the Revolutionary Union and the Communist Party. Between the Left and Center blocs there will doubtless be more or less of a working agreement. This probable line-up of forces, with reasonably good strategy, should be able to win a substantial victory for democracy. That is why the reactionaries are so strongly opposed to hold-

ing the Constituent Assembly and are willing to use violent measures to prevent it.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

The penetration of fascist Germany, Italy and Japan in this hemisphere confronts all the peoples of Latin America. The people of Cuba, with a turning point in their history, face a double perspective. If they join with the democratic peoples of the United States and Canada in resisting the fascist invaders they will enter into a new and higher period of democracy, prosperity and national independence. But if they do not build this common anti-fascist resistance, if they surrender to, or weaken before the fascist powers, they will confront the worst period of retrogression and oppression in all their history.

Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese militarists do not intend to set up civilized relations with the Latin American peoples, treating them as equal, independent nations. Far from it. If they can secure the opportunity, these barbarians will try by armed force and trickery to rob the Latin American countries of their national independence. They will seize their rich natural resources, destroy their democracy and culture, subject their toilers to the most barbarous exploitation, treat their people as inferior beings, incite one republic to make war against another and use their citizenry as cannon fodder all over the world. Fascism would introduce a new and terrible type of colonialism into Latin America, more ferocious than this hemisphere has yet seen.

The only way a disastrous victory

of fascism in Latin America can be averted is for all the democracies in this hemisphere, from Canada to Argentina, to stand united against the Italo-German-Japanese fascist invaders and their local supporters, at the same time waging the struggle against reactionary American and British imperialism. The declarations of the Lima Conference and Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy offer a basis for such democratic cooperation. The peoples of the Americas would then be a real factor for world peace. Meanwhile, it is the task especially of the people of the United States to keep their government out of the hands of the reactionaries and to make of the Good Neighbor policy a real instrument of democracy throughout the three Americas.

The fight against fascism in this hemisphere, however, is not merely a defensive one. It opens up the counter perspective to a general forward march of the many American peoples towards freedom, democracy and full national independence. For the very struggle against fascism on a national, hemispheric and world scale implies that the Latin American peoples must fight to improve profoundly the conditions of their toiling masses, to develop their democratic institutions, to assert their national independence, and to secure more and more control over their lands, industries and natural resources which are now so largely in the hands of American, British and other imperialists.

That the great masses of the Latin American peoples want to realize this second, democratic-national liberation perspective is certain. It is proved especially by the people's front advances

in Chile and Mexico and the democratic movements in many other Central and South American countries. The historic Santa Clara Congress of the Communist Party, as well as the general political situation in Cuba,

shows that the Cuban people are active participants in the great renaissance, the advance on every social front, resulting from the struggle of the Latin American peoples against fascism and all imperialist reaction.

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