



CUBA: the Evaporation of a Myth
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*From Anti-Imperialist Revolution
To Pawn of Social-Imperialism*



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Revolutionary
Communist
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Introduction

Cuba's role in the world today makes it increasingly important to expose the class nature of its leaders and the real character of Cuban society.

In words, Cuba is socialist. Its thousands of troops fighting in Africa under Soviet leadership are said to be there to advance the cause of proletarian internationalism. But the American paid-for mercenaries fighting there also wave banners of freedom and "anti-imperialism." Obviously it is necessary to go beneath the appearance of things to understand what's really going on in the world. To understand a country we have to ask what class is in power there. And to understand a country's politics we have to ask what class these politics serve.

The revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959 was a tremendous step forward for Cuba, clearing away the rule of the U.S. imperialists and the Cuban landlords, dependent capitalists and all their parasites, pimps and gangsters. Because of this, and because of the revolutionary goals that Castro and those around him proclaimed, many people all over the world looked to Cuba for inspiration and guidance in their struggles.

But the class outlook, political line and methods that the leadership promoted have led to nothing but setbacks and defeat everywhere in the world they've been taken up. They have proved wrong and harmful to the development of the revolutionary struggle.

In Cuba, the revolution has turned into its opposite. Cuba today is as much a colony of the Soviet Union as it once was of the U.S., its economy dominated by sugar, and its working people wage-slaves laboring to pay off an endless mortgage to the USSR. The leaders of the anti-imperialist revolution of 1959 have now themselves become a new dependent capitalist class.

The question of Cuba is particularly sharp right now for two reasons. Internationally, the Soviet Union, which is itself an imperialist country trying to upset the applecart of U.S. domination in order to grab up the apples for itself, is making increasing use of Cuba. It uses Cuba as both a carrot and a stick. In Angola, Cuban troops spearheaded the Soviet drive to conquer that country under the cover of opposing U.S. imperialism (which is trying to do the same under the cover of opposing the USSR), while the Soviets pointed to Cuba as an example of how Soviet "aid" has bought socialism for Cuba and offer the same deal to Angola and other countries. This combination of "anti-imperialist" rubles

and "anti-imperialist" tanks is key to the Soviet social-imperialists' efforts to replace the U.S. as the world's main imperialist power, and for that reason Cuba is invaluable to the Soviets.

HUMBLE WORDS AT PARTY CONGRESS

Within Cuba, the first congress of the country's revisionist "Communist" Party in December, 1975, marked the economic and political consolidation of Cuba into the Soviet bloc and the formal emergence of capitalist relations into the sunlight in Cuba, after years of being hidden under "revolutionary" rhetoric.

This congress ratified Cuba's new "Economic Planning and Management System," sanctifying "the profitability criterion" as the country's highest principle. It also featured a long self-criticism by Castro for not coming around to the Soviet's way of thinking sooner, a "self-criticism" in which he tries to justify Cuba's present situation and bows down so low before the New Czars that it serves as an outstanding indication of Cuba's present neocolonial status.

"Had we been humbler, had we not had excessive self-esteem," Castro explained, "we would have been able to understand that revolutionary theory was not sufficiently developed in our country and that we actually lacked profound economists and scientists of Marxism to make really significant contributions to the theory and practice of building socialism . . ." (Castro's speeches and oth-



Cuban soldiers after their capture of Ambriz in northern Angola. Over 12,000 Cuban troops under Soviet "advisors" served as an expeditionary force to conquer Angola for the social-imperialists, all under the guise of fighting imperialism.

er congress documents can be found in *Granma*, the official Cuban publication.)¹

Humble words indeed from the Cuban leadership who, not that many years ago, were portraying themselves as the lighthouse of revolution for the Third World and elsewhere, in contrast to what they considered the “conservatism” of the revisionists, and what they slandered as the “dogmatism” of the genuine Marxist-Leninists.

In the 1960s the Cuban leadership had actually become very humble in serving as a Soviet political errand boy whenever it was necessary to pay the rent—for instance, by attacking China and Mao Tsetung in 1966, backing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and so on. But at that time the Cubans did try to maintain some distance between themselves and the Soviets, if only to maintain Cuba’s prestige and “ultra-revolutionary” image at a time when the new Soviet capitalist ruling class was beginning to smell worse and worse to a growing number of revolutionary-minded people.

But now the Soviet strings which hold up the Cuban regime have been pulled very tight, and the Cuban leadership is to be more “humble” than ever. Today, Castro says, Cuba’s foreign policy is based “in the first place, on staunch friendship with the Soviet Union, the bastion of world progress.”

The use to which the Soviets have put the “staunch friendship” of Cuba has changed over the years. In an earlier period the weaker Soviet imperialists’ relationship with the U.S. imperialists tended more towards surrender and collaboration. Now with their competition with the U.S. becoming sharper and more violent every day, the Soviets’ use of so-called “detente” is mainly as a cover for Soviet aggression and preparations for war—while the U.S. imperialists use it for the same purpose themselves. Times have changed. But it seems *anything* the Soviet rulers want is fine with Cuba.

Castro goes out of his way to make this point unmistakably clear by going back over the 1962 missile crisis, when the USSR rashly set up long-range missiles in Cuba, and then, when challenged by the U.S. imperialists, not only capitulated completely by taking the missiles out, but also promised the U.S. it could inspect Cuba to make sure that they were gone—without asking the Cuban government. At that time, Castro correctly denounced the Soviets for it.

Now, Castro says, he was wrong for “not understanding” that this cowardly use of Cuba as a bargaining chip with the U.S. was “objectively” a “victory for the socialist camp.”

But this is not the only crow Castro was forced to eat at the

¹*Granma*, Jan. 4, 1976.



Fidel Castro, along with revisionist leaders Edward Gierek, Poland, and Erich Honecker, East Germany, applaud the Soviet Union’s Brezhnev during his speech to the 1975 Soviet party congress. The Soviets have found it useful to trot Castro around the world on various occasions, hoping to use his “revolutionary” image to cover the Soviet Union’s imperialist maneuvers. Castro received honors at the meeting, including “prolonged applause,” for his services in Angola.

congress. Not only should the Cuban leadership have been “humbler” regarding Soviet foreign policy, they also should have been “applying correctly the main useful experiences in the sphere of economic management” in the Soviet Union.

LAWS OF CAPITALISM GOVERN CUBAN ECONOMY

What experience does he mean? That “economic laws” (especially the law of value) “govern socialist construction,” and that “money, prices, finances, budgets, taxes, credit, interest and other commodity categories should function as indispensable instruments . . . to decide on which investment is the most advantageous; to decide which enterprises, which units, which collective of workers performs best, and which performs worst, and so be able to take relevant measures.” (Speech at party congress)

This, Castro claims, is dictated by “reality,” but it’s not the reality of socialism. The working class must take these laws and categories into account so that it can consciously restrict and limit their sphere of operation and develop the conditions to do away with them once and for all. But socialism can’t be *governed* by the economic laws of capitalism or else there wouldn’t be any difference between the two systems! Castro’s words here are taken lock, stock and profit margin from recent Soviet economic

textbooks—summing up the experience of restoring capitalism in the Soviet Union.

The “new economic system” Castro goes on to describe is based on the same principles that govern all capitalist countries, especially in the form of state capitalism: that prices be fixed according to the cost of production; that the factories and industries which produce the highest rate of return on their investment should be the areas of most expansion; that the managers of these units should be paid according to their social position and also the profitability of their enterprises; that the workers be paid according to the profitability of the enterprises they work for and lose their jobs if production would be cheaper without them; and furthermore, that workers be paid strictly according to their productivity as measured by piecework (which, Castro reported, now determines the wages of 20% of Cuban workers) or by whether or not they meet the production quota set for their jobs—in other words, whether they make rate (this is already in force for 48% of Cuba’s workers).

This is truly capitalism in its full glory. Nowhere is this more ugly than when Castro says that he’s sorry that there’s such a terrible housing shortage in Cuba, but “the revolution hasn’t been able to do much” about it—while later revealing that the government is building 14 new tourist hotels and expanding others. Clearly, the consideration isn’t what people need, but what’s most profitable. Of course, Castro doesn’t call this capitalism, any more than do the present capitalist rulers of the USSR. All the revisionists claim that this kind of thing is just a little more “realistic” version of socialism.

CUBA’S \$5 BILLION MORTGAGE

The irony of it is that for many years the Cuban leadership argued that Soviet aid and sugar purchases were allowing them to buy everything they needed to “build socialism and communism simultaneously in Cuba.” Now, with the island \$5 billion in hock to the USSR² and more dependent on it economically than ever, it’s pretty clear that what really happened was exactly the opposite—the USSR was able to buy itself a neocolony. This development also makes it clearer than ever that the Cuban leadership’s strategy had nothing to do with the working class’ strategy for building socialism—that in fact Cuba was never a socialist country. It raises the question of what kind of revolution Cuba did have and why it was turned into its opposite, so that, far from being socialist, Cuba today has not even won its independence and national liberation.

²John E. Cooney, *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 16, 1974.

Petty Bourgeois Radicals Come to Power

This isn’t the first time that an imperialist power has taken advantage of the Cuban people’s struggle for national liberation in order to take over the country for itself. The Soviet rulers’ present tricks are nothing new in the world—although painted red, they are fundamentally no different from what the U.S. imperialists have been doing for years.

In 1898, when the Cuban people were on the verge of winning their independence from Spain after many years of fighting, the U.S. stepped in under the pretext of helping Cuba against Spanish colonialism and thereby seized the island as a neocolony for the U.S. With monopoly capitalism only recently established in the U.S., this was the U.S.’s first imperialist war to open up new areas for the export of American capital and to seize sources of raw materials.

The flood of U.S. investment to Cuba reenforced the colonial and semi-feudal nature of Cuban society that centuries of Spanish colonialism had created in Cuba. The U.S. imperialists propped up the rule of the landowners in Cuba and created a handful of capitalists dependent on U.S. capital, thus transforming Cuba from a colony of Spain to a neocolony of the U.S., stifling all possibilities of progress. At the time of the 1959 revolution the system of the ownership of land in Cuba had remained almost unchanged since the days of the Spanish empire, and the country’s one-crop economy had long been stagnant.

This system laid the most crushing burden on the urban and rural working class and the landless and small peasants. At the same time, it also held back the fortunes of all but the richest landowners—the small and very weak national bourgeoisie (confined to manufacturing the few things not made by U.S. subsidiaries or imported) and the relatively large urban petty bourgeoisie.

Throughout most of these years, Cuba’s workers played a leading role in the country’s fight for independence and national liberation, as well as fighting bitterly for their own immediate interests. This reached a high point in the 1930s, when under the leadership of the then-existing Communist Party the working class and its allies unleashed a huge wave of strikes and demonstrations, including armed uprisings and the establishment of soviets (revolu-

tionary workers' councils) in the sugar mills.

The existing U.S. puppet government was overthrown, but it was soon replaced by an army coup led by Fulgencio Batista. Al-



Cuban prisoners freed from Batista's jails on Jan. 1, 1959 as troops of the July 26th Movement marched into Havana. The masses of Cuban people enthusiastically hailed the revolution that swept the U.S. imperialists and their agents from the island and wanted to tear down the old social order. Instead, the Cuban leadership has ended up maintaining the old class relationships, in a new form, while proclaiming that socialism is being built.

though the struggle was very intense for the next several years, the working class was not able to consolidate its advances and eventually was driven back. As some of its previous errors came to the fore, the Communist Party became more and more revisionist. In the 1940s its leadership accepted a partnership in the Batista government, then, when Batista dropped them, crawled into the woodwork, where they remained until the eve of the 1959 revolution. This contributed greatly to the weakening of the workers' movement as a conscious and organized force, although the workers never stopped fighting their conditions.

VOLATILE PETTY BOURGEOISIE

By the 1950s the petty bourgeoisie had become the most volatile class in Cuba. The political groups that arose from it were the best organized to fight for their interests. Castro's 26th of July Movement came from the urban petty bourgeoisie, 25% of Cuba's population—the tens of thousands of businessmen with no business, salesmen with no sales, teachers with no one to teach, lawyers and doctors with few patients and clients, architects and engineers for whom there was little work, and so on. In its 1956 "Program Manifesto," it defined itself as "guided by the ideals of democracy, nationalism and social justice . . . [of] Jeffersonian democracy," and declared, "democracy cannot be the government of a race, class or religion, it must be a government of all the people."³

This certainly expressed the outlook of the petty bourgeoisie, with its hatred for the big bourgeoisie that held it down, its repugnance for the revolution of the working class, and its dreams of a "democracy" above classes. Its practical program aimed at restricting the U.S. and the landlords by ending the quota system under which the U.S. controlled Cuban sugar cane production, restricting the domination of the biggest landlords over the medium-sized growers, distributing unused and stolen farmland to the small peasants, and a profit-sharing scheme for urban workers to expand the market for domestic manufactures and new investment.

With this program, Castro and a small group took up arms against the Batista government in the Sierra Maestra mountains, while other young intellectuals and professionals organized resistance in the cities. This war won support from nearly every other class except the tiny handful of people directly tied to the landlords and the U.S. Many workers supported it and joined in. In the fighting itself, the most decisive force was the rural petty bourgeoisie, especially the small peasants for whom armed struggle was the only way to defend their land from the landlords and the ar-

³"Program Manifesto of the 26th of July Movement," in *Cuba In Revolution*, Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdes, Editors. New York, 1972.

my. Made up largely of peasants itself, Batista's army soon began to fall apart.

The Batista government disintegrated after two years of fighting involving only a few hundred armed rebels. In the last months, even the U.S. government dropped some of its support for the Batista government, believing that it was more likely that the July 26th Movement would agree to come to terms than that the Batista government could survive.⁴

Just after seizing power in 1959, Castro went to the U.S. on a "goodwill tour," declaring in New York, "I have clearly and definitely stated that we are not communists . . . The gates are open for private investment that contributes to the development of Cuba." He even called for a massive U.S. foreign aid program for Latin America, "in order to avoid the danger of communism." But these words weren't enough to reassure the U.S. ruling class.⁵

Despite Castro's proclaimed desire to get along with the U.S. government and the U.S. imperialists' desire to get Castro to support their interests, nothing could change in Cuba without seizing the sugar estates and mills and ending the monopoly American business held there. These were the pillars of the economic and political system that had given rise to the rebellion. To challenge them meant challenging the whole colonial system and its master, but to retreat in the face of them was not possible without abandoning everything.

FIDEL CASTRO: SECRET "MARXIST-LENINIST"

When Castro proclaimed the first agrarian reform law which limited the size of the biggest estates (many of them owned by U.S. sugar companies), all hell broke loose. The U.S. began applying economic and political pressure to topple the rebel army—which in effect now was the government—and in turn the Cubans began to take over the property of those forces whose interests were opposed to the island's independence. By 1961, the government found itself in possession of key sections of the economy, while the U.S. had imposed an economic blockade. In April, the U.S. launched the futile Bay of Pigs invasion.

Early in that year the USSR had sent its first trade delegation to Cuba, and Khrushchev had offered to protect Cuba with Soviet missiles. On May 1, Castro announced that henceforth Cuba would be a socialist country. Later that year he declared that he was and always had been a Marxist-Leninist, explaining, "Naturally if we had stood on the top of Pico Turquino [in the Sierras] when we were a handful of men, and said we were Marxist-Lenin-

⁴U.S. Ambassador to Cuba E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor*, New York, 1962.

⁵*Hispanic-American Report*, May 1959.

ists, we might never have gotten down to the plain."⁶

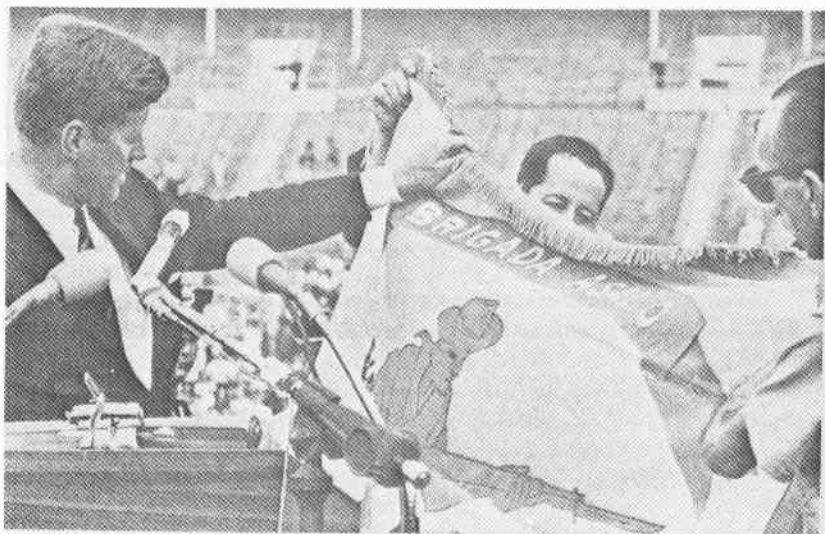
The U.S. imperialists used this development to say that the revolution's leadership had hidden its real intentions all along and came to power under false pretenses—in other words, to find some excuse other than naked self-interest for why they had opposed the Cuban revolution the minute it had touched their property. And they also used Castro's sudden announcement to slander communism by saying that this was how communists operate, by sneaking their system in through the back door without bothering to tell the masses what's going on, and that communists don't really rely on the masses but operate as "masters of deceit."

The great majority of Cuban workers and peasants were strong supporters of the revolution, and very much in favor of the measures it had taken, such as taking over the estates and mills and guaranteeing small peasants the right to their land (and in many cases giving them more), reducing rent, electricity and other prices, putting thousands of unemployed workers to work constructing hospitals, roads, schools, etc., launching a tremendous literacy campaign, and other steps which removed some of the weight from the masses' backs and allowed their enthusiasm for change to show itself in action. And many were enthusiastic about the idea of going on to socialism.

But socialism is not just an idea, nor a matter of words, nor just a government take-over. It's a social revolution, a revolution in the relations of classes so that the working class is not just the owner of things in theory, but also in practice the actual master of production and society, through the leadership of its own Marxist-Leninist party, and the political rule of the working class—the dictatorship of the proletariat. On this basis the working class can lead repeated and successful struggles against the bourgeoisie and in the process it is able to transform material conditions and itself, so as to gradually do away with classes altogether.

This is not the road that Castro and those around him too, despite all their rhetoric to the contrary. They had rebelled against the neocolonial, semi-feudal conditions of old Cuba, but their petty bourgeois position and outlook which had given rise to the longing for a quick and radical change in their status also gave rise to the ambition to retain—and strengthen—their privileged position above the masses of workers and peasants. This only capitalism could give them. This same class outlook also caused them to hate and fear the difficult class struggle and long years of hard work that proletarian rule and the real transformation of Cuba would mean. While the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia did hate the ugly features of capitalism, especially as it had oppressed them, they didn't want to change society's division of labor, which had

⁶*Revolucion* (organ of the 26th of July Movement), Dec. 22, 1961.



Although the efforts by the U.S. imperialists to reassert their control over Cuba met with ignominious defeat at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, they have not given up their hopes of someday recapturing Cuba for themselves. Here President Kennedy accepts the banner of the U.S.-backed and organized invasion force at the Miami Orange Bowl in 1962. He promised "to return the banner to the brigade in a free Havana."

placed them above the masses, free to develop their careers instead of laboring as wage slaves.

In the early years following the revolution, their class position and outlook was manifested in an idealist political line. This line reflected the desire of the petty bourgeois revolutionary intellectuals to see a world without oppression. But it also reflected their contempt and fear for the only force in society that can lead the process of transforming the world, the working class.

This so-called "Cuban line" reflected the impetuosity of the petty bourgeoisie in wanting their "ideal society" right away and without class struggle, especially without the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Cuban leaders talked as if communism was right around the corner and as if classes were eliminated simply by expropriation of individually owned property.

In fact the essence of utopian socialism, an early form that the idealist world outlook took among the Cuban leaders, is that the building of socialism depends on "enlightened" rulers with the interests of the masses at heart. The Cuban leaders, who viewed themselves as among the most enlightened "saviors" of the masses of all time, believed they could impose their wishes on society. In fact this whole line had great appeal for many revolutionary mind-

ed people from the petty-bourgeoisie in this country and around the world who wanted to see a better society but shared the Cuban leadership's view of the working class.

The same "left" political line stemming from the idealism of the petty-bourgeoisie was manifested in the activities of the Cuban leadership in international affairs. They developed the so-called "foco theory" in struggle in the countryside, acting as the "detonator" to the masses, who are inspired by them to spontaneously rise up, overthrow the old regime and put the "heroic guerilla" in power.

This is against the experience of every successful communist revolution, which is based on the conscious and organized struggle of the masses. In China, for example, this meant people's war: mobilizing the peasantry, under the leadership of the working class, establishing base areas in the countryside, and waging a protracted war. When Che Guevara tried to put the "foco theory" into practice in Bolivia, he was killed, the whole operation a complete fiasco.

PEOPLE, NOT THINGS, ARE DECISIVE

Underneath the petty-bourgeois "left" political line and coming more and more to the surface was undisguised revisionism. Instead of mobilizing and relying on the working class to change the actual class relationships that existed in Cuba, to eliminate the warped economy that imperialist plunder had created in Cuba, and on this basis to develop the productive forces, the Cuban leaders looked for something that could substitute for the masses and class struggle. Despite the rhetoric of building the "new man," they more and more based themselves on the line common to all revisionists, that things, not people, are decisive; that in order for their version of "socialism" to triumph in Cuba, productive capacity had to be obtained from abroad. Their class outlook insured they could never understand that revolutionizing the relations of production is the key to developing the productive forces. Still less could they understand that, in Marx's words, the "greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself." In place of the conscious struggle of the masses the Cuban leaders sought to purchase socialism by mortgaging the economy to the Soviet Union.

Lenin said, "Clearly, in order to abolish classes completely, it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the landlords and capitalists, not enough to abolish *their* rights of ownership; it is necessary also to abolish *all* private ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country, as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. This requires a very long period of time." (*A Great Beginning*)

This is the line of the working class in building socialism and carrying on the revolution for communism. In Cuba it certainly would have meant mobilizing the workers to break down the divisions of labor inherited from the old semicolonial society. This would especially mean changing the organization of the island, which served the almost single purpose of producing sugar for the imperialist world market. But the Cuban leaders, because of their petty bourgeois position and outlook, rejected this path.

Castro said that the main problem facing the revolution was how “to produce the abundance necessary for communism”—meaning, to him, trading sugar for the means of production and machinery that he felt the working class could never produce by relying on its own efforts. And to do this the Cuban leaders’ plan amounted to putting the *substance* of the old relations of production, in somewhat altered form—society’s division of labor and its sugar plantations—to work at top speed to produce the goods to sell to get this wealth. Now the buyer and “provider” was no longer to be the U.S., but the Soviet Union.

Once this line was adopted, the enthusiasm of the masses for changing the old society was increasingly perverted so that the role of the working class, rather than revolutionizing society, was reduced to working hard to produce the necessary cash. Thus the basic capitalist relation of production was preserved and strengthened—the subordination of the working class to production for profit. Rather than a new socialist society, and still less communism, this was, in essence, the same old society with new masters. The workers’ role was to work hard. The Cuban leaders more and more became bureaucratic state capitalists dependent on a foreign imperialist power.

Even the revolutionary fervor and desire of the Cuban people to support anti-imperialist struggles, exemplified by their support for the people of Vietnam, was twisted to support Soviet adventures abroad against their U.S. rivals, as in Bangladesh and in Angola.

Once the basic political road was taken of buying “socialism” instead of relying on and mobilizing the class struggle of the working class and masses which alone could revolutionize society, the basic economic policy of the Cuban revisionists followed as surely as night follows day. The cash that Castro sought could only be obtained by preserving and strengthening the very lopsided and semicolonial economy that had led to the Cuban revolution in the first place. The production of sugar for sale to the Soviet Union became the basis of economic policy, which all the get-rich-quick schemes, “socialist” proclamations and gimmicks depended on and served. And this economic dependency, in turn, became the basis for the further development of the political line of the Cuban leadership.

Sugar Coated Road To Neo-Colonialism

Sugar had been a curse on Cuba. The U.S. had used its control of the sugar market to control Cuba. The American and Cuban sugar lords had tried to keep the people from growing food on the unused land in order to keep them impoverished and without property, with no choice but to work in the sugar. The sugar lords tied the whole island to producing sugar for export, while this fertile tropical country ended up importing much of its food. This was the most profitable arrangement for the landowners and imperialists. Because food was so expensive, the majority of Cuban workers and peasants ate only rice, beans and roots.

In the first few years of the revolution, as the land and, above all, those who worked it, began to break free of this system, crops were diversified, with sugar production continuing where it had been planted in the past, while other land was used for other crops. These were the years of greatest improvement in the living standards of the masses, as working people and material resources that had been kept idle were freed up. The development of some industry was initiated and the construction of schools, hospitals and other projects were begun.

In the early '60s the U.S. closed off Cuba's former sugar market, so the purchases by the USSR and China helped Cuba out of a jam. In early 1963, as the economy's advance began to falter and shortages appeared, Castro went to the Soviet Union for talks with Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders. When he came back, he had a new plan. *Instead of diversifying agriculture, Cuba would produce more sugar.*

BEHIND SOVIET “AID”

By then Cuba had borrowed quite a bit from other countries. The USSR offered to substantially increase its loans to Cuba and buy up to five million tons a year of Cuban sugar—more than the country was then producing—at higher than the world market price at that time, so that Cuba could buy goods from the Soviets.⁷ The “aid” was the bait, and sugar the hook—and the Cuban leaders

⁷Edward Boorstein, *The Economic Transformation of Cuba*, New York, 1968.



In 1960, in order to smash the grip of U.S. imperialism on the island, the Cubans carried out a wave of nationalizations against the property of U.S. corporations. Above, banners drape a General Electric plant.

swallowed it.

For the rulers of the Soviet Union this was good business. Having overthrown the rule of the working class in the USSR, these new capitalists were increasingly driven by the laws of imperialism: the need to monopolize sources of raw materials, to export capital for the purpose of extracting superprofits and to contend with imperialist rivals for world domination. They saw that in tying Cuba into their imperialist orbit they would be able to extract great wealth out of Cuba over the years and use Cuba as a political and military tool in their contention with their U.S. rivals.

Like any good dope pusher, the Soviets gave the first samples at a low price. The first couple of years of “aid” were loaned interest-free. Later they began charging 2.5% interest. Their actual rate of profit was much higher than this. In the original agreement, 80% of the USSR’s credit and money had to be used for purchasing Soviet products at highly inflated prices. (As in the case of interest rates, once the dependency of Cuba had been established, the Soviets upped the ante, requiring all credit to be used on Soviet products.) According to an author with access to Cuban statistics, the USSR was charging 11% to 53% more for machinery than the price of comparable machines in the West.⁸ And making this robbery even more outrageous, although at first the Soviets paid Cuba more for its sugar than the world market price at the time (you guessed it, they stopped this practice too), they turned around and resold much of this sugar at an even higher price to Eastern Europe.

This is standard Soviet practice throughout the world. “It is through unequal trade that the Soviet Union realizes the surplus value generated by the export of capital. In essence, it is little more than a bookkeeping arrangement as to whether the profit

⁸Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba, Castro and Revolution*, Coral Gables, 1972.

comes back to the USSR in the form of interest or in the form of superprofits from sales *when the sales are tied by trade agreement to the export of capital.*” (From *Red Papers 7: How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union and What This Means for the World Struggle*, emphasis in the original)

But the Soviet Union has much bigger ambitions than mere domination of Cuba. Like all imperialist powers their appetite continually grows and they seek world domination. For the Soviets Cuba represented tremendous political “capital” with which to penetrate other countries in Latin America and throughout the world, by hiding behind Cuba’s “revolutionary” image. Because of the tremendous importance of gaining a foothold in Latin America and in hopes of making even greater political (and eventually military) use of Cuba in their struggle with the U.S. for world hegemony, the Soviets were willing to give Cuba a better “deal” than other countries under their grip.

SELF SUFFICIENCY NOT “CONVENIENT”

The reasoning of the Cuban leadership for mortgaging their country to the Soviets went like this: Cuba had extensive sugar fields and mills, and unused land besides. It had relatively few factories, low grade iron ore and little facilities for making steel. Sugar was very profitable to grow and sell on the international market, whereas diversifying agriculture and building industry would be slow and expensive.

As Castro explained in a speech, “To become self-sufficient in rice . . . we would have to use 330,000 more acres of irrigated land and invest in them our scarce water supply . . . Undoubtedly, it wouldn’t be convenient for our country to stop producing one and one half million tons of sugar, which is what we could produce on 330,000 acres of irrigated land planted to sugar cane, and which would increase our purchasing power abroad by more than \$150 million, in order to produce on this land, with the same effort, rice valued at \$25 million.”⁹

Why not take land out of rice production and plant cane, and use the money to buy rice with a good bit left over? This is the course the government followed with a vengeance. In 1964 Cuba decided to up its production of sugar cane from 3.9 million tons to 10 million tons a year by 1970.

All this made perfect economic sense—very “convenient”—according to *capitalist* economics.

Objectively, this was a decision to develop Cuba exactly as the U.S. imperialists had developed it—in a lopsided and forever dependent manner, according to what was most profitable. It was par-

⁹*Granma*, Jan. 3, 1966.

ticularly disastrous because Cuba failed to produce the 10 million tons, but even if this goal had been surpassed the basic effect on the economy's structure—its dependence on imperialism—would have remained the same. And in this situation it is definitely more profitable to grow cane than develop industry in Cuba—otherwise the U.S. imperialists would have industrialized Cuba long ago. Even in the last few years, when very high market prices for sugar allowed Cuba to make some profit on its foreign trade for the first time, “economics” still dictated that it be plowed back into making the sugar industry even bigger and more profitable.*

PROFIT IN COMMAND

At the 1975 party congress Castro spoke as though “the profitability criterion” had been unknown in Cuba for many years. In fact, the decision to expand sugar production showed that from the start his government's strategy for building “socialism” was based on profitability. This was not a mistake—it was a class decision, a basic political step that decided what road Cuba was to take and what classes would benefit from it.

Even under socialism the working class must take into account “profitability,” but profit remains an economic category reflecting the old, capitalist relations of production. Put simply this means that the working class, through the state, must consider the cost, in money, that goes into the production of things (wages, the price of raw materials, etc.) and the price at which the goods produced are sold—generally prices are expected to cover costs and produce a surplus. *But the aim of production under socialism is not profit.*

Under socialism it is the political line of the working class—its conscious decisions through its party and its state—that determines economic policy, the plan for what will be produced and how. Fundamentally, the plan is based on taking account of the material things in society (the workers, available machinery, raw materials, etc.) to meet the needs of society—food, clothing, schools, new factories, etc. The basic purpose of the working class recognizing the criterion of profit is so that it can wage a political struggle to restrict, to limit, and eventually to do away with it completely. To base an economy on “the profitability criterion” is capitalism, not socialism.

Neither can the working class build socialism by relying on foreign aid or trade, no matter how well intended. This is because its

* In late 1976 the bottom dropped out of the sugar market and the world price fell from 65½ cents a pound to 7½ cents (the Soviets had contracted to buy it at 30 cents). Castro declared that this would mean that Cuba would have to grow still more sugar for sale abroad and Cubans would have to give up the four ounces of coffee they'd been allowed to buy under rationing, so that more coffee could be exported too.



Soviet warships and submarines call regularly in Cuba where the Soviets maintain their only secure naval facilities in the Western Hemisphere. Using Cuba as a naval base in the Caribbean Sea has long been a practice of the U.S. imperialists, who still “own” and maintain a peice of Cuban territory, the Guantanamo base, as the headquarters of the U.S. Caribbean Fleet.

goal, communism and classless society, is not just a matter of abundance. But that is exactly how Castro explained it to the masses, as if communism were just a pie in the sky promise of better times. For its own liberation, the working class has to lead the masses of people in transforming conditions in each country, wiping out the material and social basis of class contradictions and training the masses in the outlook of the proletariat, so that everyone becomes a worker and the workers are conscious masters of production and every aspect of society. Only on that basis will classes disappear and communism be won.

Self reliance, unleashing, organizing and relying on the creative power of the masses within each country is the only way the working class can break the economic and social chains of capitalism.

DIDN'T DIVERSIFY AGRICULTURE

Cuba couldn't waste the sugar by letting it rot in the fields, or forget about using it to buy some imports if it could. But especially because not only Cuba's agriculture but its whole economy was dominated by sugar, it had to diversify its crops as the only possible basis for breaking out of its neocolonial structure.

In a system where the basic principle upon which all decisions are made is the needs of society and not profit, feeding the people and feeding them well is basic. The fact that the profitability of sugar has always pushed aside less profitable food crops made a lot of food staples very expensive and scarce for the masses.

Furthermore, unless agriculture was diversified and developed, Cuba would never have a basis for complete industrialization, either in raw materials from agriculture (for which Cuba still is largely dependent on imports) nor in terms of developing a market for

machinery and consumer goods.

Castro argued that it was much cheaper to import tractors from the Soviet Union, where factories could churn them out by the millions, than to set up factories in Cuba, which didn't need that many tractors. But again this is capitalist economics. If Cuba didn't develop its industry, even though this might be more "efficient" in the short run, then in the long run it would always be dependent on imported manufactured goods.

In "generously" providing Cuba with "aid" and encouraging it to enormously increase its production of sugar, the USSR was doing exactly as the U.S. had done—strengthening the most backward aspect of the Cuban economy—its dependence on sugar production. This meant reproducing in a new form the old content—export of capital to the colony and colonial dependence on the imperialist "mother country." It also meant that the Cuban leaders, by ruling Cuba under these conditions, were fast becoming sugar lords and dependent capitalists.

The decision on sugar was no mere misstep by the Cuban leadership. The example and experience of all socialist construction, including the experience in China and Albania at the time of the Cuban revolution, served as unmistakable examples of the difference between the socialist and capitalist road on the question of developing the economy.

Khrushchev, who had led in the establishment of a new exploiter ruling class in the USSR after Stalin's death, had tried to overthrow working class rule in China and Albania and bring those countries under the Soviet thumb, by ripping out Soviet technicians and blueprints and cutting off important supplies without warning. They even imposed an economic blockade around Albania, while threatening still more drastic action. Despite the fact that both countries were also very poor, and the fact that China is on the Soviet border and tiny Albania is surrounded by hostile states, the working class of these countries had done their best to develop them according to the principle of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and they were able to resist Khrushchev's offensive, although not without cost.

The Cuban leadership often claimed that the U.S. blockade, the threat of aggression, and Cuba's short supply of some key natural resources forced them to hitch their wagon to the Soviet Union. But despite whatever real obstacles that did exist to building genuine socialism in Cuba, these were certainly no greater than the conditions faced in real socialist countries. Cuba's most important resource, the working class itself, was much larger than in Albania, for example.

In fact, the blockade, far from being a justification for reliance on the Soviets, was itself yet another reason for self-reliance: to avoid the threat of strangulation the economy could not be based

on the assumption that ships would always be able to reach Cuba.

The Soviet Union, for its part, did oppose the U.S. when it suited their interests and even used Cuba to shake a few more sabers in the U.S. imperialists' faces, but as the Cuban missile crisis proved, they were quite willing to use Cuba as a pawn to be traded to the U.S. if that proved to be to their advantage. And as the development of things showed, Soviet military "protection," like Soviet "aid" and trade, meant Soviet protection of its property and the end of Cuban independence.

CHINA-CUBA DISPUTE

An incident between the Cuban and Chinese governments in 1966 shows just how fast the Cuban leaders were going down the road of neocolonial dependence, and how much, despite all their revolutionary rhetoric, their politics were increasingly dictated by the laws of capitalism. China had doubled its shipment of rice to Cuba for the year of 1965, at the Cuban government's request, but when the Cuban government demanded that China maintain that level permanently, the Chinese government responded by saying they were willing to talk about it but had some serious objections.¹⁰

China's aid and trade is fundamentally different from that of the Soviet revisionists described earlier. China's aid is not an investment. Since China is ruled by the working class and not the bourgeoisie, China's aid and trade doesn't serve the "profitability criterion"—it serves proletarian politics and is based on equality and mutual benefit.

The Cuban government offered to pay for the increased rice shipments with sugar, and if the Chinese weren't interested in that, with cash that China had loaned the Cubans to help them diversify their economy.¹¹ China answered that whatever the sugar might be worth in terms of money, they had no need for so much sugar, while they did need the rice. It was needed not only for their own consumption and to prepare a stockpile in case of war (China had recently been attacked by India, which was armed and backed by both the U.S. and the USSR), but also to supply Vietnam, then at war with the U.S. imperialists.

China's own bitter experience before and after its liberation had taught it well that economic dependence is a condition that revolution must end, an obstacle and a burden to the people. The Cuban people's rice ration had stayed the same even when China's rice shipments doubled because the Cuban government was ripping up rice fields to plant sugar cane—since rice was not as "conve-

¹⁰ *Peking Review*, Jan. 14, 1966.

¹¹ *Granma*, Feb. 5, 1966.

nient" as sugar according to the profitability principle. Chinese aid had been meant to help Cuba break out of sugar's chains. To buy rice with it would only make this situation worse.

Castro's response was to use the occasion of a Havana conference of some revolutionaries from Africa, Asia and Latin America to publicly lash out at China for "economic aggression." There he also made disgusting personal slanders on Mao Tsetung and called for his removal from office.¹² In the context of the USSR's own attacks on China and the polemics then raging between the parties of the two countries over the general line for the international communist movement, this attack put Castro in particularly good standing with his Soviet creditors—a truly disgusting example of how the "profitability criterion" ruled Cuba's politics.

NATIONALIZATION—FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

Of course, this wasn't the way Castro presented it. Every step, every measure that the government took was explained to the masses as a step towards "socialism," better yet, towards "communism." But every new nationalization, every new "revolutionary offensive," every new opportunity presented to the masses to show their revolutionary enthusiasm, was in fact guided by "the criterion of profitability" and the class interests of Cuba's rulers.

In 1963, a few months after Castro's visit to the USSR and the signing of the sugar deal, Castro announced that in addition to the great estates and the property of the U.S. imperialists which had been seized before, now the land of the medium growers was to be confiscated. Those affected, growers with 160 to 990 acres—about 10,000 farmers and their families in all—were accused by Castro of "sabotaging sugar production" and aiding the CIA.¹³

These were certainly not poor peasants, and couldn't be relied upon in the struggle to transform Cuba because they were exploiters themselves. Nevertheless, many of these farmers had supported the 1959 revolution because they had been severely restricted by the big sugar companies.

We cannot say exactly what would have been the correct policy toward these growers. The real point is not whether the particular policy toward them was a mistake or not. Mistakes need not be fatal and can be corrected, given an overall correct line. The important point is that, for the Cuban government, this policy was not at all based on how to develop socialist agriculture. It wasn't even a matter of defense of the revolution. For them, this complete expropriation was a reflection of what had become their overall policy: sacrifice everything to subordinate the maximum

¹²Speech of March 13, 1966. Quoted in Hugh Thomas, *Cuba*, New York, 1971.

¹³Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, *Socialism in Cuba*, New York, 1969.

amount of land to the sugar mills and make the cane grow as cheaply as possible.

This exact same line—all out to turn the country into an efficient sugar producing operation—came out differently when applied to the several hundred thousand poor farmers. As the people who grew so much of Cuba's food, these peasants were potentially an important force in developing the economy along socialist lines. But the government's general policy was not to lead them in the voluntary collectivization of their land and labor.

DIDN'T COLLECTIVIZE

Basically they just let them sit. Some went out of business and became part of the state farms, and a few grew rich. All this caused this part of the economy to stagnate in small private ownership, and Cuba still continued to have to spend 24% of its import money on food.¹⁴ This was ignored by the Cuban leaders, who saw the motive force in their economy not as the masses, mobilized to break the old patterns of production and build socialism, but as the profit criterion and the "get rich quick" gimmick of pushing the sugar export section of the economy.

The failure to lead these peasants through cooperation, collectivization and socialization ensured that this section of the people would remain stuck in the method and outlook of small private ownership, and that Cuba's agriculture would not develop in a socialist way.

The state farms formed from the old estates and the confiscated medium farms were in turn grouped together into giant *agrupaciones*, often totalling several hundred thousand acres. This was a more "efficient"—more profitable—way to grow sugar, especially with the market now expanding to include the Soviet Union. But it wasn't a higher, more socialist form of ownership than before because the relations of production—especially the role of the producers in the whole setup—was unchanged. Instead of working for a sugar company under the eyes of a few managers, now the mill workers and field hands worked for the government under the eyes of 20 or 30 bureaucrats. And the purpose of their labor remained the production of profit.

After a few years, when the state farms needed even more manpower for sugar, the state farm employees were forbidden to have even their private plots, on which many Cuban cane cutters grew small amounts of vegetables and other crops, principally for their own use.

Under socialism the working class strives to make most efficient

¹⁴Cuban government statistics cited by Eric N. Baklanoff, "International Economic Relations," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, ed., Pittsburgh, 1971.

use of the resources of society. In the long run this means, of course, large-scale, mechanized, diversified agriculture, and at all times the working class must wage a political struggle against the capitalist tendencies that small-scale production engenders. But for a long period of time in many countries, certainly in Cuba, it is neither necessary nor desirable to eliminate all sideline agricultural production, even when some of the produce is sold. It can contribute to feeding people. And if the state farm workers could grow much of their own food in their spare time it would be a good thing, freeing up resources to be used elsewhere.

But for the Cuban government, these private plots took time away from the main business—sugar cane. In effect, the government had become the new landlords, subordinating the laborers' needs and the needs of society to the demands of King Sugar just as before.

95.1% OF HOT DOG VENDORS "COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY"?

The shortage of manpower in the cane fields caused a mania of nationalization in the late '60s. In the so-called "revolutionary offensive" of 1968, when the sugar harvest was way behind, Castro announced that "95.1%" of all hot dog sellers, grocery store owners, barkeepers and other small proprietors had been discovered to be "counter-revolutionaries."¹⁵ Worse, these "able bodied men were loafing" while "women went to the fields."

All of these establishments—55,000 in all—were seized. They were either closed down permanently (without regard to whether, for instance, the workers might need a hot dog stand in front of a factory) or else run by bureaucrats, while the ex-proprietors were sent off to cut cane. Some turned out to be old and crippled, and many joined the almost 10% of Cuba's population who had fled the country.

Castro justified this by saying that the revolution hadn't been made just so "parasites" could run a business. But his approach to the question was the opposite of the proletariat's. In revolutions led by the working class, it is an important political principle to win over the maximum number of forces against the enemy at each point in the struggle and to neutralize those who can't be won over. The working class, having seized power from the big capitalists, has to gradually do away with the small proprietors in its midst who represent a capitalist element. But the working class' method in this situation is to use persuasion, not force. The working class can win the vast majority of these people to building socialism and, in the course of this, transform both their poli-

¹⁵Speech of March 13, 1968.

tical outlook and their economic position. But Castro's capitalism turned them into wage slaves pure and simple. For the Cuban government, it was a simple matter of economics: 55,000 "able-bodied men" = 55,000 potential cane cutters.

This nationalization was the greatest fraud and had nothing to do with socialism, even though the government might pronounce it very "revolutionary" to do away with someone else's business to serve its own. Nationalization is not necessarily socialization. Nationalization means simply control of a business by the state, which the bourgeois state does all the time, from the Post Office to Penn Central in the U.S., to the steel industry and the mines in Britain.

The key difference is which class holds power. When the working class runs the state, it is able to plan society increasingly to serve its own interests and all of humanity. To do this requires the increasingly conscious and organized participation of the workers at all levels of society, including the enterprise level in management and administration.

The masses of workers and peasants have a great knowledge about production and about their overall and particular needs. With the leadership of the proletariat's party, their knowledge can be summed up and used to formulate a plan to run the economy in order to fill those needs and advance revolution. And the masses of producers can be organized, educated and relied upon to increasingly control and participate in the carrying out of this plan and run society. Unless all this is done, there is only one other way to make decisions—according to profit.

This is the case in Cuba. There are periodic assemblies of workers in the factories all right. But as a top government official explained them, "It is not a question of discussing all the administrative decisions. The thing is that the enthusiasm of the workers must be obtained to support the principal measures of the administration."¹⁶ This isn't very different from the kind of management pep talks workers in the U.S. often hear.

The factories, state farms, hot dog stands, etc., weren't run by a plan, in the working class sense of the word. Plans were made, but since the general lines of the economy were already decided by the production of sugar, the particular plans within that had to follow suit, to also be based on profit.

But there was one very important difference between the management of the economy in the '60s and its present management. In the '60s the managers and bureaucrats were subject to little control or discipline regarding their particular enterprise or industry. In the name of establishing "communism" all at once (and with

¹⁶Speech by Armando Hart, Organization Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. *Granma*, Oct. 5, 1969.

the freedom they thought Soviet "aid" had bought them), there was no economic accounting for their performance, and little control except for their superior's orders. This allowed the former intellectuals and professionals who were running the economy to trip out pretty much as they liked with "special projects" and so-called "miniplans," free as birds, until the bills for this "freedom" quickly came due.

All this was in the name of "socialism," of "eliminating the vile intermediary of money," as Castro explained.¹⁷ But in real socialist construction, when both the forces of production and the knowledge and conscious control of the producers are still relatively limited, the working class must use some economic accounting and controls over production in order to better understand what it is free to do and to help check up on its implementation. Again, this means subordinating economics to politics. Otherwise, if the plan doesn't strictly reflect reality and if it isn't strictly carried out, then the laws of capitalism will reassert themselves.

While the new managers and bureaucrats wanted to be free of the "vile intermediary of money," they couldn't be free of the laws of capitalism and the market. The uncontrolled nature of production under this system, which created very severe economic setbacks and contributed a lot to the failure of the sugar harvest, had to be brought under the discipline of profit.

At first profit commanded the economy through the direct intervention of Castro and other leaders, who ran around directing resources into sugar and other exports and industries that seemed to promise a quick return on investment. Then, in the later 1960s, the government tried to run everything with the aid of a giant Soviet computer and a set of mathematical tables prepared according

¹⁷Speech at ANAP Conference of May 1967, cited in Thomas, op. cit.



Billboard exhorts Cubans to achieve the goal of six million tons of sugar by June 10, promising it would be a blow to Uncle Sam. Castro staked the "honor of the revolution" and, more importantly, most of Cuba's resources on the success of the 1970 10 million tons campaign. Its failure left the economy in shambles and the country further in hock to the USSR.

to the instructions of a Harvard economist.¹⁸ Since these methods arranged things for maximum "efficiency" as measured in pesos and centavos, they were simply a disguised form of running things according to profit (and in fact are often used by capitalist management in the U.S. and USSR). By the early 1970s, however, even these methods turned out to be not efficient enough and piece by piece the government began reorganizing the economy according to the same principle, in form as well as content, followed by the dollar and especially the ruble.

The real relations of production, the real class relationships, were camouflaged by fast and loose use of Marxist words. And at the same time, the workers and peasants were expected to work doubletime in honor of this phoney "Marxism."

"VOLUNTARY" LABOR

In the name of "using conscience to create wealth" and "creating the New Man," workers were increasingly called upon to do great amounts of voluntary labor. This was especially true in the late 1960s, as growing numbers of cane cutters streamed out of the countryside looking for better pay and conditions, leaving the all-important sugar harvests short of manpower.

The enormous numbers of workers, students and even sometimes bureaucrats bused into the cane fields, however, had little resemblance to real socialist voluntary work, which under working class rule is an important measure for developing society and transforming the working class.

Under socialism when the workers rule and are transforming society toward communism, there is a real basis for people to spend their spare time doing voluntary labor. But in Cuba, the "voluntary" labor was nothing like this. This was because the needs of sugar production meant that people's "voluntary labor" was often at the expense of their regular work, and because, although many people did take part enthusiastically and selflessly, logging a certain number of hours of "voluntary" labor was the only way to become eligible to buy durable consumer goods such as refrigerators, etc.¹⁹ Many workers resisted this scheme. Productivity in "voluntary" labor was often only 10% of paid labor—but it was still cheaper than paying wages.²⁰

Just as Castro had claimed that the increasing concentration on sugar was necessary "so as to fully develop the productive forces necessary for communism," he also claimed that the increasing

¹⁸W. Leontief, "Notes on a Visit to Cuba." *New York Review of Books*, Aug. 21, 1966.

¹⁹Roberto E. Hernandez and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Labor Organization and Wages," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*.

²⁰Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Economic Significance of Unpaid Labor," in *Cuba in Revolution*.

emphasis on voluntary labor was also a communist measure. In fact, as many workers were becoming very sceptical about how things were going under "socialism," throughout the '60s Castro made increasing use of the promise that "communism" would come in the very near future (starting within ten years, he said)²¹ and would put an end to Cuba's growing problems.

This was a very convenient misuse of what communism really means, as well as pure pie in the sky, as developments quickly proved. No amount of labor, voluntary or otherwise, will change the capitalist class relations, which are the real cause of Cuba's problems. And the Cuban government was using all sorts of devices—from perverting people's real revolutionary enthusiasm, to material incentives, to outright wage cutting—to disguise this fact and squeeze more and more labor out of the people.

In industry and especially among skilled workers, wages for a great many jobs were cut, under the slogan "workers renounce gains which today constitute privileges." Many times Castro has denounced the so-called "privileges" that some workers supposedly enjoyed under Batista (as well as those supposedly enjoyed by workers in the U.S. today). But it's the capitalists who've caused inequalities among the working people, not fundamentally by favoring some, but by paying all as little as they can get away with. The socialist principle "to each according to its work" means that people do receive different pay for different work, because they contribute different amounts to society. Restricting these differences, and eventually doing away with them, must overwhelmingly be done by raising the general wage level—not by forced wage-cutting.

It's the capitalists' idea of "equality" that all workers should be equally poor, and that some workers should pay for whatever advances others make. This, too, was the Cuban government's idea of "building socialism and communism simultaneously." Meanwhile, of course, class differences widened. While workers took a pay cut in the name of building a "pure, really pure society," high school teachers, for instance, got a 60% wage hike. And on the new plan, managers will be paid for their profit performance.²²

Even so, people's wages were not what they seemed. Rent was cheap and even free for some, and many prices at that time were cheaper than before. But by the end of the '60s consumer goods were so scarce that the amount of money in circulation was twice the value of goods available on the market.²³ Much of people's pay was worthless because there was nothing to spend it on. (Since then this has been "solved" by raising prices.)

²¹Speech of Sept. 28, 1966.

²²Castro's report to the 1975 Party Congress.

²³"Let's Fight Absenteeism and Fight It Completely," *Granma*, Nov. 9, 1969.



1933: Cubans in Havana celebrate toppling the U.S. puppet dictator Machado after a national general strike and the armed seizure of many sugar mills, ports and a U.S.-owned steel mill. The Cuban working class has a glorious tradition of revolutionary struggle against imperialism. By promising the workers socialism while continuing to chain them to the system of wage slavery, the Cuban bourgeoisie and their Soviet masters are playing with fire. The Cuban working class and people are sure to rise in revolution and overthrow the rule of their oppressors and build a genuine socialist society.

ECONOMY IN SHAMBLES

By the late 1960s the Cuban economy was in shambles. In 1964, after signing the sugar sales agreement with the Soviet Union, Castro had announced that by 1970 Cuba would harvest 10 million tons of sugar a year. This plan meant almost tripling sugar production.

A high 30% of the economy was being plowed back into capital investment,²⁴ focusing on clearing land for cane, buying tractors for cane, building new mills for cane, railroads for cane, ports for cane—as well as expanding other export crops and nickel mining for export. After the first two years, sugar production began to fall farther and farther behind the targeted goals.²⁵ And the more sugar fell behind, the more frantically other resources were thrown into sugar production, with workers drawn out of every other industry. Even housing was left standing half-built as the workers were snatched away to cut cane.

But this plan turned out to be a nightmare, and Cuba's rulers

²⁴Figure given by Castro in speech of March 12, 1968.

²⁵Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Luc Zephirin, "Central Planning," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*.

were in deep trouble. In their frenzied efforts to make that goal upon which Castro had very publicly staked "the honor of the revolution," they so burned out men, machines and fields that the 8.5 million tons that was achieved in 1970 came at such a cost that in the next two years cane production fell to a new low in recent Cuban history. And not only did they not get the 10 million tons, by 1970 they had fallen so far behind in sending sugar promised the Soviet Union that they *owed* the USSR 10 million tons.²⁶

Cuba's economic statistics for this period paint a picture of disaster. The country's industrial production had risen somewhat until 1968, when sugar production began to reach a fever pitch. Then it fell sharply, according to Cuban figures. Steel and shoe production, for instance, dropped like a stone. Non-sugar agricultural production fell by a fifth. (Cuban statistics quoted by the UN.) The number of cattle fell from 7 million to 5 million in three years. Cuba's poultry and many vegetables remained scarce.²⁷

According to the American "experts" on the subject, their statistics show that the standard of living of the masses was slowly falling throughout the late 1960s. We don't have to take their words for it, because according to the Cuban government the amount of goods people could get under rationing either stayed the same or decreased (as in the case of milk), and even the personal consumption of Cuba's two most famous products, sugar and cigars, was drastically cut—to have more left over for export—while the prices of many consumer items rose sharply.²⁸ That the workers didn't care for the way things were going is shown by the admission by the Cuban Minister of Labor that absenteeism from work was 20% on the average day in 1970.²⁹ He described this as "widespread passive resistance."³⁰

To the Cuban masses, the government had promised that the 10 million ton harvest would produce the abundance necessary for Cuba's economic liberation. But this drive and its failure had further enslaved the Cuban people. By 1970 the Cuban government owed the USSR over \$2 billion, and the Soviets were demanding more than a pound of flesh in return.³¹

²⁶Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the Seventies*, Albuquerque, 1974.

²⁷Statistics from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization taken from Cuban government reports, and also from various Cuban government figures' speeches. Cited by Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the Seventies*.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Speech by Labor Minister Jorge Risquet, *Granma*, Sept. 20, 1970.

³⁰1970 speech by Risquet cited by Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba From Columbus to Castro*, New York, 1974.

³¹Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Economic Policies and Growth," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*. U.S. government figures are higher. See also *U.S. Government Official Area Handbook on Cuba*, 1973.

Soviets Bark Orders, Castro Cracks Whip

The 1975 Cuban party congress was a consolidation and formal ratification of many of the changes that the Cuban government has been making since the early 1970s.

First and most important, there was a new crackdown on the working class. Along with the new wage policy described at the beginning of this article, there is now less emphasis on relying on the masses' enthusiasm and more on plain old force. This was in line with a 1973 decision which revived a system of punishment familiar to workers throughout the capitalist world: for offenses ranging from absenteeism, lateness and negligence to lack of respect to supervisors, workers can be punished by docking their pay-check, being disqualified from certain posts, transferred to another job, postponement of vacations, temporary suspensions and actual firing.³²

Individual sugar enterprises started laying off workers several years ago to increase "productivity." Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos admitted in a 1972 speech that there was some outright unemployment in two of the largest sugar growing provinces.³³ Now, according to the party congress, this practice is to become much more widespread in other industries.

The decisions of the congress established a formal system for running the Cuban economy along capitalist lines. Bureaucrats and managers won't be so free to damage profit with their fantasies anymore since that is one freedom even the social-imperialists' money can't buy. The whole economy is to be run more "efficiently" now, with profit to be made at every step. Workers are to be paid according to the profitability of the enterprises they work for (to make them work harder—which won't make them any less exploited). Managers are to be paid according to the profitability of the enterprises they manage (to make them work the workers harder), and those at the top are to be paid "rewards for results"³⁴

³²These are the provisions of the labor law of 1965, which was not completely enforced until after the congress of the Cuba Trade Union Federation (CTC) in 1973. Law quoted by Hernandez and Mesa-Lago, *op. cit.*

³³Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the Seventies*.

³⁴Castro's report to the Party Congress.

—after all, don't they have the responsibility of running everything?

ROLE OF THE CUBAN PARTY

The Cuban government has learned from the experience of the Soviet revisionists in more than just the "socialist" version of capitalist economics. The decision to finally hold a first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba ten years after its founding is a good example of that.

When the Party was founded in 1965, its role was mainly formal. Since Cuba was supposedly a "socialist" country it had to have a "communist" party. This was cooked up by amalgamating Castro's July 26th Movement, the Revolutionary Directorate (a student group which had taken up arms against Batista) and the Popular Socialist Party, the old revisionists who had long ago given up calling their party communist and opposed the armed struggle against Batista until the last minute, even going so far as to betray some of the student fighters to Batista's police. This new Party's leading bodies rarely met, few people joined it and in general it was mainly for show.

For the working class, its party is its key weapon in making revolution and building socialism. Only through the organized detachment of the most class conscious fighters can the knowledge and experience of the laboring people in their millions be summed up to formulate the line and policies that can lead the working class forward. The leaders of the Cuban revolution got a lot of support from the masses, but since they never based themselves on the working class, they had no need for such a party.

But the experience they've had as a new dependent capitalist class has made them more "realistic" about protecting and strengthening their rule. The party they have organized and brought to center stage was created by this class and is guided by its interests and outlook. Its leaders are the rulers of the state, the army, the factories and the farms. Castro reported to the congress that 40% of its members are administrators and full time party officials, 10% are teachers and health workers. As for the rest who belong to factory and farm units, we don't know exactly how many are workers and peasants and how many are technicians and managers. We do know from a previous speech that, at least in 1970, the manager and party leader in these units were almost always the same person³⁵—and on state farms more often than not, an army officer as well.³⁶

But the way we can tell what class a party represents is not mainly by the membership, but by the policies it carries out and

³⁵Risquet, speech of July 31, 1970.

³⁶Renee Dumont, *Is Cuba Socialist?*, New York, 1974.

what class interests these policies advance. Like the present revisionist party in the Soviet Union, this is not a party of the working class, to serve the working class's rule. It is a party of the bourgeoisie, to protect and strengthen their rule over the masses.

CASTRO'S "SELF-CRITICISM"

Even Castro's so-called "self-criticism" serves these class interests. "Perhaps our greatest idealism," he said not too long ago, "has been to believe that a society that has scarcely left the shell of capitalism could enter, in one bound, into a society in which everyone could behave in an ethical and moral manner."³⁷

At the party congress, Castro continued this theme: "Revolutions usually have their utopian periods, in which their protagonists, dedicated to the noble tasks of turning their dreams into reality and putting their ideals into practice, assume that historical goals are much nearer and that man's will, wishes and intentions can accomplish anything."

These are truly reminiscences of a new bourgeoisie looking back on its early days. Their rise to power began with a petty bourgeois revolution. The policies of its leaders reflected the outlook of that class, with all its vacillation, subjectivism, idealism and wishful thinking, impatience for quick change and lack of patience for struggle, and all the get-rich-quick schemes and other characteristics that reflect the petty bourgeoisie's unstable position between the working class and the capitalists. Their "left" line in the '60s and its real, underlying conservatism, and their rapid changeover to open revisionism in the face of difficulties, is all testimony to that outlook.

The main idealist form that this took was certainly not, as Castro would have us believe, having too high an estimation of the masses of people. Their real idealism was that they expected that society could be changed just because they wanted it to, without the conscious and organized efforts of the masses in their millions. This was reflected in their theory that a "small handful of resolute men" alone could topple U.S. imperialism throughout Latin America, as well as by their theory that the combination of Soviet money and Castro's ideas could bring socialism to Cuba, instead of the struggle of the masses themselves.

It wasn't idealism that they wanted things to change, nor that they believed that things could change. What was most idealist—what was furthest from reality—was the Cuban leaders' conception that they could maintain capitalism's division of labor with themselves on top, the thinkers and planners and administrators of all, while the working people would willingly carry out their plans

³⁷*Granma*, Sept. 20, 1970.

without struggling against this exploitation and oppression.

FULL-BLOWN BOURGEOISIE

What has changed in Cuba today, reflecting this transformation of these rebels into a new bourgeoisie, is that while they still maintain the appearances of "socialism," their experience at running society in their bourgeois way has taught them the outlook and methods of all capitalist ruling classes. They haven't exchanged their old petty bourgeois idealism for the outlook and struggle of the working class, but rather for that of the bourgeoisie itself. They still use rhetoric and illusions as a prop to their rule but now rely on the "discipline of the market" to make the workers work, backed up by all the coercion and outright force at their disposal.

"They grabbed, now let me have a go, too." This was how Lenin described the outlook of the petty bourgeoisie towards Russia's overthrown rulers. This applies to Cuba's petty bourgeois leaders. For them the victory over the imperialists and their Cuban overseers was not an opportunity to transform the conditions that gave rise to the neocolonial system. Instead they increasingly became replacements, in a new form, for those they had overthrown. On the basis of their own class outlook, and with the conditions so readily supplied by the Soviet revisionists, these once petty-bourgeois rebels have become a full-blown comprador bourgeoisie—dependent on the Soviet imperialists.

Cuba's trade figures with the Soviet bloc for the last few years are almost the same as they once were with the U.S. Exports still make up a third of the island's production (and most of that is sugar), with the bulk of these products going to the Soviet bloc.³⁸

While fertile land is tied down in the production of sugar, food remains on the long list of things which Cuba must purchase from abroad. This fact is a constant drag on its development. The Cuban debt to the USSR is now over \$5 billion, and to pay that back it is now planning to put even greater efforts into increasing sugar production. Recently the Cubans joined the CMEA, which has been the main vehicle for Soviet economic domination of East Europe. This endless cycle of dependency, debt and yet more dependency, and the one crop economy at its center, is identical to that which ties many other Latin American countries to the U.S.

CUBA'S POLITICAL ROLE

These are the imperialist economics which dictate Cuba's present political role in the world—its role as a tool, a puppet, used by Soviet social-imperialism to advance its interests everywhere.

³⁸Castro's report to the Party Congress.



Not content to rest on his Angola laurels, Castro went on an African tour in early 1977, visiting eight countries. At the same time, with a slightly different itinerary, Soviet President Podgorny also took an African safari. Together, the two attempted to pervert the African liberation struggles for the benefit of social-imperialism. When Castro arrived in Moscow to file his report Soviet boss Brezhnev embraced and congratulated him.

For the Soviets, Cuba is a long-term investment with far greater profits expected than simply immediate economic benefit. It is even conceivable that the USSR could lose money, in the short run, on its investments. But this would not affect Cuba's colonial dependence on the Soviet Union. Imperialist powers often subordinate their immediate profit in any particular country to their overall policies. A good example of this is Israel, where the U.S. has poured in billions of dollars, more than it could ever hope to squeeze out of control of the Israeli economy alone. Israel's real value to the U.S. is primarily as a political and military tool with which to protect its vast holdings in the Middle East.

The Soviet imperialists certainly expect to return a monetary profit on their Cuban investment. But Cuba's real value for them now is that, dressed in the revolutionary garb of anti-U.S. imperialism, it is a key tool in the Soviets' drive to replace the world domination of U.S. imperialism with its own—all in the name of revolution and communism.

“REVOLUTIONARY” CREDENTIALS

As a country which has made a revolution against the U.S. and has consistently tried to enhance its “revolutionary” credentials, Cuba is able to advance the Soviet imperialists' cause in many areas where the USSR can't act so openly in its own name.

Part of Cuba's service is to provide a cover and to counterattack against exposure and denunciation of the Soviet imperialists: to call things their opposite and hide their real nature.

Cuba was particularly valuable for this at the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Algeria in 1973, when Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk denounced the USSR as an accomplice in the U.S. aggression against Cambodia. Castro stood up and launched an attack on Sihanouk and others and spouted an embittered defense of the Soviets, whom he portrayed as the staunch and natural ally of the oppressed countries.

Today, the Cuban leaders are playing this theme still louder and more shamelessly than before. At the 1975 party congress, Castro said “no true revolutionary, in any part of the world, will ever regret that the USSR is powerful, because if that power did not exist . . . the people who fought for liberation in the last 30 years would have had no place from which to receive decisive help . . . and all the small, underdeveloped nations—of which there are many—would have been turned into colonies once more.”

The message behind this is loud and clear: underdeveloped countries cannot win liberation without depending on the Soviet Union. This call for the world to follow the “Cuban model” is a very important service to the Soviet rulers who are trying to pervert the struggles of the oppressed against U.S. imperialism to serve their own purpose of replacing the U.S. as the world's biggest exploiters and oppressors.

But of course the Soviet rulers are not fundamentally counting on Castro's speeches to advance their interests. More and more, like the U.S. imperialists, they are counting on guns. And, here too, the Cuban leaders have seen the light of Soviet “realism.”

ARMED INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA

These days instead of spreading the line of “guerilla focos” to substitute for the masses' own struggle for liberation, now Cuba is

sending its soldiers riding in on Soviet tanks and planes.

The thousands of Cuban troops accompanying the Soviet tanks in Angola are only one of the many payments the Cuban ruling class will be expected to make to its Soviet masters on the practical front.

Not only do the social-imperialists use Cuban troops to try to bring Angola under their heel. They try to sell it all as “proletarian internationalism” and they go so far as to portray Cuba as an example of what great blessings are in store for other countries if only they tie their future to the Soviet Union and its “aid.” But the fact that thousands of Cuban soldiers are sent to fight and die as pawns in this counterrevolutionary crime is a tremendous exposure of Soviet imperialism, which no amount of words can hide.

The Soviet imperialists say that the working class and masses of people are destined to remain in chains unless they receive Soviet “aid” and submit to Soviet control. The U.S. imperialists, whose own economic and military aid has long been used to enslave and reinforce the bonds of oppression of many peoples, say the same thing from their angle—if the oppressed and exploited of a country dare rise up against U.S. “protection” and plunder they are sure to fall prey to the Soviet jackals.

But the most important lesson to be learned from the failure of the Cuban revolution is just the opposite of this imperialist logic. The masses of people in each country can free themselves, and advance the cause of freeing all humanity only by relying mainly on their own efforts and not the “aid” of the world's exploiters—by taking the road of proletarian revolution.

HOW CAPITALISM HAS BEEN RESTORED IN THE SOVIET UNION

AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE WORLD STRUGGLE

“The starting point for developing the strategy for revolution in any one country must be based on a correct assessment of the world situation and the general strategy for advancing proletarian revolution on a world scale. Without such a correct view, inevitably we will make errors in analyzing the particular contradictions existing in any one country, fail to fully understand the present general crisis of imperialism, and not be able to correctly prepare the working class and the masses of people for the struggles looming ahead of us.

“The transformation of the Soviet Union from the leading country in (what was then) the socialist bloc to an imperialist superpower has profoundly affected the alignment of class forces on a world scale, and hence the worldwide strategy and tactics for making revolution.”—Red Papers 7, page 125

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