

## TOWARDS A MARXIST SCHOOL OF CUBAN STUDIES

- "*THE CUBAN PRE-REVOLUTION OF 1933: AN ANALYSIS.*" by D. L. RABY. (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1975. Pp. 28.)
- "*IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT.*" By NELSON P. VALDÉS. (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1975. Pp. 52.)
- CUBAN COMMUNISM.* Edited by IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ. (3d ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1977. Pp. 576. \$8.95.)
- CUBAN ECONOMIC POLICY AND IDEOLOGY: THE TEN MILLION TON SUGAR HARVEST.* By SERGIO ROCA. (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1976. Pp. 72. \$3.00.)
- POST-REVOLUTIONARY CUBA IN A CHANGING WORLD.* By EDWARD GONZÁLEZ and DAVID RONFELDT. (Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1975. Pp. 78. \$5.00.)
- CUBAN SUGAR POLICY FROM 1963 TO 1970.* By HEINRICH BRUNNER; translated by M. BORCHARDT and H. F. BROCH DE ROTHERMANN. (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977. Pp. 163. \$9.95.)
- FOUR MEN: LIVING THE REVOLUTION.* By OSCAR LEWIS, RUTH M. LEWIS, and SUSAN M. RIGDON. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1977. \$15.00.)
- FOUR WOMEN: LIVING THE REVOLUTION.* By OSCAR LEWIS and RUTH M. LEWIS. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1977. \$15.00.)

Cuba has had an impact on the Western hemisphere—and currently on the international arena—well beyond what one would expect from its size and resources: without gold or silver in colonial times (and today without oil), an occasional safe harbor for pirates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the "ever-faithful isle" began a rebellion in 1868 that the mobilization of the largest Spanish army in the hemisphere could not totally crush. This island of slaves and *criollos*, along with Mexico and the rest of the Caribbean, bore witness to the United States' rite de passage into the world capitalist system. A neo-republic whose history often looked like a caricature of Latin American politics—a weak oligarchy, a frustrated bourgeoisie, no significant Church influence, and an army whose top officialdom was summarily deposed in 1933—Cuba's importance is underscored by the consolidation of its socialist revolution after 1959.

That socialism leads both Marxists and non-Marxists alike to turn to Cuba for a prescription on how to break out of underdevelopment. What are, for example, the dynamics of popular revolutionary movements in the Third World? How does a political vanguard promoting revolutionary change emerge? What are the ideological roots of this vanguard? Does the ideology of the revolutionaries challenge the prevailing cultural hegemony in society? D. L. Raby and Nelson P. Valdés examine these questions in prerevolutionary Cuba in two separate monographs.

Raby's is a preliminary research report on a larger comparative project on Latin American "populist" politics using the rise of *cardenismo* in Mexico and Cuba in the 1930s as case studies and focusing on what he calls the "Cuban pre-revolution of 1933." The central thesis of his paper—which one hopes will be expanded and more cogently argued and documented in the final version—is that the overthrow of Gerardo Machado in 1933 led to the development of a "national-popular historic bloc"; an anti-imperialist alliance of Cuba's popular classes who felt "thwarted and disillusioned by the abortion of Cuban nationhood" in the experience of the thirty-one-year-old neo-republic (p. 20).

Raby is also interested in the emergence of the political vanguard that could have led this alliance to power and hence to the radical transformation of Cuban society; neither the ABC, nor the students and intellectuals, nor the Communist party was successful in forming it. The ABC failed to consolidate itself as the organized expression of the middle sectors, or rather, of the progressive and nationalist elements of the Cuban bourgeoisie. It increasingly and sharply moved to a right-wing, neofascist position. The Communist party failed to maximize the situation's revolutionary potential; it was straightjacketed by an internationally inspired, nearsighted vision of successful revolutionary alliances. The students and intellectuals supported the "populist" Grau San Martín-Guiteras government that ultimately failed because of Cuba's "peculiar social structure and semi-colonial situation" (p. 7). In what may be rightfully described as a stalemate, Fulgencio Batista and the noncommissioned officer corps stepped in as the decisive political actors; however, they had only loose ties to the national-popular movement and growing links to Cuba's ultimate power broker in the 1933 events—the United States. Raby concludes that the next twenty-five years in Cuban history would see the emergence of the "strong, disciplined and yet . . . uniquely flexible" political vanguard that did not materialize in 1933 (p. 21). He emphasizes that the 1959 politico-cultural elite was successful in consolidating the popular revolution because it rapidly moved towards socialism, a move which was aborted in 1933.

Since Raby states that this is only a preliminary draft, he simply offers us a framework of working hypotheses in which to raise questions about Cuba in the 1930s. His underlying concern—the development of a political vanguard capable of leading an anti-imperialist alliance to power—is critical and should be expanded to include documentation from primary sources. The two subjects that I would suggest for further investigation are the ABC and the Communist party: it is neither sufficient nor satisfactory simply to allude to Cuba's "peculiar social structure and semi-colonial situation" as an explanation for their failure and that of the "populist" Grau-Guiteras government.

Prerevolutionary social structure is in dire need of a closer and more careful examination. The role of the middle sectors and of the working and popular classes in the interrevolutionary years leading to the 1959 takeover has been, by and large, treated confusedly and ambiguously. Clarification entails, on the one hand, broaching the theoretical problems of analyzing Third World social structures—particularly the development of the so-called national bour-

geoisie—in the context of the world capitalist system; and on the other, the analysis of the political and tactical consequences of the tortuous contours of Stalinism in the international communist movement. Cuba may well be an appropriate ground for seriously tackling these questions: an analysis of social classes, their mobilization and political organizations, is central to the tactical and strategic objectives of revolutionary movements in the Third World.

No less important is the study of the ideologies expressed by the potential political vanguard of an anti-imperialist alliance. Where, for example, did the “socialist idea” in Cuba come from? More specifically, what influences shaped the ideology of the frustrated political vanguard of 1933 and that of the victorious leadership of 1959? Raby identifies three cultural influences on the leading participants in the 1933 events: Cuban romantic nationalism, Latin American literary humanism, and revolutionary socialism.<sup>1</sup> He underscores the oft-repeated reference to the mythology of José Martí in Cuban politics and points to the “spirit of romantic exaltation and moral fervour” that permeated even those who adopted Marxism-Leninism (p. 19). Julio Antonio Mella, for example, a founding member of the Communist party, exhorted students to “come and augment our ranks. There are secret pleasures in striving for a high and noble ideal which you do not suspect. There is no higher ideal than the emancipation of the workers . . .” (p. 19). Similarly, Rubén Martínez Villena, also a Communist, wrote:

Oh, my illusion, my illusion! In vain you strive to raise me:  
Oh, the useless longing to follow your ascent . . . !  
These wings so shortened and those clouds so high . . . !  
And these wings that long to conquer those clouds. (p. 19)

Martí would certainly have felt comfortable with Martínez Villena’s “illusion” and with Mella’s “secret pleasures”; whether Lenin would have felt the same is another matter.

Valdés approaches the ideology issue in relation to “la generación del centenario,” as the politically active students and young people of the early fifties called themselves in commemoration of José Martí’s birth in 1853. Valdés points to a useful difference between ideology and theory, the former being normative, the latter more scientific. He further suggests, as Ernesto Guevara said on numerous occasions, that, while the revolutionary leadership may not have been familiar with the theory, they certainly did have an ideology. Valdés contends, however, that this ideology had roots as “Cuban as palm trees”: the Cuban revolutionary movement, he claims, was largely untouched by the leftist traditions of the working class (p. 32). Although Fidel Castro and others articulated the rights and demands that should be granted to the lower classes, they did not try to organize them or to give them self-consciousness. The revolutionaries of the 1950s, Valdés concludes, did not challenge the prevailing cultural hegemony; they did not offer an alternative politico-cultural paradigm.

But where exactly were these roots as “Cuban as palm trees”? First, in José Martí, who professed an ideology of national liberation and anti-imperialism and proposed that armed struggle led by a revolutionary party was the route to

independence. He was, in short, an ideological populist who advocated a united popular front against Spanish colonialism. Martí was concerned with the national question and underemphasized class differences. The second "root" that Valdés identifies is Antonio Guiteras who, like Martí, was anti-imperialist, but, unlike him, was clearly anticapitalist. Neither theory nor ideology were Guiteras' primary concerns, however. He was a man of action and is rightfully considered to be the tactical precursor of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement. Guiteras, moreover, was a "revolutionary elitist," a position which Valdés sees running through the Cuban revolutionary tradition (p. 20). Lastly, Valdés points to Eduardo Chibás, the leader of the Partido del Pueblo Cubano (*ortodoxos*) as the third influential precursor of the successful political vanguard of 1959. Like Guiteras, Chibás was an elitist: he emphasized the ethical and moral behavior of political leaders who in turn could then elicit the unquestioned support of the people. According to Valdés, then, there was no significant socialist influence in the ideology of the 26th of July Movement.

This monograph is well presented and documented, although there are limits to even the best exposition in so few pages, particularly given the breadth of the subject; it would be necessary to broach rather "big" questions to round it out. I would point to the following issues while making it clear that I do not expect him to clarify them fully in future works; these can only be satisfactorily expanded by the long-term, complementary efforts of a school of intellectuals.

Just as Third World social structures must be analyzed in the perspective of the consolidation of capitalism as a world system, so must the configuration of ideologies in underdeveloped countries. Given the colonial and neocolonial histories of these countries, is it surprising that nationalism has been their dominant ideology? The content and variety of this nationalist ideology has certainly changed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In the case of Cuba, for example, could José Martí have been anything else than a united front populist who underemphasized class differences? Maybe, but his writings and his leadership responded in a revolutionary way to Cuba's colonial condition at the end of the century. Furthermore, Martí was a fierce defender of Cuban independence that, after the inevitable defeat of Spanish colonialism, he rightfully perceived as imperiled by the island's powerful northern neighbor. Thus, even without a socialist content, Martí's ideology, in his unyielding defense of Cuban nationhood, was radical in the neo-republic. His legacy was to elevate the struggle for independence to a sacrosanct principle in the Cuban revolutionary tradition. The point is that such a struggle in and of itself *did* constitute a challenge to the prevailing societal paradigm in Cuba, whether in 1895, in the 1930s, or in the 1950s. Does Valdés really want to say that only non-Cuban influences can pose such a challenge?

The question of the absence of the leftist traditions of the working class in the Cuban revolutionary movement is thornier. Valdés deals only with the ideological roots of the 26th of July Movement; but no matter what one's political position may be, it is impossible to avoid the inclusion of the old Communist party.<sup>2</sup> Its role in the "pre-revolution of 1933" and in the interrevolutionary years must be carefully studied. Sectarian and pro-Soviet though it might have

been, the party *did* mobilize the Cuban working class, particularly in the sugar industry, with varying degrees of effectiveness from the 1930s to 1959. If Julio Antonio Mella, for example, as Valdés claims, was not a significant influence upon “la generación del centenario,” we may indeed ask why not. In part, it may be that the party’s history subsequent to Mella’s death discredited the “socialist idea” in the eyes of many Cubans.<sup>3</sup> But, it may also be partially due to the anticommunist propaganda and hysteria characteristic of the postwar years and the 1950s in the “free world.” How did the dynamics of anticommunism affect the politics and ideas of both elites and masses in prerevolutionary Cuba? Surely, an honest appraisal of the ideological roots of the Cuban revolutionary movement must eventually contend with this question as well as with the role of the old Communist party.

The truly consequential question may not be whether the ideological roots of the revolutionary movement were as Cuban as palm trees (they were, but it does not necessarily follow that the prevailing politico-cultural paradigm went unchallenged and untouched by the leftist traditions of the working class, which is a difficult issue in need of painstaking investigation) but rather how the emerging political vanguard fused two revolutionary traditions—that of Cuba’s struggle for independence and that of socialism—in the Revolution of 1959. That fusion further underscores the urgency of studying the old Communist party and its role from the 1930s up to its dissolution in 1961.

Even granting that the twists and turns of the old Communist party had in some ways discredited the socialist idea in the eyes of many Cubans and that anticommunism had indeed permeated the dominant politico-cultural paradigm, how did the overwhelming majority of the Cuban people, on 16 April 1961, come to enthusiastically welcome Fidel Castro’s declaration that the Cuban Revolution was a socialist revolution? How was the unity of the vanguard forged in spite of the internecine struggles and the sectarianism of the early years? Moreover, how has that unity been maintained in spite of the political and economic changes the Revolution has undergone from the radical experiment of the sixties to the institutionalization of the seventies? In what ways did the Revolution challenge and discard the status quo ante paradigm and in what ways has it actually integrated veritably Cuban values into the new socialist paradigm?

It may well be that before an adequate appraisal of the Cuban revolutionary process—before and after 1959—can be formulated, social scientists will have to launch a massive and thorough attack on the prevailing view. Fidel has been presented as the all-powerful, all-absorbing dictator who intermittently fights the United States, the Soviet Union, and anyone who disagrees with him on the home front. The Cuban people are portrayed as passive actors who are enthralled by the tropical charisma of their bearded leader, and the leadership as fraught by factional struggles: the Fidelistas against the Raulistas against the old Communists (not to mention, of course, the incontrovertible “fact” that Fidel and Ché had had a fallout before the latter’s departure from Cuba in 1965). The failure of the 1970 harvest proved to be a watershed: the Revolution had to capitulate to the USSR and abandon its projects of guerrilla warfare in Latin

America and the simultaneous construction of socialism and communism at home. For some, the Revolution has been militarized and Stalinized; for others, the civil soldier rules. The drive towards institutionalization has proven to be both a curtailment and an enhancement of Fidel's power. The institutionalization process is bona-fide evidence that the Cuban Revolution has irreversibly been "sovietized." That process, at any rate, is in part inconsequential because *personalismo* is the tune that sets the pace in Cuban revolutionary politics.

The seven introductory essays to the third edition of Irving Louis Horowitz's *Cuban Communism* are a case in point. Horowitz tells us that these essays "provide a basic introduction to the main features of Cuba's political, military and social system" (p. 16). The pieces are steeped in generalizations about the militarization of the Revolution, the predominance of bureaucratic factors over class factors, the Stalinization of the Cuban political system, the role of *personalismo* in Latin American politics, the tension between free will and determinism, and the definitive six criteria of a "true revolution." Horowitz, moreover, tells us he is presenting "sociological analysis in an area charged with ideological passion" (p. 89).

The only way to dispute this interpretation of the Cuban Revolution is to begin a new school of analysis of Cuban history and the revolutionary process; both Raby and Valdés are working in this direction and that, in my opinion, is their foremost merit. There are simply too many tracts like Horowitz's, though to be fair, most social scientists working on Cuba are more careful about their sources and data. Horowitz's essays, however, comprise only a third of *Cuban Communism*. The anthology includes familiar pieces by Richard Fagen, Maurice Zeitlin, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Joseph Kahl and others as well as newer articles such as Susan Eckstein's "The Debourgeoisement of Cuban Cities." Individually, most of the pieces have their merit and their authors have certainly contributed to ordering and documenting a factual account of events in the Revolution even if within the dominant social science paradigm. But, again, I am challenging the analysis of the Cuban Revolution within the context of that paradigm. Initially, the field of Cuban studies in the United States was inundated by simplistic, sympathetic views of the Revolution. As an indirect response to the production of apologetic tracts, more "objective" studies were conducted by many of the authors in *Cuban Communism*. It is time that a serious Marxist school of analysis of the Cuban Revolution emerge and establish itself, not at the exclusion of orthodox social science, but as its counterpart and complement.

New light may then be shed on the fundamental questions concerning the transition to socialism in Cuba, the role of the consolidated vanguard, the special place Fidel Castro occupies in the Cuban political system, the organization of the economy, foreign policy, and the crucial issues of the *conciencia* of the Cuban people and the new revolutionary politico-cultural paradigm. Marxists, however, have a lot to learn from most orthodox social scientists in terms of the care and diligence with which the latter go about their research. Two good examples are Sergio Roca's *Cuban Economic Policy and Ideology: The Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest* and Edward González's and David Ronfeldt's *Post-Revolutionary Cuba in a Changing World*.

Roca's paper is strongest in his presentation of the basic economic data concerning the 1970 harvest. He does not really offer us any new interpretations concerning its failure. In fact, he simply ratifies the revolutionary leadership's accounts, albeit, in a different tone. The harvest failed and caused far-reaching dislocations in the Cuban economy for two fundamental reasons: first, industrial investments and yields in the sugar sector fell short of the target figures; and, second, the concurrent opportunity costs were extremely high—that is, output losses in most nonsugar sectors were severe. The paper offers a fast overview of Cuba's sugar sector in view of the 1970 harvest; however, the monograph loses quality when Roca begins to relate the harvest's failure to the subjective factors of the moral economy. That there is a linkage between the two, no one denies. How to understand, analyze, and theorize about the relationship between subjective factors and economic development is another matter. Marxist social scientists need to look at this relationship with a finer lens. Roca's exposition is, nevertheless, useful as a brief summary of the predominant social scientific explanation of that relationship.

For those who are interested in a more inclusive view of the 1970 harvest, Heinrich Brunner's *Cuban Sugar Policy from 1963 to 1970* is preferable to Roca's monograph. It takes a longer, systemic perspective on Cuba's development strategy and the role of the sugar sector within that strategy (capital formation through the expansion of the lead sector), while also considering Cuba's foreign trade problems, particularly its commercial relations with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. Brunner plays a cautiously optimistic and hence dissonant tune with respect to the Cuban economy's future projections circa 1970 in spite of the harvest failure. It may be that some of his cautious optimism vis-à-vis the sugar sector is currently being confirmed given Cuba's 1978 harvest output (nearly 7½ million tons) and its progress toward mechanization and overall modernization in the sugar industry.<sup>4</sup> Brunner also keeps the problems confronting Third World countries in the world capitalist system and the subsequent development strategies discretely in the background; that he did so in view of his well-documented research adds to the book's merits.

The report by González and Ronfeldt is useful; given that it was prepared for the Department of Defense, little has to be said with respect to its ideological framework. As with Horowitz's essays, one cannot refute that framework in the context of a review essay; but, unlike those essays, *Post-Revolutionary Cuba in a Changing World* is cogently argued and presented. It is in fact a policy paper, which may go a long way towards explaining its clarity, order, and forthrightness. It also has become somewhat of a museum piece, since it was written before Cuba's incursion into Angola in 1975. All the more reason, perhaps, to read it today. It might prove interesting to refresh our memories on how American ideologues tried to grapple with Cuban foreign policy before the wars in Angola and Ethiopia.

The Cuban politico-cultural paradigm before and after 1959, and the dominant social science paradigm setting the tone and direction in the study of Cuban history and the revolutionary process have been at the heart of the discussion in this review essay. A massive assault on the latter is imperative for a

more adequate, more complete understanding of the first. A Marxist school of analysis is urgently needed in the field of Cuban studies. There are an overwhelming number of questions and issues to deal with: for instance, where did the "socialist idea" in Cuba come from? Surprisingly enough, the origins of socialism in Cuba—with notable exceptions—have not been a consistent subject of study and investigation.<sup>5</sup> The issue demands closer attention to prerevolutionary social structure and ideology, but it also forces us to battle with a concept with which Marxists have great difficulty: class consciousness. What about the *conciencia* of the Cuban people, particularly of the working class, not only before 1959 but in the crucial first two years? A charismatic bearded leader can only be stretched so far in explaining the Revolution's popular and continued support. What have been the ups and downs of that support? How do ordinary Cubans interpret their country's most radical upheaval, now twenty years old?

*Four Women and Four Men* have many shortcomings; but in spite of these, and the political problems enveloping "Project Cuba," which was started almost ten years ago, Oscar Lewis' interviews show how eight Cubans dealt with their lives in the sixties. They could perhaps have been more representative of Cuban workers—most had belonged to the lumpenproletariat before 1959—but they are, if not representative, at least part of a sector of the population to which the Revolution has had to address itself and probably should to a greater degree.<sup>6</sup> A careful content analysis of interviews like Lewis' may give us some insight into that elusive concept of class consciousness or, simply, people's awareness and understanding of the society in which they live and their position in it. The origins and the consolidation of socialism in Cuba must, at any rate, contend with the *conciencia* of the Cuban people.

Another issue a Marxist school of Cuban studies has to face is that of ideology, not only in the roots of the revolutionary movement, but in contemporary Cuba. There would be at least two dimensions to this in the contemporary setting: the official and the popular. How does the Communist party explain the current national and international situation? What is its perspective on Cuban history? On the other hand, how do ordinary Cubans assimilate (or not) official explanations? Given that these tend to vary (i.e., 1960s vs. 1970s), are there lags in popular consciousness? How do these manifest themselves? Undoubtedly, the study of the ideological superstructure in Cuba today will prove to be a sensitive field; but, it is an urgent task—one that cannot be evaded.

However, the most significant area that a Marxist school of Cuban studies can deal with is the evaluation of the fusion of the two revolutionary traditions—that of Cuba and that of socialism—twenty years later. What is still as "Cuban as palm trees" in the Revolution? What, on the other hand, are the structural linkages between Cuba and the Soviet Union? How does that relationship affect Cuban national and perhaps even international politics? Marxists have a particular responsibility to focus on this last issue which is pivotal not only for Cuba but for the increasing number of nations which are breaking away, at least in part, from the world capitalist system.

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NOTES

1. Obviously, each of these traditions would require an exposition, one which Raby passes by in his paper.
2. For example, in his fine bibliography of the Cuban insurrection, Louis A. Pérez, Jr. does not include a separate entry for the Communist party; it is blatantly absent from an otherwise all-inclusive selection. See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The Cuban Revolutionary War, 1953–1958: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1976).
3. It is an understatement to say that this is a controversial topic, but it is important to point to at least two sources that shed a different light on the pre-1959 Communists: Charles A. Page, "The Development of Organized Labor in Cuba" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1952) and Maurice Zeitlin, *Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
4. See *Granma*, 22 June 1978, p. 1.
5. See, for example, James O'Connor, *The Origins of Socialism in Cuba* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970) and Juan and Verena Martínez-Alier, *Cuba: economía y sociedad* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972).
6. In less than two hours, Sara Gómez's film, *De cierta manera* (ICAIC, 1976), about the formerly marginal population, presents in a compassionate, critical, and revolutionary manner many of the problems Lewis points out in almost one thousand pages.