

Smash Yankee Imperialism! **Defend the Cuban Revolution!**

The overthrow of the corrupt and brutal neo-colonial regime of Fulgencio Batista in January 1959, and the subsequent expropriation of the Cuban bourgeoisie, was a victory for working people everywhere. With Soviet aid, Cuba consolidated a functional and relatively egalitarian economic system, and for three decades Fidel Castro could thumb his nose at the U.S. colossus. After the ignominious collapse of the USSR, the rulers of a declining American empire are no longer compelled to tolerate the continued existence of a collectivized economy 90 miles from Florida. The U.S. imperialists are cranking up a “democratic” propaganda offensive, while simultaneously tightening their economic embargo and leaning on their Latin American neo-colonies to isolate Cuba. The defense of the Cuban revolution has never been more acutely posed than it is today.

Cuba under Batista was a gigantic sugar plantation and fun house for wealthy Americans. By breaking the social power of the Cuban bourgeoisie, the Castro regime cut the connection with world imperialism, thus dramatically transforming life for ordinary working people. In the first five years of the revolution consumption of meat and textiles *doubled*, the new regime slashed rents, deserted Havana mansions were converted into residences for 80,000 students from peasant families, and abandoned luxury automobiles were handed over to former servants so they could start working as taxi drivers.

Today Cuban standards of health, education and housing are far above those of other Latin American countries. Rents are subsidized, medical care is free and education is available to everyone. The level of literacy is 98 percent. Everyone has a job. Cuba remains poor by the standards of the imperialist colossus to the north, but there is none of the endemic disease and desperate poverty so common throughout the rest of the region.

Soviet Connection Severed

Aid and trade from the Soviet bloc enabled Cuba to survive American attempts to strangle the revolution through an economic embargo. The Kremlin bureaucrats maintained Cuba as a bargaining chip in their search for global “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism. The USSR bought Cuban sugar and other exports above the world market price, while selling oil to Cuba below the going rate. This amounted to a subsidy of billions of dollars a year. By the late 1980s, 85 percent of Cuban trade was with the Comecon countries.

In 1990, as perestroika disorganized the Soviet economy, shortfalls and delays in deliveries to Cuba made it necessary to ration basic foods and fuel tightly. Industrial oil consumption fell by 50 percent. In December 1990, the Soviets halved the subsidy on sugar, and imposed world market prices for everything else.

The counterrevolutionary victory over the August

1991 coup in the USSR severed Cuba’s economic lifeline. The Yeltsinites lost no time announcing the cancellation of the sugar subsidy and the withdrawal of Soviet military personnel from Cuba. By October 1991 Castro reported that less than 40 percent of scheduled imports from the former Soviet bloc were arriving in Cuban ports. The Cuban daily *Granma* noted bitterly that Moscow’s abandonment of the Cuban revolution gave the “green light” for U.S. aggression.

The *Batistianos* hailed the announcement of the Soviet pullout. The “Cuban American National Foundation” (CANF), an organization of Florida millionaires and veterans of the CIA’s Bay of Pigs fiasco, set up a commission to plan the counterrevolution. Included in the CANF commission are Jeane Kirkpatrick and Ronald Reagan (*Guardian Weekly*, 15 September 1991). Another CANF connection is George Bush’s son, Jeb, a millionaire Miami property speculator. So far the CANF claims to have found buyers for 60 percent of Cuba’s land and industry (*New York Times*, 6 September 1991).

Cuba’s ‘Option Zero’

With poor sugar harvests and little hard currency to buy oil and other vital imports, Havana has launched a drive for self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. It is attempting to lure workers made redundant by drastic cutbacks in industrial production onto state farms. But the self-sufficiency campaign is hampered by a shortage of animal feed and fertilizers. Cuba still needs to buy wheat on the international market. The Cuban leadership is trying to prepare for a complete cessation of oil imports. In this “option-zero” scenario, oxen, horses and hundreds of thousands of Chinese bicycles are to be substituted for trucks and cars.

Castro adamantly opposed Gorbachev’s pro-capitalist market “reforms” from the beginning. In the late 1980s the Cuban government banned Soviet newspapers considered too enthusiastic about perestroika. Instead of “market socialism” the Cuban bureaucracy’s slogan is “*Socialismo o muerte*” (socialism or death). Yet despite the socialism-or-bust rhetoric, the regime is now desperately seeking foreign investment to offset the economic pressure of capitalist encirclement and reduce the country’s dependency on sugar. The Cuban government wants to boost tourism and, to this end, is promoting joint ventures with Spanish and Brazilian capitalists.

The burgeoning of the tourism industry has planted a dollar economy side by side with that of the peso. Cubans are now waiting on tables and driving taxis for foreigners with hard currency. The British *Independent* (2 November 1991) described how this is eroding the anti-imperialist sentiment that has helped maintain the regime:

“Cuba’s best beaches, her choicest foods, her scarce consumer goods, are available only for dollars—which

Cubans cannot legally possess....Many Cubans comment on the contrast between rhetoric of national sovereignty and the daily humiliation of the peso shopper.”

As tourism has increased, prostitution, bureaucratic corruption and the black market have all kept pace. The austerity measures adopted by the regime compel ordinary Cubans to look to their *socios*, (black market connections) for many consumer items. The *Guardian Weekly* (17 March 1991) reported that an acerbic parody of the official slogan, “*Sociolismo o muerte*,” has gained widespread popularity.

The Mechanics of Stalinist Rule

For 30 years Castro has tolerated no organized political opposition. In 1976 the regime unveiled a new constitution that formalized the Cuban Communist Party’s (PCC) monopoly on politics and proclaimed it “the highest leading force of the society and of the state.” The new constitution established local, regional and national “Assemblies of People’s Power.” These bodies only exist to provide a facade of popular legitimacy for decisions made by the PCC.

Nominations to the municipal assemblies at public meetings are subject to approval by PCC commissions, while the party itself makes the nominations to the higher assemblies. The National Assembly normally only meets twice a year, in July and December, usually for two days each time. Half the National Assembly members are nominated by the party from among delegates to the lower bodies. The other half are nominated directly from the PCC or government bureaucracies. Over 90 percent of delegates to the 1981-86 National Assembly were party members or candidate members.

Like every other Stalinist party, there is no internal democracy within the Cuban Communist Party itself. The PCC held its first congress in late 1975—seventeen years after the “July 26 Movement” came to power! Castro saw no problem with this, and blithely commented: “We are fortunate to be holding it now. Fortunate indeed! This way the quality of the Congress is endorsed by 17 years of experience” (*Granma*, 25 January 1976; quoted in *Workers Vanguard*, 12 March 1976). The congress itself was a carefully managed affair that concluded, as Stalinist congresses usually do, with the unanimous approval of the leadership.

Cuban Stalinism: ‘Pro-Family’ and Anti-Gay

Cuban children learn at an early age that women are responsible for childcare, cooking and cleaning. Unlike the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky, who openly declared their intention of liberating women through socializing domestic labor, the Cuban bureaucracy, like every other Stalinist regime, celebrates the “socialist family.”

The Castroist ruling stratum promotes the nuclear family and all the associated social backwardness as a point of support for its own authoritarian rule over the proletariat. Women remain concentrated in traditionally female jobs. The higher the administrative layers of the party and state bureaucracy, the lower the proportion of

women.

The encouragement of the family goes hand in hand with the persecution of homosexuals. In 1965 the regime set up special “Military Units to Aid Production” which were really prison camps, mostly for homosexuals. The First National Culture and Education Conference in 1971 virulently denounced the “pathological character” of homosexuality, and resolved that “all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading.”

Of the 100,000 people who left Cuba via the harbor at Mariel in 1980, roughly 10,000 were lesbians and gays. These people were forced into exile through a state-sponsored campaign of homophobia directed through the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. In the age of the AIDS pandemic, and the growth of homophobia, Cuba has the unpleasant distinction of being the only country in the world that forcibly confines people who test positive for the HIV antibody.

Castroism and Workers Democracy

The July 26th Movement that took power on New Years Day 1959 was an insurrectionary rural-based guerrilla movement. It was based in the Sierra Maestra mountains and was committed to a program of radical liberalism. After two years of guerrilla war, the rotten and corrupt Batista state apparatus collapsed, with the bulk of the officer caste fleeing to Miami. The July 26th Movement filled the power vacuum by forming a short-lived coalition with a few liberal politicians.

When a section of the bourgeoisie, backed by the American government, opposed some of the Castroites’ radical nationalist measures, the July 26th Movement split. A majority, headed by Fidel and his brother Raul, opted for the expropriation of the Cuban capitalists. In July 1961 the Castroites fused with the Partido Socialista Popular, a traditional Moscow-line Stalinist formation that had earlier had a minister in Batista’s government. The fused organization went on to form the Cuban Communist Party.

In the minds of New Leftists of the 1960s, the Castroites were light-years away from the colorless apparatuses of Eastern Europe. Yet one-party Stalinist rule deformed the Cuban revolution from its inception. As in every other deformed workers state, the working class played no independent political role. This was the inevitable outcome of the victory of a rural-based guerrilla insurrection in which the urban working class remained on the sidelines. In 1961, in the heady early days, Fidel proclaimed that the revolution must be a “school of unfettered thought.” But soon the “barbudos,” as the bearded guerrilla fighters were known, were responding to all criticism with police repression.

The harassment of the ostensibly Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) in the early years of the revolution is a case in point. POR members unconditionally defended the revolution against imperialism, but they also criticized the bureaucratism of the new regime. Castro’s political police answered by smashing their printing press, breaking up the plates of a Spanish-lan-

guage edition of Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* and throwing five POR members into jail.

The Subjective Factor in History

For the "men of action" of the July 26th Movement, Marxist criticism and democracy within the left were simply impediments to "unity." In October 1960, as the large-scale nationalizations were under way, Che Guevara, a left-winger within the July 26th Movement, expressed the contempt for Marxist theory that animated the young pragmatists:

"Cuba's is a unique Revolution, which some people maintain contradicts one of the most orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement, expressed by Lenin: 'Without a revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement'...."

"The principal actors of this revolution had no coherent theoretical criteria...."

"Beginning with the revolutionary Marx, a political group with concrete ideas establishes itself. Basing itself on the giants, Marx and Engels, and developing through successive steps with personalities like Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and the new Soviet and Chinese rulers, it establishes a body of doctrine and, let us say, examples to follow."

"The Cuban Revolution takes up Marx at the point where he himself left science to shoulder his revolutionary rifle.... We, practical revolutionaries, initiating our own struggle, simply fulfill laws foreseen by Marx, the scientist.... the laws of Marxism are present in the events of the Cuban Revolution, independently of what its leaders profess or fully know of those laws from a theoretical point of view."

"We Are Practical Revolutionaries," 8 October 1960, reprinted in *Venceremos!*, J. Gerassi, ed.

Despite their personal courage and dedication to the cause of the oppressed, the Castroists' tendency to denigrate the role of the subjective factor in history constituted a *political obstacle* to the ultimate victory of the revolution. The "laws of Marxism" can only triumph through living, politically conscious human beings who apply them in the struggle to change the world. They do not operate autonomously or automatically.

The struggle for socialist revolution is a struggle to win the masses of working people and oppressed to the political program of revolutionary Marxism. The history of the Cuban revolutionaries themselves, bold and radical as they were, confirms that the road to human liberation lies only through consciousness. This is what Marx meant when he said that the working class must emancipate itself—it cannot be freed by some group of leaders, however well-intentioned and sincere. The role of the Leninist vanguard is to develop and struggle for the revolutionary program against the myriad forms of pseudo-socialist false consciousness (including Castroite Stalinism). The victory of socialism requires that the Marxist program, embodied in a Leninist party, is embraced by the masses of the oppressed and exploited.

The Cuban leadership remains far more popular at home than the grey bureaucrats of the former Soviet bloc ever were. Over the years there has been significant participation in the various mobilizations conducted by the regime. But popular support for the initiatives of the ruling stratum is no substitute for the exercise of political

power. The ability to make suggestions or to have input into how campaigns are carried out is fundamentally different from the power to decide and set the priorities in the first place. In a healthy workers state working people must in fact, as well as in name, be the political decision makers.

Cuba's "Revolutionary" Foreign Policy

The Castro regime has retained a certain luster for much of the petty-bourgeois left that has long since abandoned the once-popular Stalinist rulers of Vietnam. The ex-Trotskyists of Ernest Mandel's "United Secretariat," who once adulated the Castroites for their "evolution toward revolutionary Marxism," are somewhat more reserved today. Yet they still "reject any sectarian attitude towards the Cuban leadership" and consider that, despite a few blemishes, the Castroites remain "revolutionary."

Mandel's former partners in the "United Secretariat," the Castro sycophants of Jack Barnes' idiosyncratic U.S.-based Socialist Workers Party (SWP), feel no need for any critical fig-leaf. The Barnesites cite Cuba's foreign policy as proof that Castro is carrying on the revolutionary internationalist traditions of Marx and Lenin. Yet Castro's foreign policy over the years has generally been tailored to the requirements of the anti-revolutionary Kremlin bureaucracy.

In May-June 1968, when ten million workers and students brought France to the brink of revolution, Castro covered for the sellout of the strike by the French Communist Party. A few months later Havana supported the Soviet tanks that rolled into Prague to oust Alexander Dubcek's reform Stalinists and install a faction more to Leonid Brezhnev's liking. In June 1989 the Cuban bureaucracy apologized for the massacre of worker and student protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square by the Chinese Stalinists.

Cuba's record in Latin America is equally wretched. In the early 1970s Castro endorsed Salvador Allende's popular-frontist "Unidad Popular," a coalition government with sections of the Chilean bourgeoisie. This class-collaborationist policy disarmed the Chilean working class politically, and set the stage for the massacre of tens of thousands of leftists and militant workers in the aftermath of Pinochet's September 1973 coup. Throughout the 1980s the Cubans advised the Nicaraguan Sandinistas against expropriating the bourgeoisie, and instead advocated a national-patriotic front with the capitalists. The Sandinistas searched in vain for the mythical "Third Road" between capitalism and socialism for nearly a decade, until a half-starved population voted them out in favor of the parliamentary wing of Reagan and Bush's *contra* movement.

Castro apologists frequently point to Cuba's support to the bourgeois-nationalist MPLA government in Angola against South Africa as evidence of Marxist internationalism. While revolutionaries militarily supported the Soviet-supplied MPLA/Cuban forces against the apartheid state and its Angolan allies, this was no struggle for workers power. The Cubans in Angola were Soviet proxies. When Gorbachev cut a deal with the White House in 1988, Cuban troops began pulling out.

On the other side of Africa, Cuban soldiers helped prop up Mengistu's bloody Ethiopian regime (another Soviet client) during its long, brutal, losing war against the legitimate struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination.

When the imperialists began their diplomatic pre-arrangements for war against the neo-colonial Iraqi regime in 1990, the Cuban Stalinists joined the hypocritical chorus condemning the invasion of Kuwait. Cuba did not even oppose trade sanctions against Iraq in the United Nations. Speaking to the UN General Assembly on 25 August 1990, Cuba's delegate Ricardo Alarcon announced that "my government has taken the relevant steps to ensure that our country too complies" with the sanctions. Participation in the imperialist embargo of Iraq could only qualify as an example of Leninist "internationalism" to those, like Jack Barnes & Co., who are wilfully blind.

The Future of Castroism

The Castro regime still has a reservoir of support amongst Cuban working people. Having eliminated any competitors on the left, Castro can present his rule as the only alternative to life under the U.S. jackboot. Still, as the Cuban economy moves progressively closer to the "zero option," powerful contradictions threaten to shatter the stability of the regime. As ordinary Cubans queue overnight for many consumer necessities, the contrast between the egalitarian rhetoric of the ruling caste and its bureaucratic privileges become more conspicuous and more maddening. The British *Independent* reported: "The slogan of the Union of Young Communists, for instance, is 'Follow me!' Young people shout it, with a mixture of mockery and rage, at Roberto Robaina, the leader of the Young Communists, as he rides in his chauffeur-driven car past the long and irritable queues of people who wait, interminably, for Havana's overcrowded buses."

The Castroites have responded to the deepening discontent with denunciations of "subversives" and "fifth columnists." They have also established neighborhood "rapid reaction squads," which even make the loyal Fidelistas of the SWP squeamish (*Militant*, 18 October 1991).

No single personality inside or outside the bureaucracy personifies the forces of counterrevolution in Cuba as Yeltsin did in the USSR. Yet, the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR has had powerful repercussions. In an attempt to tighten central control and weed out potential dissidents, the PCC in October 1990 announced the abolition of half the national and regional party posts.

This move followed on the heels of the 1989 execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez, a popular hero of the Angolan war, for drug trafficking. Ochoa pleaded guilty to a raft of implausible charges after a classically Stalinist show trial. Following the elimination of this potential rival to Fidel, other top bureaucrats were also jailed. The most prominent was Jose Abrantes Fernandez, the Interior Minister, who was considered third in line after Fidel and his brother Raul.

The Castro regime has little to offer the workers and

peasants of Cuba besides moral exhortations to work harder and consume less. But "peaceful coexistence" with the pirates of Wall Street is not an option. There is no place for "socialist Cuba" in George Bush's New World Order.

For 30 years the chieftans of U.S. imperialism have been obsessed with overturning the Cuban revolution. Bush and the Pentagon know that a military intervention against Cuba would not be a walkover like the 1983 rape of Grenada or the 1989 assault on Panama.

Defend and Extend the Cuban Revolution! For Workers Political Revolution!

Today, in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism, the proletarian internationalism of Lenin and Trotsky has burning immediacy for the Cuban workers. In a historic sense the survival of the Cuban revolution has always depended on its extension. Even with the Soviet lifeline, the long-term viability of the revolution depended on the integration of the Cuban economy into a regional federation of socialist states. This perspective, that of permanent revolution, is counterposed to the dead-end "Patria o muerte" of the Havana regime.

The current global capitalist depression is a nightmare for the masses of working people in Latin America, as it is for millions north of the Rio Grande. Tens of millions of people in the Americas, consigned to a life of uncertainty, poverty and hunger are acutely aware of the profound irrationality of the capitalist world order.

It is the duty of every class-conscious worker to defend Cuba against the "democratic" counterrevolution promoted by the American ruling class. In the first place it is necessary to fight to break the embargo against Cuba. The workers movement of Latin America, Canada and the U.S. has the power to stop any imperialist attack in its tracks. One way to popularize the notion of political strikes against U.S. military aggression is by educating working people about the practical benefits the revolution brought the Cuban masses in terms of shelter, healthcare and education. These are questions of immediate importance to millions of workers in the U.S. and Latin America.

The way forward for the Cuban working class is not through endless belt-tightening and conciliation with imperialism and its regional vassals. To survive, the Cuban revolution must find allies through successful overturns of capitalism elsewhere in the region. This runs counter to the nationalist "pragmatism" of the bonapartist Castro regime and its autarchic schemes for animal-powered "socialism" on one island.

The defense of the Cuban Revolution is linked directly to the necessity for the workers to wrest political power from the hands of the PCC through proletarian political revolution. Such a revolution, which requires the creation of a Leninist-Trotskyist party to succeed, would instantly alter the present unfavorable balance of forces. The creation of genuine organs of direct revolutionary democracy would reinvigorate the Cuban Revolution and act as a powerful impetus to workers struggles throughout Latin America. It would not fail to find an echo in the growing Hispanic component of the American working class. ■