

THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

-Andrew Selek

The explosion of historical necessities in Cuba was the product of the tireless efforts of all patriotic forces united not in words but in action. The Cuban revolution was a further confirmation of the fact that imperialism was and is on the retreat and the forces of progress are on an offensive.

Bourgeois theories like that of geographical fatalism; that communists are interested in world wars because it is only under the conditions of such wars that social revolutions can be successful etc., were blown up into pieces in the first liberated territory in America.

How was a revolution successful barely 120 kilometres away from the headquarters of the forces of reaction? How was guerrilla warfare successfully conducted on an island? To answer these questions, one has to examine both the objective and subjective factors that prevailed internally and externally especially from the forties.

NEO-COLONY

The struggle of the international working class reached new levels in the forties. Conditions of the working class were deteriorating. The struggle led to the emergence of socialism as a world system after the victory over Nazism. Cuba had been US neo-colony since the proclamation of the republic in 1902 following the withdrawal of colonialist Spain. The governments of Batista (1940-44); of Grau (1944-48); and of Carlos Prío (1948-52) were defending the dollar power at the expense of the Cuban masses. The army of reserve labor consisted of 600,000, thousands were kicked out of the remaining land by the landlords, the working class was ruthlessly exploited, illiteracy, unhygienic conditions, embezzlement of public funds, gambling prostitution and vice were everywhere. The opposition bourgeois political parties had sufficiently exposed themselves that they were incapable of coping up with the situation and that they were neither a solution nor an attempt to a solution.

The Communist Party founded in 1925 and all other patriotic forces were severely persecuted, but they held high the banner of the revolution.

COUP D'ETAT

Under these conditions, it proved easy for Batista backed by US imperialism, which was already not happy with political developments in Cuba, to organise a military coup d'etat in 1952. The discredited Prío and his henchmen did not offer any assistance. Reactionary trade union leaders sided with Batista. The coming into power of Batista meant further humiliation and misery to the masses.

Given all these conditions, the revolution became both a necessity and a possibility. The recognition of the necessity of the revolution is necessary but not sufficient. It is necessary to point out how revolution should be made under specific conditions. In Cuba all other forms of struggle had been exhausted. There was no choice but to embark on armed struggle.

ANNOUNCEMENT

On the 26th July 1953, young revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro Ruz, attacked the second biggest military installation in Santiago de Cuba, the Moncada Garrison. The aim of this action was to capture weapons and to arm the masses and to announce the new form of struggle, the armed struggle. This mission failed to achieve its main objective. But not always are tactical setbacks a synonym of defeat. Some of those who participated in Moncada were killed and others like Fidel were arrested. The enemy became more vicious. The Moncada programme united all the patriotic forces against Batista. When Fidel was put on trial he exposed the brutality of the enemy. After he had been sentenced, there were popular demonstrations demanding his immediate release.

In 1955 the workers' struggle reached great heights and the national campaign for the release of political prisoners forced the enemy to respond positively to the demand of the masses.

After the release of Fidel and his comrades, active political work was done among the masses. Funds to buy weapons and to maintain the struggle going were collected among the masses. This activity helped the revolutionaries to check if they were in close contact with the masses or not. At the same time it guaranteed that the struggle was for the masses and therefore it should be financially maintained by the masses themselves. Underground cells were formed throughout the country. Home-made bombs, uniforms and food for the guerrillas were prepared by the underground cells.

Fidel and his comrades left for Mexico. They bought a small boat Granma and weapons. Frank Pais, the leader of the underground machinery, prepared the masses for the general popular uprising on the day of the landing of Granma. Underground newspapers and radio station, Radio Rebelde, were established to maintain constant close contact with the masses. The student movement led by Echeverria had regular contacts with the July 26th Movement.



On the 30th November 1956, the general uprisings which were intended to coincide with the landing of Granma took place. But due to bad weather conditions, Granma landed two days later than scheduled. On the 5th of December 1956, the baptism of fire took place. The guerrillas suffered heavy bombardment from the enemy. They lost their boat, weapons, provision and 70 fellow-combatants. The remaining twelve tactically retreated to the Sierra Maestra mountains, where they licked their wounds and re-organised themselves politically and militarily. With the help of the rural population, the rebel army with Fidel at its head, steadily recovered. They became the nucleus of the future people's army, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba.

The military action and the social and mass struggle were closely linked together in their conceptions from the very beginning. While the guerrillas were daily annihilating the enemy forces, the workers and peasants were also weakening the economic sphere of the enemy.

The sustained teachings, the lessons and example of the communists had contributed to the spreading of Marxism-Leninism. This became an attractive and unique doctrine for many young revolutionaries rising to political consciousness. At the same time, the people themselves were to discover the profound truth of the doctrine of Marx, Engels and Lenin. This does not suggest that all members of the revolutionary movement were communists, but Marxism-Leninism was the way of thinking of its main leaders. Most of its members were coming from the workers or families, i.e. workers and peasants.

UNITY

One of the fundamental problems of armed struggle is to maintain unity within the movement - unity in ideology and in organisation which will guarantee unity in action. There must be unity in action between urban and rural combatants. There must be unity between the exiled leadership and the leadership in enemy prisons. There are moments when the urban combatants felt that they are more important because they suffer the immediate reprisals of the enemy. This tendency can be very dangerous if the movement does not eliminate it before it takes root.

In Cuba there were moments when there was no solid unity between guerrillas on the mountains and combatants in the cities especially the students' movement. This did not only evolve around tactical questions but also the question of the participation of the Communist Party in the armed struggle. In some instances urban combatants organised popular strikes without correct co-ordination of work and as a result those strikes were not successful. Distinguished leaders sometimes are produced and tested during difficult periods of the revolutionary movement. Those moments are like the examination room from which capable leaders come. Fidel distinguished himself as a leader capable of forging unity in action of all patriotic forces. That unity was forged in a bitter struggle against the enemy.

The armed forces of Batista were being destroyed in a series of battles. Armed movements of strikes and protests in the cities like those of August & September of 1957 and of April 1958 demonstrated that enemy repression could not undermine the

revolutionary movement. The second front, Frank Pais, commanded by Raul Castro Ruz was formed. Columns commanded by Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos traversed through Camaguey Province, penetrated into the Escambray and the enemy suffered heavy blows in Las Villas Province. In the Oriente Province, the rebel army under the Commander-in-Chief, Fidel Castro, started the offensive. Important installations were occupied by the rebel army and the armed people in Santiago de Cuba.

Batista, fearing the revolutionary march of the sons and daughters of Jose Marti, left the country. Officials of his army, together with some bourgeois politicians tried to establish a 'new government' in Havana. The masses responded by a general popular strike against the enemy manoeuvres. This strike was called by the rebel army.

The enemy was defeated but that was not an end. The question was who should seize the power. In some countries heroic battles have been fought and won but revolutions lost. In Cuba the war and revolution were won by the people. But why? This was mainly because from the beginning of the armed struggle the working class in alliance with the peasantry and other patriotic forces had close contact with its vanguard party played the vital role in the making of history; the popular masses were active participants in the revolution; bourgeois nationalism was constantly combated within the national liberation movement; and the leadership had no interests different from those of the masses.

Proper steps were taken against foreign and national monopolies. Political and economic reforms took place in favour of the masses. This marked the beginning of struggle against capital. But the dollar power could not fold its arms and relax. US imperialism together with its lackeys in Latin America and the whole world of dollar influence, started the economic blockade against Cuba. Counter-revolutionaries were trained in subversive activities in the USA. Attempts to assassinate the leadership of the revolution were frustrated. Diplomatic pressure was put on Cuba. She did not succumb to all these criminal activities. This was precisely because Cuba was not alone. She had the support from her natural allies; the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, the national liberation movements and all the progressive forces in Western countries. Even within South Africa,

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She tossed her head and played the temperamental role of a light-hearted girl who doesn't suspect that she has done anything illegal, which can have dire consequences for her.

She knew a great deal, but didn't tell a thing. And most important: she kept right on working. Her surroundings and methods changed, her tasks were different, but she did not drop her hands in her lap in any sense of the word. Her duty to the party had not changed. She did what she was given to do fast, exactly and devotedly. If it was necessary somehow to straighten out a complicated situation in order to save someone outside, Lida took it on with an innocent face. She became a trusty in the women's section of Pankrats and scores of unknown people outside were saved from arrest by messages which she got through. After almost a year of this, one of her messages was caught and put an end to this "career" for her.

Now she is going with us to trial in the Reich. She is the only one of our group who has any reasonable hope of living in full liberty. She is young. If we should not be here, please don't lose her. She needs to learn a lot. Teach her and don't let her be stunted, but don't let her become proud of herself or content with what she has accomplished. She has stood the test of the toughest struggles. She has passed through fire and has proved to be of excellent mettle.

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The bastion of reaction in Africa, pro-Cuba demonstrations were organised in front of the US embassy and all over the country.

The revolution in Cuba did not only solve national problems but transformed itself into a socialist revolution. Cuba became the first socialist country in the Western Hemisphere and the first truly liberated territory in the American continent.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

IS IRREVERSIBLE