

# On the Origins of the Cuban Revolution

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***The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*, Samuel Farber. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 212 pages, \$19.95 paper.**

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ONE OF THE most useful works on the Cuban Revolution has appeared with Samuel Farber’s *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*. Its succinct, clearly-written, straightforward account draws widely on range of primary and secondary sources, and also on the author’s personal experience as someone who grew up in pre- revolutionary Cuba and who retains a connection with revolutionary socialist perspectives.

Of interest is the author’s intelligent utilization of Leon Trotsky’s formulations of the theory of uneven and combined development, and the theory of permanent revolution, to develop thoughtful analyses of Cuban history. No less important, this volume was designed as a serious intervention into current scholarly and political discussions and debates of today, particularly against liberals and conservatives in the United States and within the Cuban exile community (and also more covertly within Cuba)

who — in contrast to Farber himself — want to advance the notion that capitalism in Cuba was before 1959, and could be in the future, in the interests of the Cuban people.

The fact that Farber is a sharp critic of the Cuban Revolution and, even more so, of the Castro regime, in a sense adds to the value of his contribution.

## The Revolutionary Leader

Full disclosure: I have always been a supporter of the Cuban Revolution, and I do not share Farber’s particular characterization of the Cuban government. I will indicate some of my differences at the conclusion of this review. But Farber’s passion for objectivity enables him to reconstruct the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s in a manner that both partisans and critics will find useful.

Now more than ever, such a contribution is vitally important as Cuba enters a new era, with the present incredibly fluid and future difficult to predict, and truly — as the old cliché goes — “with great stakes trembling in the balance.”

As we try to understand where Cuba is going, it is essential not to lose sight of where it has been. Although I was young, I can recall how profoundly we were all affected by that crazy, heroic, joyous reality of the Cuban Revolution — scruffy, dedicated young guerrilla fighters with a buoyant sense of humor surging into their country's cities, their numbers swelled by exultant crowds, as the army and police and torturers and hangers-on of the vicious pro-U.S. dictator Fulgencio Batista melted away.

The revolutionaries took power on January 1, 1959. In the wake of this victory, revolutionary Cuba soon challenged the economic and political domination by the United States that had afflicted the island since the 1890s. Among those who hated the Revolution, the rich and the gangsters led the way to Miami. In Havana, the suits of “respectable” politicians were briefly on the scene, then were crowded out by the military fatigues of the guerrilla fighters who were not willing to compromise away the struggle for social and economic justice for the oppressed and exploited classes that they had initiated in the mountains.

Leading the revolution onto an increasingly radical course was a bearded and eloquent militant (amazing to us coming out of the clean-shaven conformist 1950s of the United States) named Fidel Castro. Despite the inevitable collision with U.S. imperialism, he refused to back down. Enthusiastic masses of the Cuban people followed him into a successful confrontation with U.S. power, and both Fidel and Cuba became powerful symbols of anti-imperialism and successful liberation struggle.

U.S. and Latin American radicals continued to watch and debate events in Cuba over the years. I recall a discussion back in the late 1970s with a comrade less inclined to be critical than I was of Castro's top-down leadership style and the absence of institutions of workers' democracy at all levels of Cuba's government. “Okay,” I said, “let's say that Fidel's decisions are always in the best interests of defending the interests of the masses of the Cuban people and advancing the Cuban Revolution — but what happens when Fidel isn't there any more?”

My friend responded: “Well, Fidel is still pretty young and healthy — I think he'll be around for a while.”

As this review is being written, in mid-September of 2006, a National Public Radio report on Cuba by Tom Gjelten stresses what all of the U.S. media keeps harping on: “Castro is now an old man, still recovering from abdominal surgery and unable to make an appearance at a summit of non-aligned nations in his own capital of Havana.”

The NPR report sports a couple of sound bites from Mexican journalist Jorge Castañeda (author of the “revolution-is-passé” best-seller of the early 1990s, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War*). Castañeda tells us what he thinks is the view of Castro among radicalized young people in Latin America: “They know he's not a revolutionary, they know the Cuban experience is a failure” — and yet “they still say, ‘Well, yes, but he stands up to the Americans.’”

Castañeda's generalizations are thrown into question by some of what Farber tells us. The fact that this “failed” revolutionary experience greatly enhanced the quality of life for a majority of Cubans comes through in these pages. And Farber shows us that regardless of what criticisms one may advance, there is no question that Fidel Castro, for all of his adult life, has been a revolutionary.

He emerged, as Farber indicates, from a radical populist subculture that “repudiated a long history of betrayal and corrupt political behavior in Cuba, particularly after the mid- 1940s, and rejected the deeply entrenched view that public office was, more than anything else, a source of unlimited personal enrichment and social mobility.” Given the nature of Cuban politics and society at this time, this orientation could only be realized through “revolutionary social change.” (49)

## **Radical Populist Roots**

The radical-populist subculture in Cuba was rooted in the early Auténtico Party that arose in the 1930s, a current influenced by democratic, anti-imperialist and socialist ideas, but which became utterly compromised and corrupt when it came to power in 1944. Castro was part of a radical splitoff, the Ortodoxo Party led by the volatile and uncompromising Eduardo Chibás, who died by his own hand in 1951.

As Farber comments, from his student days Castro, while graced with a remarkable “political radar and rapport with people,” also “seems to have been somewhat more educated and cultured than the typical populist activist,” in fact “transcending the traditional populist tradition” as he familiarized himself with Marxist thought, which he tended to blend with the radical-nationalist ideas of the left-wing Cuban revolutionary of the 19<sup>th</sup> century José Martí. (57, 58, 59)

As Farber explains, “the nature of populist politics, with its ambiguous class commitments, allowed Fidel Castro, at least for a while, to be different things to different people.... Fidel Castro had political designs that he shared with no one. They were pragmatic in the sense that although Castro wanted to make a radical revolution, he left it to historical circumstances, the existing relations of forces and tactical possibilities, to determine specifically what kind of revolution it would be, all along making sure that he would be in control.”

The phenomenon of the benevolent leader who maintains tight control is part of a widespread political-cultural phenomenon in Latin America known as caudillismo, but as Farber notes, Castro was “a caudillo with political ideas,” whose approach “did not involve a long-term strategic plan but rather a series of tactical adjustments and innovations by an intelligent revolutionary politician.” (61, 63)

## **The Revolutionary Struggle**

Genuine revolutions such as this one are dependent not simply on dynamic individual leaders but also on cadres, vanguards, organizations, political and social movements, masses of people, classes and social forces, as well as complex and contradictory political institutions and economic formations.

All these are part of Farber’s account — although for those seeking the story in all of its fullness, there is more that must be sought in the works of Carlos Franqui, Robert Taber, Marta Harnecker, K.S. Karol and others. (One could also do worse than to utilize, along with such works, the 2003 anthology *The Cuba Reader*, splendidly edited by Aviva Chomsky and others.)

In the introductory remarks in his *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*, Franqui — one of the most radical of the revolutionaries (who later joined the ranks of anti-Castro dissidents) — writes: “And if we prevailed then over tyranny and domination, it was because the people joined in the struggle and became its real protagonists.”

Farber concurs — although with an interesting and perhaps problematical twist: “Although the social revolution and class struggle were always controlled from above, they were accompanied by mass radicalization and participation” (133, emphasis added). This insistence on an invariable one-way, top-down dynamic strikes me as questionable and certainly worthy of deeper investigation, but the mass nature of the revolutionary phenomenon cannot be questioned.

The important element of truth in Farber’s “twist” is the fact that the mass revolutionary upsurge was not spontaneous but was dependent in large measure on intermediary formations, of which

three were particularly important. An uncharacteristic gap in Farber's account is that there is only a fleeting mention of one major component of the revolutionary anti-Batista struggle, the student-based Revolutionary Directorate — although, in his defense, this formation turned out not to have the central importance of the other currents on which he focuses: the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement and the Popular Socialist Party (PSP, the “old-line” Communists).

Farber provides an informative and insightful analysis of the PSP — the serious limitations that made it incapable of providing serious revolutionary leadership, and the genuine strengths that made it almost indispensable when Castro and those around him came to power and decided on an uncompromisingly radical turn that guaranteed a collision course with the United States.

Although the ideology of PSP was, for many, synonymous with “Marxism,” Farber correctly points out that this was a “crude Stalinist Marxism” promulgated by the one-party dictatorship of the Soviet Union since the consolidation of the bureaucratic tyranny of Joseph Stalin back in the 1930s. In addition to schematic and dogmatic theoretical constructs and a strong tendency toward political opportunism, “Stalinism meant a contempt for principled and consistent democratic practices whether inside the party ... or in society at large (dismissing the need for civil liberties and democracy under socialism as a bourgeois notion).” (40, 178-179)

As Farber shows, the free-wheeling nature of Castro's diverse July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement proved far more capable of inspiring masses of Cubans and leading them into revolutionary struggle. He goes on to make an important point, however. “The Soviet Union and the Cuban Communists shared a bureaucratic approach to revolution that differed from both the classical Marxist approach and that of Fidel Castro...”

While authentic Marxism “posited a rising autonomous workers struggling for its self-emancipation and that of its class allies,” a traditional Stalinist Communist Party “defined itself as the representative of the working class regardless of the actually expressed views and wishes of that class and ...felt free to substitute its own interests for those of the working class.” (137, 179)

In contrast, “Fidel Castro ... was a tactical master at detecting the readiness of public opinion for whatever political steps he was contemplating,” so that “the Castro-led forces came to power with a great deal of popular support, prestige, and credibility.”

Far from classical Marxism's “autonomous workers' movement” engaged in “self-emancipation,” however, Castro's radical policies “moved from the leaders to the masses rather than the other way around. The various forms of the leaders' radicalism filtered in various ways down to the masses, who continued to support the various measures Castro periodically and unexpectedly produced after long sessions with close associates.” (138, 134, 135)

Also on the political scene leading up to 1959, of course, were the more well-to-do anti-Batista moderates, with liberal-to-conservative ideological perspectives, who constituted the traditional political elite which had been sidelined by Batista's “Bonapartist” dictatorship. But with no mass base and an inclination toward safe respectability, such “leaders” could only be a significant factor because of their relationship with U.S. economic and political interests and in partnership with popular struggles organized by others — in this case, the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement.

As Farber puts it, in seeking to be different things to different people, Castro's “behavior and pronouncements involved a great deal of secrecy and deception” — which meant “manipulating people and hiding his political agenda, with the purpose of dividing and conquering his actual and potential opponents,” particularly those who would seek to block the radical trajectory of the revolutionary change to which he was committed. For example, “Castro's political dissimulation of

his anti-imperialist politics significantly helped to delay U.S. hostility toward his movement while it was in opposition and, to a degree, after it came to power.” (63, 67, 127)

### **“History Will Absolve Me”**

To their extreme chagrin, the respectable moderates among the Cuban political elite and the anti-Batista business interests discovered all too soon (yet too late) that Castro had far more radical designs than they had bargained for.

Evidence of his social-radical intentions, though, was there from the beginning. Farber cites Castro’s eloquent courtroom speech of 1953, when he was on trial for leading the failed assault of July 26<sup>th</sup> on the Moncada barracks, which had been meant to spark a national insurrection. That speech was turned into a pamphlet — History Will Absolve Me — meant to recruit to the new revolutionary organization, the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement.

While addressed to “the people in general,” it was also “more narrowly directed at the militant anti-Batista students and young workers who had not yet joined his group. Castro sensed that several thousand of these young people were ready to be brought into his nascent movement.” (64-5)

The content of the speech, according to Farber, is not “class-based” and represents a “radical, non-socialist platform” typical of much of Latin American populism. But this strikes me as somewhat misleading. He offers a brief quote from the speech to give a sense of its tone: “When we speak of the people, we do not mean the comfortable and conservative sectors of the nation that welcome any regime of oppression, any dictatorship, and any despotism.... [W]e mean the unredeemed masses to whom everything is offered but nothing is given except deceit and betrayal.” (39). But it is worth looking at more of this revolutionary classic:

*“In terms of struggle, when we talk about people we’re talking about the six hundred thousand Cubans without work, who want to earn their daily bread honestly without having to emigrate from their homeland in search of a livelihood; the five hundred thousand farm laborers who live in miserable shacks, who work four months of the year and starve the rest, sharing their misery with their children, who don’t have an inch of land to till and whose existence would move any heart made of stone; the four hundred thousand industrial workers and laborers whose retirement funds have been embezzled, whose benefits are being taken away, whose homes are wretched quarters, whose salaries pass from the hands of the boss to those of the moneylender, whose future is pay reduction and dismissal, whose life is endless work and whose only rest is the tomb; the one hundred thousand small farmers who live and die working land that is not theirs, looking at it with the sadness of Moses gazing at the promised land, to die without ever owning it, who like feudal serfs have to pay for the use of their parcel of land by giving up a portion of its produce, who cannot love it, improve it, beautify it, nor plant a cedar or an orange tree because they never know when a sheriff will come with the rural guard to evict them from it; the thirty thousand teachers and professors who are so devoted, dedicated, and so necessary to the better destiny of future generations and who are so badly treated and paid...” (Harnecker, 102-3).*

True, History Will Absolve Me goes on to talk of the plight of 20,000 small businessmen and 10,000 young professionals – but the greater emphasis of this particular brand of radical populism, as we can see, is only a step away from a class-struggle and anti-capitalist orientation, and this is consistent with the ideological balance and social composition within the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement membership.

Farber acknowledges that “many of them seem to have been workers by origin or occupation,” but he emphasizes that “very few had been active or even involved in trade union or working-class

political organizations” and that the 2000 or so peasant recruits (responding to the July 26<sup>th</sup> initiated guerrilla war spread in the mountains and rural areas after 1956), with a few exceptions, similarly “had little or no history of previously organized peasant struggles.”

He argues that this allowed Castro “to mold these men into faithful followers of his caudillo leadership,” that this particular vanguard formation, “an inner circle of ‘classless’ men unattached to the organizational life of any of the existing Cuban social classes became Fidel Castro’s political core.” (49-50) As we shall see, however, the reality was more complex.

A new stage of the anti-Batista struggle had opened after 1956, once the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement established a guerrilla base in the Sierra Maestra, proving too formidable a force for Batista’s military to defeat.

Castro successfully sought “the formation and consolidation of a politically militant but socially moderate coalition to overthrow Batista and avoid alarming the United States,” even though “Castro wrote privately to his confidante, Celia Sánchez ...that when the current [anti-Batista] war ended, a bigger and much longer [anti-imperialist] war would begin against the United States.” (65) Marx and Lenin, no less than José Martí, informed this vision of the Cuban Revolution’s trajectory.

## **The Revolution’s Course**

Farber effectively challenges the common notion advanced by some U.S. liberals and even elements of the Left that Fidel was leading a potentially “friendly” revolution that veered toward revolutionary extremism only because of the blind hostility of a short-sighted U.S. foreign policy.

*“The revolutionary leaders [of Cuba] acted under serious external and internal constraints but were nevertheless autonomous agents pursuing independent ideological visions,” he argues, although the course of the revolution can be viewed as a “predetermined response to objective economic, social, and political conditions as understood and acted upon by men whose guerrilla experience conditioned them to act as realistic revolutionaries to survive.” (4-5)*

Farber offers a sense of the diverse and divergent elements in the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement (M-26) and among its allies, although in some passages of Carlos Franqui’s bitter, contradictory, but illuminating memoir, *Family Portrait with Fidel*, we get a clearer picture. Within M-26 was a cluster of those who “were staunch fidelistas and contributed to Fidel’s mystique,” inclined to back Castro in whatever tactical permutations he felt the need to pursue.

Among the others, “the strongest, most powerful group was that of the pro-Soviet comandantes,” which included Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, and Ramiro Valdés; there was also Camilo Cienfuegos, who was “loyal to Fidel, but ... followed Che and other Marxists.” (Franqui, coming from a different M-26 current, praises Che’s “force of will, talent, and sheer audacity” as a revolutionary leader, and also tells us that Che was “a sort of free-lance Communist,” but that “his brand of communism” was tempered by his “independence of character and his sense of morality.”)

This pro-PSP/pro-Soviet current saw such alliances as essential to enable the Cuban Revolution to move forward to socialism and survive the consequent U.S. hostility; they were not confident, even as late as 1959 (when the revolutionaries came to power), that Castro’s commitment to radical revolution would withstand U.S. pressures, and at times considered openly challenging the M-26 leader.

Franqui, an ex-Communist, was part of an independent radical current (which included David Salvador, Faustino Pérez, Marcelo Fernández, Enrique Oltuski), with a base among intellectuals and

in the trade unions. No less anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist than the current of Che and Raúl, Franqui and his co-thinkers were critical of the Soviet Union and hostile to the PSP, favoring instead what Franqui called “a free socialism and a humanist revolution.”

Elements of this cluster of independent radicals broke with Castro soon after the 1959 triumph (trade union leader Salvador ending up in prison) while others remained — Franqui breaking only in the late 1960s, Pérez and Oltuski remaining for the duration. There was also a smaller, less influential group of “democratic liberals” in M-26 that included Raúl Chibás, Huber Matos, Manuel Ray and others with a background in the Ortodoxo Party. They were eliminated as a force (most went into exile, though Matos went to prison) when they opposed the revolution’s radical turn and accommodation with Cuban Communists and the Soviet Union. (Franqui, *Family*, 23, 24, 58, 158-159; Farber, 60-61, 114, 125-126)

As Farber emphasizes, “although [Castro] did not necessarily foresee membership in the Soviet bloc, he also did not preclude it a priori;” but when he concluded that the only way to advance the Cuban Revolution along the radical path that he had indicated in his 1953 speech to the court was to align himself with the Soviet Union, he threw his weight fully to the M-26 current led by his brother Raúl and Che Guevara, and to an intimate working relationship with the PSP.

As Farber notes, “Castro always resisted subordinating himself to any organizational apparatus,” and he engineered the merger of the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement, the Revolutionary Directorate, and the PSP into “his own ruling Communist Party ... only in 1965, when virtually all the major social and economic changes in Cuban society had already been carried out under his personal leadership and control.” (63)

These changes led to a qualitative improvement in the lives of the majority sectors of the Cuban population specified in Castro’s *History Will Absolve Me*, and their support for Fidel’s leadership and general policies consequently endured for decades.

“A strategic and tactical continuity existed in Fidel Castro’s leadership both before and after Batista’s overthrow,” Farber writes. “He knew or could anticipate that he could more or less take mass support for granted, since his radical measures would find support among those deriving material benefit from them.” The revolutionary regime’s radical course “alienated some sections of the upper and upper-middle classes, [but] it cemented popular support and definitively established that the revolution was dedicated to the material improvement of the working class and the poor.”

U.S. business interests and the U.S. government naturally responded with horror and extreme hostility to this turn of events, but as Farber notes, “the multifaceted U.S. opposition to the Cuban government that developed after May 1959 raised popular anti-imperialism” to almost unprecedented levels throughout the island, and — in stark contrast to other “third world” regimes seeking to stay on good terms with U.S. corporations and policy-makers — “instead of quieting down popular anti-imperialism, Cuban leaders typically raised the ante and encouraged its development, often at massive demonstrations. (120, 133, 135, 136)

### **Larger Contexts, Past and Future**

Among the most interesting aspects of Farber’s study involves his discussion of U.S. foreign policy in relation to Cuba, and also his discussion of the Soviet Union’s shifting Cuban policy.

Both discussions are characterized by a high degree of sophistication, with information drawn in both cases from a variety of sources, including previously inaccessible U.S. government archives.



Regarding the interplay of policies of the United States government and Cuba's new revolutionary regime, Farber comments that "an institutional analysis requires some overall notion of what kind of revolution, broadly speaking, the United States would and could have accepted in the Latin America of the 1950s and 1960s." Certain key U.S. policy decisions that culminated in the breakdown of relations "were not errors at all but inflexible policies institutionally determined by the system of U.S. imperial commitments and business needs."

Historically U.S.-Cuban relations "represented de facto if not fully de jure colonialism," he observes, concluding that U.S. policy toward the Cuban Revolution was obviously conditioned, first, by the need for "defense and protection of the political and juridical conditions necessary for the functioning of private property and capitalism, particularly insofar as U.S. investments in Cuba were concerned," and, second, by "the related but not identical Cold War aim of opposition to Communism, domestic or foreign." (70, 71, 76)

We have already noted the desire of Cuban revolutionaries to connect with the Soviet Union, to secure both protection from the United States and material assistance for the radical course they wished to chart for their revolution.

"The Soviet Union was guided by tactical considerations influenced by a number of factors, including the existing state of relations with Washington, the Soviet Union's fears of economic and military overcommitment to Cuba, and the gradually emerging pressures from Communist China and its effect on the Soviet Union's standing in the international Communist movement."

While the Soviet Union "did not seem to have a strategically coherent approach to dealing with developments in Cuba," its leader Nikita Khrushchev tended to favor a policy which "pushed the Soviet Union into a proactive presence in the Third World" in a manner that would tilt the international relation of forces in favor of the Soviet Union.

"The Soviet Union of the Khrushchev period typically supported Third World governments that broke with the West and adopted independent foreign policies, preferably tilting somewhat toward anti-imperialist, pro-Soviet positions."

The Cuban Revolution, and especially its Marxist-influenced trajectory, were completely unexpected. Initial confusion and caution quickly gave way, however, to Khrushchev's buoyant embrace.

"You Americans must realize what Cuba means to us old Bolsheviks," his emissary Anastas Mikoyan later confided to the U.S. Secretary of State. "We have been waiting all our lives for a country to go communist without the Red Army. It has happened in Cuba, and it makes us feel like boys again." (144, 152, 147)

Something odd happens, however, at the very beginning of the chapter in which the Soviet Union is discussed. Farber puts forward a theoretical generalization that strikes this reviewer as highly dubious.

"By 1959, the Soviet Union, a relatively new imperial state, was involved in a serious conflict with the United States, the most powerful of all imperial states," he asserts. "Beyond the geopolitical elements underlying the clash between the two major powers, a major conflict existed between two competing modes of production: the traditional capitalist system represented by the United States versus a new class system based on nationalized economy administered by a Communist Party-dominated bureaucracy." (137)

There are several questions that can be raised about this. One involves the characteristic of what existed in the Soviet Union as "a new class system," which implies a certain durability that history



has not confirmed. Unlike the class systems associated with ancient slave civilizations, feudalism, and capitalism — what existed in the Soviet Union failed to survive for even a century.

To equate the Soviet Union and the United States as “imperial states” raises additional questions, if one is to interpret this as involving the kind of economic expansionism traditionally associated with the Marxist conception of imperialism. U.S. business interests were driven by a capital accumulation process (involving the voracious, unstoppable need for more and more investments, leading to more and more profits, necessitating more and more profit-seeking investments). This was inseparable from and necessary for the health of the U.S. capitalist economy (i.e., the national interest), and this reality has necessarily guided the foreign policy of the U.S. government.

These facts are consistent with the information and analysis provided in Farber’s book. But the informative analysis he offers on the workings of Soviet foreign policy — while demonstrating a dictatorial regime’s power struggle with the United States, with ample indications of a manipulative and opportunistic orientation and an absence of any concern for socialist democracy — provides no corroboration of any equivalent to the capital accumulation process as a driving force in what was Soviet foreign policy.

One more question is raised by the dubious generalization. According to Farber the development of the Cuban Revolution under Castro’s leadership had “an elective affinity with the Soviet model of socialism,” that it represented “a left-wing authoritarian populism that under existing circumstances evolved into a variety of Communist nationalism.” (5, 168)

Does this mean that what was established in Cuba is “a new form of class system” that deserves to be overthrown by the oppressed and exploited laboring masses? In wrestling with this question, it is worth giving attention to the descriptive specifics that Farber presents:

“Castro’s politics are inextricably bound with his caudillismo, by which I mean, among other things, the politics of blindly following the leader. This constitutes a major obstacle to raising the Cuban people’s political consciousness and increasing their organizational autonomy.”

Farber does not claim “that the revolution was not popular or that it did not involve a radical social and political change,” but he insists that “although the great majority of the population was encouraged to participate, it was not allowed to control or direct the revolution.” (68,168)

This is hardly a new criticism. Two critical-minded supporters of the revolution, Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, made the point in 1969:

“The revolutionary leadership might have seen in this situation an opportunity to attempt the difficult feat of bringing the people more directly into the governing process, forging institutions of popular participation and control and encouraging the masses to use them, to assume increasing responsibility, to share in the making of the great decisions which shape their lives. In practice, however, the relationship between government and people continued to be a paternalistic one, with Fidel Castro increasingly playing the crucial role of interpreting the people’s needs and wants, translating them into government policy, and continuously explaining what had to be done, and what obstacles remained to be overcome.” (Huberman and Sweezy, 204).

More than twenty years later, such knowledgeable and sympathetic observers of revolutionary Cuba as Jeanette Habel and Frank Fitzgerald offered detailed studies in which the same observations were repeated with ample documentation, and with calls for radical reforms to establish democratic control by Cuba’s laboring masses over Cuba’s political-economy.

Should those favoring socialism now urge a struggle for radical-democratic reform in Cuba, or a struggle of class-against-class culminating in new social revolution? Actually, Farber seems to think, in fact, that capitalist restoration is Cuba’s most likely future. [See the interview with Sam Farber

elsewhere in this issue on this point — ed. On ESSF website: [Cuban Reality Beyond Fidel](#)]

Today, from within Cuba itself, there are some revolutionary-minded elements — even in the Cuban Communist Party — who speak of “the Stalinism which contaminated us ... [as] a contagious virus, in spite of which, and not without battles, the ideal of socialism was able to survive, because it was the very essence of the revolutionary process.”

These are the words of Celia Hart (daughter of two historic leaders of the Cuban Revolution, Armando Hart and Haydée Santamaría) in one of her many articles popularizing the ideas of Trotsky in her homeland. More recently, in an interview with French Trotskyists, she has commented: “The interpenetration of the bureaucracy and the market economy, that’s where the danger lies. We have to demolish the foundations of the bureaucracy, because it is on these foundations that the bourgeois class can develop — we saw in the USSR, in Poland, and elsewhere how the bureaucrats, who were managers, men of power, became owners, became capitalists.”

Actually, there is some overlap between this and the conclusion of Farber’s book, which asserts that with Fidel Castro’s death “a capitalist transition is highly likely to be led, as in the Soviet Union and China, by Cuban Communists and would restore ... much of the power that the United States lost in Cuba almost fifty years ago.”

This and the ideological confusion going along with it will, he predicts, “be challenged by those upholding the legacy of Fidel Castro as well as by those trying to create a new revolutionary and democratic Left in Cuba.” (172)

The question remains whether positive elements in the legacy of the Cuban Revolution are stronger than Farber is inclined to acknowledge and – perhaps intertwined with revolutionary developments and counter-influences elsewhere in Latin America — will push aside bureaucratic afflictions and capitalist restoration, resulting in the ideal of socialism (the free association of the producers) being made real “as the very essence of the revolutionary process.”

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