

Tyranny Shaken in the Caribbean

Anonymous

April, 1959

The overthrow of the odious dictator, Fulgencio Batista, by a few thousand armed irregulars and the not-too-passive resistance of the whole Cuban people, has thrilled all lovers of Liberty and has given new hope to the millions still writhing under the heels of tyranny in many countries. It has given new hope to the people of Santo Domingo and Hungary, of Nicaragua and Korea, to the tormented masses of Russia and of South Africa. Every tyrant that falls renews the hope for a better ultimate tomorrow.

In its subservience to the North American sugar interests and also to the foreign gambling racketeers, in the venality within its ranks, and in the excessive brutality of its police forces, the Batista dictatorship was excelled only by that of the Trujillo family in the Dominican Republic. Batista was the first ruler of Cuba to violate the extra-territoriality of the Diplomatic Corps and the traditional inviolability of the University of Havana. The opposition in Cuba consisted of the near-totality of the population.

Foremost in the struggle against Batista from the beginning was the Federation of University Students (FEU), five successive presidents of which were murdered by Batista's police. In all, several thousand students were killed, and they, on their part, had maintained a running battle with reprisals against the uniformed thugs, bombings and sabotage, culminating in an attack on the Presidential Palace (March 13, 1957), in which Batista himself narrowly escaped the justice of the enraged youth of Havana.

Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement was not based directly on either the workers' or the peasants' or the student-intellectual movements as such. Although its origin goes further back, its effective action started with the landing of 82 men in the southeastern province of Oriente, December 2, 1956. Nearly all of this original invasion force were killed almost immediately. The survivors fortified themselves in the roughest mountain terrain of the Sierra Maestra where hundreds flocked to join them. The permanent armed resistance of this small guerrilla army in the hills inspired the masses more than had the numerous sporadic demonstrations and outbreaks in the large cities. The romantic appeal was tremendous. Rebellious acts elsewhere in the island were many times erroneously credited to the 26th of July Movement. The popular imagination was fired with the vision of the bearded rebel on horseback. To a considerable extent the red and black banner of Fidel Castro came to symbolize the whole struggle against Batista.

Every revolutionary movement against tyranny has, by its very nature, some social content, and that of Fidel Castro has been no exception. However the 26th of July Movement has only

advocated consistently one thing—the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista. Little indication was given as to what should be done the day after victory. No bold program of social transformation was presented, simply a vague promise of "democracy." There were occasional general references to agrarian reform and more rural schools but nothing very concrete even in the way of promises.

In the flush of victory, Fidel announced that United States interests would be protected and encouraged, while his brother Raul declared that the foreigners' strangle-hold on Cuba's sugar mills and plantations must be broken through expropriation. This lack of a consistent, positive program attracted political opportunists of all shades. Catholic Action and the Communist Party were both active and influential in the 26th of July ranks during the months in the mountains, and presumably still are, in spite of Castro's anti-communist statements.

In the course of the struggle, Fidel Castro has given evidence of a totalitarian orientation. His prima donna attitude is well known. Until the signing of the Pact of Caracas, he openly refused to cooperate with other revolutionary opposition forces on anything resembling a basis of equality.

The Revolutionary Directorate, composed of students (FEU), intellectual and other elements, had stepped up its fight in the urban centers and had managed to establish a "second front" with its own guerrilla forces in the Sierra del Escambray of Central Cuba. It was primarily these people of the Escambray and the "Autenticos" who later took the city of Santa Clara, precipitating the final military phase of the revolution.

The anti-Batista labor elements, grouped largely around the "Autenticos" Party of ex-President Carlos Prío Socarras and the Libertarian Association, found grounds for cooperation with the Revolutionary Directorate. Fidel Castro however, rejected all proposals aimed at coordinated action unless he were first recognized as the supreme leader of the revolution. A general strike that might very well have overthrown Batista months ago was aborted and failed miserably due to this lack of coordination.

A military stalemate had been reached. Batista had been well armed by the U.S. and Great Britain. The growing ranks of the revolution lacked the armament for a military victory and the program for a political victory. At this point, Romulo Betancourt, "democratic-socialist" President-elect of Venezuela, called a unity conference of representatives of the various anti-Batista organizations. Out of this conference came the Pact of Caracas, in which, by way of "compromise," Castro's candidate for the provisional presidency—Urrutia—was accepted by all of the groups in the interest of unity.

This Pact was the condition for unlimited Venezuelan support, and armament from Venezuela flowed into Cuba in large amounts. The big push was prepared, strategically well-timed to coincide with the eve of the sugar harvest. Santa Clara was occupied and the revolution had cut the island in the middle. With the harvest due and un-postponable, the economic and military position of the Government had become untenable. The rats started to abandon the ship; Batista took off for Trujillo-land to join Peron and Perez Jimenez, his bags bulging with currency. The Cuban workers came out on general strike and the mopping-up was then a matter of hours.

Immediately the dictatorship of Batista had fallen, steps were taken by Castro and Urrutia to assure the greatest possible concentration of power in the hands of the 26th of July Movement. The commitments and assurances given the other groups in the Pact of Caracas were broken. The Urrutia Government was obviously not going to be a "Government of the Revolution;" it was already a government of the 26th of July Movement. Elections were scheduled for 18 months in the future, in order to give time for the consolidation of this "provisional" government.

The top leadership in all of the labor organizations was replaced by followers of Fidel Castro. In many cases the old leaders had been supporters of Batista, but in others they had not been. Castro's appointees are mostly individuals who have been completely unknown as active unionists.

It was announced that all civilians holding arms were to surrender them to the newly constituted authorities. The People in Arms who had won the revolution were to be disarmed by the new Man on Horseback.

Following the "liberation," our comrades of the Libertarian Association of Cuba resumed publication of their paper, *El Libertario*, which had been suppressed years before. They had participated actively in the revolution in close cooperation with the Revolutionary Directorate and in a bloc with the labor elements of the "Autenticos" Party. Some of them had fought in the 26th of July ranks and others in the Sierra del Escambray and in the mountains of Pinar del Rio. In the first issue of *El Libertario*, they called for the democratization of the labor unions with no governmental interference, raising also the demand that there be no disarmament of the people.

It is too soon to draw any balance sheet of the Cuban Revolution. If no concessions are made to the masses in the form of genuine deep-running social changes, then it may well be that we have only witnessed its first stage. As matters stand today, there is definite danger of a new dictatorship with Fidel Castro, the revolutionary hero of today, firmly in the saddle. Such a dictatorship, based on an amass party of yes-men, might in the long run prove even more dangerous than the one that preceded it.

In any case, in our enthusiasm over the fall of the tyrant Batista, we must never lose sight of the full reality. This has been a partial victory—a great victory—but still a partial one. The Cuban Revolution, although it is a people's revolution, has not yet become a social revolution, and while the social sores that gave rise to Batista still fester, one cannot consider the disease afflicting the island to have been cured.

In the broader, ultimate sense, no revolutionary government could achieve the necessary social transformation that would solve the problems facing Cuba. This can only be accomplished by the people themselves, participating actively and directly in the reorganization of all of society. Without the elimination of the whole statist principle and the exploitation of man by man, any number of social reforms can be but palliatives and not cures.

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The Cuban Revolution has already set into motion a number of forces heretofore relatively quiescent, aimed at the elimination of other dictatorial regimes in the Caribbean area. For decades the Trujillos and the Somozas have ruled Santo Domingo and Nicaragua as their own private estates. Dynasties have been established under which the aging or dying dictator bequeaths the power to another member of his family. All internal opposition has been ruthlessly suppressed.

Fidel Castro in Cuba and Romulo Betancourt in Venezuela, apparently with the support of Figueres in Costa Rica, have declared their intention of intervening against the remaining dictatorships in the Caribbean. At the present moment an international armed force is being readied to attack Trujillo under the banner of the 27th of February organization of Dominicans in exile. Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and others are already being recruited for this purpose.

As enemies of tyranny, these revolutionary legionnaires merit our fullest support, along with the warning that they beware the ambitions of their leaders. It appears possible that for Fidel Castro, active support of a revolutionary war against Trujillo may provide him with the oppor-

tunity to further consolidate himself at home and build anew modern Cuban army that can then serve to keep him in power.

In recent decades, it has been axiomatic to say that the days of the barricades and of guerrilla warfare are over, that the modern instruments of suppression and repression invalidate all past experience in these fields. It would be childish not to recognize that tanks and airplanes and atomic bombs have altered the "science" of revolution. But many of the old methods can be brought up to date.

The Hungarian Workers' Revolution of 1956 and the Cuban Revolution of 1958 have both demonstrated that a people in arms is perfectly capable of overcoming the armed might of a modern state. Herein lies great future hope for the oppressed on both sides of the "iron curtain."

Fidel Castro recently requested the United States to withdraw from Cuba, the Military Mission attached to the U.S. Embassy there. He said that since his few guerrillas had licked the much larger American-trained Cuban army, it was obvious that the U.S. Military Mission was useless.

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