

The nature of Cuban socialism

An interview with Fidel Castro

August 13 marked the 91st birth anniversary of Fidel Castro, the revolutionary Cuban leader. Here, we reprint an interview first published in 1961 in *L'Unità*, the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party, where Castro talks about the character of the Cuban revolution, armed struggles and the complacency of the national bourgeoisie.

ARMINIO SAVIOLI

"Do you really want to write that this is socialist revolution? All right, write it. We are not afraid of words. Do not say, however—as Americans do—that there is communism here, because communism cannot be found even in Russia, after forty years from the overtaking of power... National middle classes? Forget about them, my boy, forget it entirely that national middle classes can still play a revolutionary role in Latin America... Yes, I studied Marx's and Lenin's works even before launching the attack against Cuartel Moncada, in 1953... A society is divided into classes, there is a class struggle: these are unquestionable truths... No, the Americans will not attack us. Imperialism is dying, anyway. It can choose between suicide and natural death. If it attacks, it means suicide, a fast and certain death. If it does not attack, it can hope to last a little longer..."

I am reporting these sentences, which are the most significant among those which were articulated to me last night by Fidel Castro, during a conversation that started at 0200 hours and ended at 0530 this morning. The Cuban Prime Minister had promised me an interview on January 3 during a reception at the presidential palace. However—overburdened as he is by a huge amount of political, military, and diplomatic work, and intolerant as he is of any formality and detailed planning before meetings—he was unable, or decided not to keep his promise. Last night's conversation—which was very extensive, open-minded, and cordial—happened by chance. This is how it happened.

At 0100 hours I was at the El Caribe night club, located on the second floor of the Havana Libre Hotel. Fifteen jazzmen, six singers, and ten ballerinas were doing everything they could to entertain eight customers, including me. The waiters were yawning all the time. Boredom was supreme. At 0130, the night club glass door was pushed wide open. Five athletic silhouettes in uniform, with pistols on their waists and small submachine guns on their shoulders, came in in complete silence (the carpet eliminated any noise made by the boots), sat around a table and ordered Coca Cola.

In spite of the darkness (all Cuban night clubs and bars are almost completely dark), I recognised the heavy and slightly round shoulders, the tall size, and the black, Renaissance-like beard of Fidel Castro. I moved closer to him, and impolitely lit up a match under his eyes.

Comandante — I said — you promised me an interview. Let us set a date right away.

No chico (chico means boy, and Fidel calls everybody chico, at least all those who are his friends). No, please, I hate dates. Sit down, let me/rest a while, tomorrow we'll talk about it...

The bodyguards were smoking in silence. Another soldier watched the door. Waiters and ballerinas pretended not to see anybody. The boring performance went on. From time to time, Fidel Castro applauded politely. At 0200 o'clock he got up. Then a singer shouted "Viva el caballo!" El caballo, the horse, is Fidel Castro. This is the people's affectionate way of referring to him because of his indomitable strength. The Premier went out, thanking him with a smile. I followed him.

Comandante, what about the interview?

Chico, there are scores of journalists who are waiting...

Comandante, I have been waiting for a month.

Ah? Yes, you are the Italian Communist, the Togliattiano... [from the name, Togliatti, of the Italian Communist Party Chief].

Fidel Castro smiles, opens his arms and raises his shoulders (a usual, slightly timid gesture of his).

All right, let's go.

We go to the Hall of Ambassadors, and sit down at a conference table under a huge chandelier of unbelievable bad taste. In a second, 10, 30, 40 people are around us: mulatto girl singers with bit eyes painted in

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