

LONGFORM |

THE NATURE OF CUBAN SOCIALISM

After page 10

black and blue, waiters, casino croupiers, Latin American delegates...

Comandante, what is the character of the Cuban revolution?

You newspapermen are crazy for definitions and neat schemes... You're impossibly dogmatic. We are not dogmatic... At any rate, you wish to write that this is a socialist revolution, right? And write it, then... Yes, not only did we destroy a tyrannical system. We also destroyed the philoimperialistic bourgeois state apparatus, the bureaucracy, the police, and a mercenary army. We abolished privileges, annihilated the great landowners, threw out foreign monopolies for good, nationalised almost every industry, and collectivised the land. We are fighting now to liquidate once and for all the exploitation of man over man, and to build a completely new society, with a new class contents. The Americans (Cubans say just that, *los americanos*, to mean the United States) the Americans and the priests say that this is communism. We know very well that it is not. At any rates, the word does not frighten us. They can say whatever they wish. There is a song, which is popular among our peasants, that goes more or less like this: "Bird of ill omen—of treason and cowardice—that are throwing at my joy—the word: communism!—I know nothing about these 'isms'—Yet, if such a great welfare conquest—which can be seen by my own eyes—is communism, then — you can even call me a communist!"

Comandante, what do you think about the Popular Socialist Party, which is the party of Castro communists?

It is the only Cuban party which has consistently called for a radical change of social structures and relations. It is true that at the beginning the communists distrusted me and us rebels. Their distrust was justified, their position was absolutely correct, both ideologically and politically. They were right in being distrustful because we of the Sierra who were conducting the guerilla were still full of petit bourgeois prejudices and defects, in spite of our Marxist readings. Our ideas were not clear, although we wished to destroy tyranny and privileges with all out strength. Then, we met with each other, we understood one another, and started to work together. The communists have shed much blood and heroism for the Cuban cause. At present, we continue to work together in a loyal and brotherly way.

According to your opinion, following the latest developments of the Cuban revolution, has the historical outlook for Latin America changed? In other words, do you believe that the Cuban example can and must be followed by other peoples on the Continent?

Yes, I think so.

Do you mean to say, then, that other peoples should take up arms in order to overturn governments that are either dictatorial or sold out to the United States?

Yes, we hope that others will follow our example. In conclusion, we are all one people, we speak the same language, from the Rio Grande to Patagonia, and have shared a common history, which can be summed up in a few words: exploited as colonies first by Spain, and then by the United States. All that is going to stop. There are countries—hold it, don't write this down, because I don't want to create international incidents—there are countries where revolutionary spirit, patriotism and hatred against imperialism are much stronger, livelier, and more profound than they were in Cuba three years ago. A revolution will break out simultaneously in many Latin American countries, which will destroy prejudices, regionalism and provincialism. Latin America will then become just one, great, free, civil and independent nation. The Chinese were more divided among themselves than we are, with different dialects and even languages, and a multiplicity of nationalities. And yet, the Chinese revolution is one and indivisible.

Much is being said on "national ways" and on alliances... Do you believe that national-minded middle classes can still play a positive role in Latin American revolutions?

I don't believe so, I never did. It is true that there are groups of industrial bourgeoisie which are against, at

times very much against, imperialism, because of competition. But these same groups hate the workers even more, for class reasons. Between US monopolies and national bourgeoisies there can be temporary conflicts and skirmishes, not a true all-out struggle. There is no historical incompatibility between them. Our national bourgeoisie here at home is complacent and coward, and always ready to concede to imperialism which in conclusion keeps it alive and gives it help and arms to be used against social revolutions. National bourgeoisie sleep, just as the Cuban bourgeoisie used to sleep. Privileged classes can no longer participate in true revolutions, least of all lead them, in our century. Believe me, this is the truth.

What are, then, in your opinion, the forces which have the historical task of organising revolutions in Latin America?

The industrial and agricultural proletariat, the peasants, the small bourgeoisie, above all the intellectuals. I do not wish to encourage factionalism. Nor do I deny that some layers of the national bourgeoisie can support, in part and temporarily, certain revolutionary events. I grant that some children of the bourgeoisie can enter the ranks of the people,

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participate in revolutions, and even direct them, as conscious individuals, armed with a revolutionary theory (after all, even I am the son of great landowners!). Yet, I am reasoning from a class viewpoint. There is no longer anything good we can expect from the national bourgeoisie as a class. The same goes for national armies. Revolutionary and patriotic officers can be found, but professional and caste armies are like a cancer that must be uprooted from Latin America. If the armies are not destroyed, there can be no true governments of the people, and social reforms cannot be enacted. At the first smell of an even modest reform, the army intervenes and paralyses everything. And when a corrupt government is on its way out, and a revolution is in sight, there comes the army again with a state coup and with a new government which is worse than the one that preceded it. These are the lessons of our history.

In some countries, however, the national bourgeoisie is very strong. It will not be easy to overturn it, together with the landowners, the generals, the oligarchic cliques, and the overlords...

Also in Cuba, the feudal-bourgeois group was very strong. It controlled everything: the army, the press, the judiciary, the radio, schools, universities, the police, everything. Yet, we won. Armed and well organised workers, peasants and students: this is the only revolutionary force of this Continent.

Comandante, what is the socialist camp's contribution to the Cuban revolution?

My boy, what would have happened to us had

Khrushchev not sent us oil and brought our sugar? And had the Czechs not sent weapons to defend ourselves, and machines, spare parts and technicians? We have here two or three hundred Soviet technicians, great workers, correct, kind, true brothers. The USSR is gambling on her peace, in spite of twenty million dead in the last war; it is compromising her peace and prestige in order to defend us, a small island. And it is doing this not with strings attached, without asking for anything. And you ask me what I think of the socialist camp? They are our friends.

Fidel's voice is hoarse, but the indomitable caballo resists, jokes, laughs, speaks rapidly, and concisely, by using vernacular expressions which makes his eloquence more down to earth, and so different from the solemn and slow eloquence of his official speeches.

Now, it is the others' turn to ask questions. They ask him personal questions. One says with a certain pomposity: "What do you feel when you wake up in the morning and think that you are the great leader of all Latin America?"

Fidel blushes and shrugs his shoulders.

"I am a man like any other. Here, for instance, this



PHOTO: REUTERS

chico right here (he points his finger at me) wakes up worrying that he will not be able to write a good article. True? So I wake up with the feat that I may not be able to do well my work as a revolutionary... And with the added pain of having to execute people... What do you think, that we like to kill? We are compelled to do it. The terrorists place bombs, and shoot out militiamen. Do you remember when they blew up the French ship? There were one hundred dead. [On March 4, 1960, the *Coubre*, a French freighter loaded with Belgian arms and ammunition, was blown up in Havana Harbor] Yet, it is terrible to have to execute people (suddenly, Fidel's eyes are filled with tears, and he is upset). Believe me, it's a death struggle. It is either us or them. We have to defend the revolution and make it go forward. We cannot show any pity. And yet it's terrible..."

It is 0530 hours. Fidel gets up, shakes hand with everybody, patiently and modestly signs postcards, pictures and books, and finds again his beautiful smile. "Adios, companeros, muchas gracias!"

Then, turning to me, he says: "Got your interview, Italiano? Now you won't be on the look-out for me..."

On the contrary, Comandante, I still have many questions to ask of you.

All right, all right, we'll see...

Then he leaves, walking slowly and in a slightly bent way, with his armed escort, and in a big black car disappears in the Havana streets, silent and deserted, and swept by a cold wind from the north.

Arminio Savioli was an Italian journalist and editor of L'Unità.