Chapter 6: Castro's Cuban road from populism to Stalinism

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The ?unique? features of the Cuban revolution have produced endless confusion in the ?Trotskyist? movement, rivalling the programmatic chaos and ensuing revisionism engendered by the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. The fundamental problem the Cuban revolution poses is how can a petit-bourgeois nationalist movement not only overthrow a pro-imperialist military dictatorship (i.e. a political revolution) but pass on under the same leadership to overthrow capitalism and establish a self-proclaimed ?socialist state? indistinguishable in type from China or Vietnam?

From this problem flow questions relating to the fundamentals of revolutionary Marxist theory. Does the experience of the Cuban revolution contradict the Marxist notion of the historical limits of the petit-bourgeoisie as a class and of petit bourgeois nationalism as a programme for social revolution? Does the experience of the Cuban revolution contradict the Marxist theory of the state?

The ?adaptations? made to the fundamentals of revolutionary Marxism, by all sections of the movement which claimed to be ?Trotskyist, to ?account for? the Cuban events were all, in fact, revisions of the first magnitude. Permanent revolution is reduced to an objective force, a historical process that works its will independent of the consciousness of human beings even with regard to the socialist revolution. Its petit-bourgeois agents can be ?unconscious Marxists? or ?unconscious Trotskyists?. Therefore a revolutionary party is a desirable, but not essential, instrument of this process. Revolutionary workers? governments can exist without the ?norms of proletarian democracy?, that is, without soviet-type bodies to express and exert the revolutionary pressure of the working class. Lastly, the proletarian dictatorship can exist ?without the norms of proletarian democracy? yet be qualitatively a healthy workers? state ? one not in need of a political revolution.

The positions developed by Joseph Hansen and the SWP (US), which provided the basis for the re-unified United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), repeated in a starker manner the theoretical and the programmatic collapse that occurred after 1948. The importance of the Cuban revolution was realised in the context of the Nicaraguan revolution and the consequent split in the USFI (1979/80). The issues it raises are not matters of idle historical curiosity, but have a burning relevance for the struggle for revolution today.

Cuba?s whole history prior to 1959 was dominated by its colonial and then semi-colonial status. From being a Spanish colony it passed into the hands of US imperialism. Formal independence was an empty shell under both parliamentary bourgeois nationalist regimes and under repressive military dictatorships. Attempted constitutional ?revolutions? like that of 1933-34 were rudely aborted by US-backed military coups. The underlying cause of this was Cuba?s integration with, and subordination to, the US economy. As with all semi-colonies in the imperialist epoch, this integration had not transformed Cuba into a balanced and developed capitalist economy.
Cuba was dominated by sugar production for the North American market. At the beginning of the 1950s sugar production accounted for 36 per cent of Cuba’s GNP, for 80 per cent of its export revenues; and 83 per cent of all cultivated land was under sugar cane.

With 41 per cent of labour tied to agricultural production and 20 per cent to tourism, Cuba’s economy was tied to the sweet tooth of the North American populace and the pleasures and vices of its bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie directly owned a large part of the economy, 35 per cent of capital invested in sugar was US-based. In the late 1950s more than $1bn of US capital were invested in Cuba.

A small class of latifundists (less than 3,000 of them owned 70 per cent of the land) and a comprador and rentier bourgeoisie acted as the agents of US imperialism. Only a tiny fraction of the Cuban possessing classes were capable of any sustained opposition to US imperialism and even these turned sharply against the Castroite revolution as soon as it began to take limited measures of agrarian reform. The Cuban revolution confirmed to the hilt the Trotskyist assertion that in the epoch of imperialism the colonial and semi-colonial bourgeoisie are completely incapable of leading the struggle for national independence and independent (capitalist) economic development. On the other hand, the popular classes were not dominated by a peasantry chronically deprived of land. Cuban society was more urban than rural (57 per cent urban to 43 per cent rural in 1959).

Moreover, the countryside itself was dominated not by land hungry, small peasants but by rural proletarians suffering from chronic and massive unemployment, job insecurity, low wages and appalling social conditions. The sugar refineries were well organised in trade unions, as were the urban workers generally. The CTC (Cuban Trade Union Federation) unionised half the total workforce.

Cuba was possessed of a revolutionary nationalist tradition, that of Jose Marti and Antonio Maceo and the insurrectionary war against Spain and then US colonialism (1895-8); a tradition with parallels in the early years of the imperialist epoch (in China, Mexico, Turkey, Iran etc.) The island also had seen a reformist, constitutional attempt to break with US dominance.

In 1933-34 the democrat Dr. Grau San Martin was brought to power and driven from it 100 days later, by a military coup d’état engineered by Fulgencio Batista. Castro’s July 26th Movement was politically a continuation of these movements. There were no differences with Grau’s Autenticos of the 1930s or Chibas? Ortodoxos of the late 1940s. Fidel Castro was a member of the latter party. The programme Castro was thus committed to was of political and economic independence and democracy.

History Will Absolve Me, Castro’s duly doctored (and re-written) speech from the court dock after the 1953 attack on Moncada Barracks was pure ?Chibasism? in its programme. It promised restoration of the 1940 constitution, a ?government of popular election?, a land reform to restrict large land holdings and nationalisation of US-owned electric and telephone companies. By December 1956, Castro had even renounced the nationalisation of the utilities and declared ?Foreign investment will always be welcome and secure here.?1 His differences with the Chibas and the Ortodoxo party, which carried on the tradition after Chibas? death, were that whereas they (and Grau and the Autenticos before them) were bourgeois nationalist reformists, he was (like Maceo and Marti) a bourgeois nationalist revolutionary ? that is, he employed revolutionary methods of struggle not constitutional ones.

The July 26th Movement (J26M) however, never formulated a precise programme. It never held a conference or elected a leadership. It was in essence a military apparatus for overthrowing Batista. It was itself a miniature popular front. On its left wing stood figures like Raul Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara who were strongly influenced by Stalinism and privately had no objections to an overthrow of capitalism; and on its right wing stood the anti-communist figures like Hubert Matos and Faustino Perez.
The July 26th Movement - a coalition across classes

In the cities the J26M leaders, known as the Plain (Llano) were anti-communist bourgeois nationalists to the core. Nor were they an insignificant force. Frank Pais in Santiago and Faustino Perez in Havana controlled large movements of resistance and sabotage and supplied the rural guerrillas with arms and money. The Plain leaders were fiercely anti-communist and open defenders of private property. Faustino Perez reflected the views of this group in his attitude to the 'extremist' Castro when he stressed in spring 1958 Castro will not be part of the Provisional Government:

'We shall create a climate of confidence and security for the investment of national and foreign capital.' 2

On the left there were figures like Raul Castro, an ex-member of the CP youth and resolutely pro-communist (Stalinist). Guevara probably considered himself a Marxist from 1954 onwards.

His experience of the American backed coup against Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and a reading of Lenin's State and Revolution led him to reject the 'peaceful road' to revolution.

All wings of the J26M were highly suspicious of, if not hostile to the PSP, the Cuban Stalinists. The PSP had a history of collaboration with Batista and openly condemned the Castroites before 1958 as 'adventurous'. But by the spring of 1958, Bias Roca, the veteran Stalinist leader threw his weight behind Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, leader of the pro-Castro wing of the PSP and against Anibal Escalante. A number of PSP cadres including Rodriguez were sent to the Sierra Maestra, base of Castro's guerrillas, where a secret pact was made between the PSP and the Castroites in March 1958. It is clear that the J26M was not simply a petit-bourgeois movement but rather a coalition of bourgeois and proletarian (albeit politically petit-bourgeois i.e. Stalinist or proto-Stalinist) forces.

In January 1959, the two year long civil war between the J26M, its 'rebel' army and the Batista regime culminated in the overthrow of Batista. Batista had led a corrupt military dictatorship that had acted as an agent for US imperialism in its Cuban semi-colony since 1953. The 1959 revolution was not however a mere putsch or coup d'état. In the countryside it assumed, during 1958, the character of a serious movement of the rural proletarians and poor peasants. In the cities it had the support of important sections of the nationalist bourgeois and petit-bourgeois strata grouped in the Directorio and the Civic Resistance Under attack from such a wide spectrum of Cuban society and deserted by its US backers, Batista's regime collapsed after the failure of its summer offensive of 1958. A general strike in Havana assured the complete disintegration of the old regime.

The high command and much of the officer caste of the army, the judiciary and high state bureaucracy fled en masse. Castro subjected the remaining forces to a far reaching purge with hundreds shot and thousands imprisoned. The units of the old army were integrated with the Rebel Army and placed under J26M officers and commanders.

From January 1959 there was, as a result of this disintegration, a specific form of dual power, a fragmentation of the state power. The bourgeoisie's hold on the army was very weak because of the loss of most of the officer corps and the whole of the high command, but substantial sections of the air force and the old regiments existed and would have formed a basis for a reassertion of the bourgeoisie's control over the army. On the other hand, was the 3,000 strong Rebel Army, which by January 1959 was made up of 'three-fourths to four-fifths' of rural proletarians and small scale peasant proprietors under the leadership of pro-PSP or populist and centrist tendencies.3

The effect of this where the left-wing of the J26M was in command (Raul Castro in Oriente for example)
was an immediate push to grant peasant-worker demands. In February, 22,500 families were awarded 67 acre plots. In Camaguev on the other hand, rightists under Hubert Matos and backed by figures like Diaz Lanz (head of the old air force) held up reform. The duality of power ran through the army and the J26M itself. Fidel Castro played the role of a bonaparte ? the ?lider maximo? balancing between, and obscuring, this division.

However, the actual balance of forces was heavily unfavourable to the bourgeoisie. Its real strength lay in the pro bourgeois, class collaborationist politics of the J26M, in Castro?s unwillingness to break from the utopian project of national independent capitalist development for Cuba. It also lay in the Raul Castro/Guevara wing?s inability to break with the ?lider maximo? and put themselves at the head of (and therefore potentially under the control of) the workers and poor peasants. They refused to openly express class demands against the bourgeoisie. They would not give voice to the proletariat?s historic goal. Lastly it lay in the PSP?s popular front stagist programme which gave the weakened bourgeoisie pride of place in the popular front. These forces, not the Cuban bourgeoisie?s intrinsic strength, accounted for the nine-month period of dual power.

The Castroite project throughout this period was to maintain the popular front whilst striking at the working class/poor peasant or bourgeois elements should either of these classes attempt to decisively tip the balance in their own favour. A wave of strikes and land occupations in January and February caused a serious breach between the ?Lider maximo? and the PSP (a military bloc had existed from March; a trade union pact from November 1958).

In April 1959, Castro classified communism Peronism and fascism as merely different kinds of ?totalitarianism?. Castro declared that the Cuban revolution was ?humanist? ? capitalism bred hunger whilst communism ?took away liberty?. The Cuban revolution was not red but ?Olive Green?.

Early in 1959, the J26M officered police stood by as members of the Havana Civic Resistance ransacked the offices of ?Hoy?, the PSP?s newspaper, an action which led its editor, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez to declare the PSP had gone underground before and could do it again. By May 1959, a vitriolic campaign was being conducted in the pages of Revolution, the J26M?s paper, against the PSP. The Stalinists were denounced as ?anti-revolutionary?, similar to the counter revolutionaries. Particularly singled out for attack was their encouragement of strikes for wage increases, and their involvement in peasant land seizures in San Luis.

**Castro is forced to break with his bourgeois allies**

However, Castro?s anti-communist campaign inevitably encouraged the Cuban landowning bourgeoisie?s resistance to his own land reform. Although a moderate capitalist reform, its operation and implementation lay effectively with the armed guerrillas of the Rebel Army in a situation where the peasants and rural proletarian masses expectations had been aroused by the revolution. The first attempt at nationalisation and the methods used to enforce them touched the US and Cuban companies and land owners to the quick. Confirming the thesis of permanent revolution that none of the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois revolution can be carried out in colonial or semi-colonial countries under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, or any alleged ?national? or ?revolutionary? fraction of it, the Cuban landowning and capitalist class passed in its totality into the camp of counter-revolution. Castro was forced to move against the most vociferous opponents of agrarian reform in his government. A group of bourgeois ministers were sacked in June. In July he mobilised the workers and peasants in a general strike and mass demonstration, to remove the bourgeois president Urrutia and to purge the air force.

Castro?s reluctance to break his ties to the bourgeoisie can be seen in his hesitancy to purge all the
bourgeois ministers. However, the activities of US imperialism and their agents in Cuba were to leave him no choice. On 11 June the US issued a strong protest against the agrarian reform measures, demanding prompt, adequate and effective compensation. Castro was faced with a choice: either concede on the agrarian reform and strengthen the bourgeoisie and its alliance with US capital?thus alienating his peasant base?or push ahead with the reform and strike out against the right wing.

He chose the latter. The day after the US note, Castro demanded the resignation of various bourgeois ministers?Sori Marin, Minister of Agriculture; Elena Mederos, Minister of Health; Luis Orlando Rodriguez, Minister of the Interior, Angel Fernandez, the Minister of Justice and Agramonte the Foreign Minister.

All these ministers were replaced by trusted members of the J26M, often close intimates of Castro. While the political representatives?of the bourgeoisie were purged, the economic representatives?were left untouched?bourgeois figures like Cas Fresquet (Finance) and Bunilla (Commerce) remained in their posts, while Pazos remained in charge of the Bank of Cuba.

These actions forced Castro into close reliance on his own left wing and consequently back into a bloc with the PSP in October/November, counter-revolutionary activity by US and native Cuban capitalist sabotage forced Castro to strike decisively at the bourgeoisie outside and the J26M effectively ending the latter as a popular front or indeed as a movement?at all. Hubert Matos was arrested and J26M purged of anti-communists. The army was reduced by 50 per cent and renamed the Revolutionary Armed Forces. The Defence Ministry was completely purged and put under Raul Castro?s command. The organisation of a mass armed militia of workers and peasants was launched and standing army was integrated with the militia. Castro, forced to act with the left wing of the J26M, his brother, Guevara and Rodriguez against political and military agents of the Cuban capitalists, drove all the bourgeois ministers from the government. Fresquet at the Finance Ministry was the sole exception, took over the National Bank, and effectively economic power and policy emanated from there. By November 1959 the popular front had been ended, along with the duality of power.

These actions all necessitated a rapprochement with the principal political force within the Cuban working class, the 18,000-strong PSP. Having ousted them from the CTC completely in February/March and formed a bloc with the pro-bourgeois labour bureaucrats in the Frente Obrero Humanista, in November/January 1959-60, Castro was now forced to strike a new alliance with them and purge his former supporters.

The left wing of the J26M were now in the ascendant and the process of founding a unified party apparatus to replace the movement began in December 1959. Whatever Castro?s differences with sections of the PSP leadership, he had now irrevocably cast in his lot with the PSP. This process of fusion with a politically petit-bourgeois Stalinist workers?party did not however immediately mean a break with US imperialism or a conscious and determined march towards socialism. If the Castro fusion with the PSP gave the government the appearance of a workers and peasants?government, it was not a revolutionary workers and peasants?government.

It was not anti-capitalist in its actions or programme, and it was not under the control of democratic armed organs of workers?power i.e. soviets and a democratic workers and peoples?militia. It commenced its life as a bourgeois workers and peasants?government, but one born under special circumstances. Firstly, the bourgeoisie had lost all vestiges of control of its armed apparatus (the fundamental bastion of the bourgeois state had been smashed.). Henceforward the bourgeoisie could only recover its rule by armed counter-revolution, i.e. by revolt from outside the state machine. Secondly the bourgeoisie, aided and abetted by the right wing of the US bourgeoisie (Nixon and the CIA) were in fact renewing counter-revolutionary civil war. Thirdly, the workers and peasants were being armed, and whilst they had no
effective alternative leadership to the left J26M/PSP leaders, they formed an armed bulwark against capitulation and a pressure for decisive measures against the counter-revolution.

This government was in effect a ?government of the parties of petit-bourgeois democracy?. Its programme and the intentions of its leaders did not go beyond bourgeois limits, its social roots were the urban and rural workers and poor peasants. It was in this sense a bourgeois ?workers? and peasants? government?, i.e. one which is described in the Comintern?s 1922 theses as being ?tolerated by the enfeebled bourgeoisie in critical times as a means of deceiving the proletariat about the real class character of the state, or to ward off, with the help of corrupt workers? leaders the revolutionary offensive of the proletariat and gain time?.

However the growing class conflict in Cuba, the increasingly organised expression of the expectations of the armed workers and peasants, the response via sabotage and guerrilla activity of the Cuban bourgeoisie and its agents in the state bureaucracy, and the hostile blows of US imperialism forced this government ?to go further than they themselves wished along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie?.

Attempts by this government to ease the stranglehold of US imperialism over its economy by entering into a trade agreement with the USSR led to a dramatic worsening of relations with Washington. In June 1960, US oil companies (and the European controlled firm Shell) refused to refine Soviet oil. The Castro government replied by nationalising them. In July, the US responded by cancelling the agreement to buy the sugar crop ? only an agreement with the USSR and China to buy sugar saved the economy from disaster.

Between August and October 1960, the government nationalised all the US-owned sugar mills, electricity facilities and telecommunications industry, all the banks and all American and Cuban-owned large and medium industrial concerns. By the end of 1960, 80 per cent of Cuba?s industrial capacity was nationalised and the agrarian reform had been dramatically speeded up. Under the pressure of imperialism, the Castro government had been faced with a choice: either to submit to imperialism, or take the measures necessary to break the power of imperialism and its agents in Cuba by expropriating it.

While the Castroite government was forced to break with the bourgeoisie and take anti-capitalist measures, the form that this took was different to that envisaged by Trotsky. From the summer of 1960, the Castro government had become a bureaucratic anti-capitalist workers? government ? a government forced to attack and break the economic power of the bourgeoisie, but through carefully controlled bureaucratic measures and mobilisations. The Castro government was able to carry out this expropriation relatively ?peacefully? because it had already broken the political and military power of the bourgeoisie within the state, and was able to use the Revolutionary Armed Forces and militia against internal resistance. The major threat to the government came from intervention by US imperialism either directly with US troops, or indirectly through armed Cuban counter-revolutionaries.

**Castro fuses with the Stalinists**

It was this threat that necessitated the controlled mass mobilisations under the control of the Castroites (loyally supported by the PSP). The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) were set up in September 1960 while the militia, integrated with the RAFs, reached 50,000 by the summer of 1960. The militia, which was made up of workers who did military training after work, had at its centre the purged rebel army, its officers trusted Fidelistas. The heads of the militia in the provinces were often heads of G2, the military-political intelligence organisation. The CRDs were headed by Jose Matar, a leading PSP member.
The militia was downgraded as the threat from US imperialist intervention receded. After the defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, a divisional command structure was reintroduced into the RA, and by 1964, the militia was disarmed, leaving the RAF as the sole armed force of the state.

By November 1960, a US trade embargo was in effect which completely cut off Cuba from its traditional markets of North and South America (80 per cent of Cuban imports came from the USA and from US oil companies in Venezuela). Only the support and aid from the Stalinist bloc (primarily the USSR) allowed the Cuban government to develop a workable economic strategy. At the end of 1960 Guevara led a trade delegation to the USSR and the Eastern bloc, which resulted in the entire 1961 sugar crop being taken up. At the same time (end of 1960), a team of Czech technical advisors arrived to help set up a planning agency.

In February 1961, the government departments and agencies were completely reorganised to fit in with the tasks of the new planned economy. JUCEPLAN was transformed into the central planning agency, which evolved the first plan which was in operation from the start of 1962.

The massive nationalisations of 1960, the expropriations of US holdings and of the Cuban bourgeoisie, and the establishment of the monopoly of foreign trade laid the pre-conditions and established the necessity for state planning. From the implementation of the first five year plan in 1962, we can speak of the creation of a degenerate workers' state in Cuba.

The PSP cadres were central in the staffing of the administrative apparatus of this plan and this increased importance, plus their vital role in maintaining discipline within the trade unions was recognised in the fusion between the J26M and the PSP in the Integrated Revolutionary Organisation (ORI) in July 1961. This organisation was later to become the Cuban Communist Party in 1965.

The ?fusion? in fact took the form of a takeover of the Stalinist party apparatus by the Castroites, a project which caused considerable conflict with ?old guard? Stalinists. When the National Directorate of the ORI was announced, it consisted of 25 members: 14 from J26M, 10 from the PSP, one from the Revolutionary Directorate. By October 1961, offices of ORI had been set up in almost every town (100 out of 126 townships).

Anibal Escalante, the veteran Stalinist who had been given responsibility for organising the ORI, ensured that trusted Stalinists staffed the leading positions in the towns and provinces. Recognising this threat, Castro denounced Escalante for ?sectarianism? and for creating a ?counter-revolutionary monstrosity?, in March 1962. Escalante was expelled from the Directorate, having left hastily for Prague. A Secretariat of the ORI was set up with Fidelistas having five of the six places ? Bias Roca being the only PSP member.

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When the Cuban Communist Party was set up in October 1965, the strength of the Fidelistas could be seen in the fact that of the 100 Central Committee members, 72 had military titles, i.e. were trusted Castroites from the Rebel Army. The entire eight-man Politbureau were Fidelistas. From 1961, the Castroites had consciously set out to construct a Stalinist party in their own image ? taking over the PSP apparatus and purging it of its old guard leadership. The struggle with in the ORI explains the length of time it took to found the Cuban Communist Party.

By the summer of 1960, Castro had broken decisively with the remaining Cuban and US bourgeoisie. However, the absence of workers? councils (soviets) and a revolutionary communist party comprising the
vanguard of the proletariat, ensured that the outcome of these events was not a revolutionary workers? government, i.e. a bridge to the full and direct political power of the proletariat, but a bureaucratic anti-capitalist workers? government. This government under the Castro faction and the PSP, with the material aid of the Kremlin bureaucracy, became a bridge to a qualitatively bureaucratised workers? state, one in which the working class and its vanguard were from the outset deprived of political power.

In a speech in February 1961, Guevara referred vaguely to ?workers? councils?, which could ?approve plans and directives?.

These became technical councils which were to be transmission belts for government targets. In August 1961, the trade unions were reorganised to expedite work co-operation in fulfilling government production goals. By April 1962, Guevara was blaming the lack of labour discipline for the poor sugar harvest. In November 1962, the CTC congress and union congresses were held to ?endorse? the government programmes. Guevara stated that the reluctance of some trade union leaders to endorse the new contracts ?would not be tolerated?.

In 1962 identity cards were introduced for workers and stringent laws on labour discipline were instituted. A law of 1964-1965 enforced sanctions for breaches of labour discipline. The Grievance Commissions established in 1961 were abolished as being ?too lenient?. In the words of Martinez Sanchez, Minister of Labour, the law would,

?strengthen labour discipline and increase production and productivity. It will be applied to the kind of worker who is a residue of exploiting society. We still find workers who have not taken the revolutionary step and tend to discuss and protest any measure coming from the administration.?10

Whilst gains were made for and by the working class (the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, statified and planned economy, a state monopoly of foreign trade), the Castroite bonapartist clique and a privileged bureaucracy usurped power from the working class. The Cuban overturn had a predominantly counter-revolutionary character. It was not qualitatively different to the overthrows that created the other degenerate workers? states. In carrying through this programme, Castro proved himself a Stalinist. This regime from its foundation could only be removed by political revolution.

Many of the features of the petit-bourgeois populist origins of the Fidelista movement remained hybridised with the essential features of a Stalinist dictatorship. The People?s Power committees and so forth were never organs of working class power or proletarian democracy. Whilst the origin of the regime in an anti-imperialist revolution gave Castro?s power an overwhelming popularity, not seen in the USSR or Eastern Europe, the avenues for a peaceful transition to the political power of the working class do not exist in Cuba.

In this same period the Cuban supporters of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (IS) were at first hounded out, then imprisoned by the Castroites and PSP. At the 1960 Youth Congress in Havana, the delegates identifying with ?Voz Proletaria?, the paper of the Cuban section of the IS, were denounced publicly in the PSP?s press as CIA agents. In 1961, the paper?s press and the plates of Trotsky?s Permanent Revolution, which was being published, were smashed and the paper was suppressed. Later the supporters of Voz Proletaria were either imprisoned or deported as ?counter revolutionaries?.

*Is the petit-bourgeoisie a ruling class?*

The contradiction which might appear to exist between the positions of Lenin, Trotsky and the great
revolutionary Marxists with regard to the role of petit-bourgeois political formations dissolves if the full
dynamic of the Cuban events is understood.

The petit-bourgeoisie cannot be a ruling class ? i.e. it cannot establish a state power defending its own
class rule, just as petty commodity production cannot be a dominant mode of production, but is always
dominated by a large-scale property belonging to another mode of production ? slave, feudal or capitalist.
The Cuban revolution in no way contradicts this fundamental Marxist assessment of this intermediate class.

Petit-bourgeois parties and their personnel can however be the instrument of the rule of other classes. By
a process of internal differentiation, the grouping around Castro evolved from petit-bourgeois nationalism
to petit-bourgeois Stalinism. The Fidelista clique assimilated themselves to the Stalinist party and
programme whilst ousting most of the latter?s former leadership and hybridising its programme with
elements of petit bourgeois nationalism (central role of the peasantry, rural guerrilla warfare), as Mao had
done before.

Castro, who in 1959 was a bonaparte for the enfeebled Cuban bourgeoisie was, by 1962, a bonaparte
?for? the politically expropriated Cuban working class. Trotsky considered in 1938 that ?experience? (i.e.
of Russia, Spain and France) confirmed the inability of the parties of petit-bourgeois democracy to create a
?government independent of the bourgeoisie?. He thought that exceptional circumstances might force
them to go further than they wished, that the establishment of such a government was ?highly improbable?
and that even if it occurred, it would be ?merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the
proletariat?.11

The realisation of this ?highly improbable? alternative in Trotsky?s prediction and then in a manner and
with a result not foreseen by him, does not undermine either the Marxist method or the fundamentals of
Trotskyism. It demands the application of that method to understand these events, developing the
programme as a guide to action for the proletariat in situations unavoidably only dimly foreseen by Trotsky
himself.

The condition which opened the ?Cuban road? to the establishing of a degenerate workers? state was the
continued existence of the USSR and indeed, the proliferation of degenerate workers? states. Without the
political, economic and military aid from the USSR, the Castro government would eventually have gone
down to defeat ? either at the hands of Cuban-US counterrevolution, or at the hands of the Cuban
proletariat led by a Trotskyist vanguard party. The willingness of the Soviet bureaucracy to assist Castro in
avoiding such alternatives was due to the Kremlin?s tactical disagreements with imperialism and its
strategic counter-revolutionary hostility to the seizure of power by the working class.

The desirability of Cuba as a missile base was prompted by the severe disparity in military capability
between the USSR and the USA at the end of the 1950s. The refusal of the US bourgeoisie to discuss
arms limitation talks, despite Soviet concessions on the citing of offensive missiles in NATO countries in
1958, led to the USSR seeking a counter-weight. Actions such as the walk-out of the 1960 summit by
Kruschev signalled not an abandonment of ?peaceful coexistence?, but a search for a greater bargaining
power. The Cuban revolution was just such a political counter-weight. The arms programme of Kennedy on
assuming office in 1960 made this even more imperative. Hence, whilst the Kremlin oligarchy did not plan,
or incite Castro to, the creation of a degenerate workers? state in Cuba (any more than they did in
Yugoslavia, China or Vietnam), they economically and military acquiesced, for their own state interests.

In many instances it can be seen that it was the Castroites themselves who pushed ahead faster than
either the USSR or their agents in Cuba liked. The nationalisations of August 1960 were coolly received by
the PSP. Escalante declared at the 8th Congress of the PSP that the revolution should try to keep the
national bourgeoisie within the revolutionary camp?. Bias Roca goes on record as saying some nationalisations could possibly have been avoided?, and that private enterprise which is not imperialistic is still necessary.?12. While the PSP was trying to maintain its alliance with peace-loving sections of capital, Guevara was declaring at the first Congress of Latin American Youth:

?If I were asked whether our revolution is communist, I would define it as Marxist. Our revolution has discovered by its own methods the paths that Marx pointed out?. 13

The considerable mass base of the Castro regime, the treachery of the Kremlin leaders over the Cuban missiles crisis in October 1962 (the decision to remove the missiles and the offer of United Nations observers in Cuba?both made without the consultation or participation of the Cubans), together with the limited economic aid, predisposed Castro, Guevara and co to a relatively independent foreign policy, especially in the years 1966-68. In this period Castro advocated and Guevara practiced a guerrilla strategy aimed at producing regimes similar to the one in Cuba.

The policy led to sharp clashes with the Latin American Stalinists, and ended in complete fiasco. By 1971-72, this policy was completely abandoned in favour of support for an orthodox popular front in Chile, and a statement of the unique national roads?to be followed in Latin America. From 1972, with Cuba?s entry into Comecon, Cuba came to provide in return for USSR economic aid, an interventionist strike force in Africa. In Angola 1975-76, the Cubans aided the MPLA against South Africa, but also stiffened the MPLA leaders? crack-down on the left nationalists and on working class action. In Ethiopia in 1978, Cuban troops assisted the nationally oppressive Dergue to impose its domination over Eritrea.

In short, the Stalinism that Castro tried to disguise with populism became more and more overt. His recent support for the crackdown on Solidarnosc is entirely consistent with his political trajectory since the early 1960s.

Footnotes
5. H. Thomas, op. cit. p.1199
8. E.Gonzalez, Cuba Under Castro, (Boston 1974) p.102
9. Hispanic American Reports, (June 1962) Vol. XV, No.9
11. L Trotsky, op. cit. p.135
12. H Thomas, op. cit. p.1212
13. Ibid, p.12

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