

"BATISTA'S DILEMMA": from the NEW YORK TIMES archives

Discussion Questions

- How are the authors of both responses to "Batista's Dilemma" *limitations* of origin (think OPCVL)?
- Overall, which response do you agree with more? Why?

BATISTA'S DILEMMA

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pg. 20

BATISTA'S DILEMMA

Matters are going from bad to worse in Cuba and it would be a disservice to the Inter-American System to ignore that fact. President Batista is gradually accumulating all the evils that inevitably follow from the primary evil of destroying a democratic process to install a dictatorship.

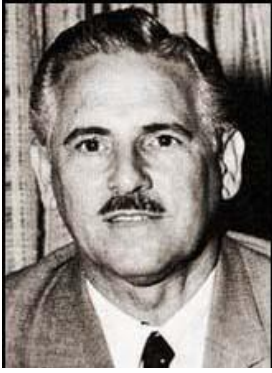
The chain of events is classic in its development. On June 1, 1952, Cuba was to have had a Presidential election. On March 10 General Batista forestalled it with a garrison revolt. He thereupon suspended the Constitution of 1940, dissolved Congress and instituted a dictatorial regime. At first he kept a free press, permitted trade unions to strike, and decreed new elections for Nov. 15, 1953.

As of today there is complete censorship; the Minister of Labor announced on July 20 that the Government will not tolerate any more strikes; the elections have been put off to June, 1954, and a sweeping decree law was published on Aug. 6 which is as tyrannical as any legislation in Latin America. It even has as one of its many pernicious features the same "crime" of *desacato* [disrespect] which President Perón of Argentina has made so notorious. Even if the censorship introduced after the sanguinary uprising in Oriente Province last month were lifted, this "Decree Law 997 on Public Order" would still make freedom of speech, press and radio a mockery.

The recent unsuccessful revolt shows what a dangerous brew has formed beneath the lid on which President Batista is sitting. It therefore follows that he dare not relax his repressive administration, but if he continues his repression of a people as tough and turbulent and individualistic as the Cubans, he is going to stir up worse trouble.

This is the sort of vicious circle that tyranny sets in motion. General Batista establishes a dictatorship which automatically causes a revolutionary reaction. Then, fearing these revolts, he is driven to introduce ever more drastic measures. Meanwhile the public develops its own fears of internal strife. Business stagnates, investments fall off, there is a tendency for capital to flee the country, tourists are discouraged.

So long as the army remains loyal the lid can be held down—although not forever, not with a people like the Cubans. The only safe way out is the constitutional one. If honest elections are held for President and Congress and the verdict of the people is accepted, a peaceful solution of the Cuban dilemma can be imagined. Otherwise there are only too many precedents in Cuba's violent history for what may happen.



Response #1: Carlos Prio Socarras ("Prio"), who was deposed by Batista in a military coup in 1952

Cuba's Desire for Freedom

Suppression Under Present Regime Likened to Soviet Tyranny

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

The Cuban people owe THE NEW YORK TIMES a tribute of gratitude for the recent magnificent editorial on "Batista's Dilemma." The editorial accurately describes Cuba's tragic condition under the dictatorship that overthrew our democratic institutions. It underlines the dictator's own impotence to break the "vicious circle that tyranny sets in motion," which is relentlessly and unavoidably pushing Cuba into the throes of violence, rebellion and economic collapse.

Were it not for the crushing censorship established by Batista, and for the Soviet-type statutory reprisals actually written down in the arbitrary "Decree-Law 997 on Public Order," which you mention in your editorial, you would doubtlessly be receiving thousands of congratulatory messages from Cubans in every walk of life.

Since, however, freedom of opinion has been brutally suppressed by Batista under martial law, Soviet-like regimentation and police brutality, I think it is my duty, as the last Constitutionally elected President of Cuba, to voice the heartfelt gratitude of my people for the stand you have taken in their hour of suffering. Their suffering is as appalling as the fate of any of the unfortunate peoples of Europe who are now held in bondage behind the Iron Curtain of Soviet domination.

Army Support

Your article does great honor to the Cuban people when you say: "So long as the army remains loyal (to Batista) the lid can be held down—although not forever, not with a people like the Cubans." You may rest assured that the Cuban people will in their turn honor the high opinion in which you hold them.

They will show again that they are worthy of the liberty for which they fought so stubbornly for over a hundred years, and of the generous attitude of the American people when they declared through a Joint Resolution of Congress that the Cuban people—then fighting a death-battle against Spain—"are, as of right ought to be, free and independent." That statement, which was sealed in American and Cuban blood in the battlefields of the Spanish-American War, is as true today as at the time it was solemnly pronounced by your Congress in 1898. Cuba is ready to reconquer her liberties at any cost—however frightful the price may be in toil and blood and tears.

But we need, as we did back in 1898, a sympathetic understanding of our plight by the American people. This time it would not be necessary for the American nation to step armed into the conflict. Spiritual aid, such as the one rendered by your editorial, is all that would be required to bring about, with the least possible suffering and calamity, the re-establishment in Cuba of democratic institutions.

Indifference on the part of this country to the plight of the Cuban nation would amount to an abandonment of the democratic heritage which sent its sons to Cuba to fight and die fifty-five years ago around Santiago de Cuba, on the very spot where Cuban blood was recently spilled in an immature but heroic attempt to overthrow Batista's brutal rule.

Precedent for Sacrifice

The brave youths who sacrificed their lives there on that fateful day—many after being taken prisoner, and savagely beaten and tortured—were trying to follow the footsteps of the Americans and the Cubans who stormed San Juan Hill and El Caney on another July morning, with Theodore Roosevelt and Garcia.

And the tyranny which all worthy Cubans are resisting is a thousand times more dangerous to American security than the rule of Spain in Cuba, because through injustice, destitution and despair it breeds, right on the doorstep of the United States, the conditions which Soviet tyranny is now seeking to foment throughout the free world, in order to implant its dogma of class war and false nationalism. And this is in its turn a more effective and fearful weapon than whatever degree of efficiency the Soviets may have attained in the development of the H-bomb.

It is upon those weapons of moral disintegration, more than upon their ability to deliver an H-bomb attack, that the tyrants of the Kremlin are counting in their universal effort against democracy; and the minor tyrants like Batista are—wittingly or unwittingly—their most effective allies in the struggle which has engulfed us all.

CARLOS PRIO SOCARRAS.
Miami, Fla., Aug. 28, 1953.

Repression in Cuba Denied

Respect Affirmed for Freedom of Press
and Speech, Labor's Rights

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

I have read your editorial of Aug. 25 "Batista's Dilemma." Since there appear in the editorial—no doubt as a result of your having been misinformed—certain untrue affirmations, I am compelled to make the following explanations:

Conflicts caused by struggles between labor and political factions compelled the Sub-Secretary of Labor of Cuba to declare that the Government would tolerate no further strikes. However, he explained that he referred to strikes of a politically subversive character—punishable for more than twenty years now by the criminal laws of my country. He likewise explained that legislation provides for the adjustment of lawful strikes and that workers would have all Government guarantees during such strikes.

Your editorial states that the Government has promulgated a new law concerning "contempt," similar to one of President Perón of Argentina. This is untrue. The crime of contempt was not created by the law which you comment upon. Cuba's criminal law, in force since the inauguration of the republic, punished this crime by very serious penalties. The Penal Code of 1936 reduced these penalties, and the new decree law now published by my Government modifies these penalties, making them milder. The courts are authorized to punish the offender held for contempt with only a fine or deprivation of liberty; formerly deprivation of liberty was mandatory.

Censorship Measures

The capacity of Governments temporarily to decree censorship in exceptional cases is a constitutional principle universally accepted. For this reason such measures cannot be considered anti-democratic; much less so when they are rendered by a Government which has given evidence that cannot be denied of its absolute respect for freedom of speech and of the press, as is acknowledged by the same editorial and which is shown by the complete liberty and ample facilities afforded now as always to foreign correspondents for their reports.

On the other hand, the new law does not limit at all the right to the free expression of thought, which is fully recognized by the Constitution by which the present Government is guided. The new law does not go beyond the offering of natural protection to Cuban society in regard to libel and insult, to crimes against the national economy and for the punishment of those who employ publicity for such criminal purposes. Such protection is customary in all democratic countries of the world, of which the great North American nation is an example, where severe laws against libel in general and concerning the solvency of the nation exist, constituting examples worthy of being imitated.

As far as criticism of the Government is concerned, it is not true that there exists any prohibition whatever. On the contrary, the new law declares that such criticism is necessary to the civic life of the nation.

Opposition Resistance

I make no reference whatever to the interpretation of the political situation and the events in the Oriente Province which have been published. But I should like to state some facts which your interpretation does not appear to have taken into consideration. These include the resistance of the opposition to going to the polls, pretending that the Government which was overthrown by popular consent, by the revolution, be restored, in view of its overstepping of power. Such restoration has been pursued by a party through an appeal before the Supreme Court, which has just been refused, recognizing the revolution as the lawful Government of the republic. And restoration has also been attempted, with no popular backing, by financing and giving arms to the authors of the bloody events which took place in the Oriente Province.

The personal records of the instigators and the documents which have been seized show that a great many of such individuals have been sentenced by the courts for varied and numerous common crimes and many of them are known to be active Communists.

ALFREDO HERNANDEZ,
Consul General Minister.
New York, Sept. 9, 1953.