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## The origins of the Cuban revolution

HUGH THOMAS

THE Cuban revolution happened quite quickly; the transformation of society occurred between 1 January 1959 and the end of 1960. The revolution was also comparatively bloodless; though a figure of 20,000 often appears for the number killed by Batista between 1956 and 1958, the dead on both sides in the civil war may have been as few as 2,000.

Various explanations are current for what happened. There are those who maintain that the course of the revolution was dictated by the U.S. Government; had it not been for the mistakes of the State Department and the selfishness of U.S. business interests in Cuba, this theory goes, the Cuban revolution would have remained 'humanist', as Castro proclaimed it in May 1959. But though the American military mission, established between 1950 and 1959, had been comradely with Batista's generals, an embargo on further arms to Batista had been imposed in March 1958 after U.S. grant-in-aid weapons had been used for crushing the Cienfuegas rising of 1957. Afterwards some people in the U.S. Administration thought Castro a communist, others were less certain.

Castro visited Washington in April 1959 and refused an offer of aid. Thereafter Cuban jeers at, and then violent criticisms of, the United States began. The U.S. Administration was quite correct, however, if unimaginative. For a little over a year the U.S. provocations offered to Castro appear only to have been three: the press criticized the trials of Batista 'war criminals'; the Senate Internal Security sub-committee hauled before them the defecting chief of Castro's air force, who announced that Cuba was being taken over by communists; and the Florida authorities allowed both this man and others to fly backwards and forwards to Cuba, sometimes dropping pamphlets, at other times weapons. These incidents must have been irritating to the revolutionary leaders in Cuba, and they must have played into the hands of those who wished to drag the revolution into a more extreme path. It must also have been irritating that the official U.S. reaction to the revolution was not one of exuberance, but rather of studied patience. But it is hard to believe these happenings were the single cause of the startling events of the revolution's first year.

The present Cuban explanation of events is that Cuba, previously a

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semi-colonialist society, was so severely exploited by U.S. and Cuban capitalists that the condition of the working class eventually became intolerable, the tension being especially sharpened under the tyrant Batista (1952–8); Castro's 26th of July Movement and the Communist Party therefore formed the *élite* which led the masses towards a coherent realization of their misery and the country towards the 'objective conditions' for revolution. Yet this explanation is also inadequate. Cuba, although a poor country in many respects, was certainly among the richer countries of Latin America. *Per capita* income reached a figure of \$341 at its highest level in 1947. The average daily salary about the same time for the best-paid sugar worker was \$3.25, which probably would have given him an annual wage (with a six-day week for the five-month sugar harvest) of nearly \$500. This is a small wage, but in many countries in Latin America it would be considered high. Wages apart, however, the general availability of consumer goods, the social services per head, the labour laws, the communications system, literacy rates, all normal criteria indicate that Cuba was among the leading nations of Latin America—to be ranked in terms of development below only Argentina and Uruguay, and perhaps on a level with Chile. Certainly, Cuba had had for two generations before the revolution the highest standard of living of any tropical area in the world. It does not therefore seem to be poverty, any more than North American foolishness, that caused the revolution to take the turn it did.

The difficulty of explaining what happened in Cuba in Marxist terms has led some people to another extreme: they have seen the whole series of events as dictated by the whims of one man. The trouble with this argument is that it really credits Castro with greater powers than any man can singly possess. Instead of describing a monster, this argument creates a god.

The origins of the revolution seem more likely to be found in the fact that Cuban society was not so much under-developed as stagnant: semi-developed perhaps, with some of the characteristics of advanced countries when they enter decline. Cuba was not a country in the depths of poverty, but one extraordinarily frustrated, where opportunities existed for economic and social progress but where these were wasted—and the fact of the waste was evident. The undoubted advances whetted the imagination of the working class, but did not satisfy it. The case of the well-paid sugar worker symbolizes the situation; getting \$3.25 a day for the five months of the harvest, afterwards he could expect to earn nothing. Unused to saving, and perhaps incapable of doing so since he had to pay off debts incurred during the previous dead season, his life collapsed. For half the year he was comparatively well off, able to choose between a quite wide selection of consumer goods; for the rest of the year he lived in resentment, possibly more extreme than if he had been unemployed all the

time, as a large fraction (around one-fifth) of his colleagues in the trade were. About 500,000 persons were in this frustrating position, nearly one-third of the total labour force of about 1.7 million. Nearly all of them were in debt throughout their lives—being disposed for that reason alone to hope for a violent upturn in society, which might declare a moratorium on, or even an annulment of, debts.

### **State of the sugar industry**

The key to Cuban society before the revolution is, in fact, the sugar industry. Sugar-cane is grown quite easily and is therefore an obviously economical source of income for landowners. The cane is cut, hauled, in Cuba's case, to the 160 or so mills—a sort of rural factory—and grinding begins about 1 January every year. The period of activity lasts for about five to six months. From about the start of the first World War up to 1959, Cuba was the world's largest sugar producer, and she is still far the largest exporter of sugar. However, she was, as a producer, overtaken by the Soviet Union in 1959, and sugar production elsewhere has been rapidly catching up. For example, in the three years immediately after the first World War, Cuba produced 24, 24, and 23 per cent of the world's sugar. In 1946, 1947, and 1948, after a heavy dip during the depression, the percentages were still 18, 21, and 21. In 1956, 1957, and 1958, the figures were 11, 13, and 12 per cent. The reasons for this decline were chiefly new and cheaper methods of production in many countries, especially the United States, Western Europe, the U.S.S.R., and India. In the 1950s countries which had never thought of growing sugar before began to do so.

In addition to being the world's largest producer of sugar, Cuba was, for about a century, the major single source of sugar for the United States, and for a time after the Civil War her sole source of sugar. For most of this century up to 1960, Cuba supplied between 40 and 60 per cent of U.S. sugar, with a drop towards 30 per cent and for a time 25 per cent during the 1930s depression. After this unstable period, Cuba secured a part of the U.S. market by a specific quota, allocated annually according to the U.S. Secretary for Agriculture's estimate of U.S. sugar needs. For example, if in the 1950s U.S. domestic producers of sugar-cane and beet produced about 1½ million tons, Hawaii and Puerto Rico might be expected to produce about another million each, the Philippines 500,000, and Cuba 3½ million. In addition if one of these countries fell short of its quota, the deficit would be divided, Cuba sharing in it: in consequence, Cuba's market for sugar could depend partly on conditions in the Philippines. The quota was a great advantage but also a great bondage, and therefore there is a certain logic in the Cuban Revolutionary Government's criticism of its existence in early 1960 and denunciation of its disappearance in August of the same year. The tragedy of the Cuban sugar industry in the years before the revolution is that it was

hard to see how, even with the most effective methods of production, it could expand its share of the world market, or its own production. Both U.S. and world markets were quota-controlled and tariff-protected to the point where expansion was almost forbidden.

One should note, however, that a large percentage of Cuban sugar mills were in fact U.S.-owned. In 1939, this was true of sixty-eight mills out of 158, and these were responsible for 55 per cent of the production; only fifty-six mills were Cuban (the balance being part Spanish, Canadian, British, Dutch, and French). In 1958 there were thirty-six U.S.-owned mills against 121 Cuban, with the U.S. mills producing only 37 per cent of the total. This increasing Cubanization of mill-owning was hardly to be regarded as a victory for nationalism, however, but rather as a recognition that Cuban sugar was no longer such a good investment. U.S. total investment in Cuba in 1958 was about \$900 m., considerably less in real terms than the figure for 1930. Of course, it was natural for Cubans to denounce the high percentage of foreign ownership, throughout this long period, of the staple product of the country, especially when other sections of the commanding heights of industry were also U.S.-owned; these included almost all public utilities in Havana, railways, and banks, which had been largely U.S.- and Canadian-owned since the bank crash in the 1920s. However, there were some advantages in this: foreign ownership could help to keep the door open to new ideas in technology and research; some of the best schools in Cuba seem to have been run by Americans, some being financed as a public obligation, others privately; American firms were also probably less given to tax evasion than Cuban. The overall effect of U.S. ownership of such prosperity as there was in Cuba was that the Americans could not avoid being blamed when things went wrong with the economy; and the economy had been in crisis for as long as anyone could remember.

In fact, Cuban sugar before the revolution was going through the classic experience of a great industry in decline. Cuban sugar-growers never sought to make the best use of their ground, the yield per acre, for instance, being far below that of Puerto Rico or Hawaii. Irrigation was not only rare but not apparently even planned, though it was obvious that it gave a higher yield. There was very little research as to the type of cane best suited for Cuban conditions: the agricultural research centre at Sagua la Grande was hardly able to carry on, since even the meagre earmarked funds often 'disappeared' before they got there.

Further, the industry was hamstrung by bureaucratic control. The opening of grinding each year was announced by presidential decree. The Sugar Stabilization Institute estimated the crop to be harvested and divided it among the different markets—the U.S. quota, the world market, domestic consumption, the special reserve. The sugar output of each mill, according to grinding capacity, was also divided among these

four markets. On top of this, there were governmental regulations for freight rates, size of bags, port of shipment, official average price for settling with non-mill growers of cane, and so on. An elaborate pattern of control which almost anticipated nationalization had thus been set up.

Despite the disarray, however, sugar continued to dominate the economy. It did so to such an extent that it seemed as though every financial commitment made in Cuba—no matter how well the risk appeared to be spread—depended in fact on the fate of sugar. The whole economy fluctuated to the rhythm of the sugar harvest. Two-thirds of the annual pay-rolls for even tobacco workers (whose job was year-round) was paid during the six months of the harvest; manufacturers, even manufacturers of shoes, found that the only economic period for sales was in the sugar harvest; 80 per cent of the tonnage on, and over 50 per cent of the revenues from, the *public* railways arose from the hauling of cane, and the mills themselves operated a railway mileage almost double that of the public railways.

The country was also at the mercy of world sugar demand. Changes of a percentage of a cent in the world market price of sugar not only meant the creation or ruin of fortunes in Cuba, but also indicated whether ordinary life was intolerable or acceptable. Assuming exports of 3 million tons, a 1 cent variation up or down in the price of sugar could make a difference of \$60 m. in Cuban receipts; and world market prices of sugar have varied extraordinarily. Between 1920 and 1958, Cuban production reached an approximate total of 4 million tons eight times: the value got for this amount varied between \$1,000 m. and \$200 m. Cuba was in fact a kind of litmus paper on which every world depression, war, or crisis would inevitably be marked. For example, in 1950 under the impact of post-Korean rearmament, the whole of Cuba's molasses from the 1951 harvest was sold at 20 cents a gallon, instead of 5 cents a gallon a year earlier. It was unlikely, therefore, that Cuban investors could be expected to back enterprises which, though helping perhaps to diversify agriculture, could not possibly be so rewarding as sugar, and whose whole success or failure in Cuba would in fact anyway be determined by sugar. Large landowners were already concerned with sugar: the cultivation of other crops was thus left to those with the most difficult capital problems. What technological knowledge there was in Cuba was primarily vested in the sugar industry. For the eager investor, assuming that he wanted to invest in Cuba rather than in New York, there were very few stocks; most were family businesses, where outsiders even with money were not wanted. There was, as a result, extraordinarily high liquidity in the country, the banks in 1950 having 58 per cent coverage of their accounts.

Credit was almost impossible to obtain unless the proposed project was in some way connected with sugar, yet investment in new industries (perhaps making use of sugar by-products) and diversification of

agriculture were the only way forward. This blockage could be observed throughout the economy. Education, health, social services of all kinds, public services, commerce, departments of agriculture other than sugar, trade unions, all gave the impression of being not only incapable of development, but also afraid of it. The Cuban educational system had deteriorated between 1925 and 1959. A smaller proportion of school-age children were enrolled in Cuban schools in 1950 than in 1925, and the loss of pupils between the first and eighth grades, during the course of education, was considerably higher in 1950 than in 1925. The number of hours' instruction had even been cut. There was a disproportionate increase of private-school enrolment—which inevitably intensified social class differences. The illiteracy rate actually rose between 1931 and 1953.

The continued failure, not simply of the Batista Government, but of the preceding Governments of the Authentic Revolutionary Party, to take action when in fact it was government alone which could create the climate for economic change naturally created disillusion. By 1950 it was evident that another period of post-war prosperity was about to end, with no advantage having been taken of the relative prosperity to 'do something' about the economy. What precisely had to be done was unclear. Diversification of agriculture was a phrase which had been on everyone's lips for decades. A World Bank Mission prophesied in 1950 that unless the vicious hold sugar had on the economy was broken 'all efforts at economic betterment will be severely handicapped. . . Cubans of all classes will suffer by lower incomes and perhaps even by internal dangers to their cherished political freedoms.' In the latter days of the Prío Government, that is, 1950–2, there was a widespread feeling of urgency and of hope. The emergence of the *Ortodoxo* Party, which promised a new economic deal as well as freedom from corruption, was a sign of this. The founding of the Central Bank, which from the start was a model of honest administration, was another sign. It was this mood of positive hope that Batista thwarted by his second *coup d'état* of 1952. And the ease with which Prío, the previous President, and his *auténtico* followers gave way without fighting seemed perhaps most disillusioning of all. It was not that Batista was, or was thought to be, a specially cruel dictator from his previous record of power: personally he appears to have been popular with ordinary Cubans. The sin of Batista was to thwart the high hopes of a new generation by a return, or rather a continuance, of a cynical and short-sighted regime.

Other Latin American economies were, and are, as unstable and as unbalanced as that of Cuba: and the central cause of the trouble, the monocrop, appears elsewhere. At the same time, none of the countries whose economies are to a lesser or greater extent monocultures actually depend on sugar, whose price has always been highly volatile.

There were, however, other factors which caused the Cuban neurosis

to be articulated eventually in the most extreme way: these were political and institutional. The institutions of Cuba in 1958–9 were amazingly weak. The large middle and upper class had failed to create any effective defence against the demands of what may be taken to be the majority, when those demands came at last to be clearly expressed, as they did in January 1959, by a group self-confessedly middle class in origin.

### **Weakness of the traditional conservative forces**

Perhaps the first and strongest factor working in favour of the revolution was the absence of any regionally based obstacles. Cuba is a small country with a traditionally centralized administration. There is no problem of an Indian population and though the Negro and mulatto minority (perhaps 30 per cent) is most numerous in Oriente there are large Negro and mulatto minorities elsewhere. In the early years of the Republic there did seem a possibility that the local bosses found elsewhere in Latin America would emerge to withstand the carrying out of legislation: President Gómez was, for instance, undoubtedly the political boss of Santa Clara. But these bosses did not develop as politically important after the 1920s. A possible reason for this was the survival, even among the violent disputes of the early days of the Republic, of a general sense of Cuban identity forged during the generations of struggle against Spain—after all, no Spanish colony took so long to become independent as Cuba. Possibly the central highway, constructed in the late 1920s, played a part in making it easy for potential local chiefs to get fast to Havana, where so much patronage and cash could be got so easily—and thence on to Miami and the Florida real estate agencies. The proximity to America, the degree of U.S. interest and investment in Cuba, was perhaps another factor limiting regional feeling. And, in January 1959, the 26th of July Movement was the effective boss of the most likely rebellious area, Oriente.

To the absence of a regional restraining force was added the weakness of two other traditional conservative forces—the Church and the regular army. The Cuban Church has never really found an identity. Churches are few in Cuba. The Church played no part in the development of the Cuban spirit of independence, which instead was nurtured by free-masonry and rationalism. Few priests before 1898 were Cuban born, and even after 1900 the majority continued to come from Spain. Church and State had been separated in the Constitution of 1901, State subsidies also disappearing. Later on, the Church made something of a comeback, a large number of Catholic schools being founded in the 1930s; in 1946 a Catholic university was also founded. In the 1950s this educational emphasis led to the appearance of a number of almost radical Catholic groups which opposed Batista. In Oriente there was, in the early stages, some degree of relationship between the 26th of July Movement and the



Church—chiefly since it was widely known that the intervention of the Archbishop of Santiago had helped to save Castro's life after the Moncada attack in 1953. The leading Catholic and conservative newspaper the *Diario de la Marina* was, on the other hand, among the first to suggest that the 26th of July Movement was communist.

After Castro got to power, the Church made no serious move to gather middle-class opposition, and it was only in 1960, when it was too late, that a series of sporadic pastoral letters appeared denouncing communism. All church schools and convents were closed by the end of 1961, and most foreign priests and secular clergy (i.e. the majority) were expelled. Since then there has been a surprising calm in the relations between Church and State, presumably by mutual consent; the Church in Cuba has, in short, never been a serious factor in the situation.

The regular army, the second traditional opponent of revolutionary regimes, was even less of an obstacle. By early 1959 it had in fact ceased to exist—not simply due to its demoralization in 1957 and 1958, when fighting Castro in the Sierra, but also to the repeated divisions which had weakened its *esprit de corps* during preceding years. Founded officially in 1909, the Cuban army derived its first leaders from the amateur generals of the war of independence. From the start it was political—all the first officers being Gómez liberals, later replaced by Menocalistas etc. By the early 1930s an officer corps of a kind had emerged, paradoxically from among those opposing President Machado and his Chief of Staff, General Herrera. Nevertheless, even they found the amateur spirit difficult to combat. Few people took the army seriously, for most Cubans, remarked Adam y Silva, an officer at this time, think that they themselves can do anything provided they possess a rifle and a *machete*. It was this new professional group who provided the *coup de grâce* to Machado in August 1933, but their morale was not high. Within a month, the entire officer corps had given way before their own NCOs led by Batista, a collapse perhaps made easier by the fact that, even before the 'sergeants' revolt', 56 per cent of the officers had previously risen from the ranks. However that may be, probably not more than six officers survived as officers; thereafter, till 1944, the army was led by the ex-NCOs of 1933.

Afterwards, once again, in the administrations of Grau and Prío, a new non-political officer corps began to emerge. But, by basing itself essentially on the Constitution of 1940, this group could hardly avoid taking a political stand sooner or later. By 1951, the '*puros*', as the more dedicated of them began to be known, were found associated with the *Ortodoxo* Party. President Prío seems to have feared a *coup* by them more than one by Batista and his old cronies of 1933. After Batista's *coup*, the *puros* passed automatically into opposition, some still in the army, others outside. There was conspiracy upon conspiracy; hundreds of officers were arrested; by 1959 most *puros* were either unconnected with the army or

(temporary) backers of Castro. The Batista officers, some being men made by him between 1933 and 1944, others being new recruits of the old character, dominated the army. When Castro came to power, he caused an immediate purge. Batista and the top group had fled, but many middle-rank officers were captured and tried for war crimes. Several hundred were shot, several hundred more condemned to imprisonment. Officers fortunate enough not to be tried were nearly all dismissed—though a few, with proved pro-rebel sympathies, were taken into the new service. All 25,000 or so of the rank and file in Batista's army seem also to have been purged.

In 1959 therefore there was no army in existence other than the rebel army. It was with its officers that Castro was to have some of his greatest trouble, but they were unable at any time to bring themselves to make a real stand. They had fought to bring Castro to power, and their whole careers depended on him. They wanted a revolution, just as he did, and they found it hard to define where they differed from him. Huber Matos, military governor of Camagüey, declared himself in October 1959 an anti-communist, and his officers stood by him; but he merely resigned, he did not, could not perhaps, take action. As for the remains of the *puros*, their leaders, such as Barquín, were sent abroad as military attachés; they too were later to resign, but not to act. The rebel army meantime was rapidly transformed under its new commander, Raúl Castro, into a new but, as in the past, primarily political force—this time a communist one—which never sank below 30,000 men. Within two years it was in fact transformed into an *élite* professional group which dominated a far larger part-time militia one.

#### **Weakness of the trade unions and the civil service**

The trade unions also could offer no serious opposition to the revolution; yet the revolution destroyed them, or anyway converted them into departments of the Ministry of Labour. Cuban labour began to be effectively organized under the shadow of the depression and the Machado dictatorship. Batista enabled the communists to form and dominate a congress of unions in the late 1930s—in return for communist electoral support for himself. Between 1938 and 1947 the unions were, if not structurally, at least in effect a section of the Ministry of Labour. The rather cynical alliance of Batista and the communists (till 1944) was responsible for some enlightened labour legislation: a minimum wage; minimum vacation of one month; forty-four-hour week and forty-eight-hour-week pay; nine days of annual sick leave; security of tenure except on proof of one of fourteen specific causes for dismissal, and so on—all admirable measures in themselves, enshrined in the 1940 Constitution, and all in effect till 1959. These measures were in fact so favourable to labour in the late 1940s and early 1950s as undeniably to hinder the

economic development of Cuba; labour opposition to mechanization, for example, seems to have been a serious handicap. The general impression to be gained from the labour scene just before Batista's second *coup* was less that of solid benefits won by a progressive working class than of a number of isolated redoubts, held with great difficulty and with continuous casualties, in a predominantly hostile territory.

However, on to the essentially fossilized condition of labour was imposed, from the mid-1940s onwards, a struggle for control between the communists and the *auténticos* led by Eusebio Mujal, himself an ex-communist. From 1944 on, Mujal had the overt support of the Government of Grau San Martín. Grau's Minister of Labour, Carlos Prío, and Mujal finally secured the communist defeat, at what was both internally and internationally the most favourable point in 1947—their methods being a mixture of political skill, bribery, and gangsterism. Thereafter from 1947 till 1958 Mujal was the boss of Cuba's unions. It made almost no difference to him when Prío was overthrown by Batista in 1952: had Prío made a fight of it, Mujal might have backed him; he did not and Mujal reached a 'non-political' deal with Batista. From then till 1958 the unions were much as they had been during Batista's first administration, with the difference that the leaders were not communists but *ex-auténticos*. Gangsterism and bribery remained an essential characteristic of union activity. Associated with Batista as being responsible for the regime's ability to survive, Mujal shared his fate—a prosperous exile.

Cuban labour remained organized in early 1959 in a surprisingly similar way to that in late 1958, but largely bereft of leaders. Mujal's successor, David Salvador, Secretary-General of what now became the Revolutionary Confederation of Cuban Labour, had been a leader of the Havana underground in the struggle against Batista. He was not a communist, and nor were the majority of the 3,800 victors in the trade union elections of May 1959. But by the time of the CTC Congress in December, most communist leaders of the past had reappeared. Although overt communists were kept off the executive committee of the CTC, fellow-travellers got on—fellow-travellers who were primarily opportunists, whose motives can only be guessed at, but some of whom certainly seemed willing to collaborate with any Government, Batistiano or Castroist. Conrado Bécquer, the sugar workers' Secretary-General, has much the same position today as he had in the early 1950s. The explanation must be that the idea of a free trade union, separate not only from the employer but also from the Government, had not existed since 1939 or even before. By Cuban standards, a trade union official is a government official, come what may. Bécquer could well be Secretary-General of the sugar workers under Miro Cardona or Manuel Ray.

It was equally hopeless to expect the civil service to be a restraining factor in the revolution, although, with nearly 200,000 employees, it

was the second largest source of employment, ranking after the sugar workers. Despite the passage of numerous laws, starting in 1908 under the Magoon administration, no Government was able to depend on a reliable civil service. With the exception of the National Bank, during the short period from its inception in 1949 to the Batista *coup*, all departments of state were regarded as the legitimate spoils of political victors. Of course, in this Cuba was no different from other countries. But in few countries of a comparable degree of wealth was the absence of an administrative career in government so conspicuous. In some Ministries, employees never seem to have appeared except to collect pay; the absence of responsibility was possibly most marked in the Ministry of Education. Also, since the salary scale was low, there was every incentive for employees of all grades to dip their hands in the government till, as their political masters did. Since governmental and non-governmental pension funds, which were lodged with the Treasury, had been used by the Grau Government to help pay other lavish but unspecified government expenses, it was very difficult after 1947 to allow any employee to retire. Many people thought that in fact 30,000–40,000 government employees were really pensioners. Thus government employment was a kind of social assistance.

The scandal of the old bureaucracy is certainly a reason why, after the victory of the 26th of July Movement in 1959, the idea of a total break with the past seemed so attractive. The word government had been debased for so long: not only the old bureaucracy but the old political parties were widely and with justice regarded as organizations for the private distribution of public funds. Who in 1959, even after seven years of Batista, had really forgotten the scandal of Grau's schoolteachers; or of Grau's Minister of Education, Alemán, who had arrived suddenly one day in Miami with was it \$10 m. or was it \$20 m. in cash in a suitcase? In what way was Batista's cheating in the State lottery worse than Prío's? It was all very well to return to the Constitution of 1940: but how far had it worked between 1940 and 1952? It had in many instances merely laid down general principles; the subsequent legislation had never been carried out to implement it.

For example, the Constitution provided that municipalities should construct and maintain public works. They could borrow money to finance such undertakings, provided they asked the proper authority. But this authority, the Tribunal of Accounts, was not set up till ten years after the Constitution. There were many similar examples. Some of the best-intentioned sections of the Constitution were in fact a little absurd, such as the provision in Article 52 that the annual salary of a primary school-teacher should never be less than a millionth part of the national budget. At the same time, not many people, even sincere democrats, could summon up enthusiasm for the 1940 Constitution, since it had been estab-

lished with the backing of Batista and the communists. And at a deeper level, there was a genuine doubt among many in Cuba in 1958–9 about the structure of previous Cuban Constitutions ever since independence. Batista's police were certainly bloody, but the old days of gangsterism under the democratic rule of Grau were hardly much better. There was a time, for instance, in 1947, when three separate political gangster groups were fighting each other in the streets of Havana, each being separately backed by different divisions of the police, whose chiefs had been specifically appointed by the President to balance them off.

### Revolutionary tradition

Although Castro did not come to power with a real party organization, or even a real political plan, he nevertheless did have behind him a real revolutionary tradition, a tradition which was firmly rooted in the previous sixty years of Cuban politics, almost the whole of which had been passed in perpetual crisis. This tradition had been most recently expressed among the *Ortodoxo* Party founded by Eddy Chibas and to which Castro himself had belonged until about 1955. Before the *ortodoxos* there had been the *auténticos*, who had provided the Governments of Grau and Prío from 1944 to 1952, and who also had promised many things when they were young, before they had come to power—in the 'heroic' days of the students' Directorate, fighting first against Machado and then latterly against Batista. Batista himself had come in in September 1933, promising everything and perhaps even meaning it for a while. Before him Machado had been thought of at first as the man the young republic had been waiting for—'almost "apollo-like"', someone had written in a French review. And long before that, in 1895–8, during the War of Liberation, the promises had been extremely full and glowing. To these recurrent waves of enthusiasm, most of them nationalistic and anti-American, most of them radical, each one of them more vigorous, more extreme than the last, Castro was the logical heir.

In 1959 the enthusiasm and the hopes for the revolution were greater than ever before, specifically because they had been deceived so often before. The pattern of elation and betrayal is a familiar one in Cuba (it is to be found even in Miami today), though it is surprising that so many betrayals should not provoke cynicism. All the time between 1902 and 1959, Cubans were trying to prove themselves worthy of the heroic figures of the War of Independence—Martí, Gómez, or Maceo. Efforts were made, understandably, necessarily perhaps, by Castro to make himself, Camilo Cienfuegos, and others the equals of the heroes of the past. The men of 1959 were undoubtedly in many cases the real sons of the men who made the revolution in 1933. Castro was to do the things that many people had been talking about before. Many moderately middle-class Cubans suspected, without much economic knowledge, that the only way

out of the chronic sugar crisis, the only way to diversify agriculture, was to embark on very radical measures: to nationalize American property and to force a break in commercial relations with the United States.

Amateur Marxism was a strong force on the left wing of the *Ortodoxo* Party in the early 1950s, though it is now proving an illusion to suppose that even Marxist-Leninism can bring a swift diversification of agriculture. One can see how the illusion nevertheless became widespread, how anyone who seemed likely to realize it was certain of backing, regardless of whether he trampled on formal democracy. There can be only one reason why the moderates in the Cuban Cabinet of 1959—the admirable professional and liberal persons who now perhaps back Manuel Ray and argue that Castro has betrayed the revolution—failed to unite and resist Castro, backed by the considerable strength of the Cuban middle class: the reason is surely that they half felt all the time that, given the betrayal of so many previous revolutions, Castro was right. Many moderates after all did stay in Cuba, and many are still there.

What of the communists? They have never dictated events, but merely profited from opportunities offered to them. Founded in 1925, their greatest figure was undoubtedly their first leader Mella, the glittering student of the generation of 1922. He was murdered in 1929 in Mexico by either Machado or his own communist friends. Thereafter the Communist Party progressed from internal splits to collaboration with Batista and Grau San Martín, with various changes of name and also of policy, though rarely of leadership after 1933. It was overcome with surprising ease by Prío and Mujal in 1947. The communists got 117,000 votes in the presidential elections of 1944, but they were by that time in a curious position, being less a party of revolution than one which had a great deal to lose, almost conservative in their reactions in fact. Thereafter their influence waned, throughout the intermediate period between then and the Castro civil war, until mid-1958 when, after some difficulty, they established a working alliance with Castro, whom they had previously dismissed as a '*putschista*'. Since then, they have, of course, come into their own in many respects, if not quite absolutely; but their role in the origins of the Cuban revolution seems to have been small.

To sum up: the origins of the Cuban revolution must be sought in the state of the Cuban sugar industry. Similar conditions may exist in other countries of Latin America, in respect of other crops; these have hitherto been less pronounced. Even although other revolutions in the area may in fact be equally due, they have been hindered by the strength of institutions or regional habits, which in Cuba, for historical reasons, were especially weak. Finally, the Cuban revolution of 1959, far from being an isolated event, was the culmination of a long series of thwarted revolutions.