



Cuba?the final domino?

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A small island nation of ten million people, Castro's Cuba has long been used to hostile encirclement. But as the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) prepares for its Fourth Congress this year, the country can rarely, if ever, have been more isolated.

The winds of popular revolt have even swept through that last bastion of Stalinist orthodoxy in Eastern Europe?Albania. But Cuba under Castro has set its face against the historic upheavals occurring an ocean and a continent away.

At the end of 1989, faced with the collapse of Cuba's closest allies in the Eastern Bloc, Fidel Castro made some of his most unyielding statements yet as to his commitment to defending 'socialism' in Cuba. In his new year message to the Cuban people he said that the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) would not deviate from the 'socialist path' and called on Cubans to 'defend the ideological and military trenches of the revolution'.

In a clear scathing reference to glasnost in Eastern Europe and the USSR, Castro declared that the revolution could not be defended by 'insulting socialism, destroying its values, discrediting the party, demoralising the vanguard and renouncing its leading role.'¹ In February 1990, defying friend and foe alike, he insisted to Cuban trade unionists that 'there can be no doubt that unity around the revolutionary ideas . . . of socialism and communism will be upheld and defended at any price.'²

Characterising Castro as the 'last of the dinosaurs', the US administration has been confidently predicting that Castro's regime will quickly follow the fate of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and General Noriega's regime in Panama. While last year in Cuba banners and posters sprouted declaring for 'Socialism or Death', in Miami bumper stickers optimistically declared 'Next Christmas in Havana'.

Although Gorbachev too may have shaken his head in disbelief at the latest turn of events in Cuba, many Stalinists and anti-imperialists?especially in Latin America?have seen the Cuban stand as one of the few positive developments in an otherwise disastrous period. Gorbachev is regarded, correctly, as the architect of a foreign and domestic policy which capitulates to imperialism and weakens the struggle against it. Castroism has refurbished its image as one of the last bastions of socialism and of support for the anti-imperialist movements.

Nevertheless, the pride is tempered with fear. Is Cuba not 'out on a limb', many ask? Surely, it is only a matter of time before this vulnerable little island is crushed under the heel of the Colossus of the North? Many well-wishers of Cuba are only too aware that the survival of the Castro regime rests in the hands of an increasingly fickle and craven Soviet bureaucracy.

Trotskyists too are concerned for the fate of the Cuban revolution. The gains made by the Cuban masses since 1959 are clear to see for anyone not blinded by hatred of the regime. Living standards have improved considerably. Illiteracy was almost eliminated in the 1970s. In the same decade health care improved dramatically: Cuba's mortality rate per 10,000 live births was halved between 1970 and 1980. Life expectancy (72.5 years) has surpassed that of the USA.

In 1982 even a Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress was forced to admit in 1982 that Cuba had achieved:

? . . . a highly egalitarian redistribution of income that has eliminated almost all malnutrition, particularly among

children, and a national health programme that is superior in the Third World and rivals that of numerous developed countries.³

But the threat to these gains does not just lie outside Cuba. The very policies of the Castro leadership have for decades blocked the road to the development of these gains in the direction of socialism; now they threaten the very survival of the gains themselves.

The origins of the current crisis

The Third Party Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1986 met in an atmosphere of crisis. The Cuban economy was stagnant. The chief theme of the Congress was how to reverse the situation. Between its first and second sessions, held in February and December 1986 respectively, Castro launched the 'Rectification Process'. This policy has meant that the party has strengthened its grip on the central economic levers and is using them to cut living standards and intensify labour discipline. What led to this desperate move?

In the 1960s deep divisions existed in the leadership of what had become a Cuban Stalinist party, the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (ORI).⁴ This organisation was made up of the July 26th Movement (J26M), which had led the guerilla struggle against Batista, and the old Stalinist party, the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). The different traditions of these components of the ORI, and their different histories, were reflected in their approach to economic policy. Both factions were struggling with the same problem. The revolution of 1959 had provoked a serious clash with the USA. In the course of this struggle the petit bourgeois leadership of the J26M around Fidel and Raul Castro broke with their bourgeois allies and expropriated the major imperialist and Cuban industries.⁵

Survival depended on the economic support of the Soviet Bloc, especially the USSR. In its most significant step the USSR stepped in and replaced the USA as the major buyer of Cuban sugar. To ensure continued support for this new foreign policy and remove internal opposition to it, Castro's forces remodelled the economy along non-capitalist lines.

But these measures were not implemented by the democratic organisations of the Cuban workers. The J26M and the PSP had made this impossible by systematically repressing all semblance of workers' control and democracy. Instead, Castro relied on the ORI and the increasingly bureaucratized trade union movement to force through the new economic plans.

For decades Cuba had been tied to agricultural production—especially sugar—for the US market. Castro initially sought to diversify the economy. But his attempt to develop industries which could produce the goods previously imported from the USA was quickly abandoned in favour of a plan which emphasised traditional agricultural production.

The government soon realised that a tiny island like Cuba would have to play to its inherited economic strengths within a wider dependence on the Soviet Bloc. This plan was encouraged by the USSR which offered a stable market for Cuban agricultural produce at prices above those of the world market.

How much dependence on the USSR?

A captive Soviet market could not entirely diminish the impact of the US economic blockade. To alleviate this pressure more and more economic aid from the USSR was required. Events such as Khrushchev's October 1961 capitulation to the USA's demands to remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba—without reference to the Cuban leadership—left the Castroites deeply suspicious of the wisdom of this dependence.

One wing of the Cuban leadership around Che Guevara attempted to minimise the scope of external economic assistance by emphasising the role of 'moral incentives' and 'socialist consciousness' among the workers. State enterprises would operate as branches of a centralised economy, their efficiency no longer measured by their 'profitability'.

Productivity would be ensured by a continuing socialist enthusiasm for work, by a strong identification with the fate of

the factory or farm, and inspired by a vision of the society to be built. Voluntary labour and shock 'production brigades' figured very heavily in drives to fulfil production targets.

Another wing, largely around the old PSP cadre, emphasised the necessity of market incentives for individual enterprises and supported a degree of decentralised decision making. Modelling themselves on the reforms introduced under Khrushchev they argued for tangible incentives to increase productivity and to stimulate the private market in parts of the economy; in short, a Cuban version of 'market socialism'.

By 1965 Castro, who had initially stayed aloof from the argument, came down in favour of a more centralised and voluntarist approach. He declared that by 1970 Cuba would produce a 10 million tonne sugar harvest, over double the output of 1964. Given the favourable buying price guaranteed by the USSR, the prize for achieving such an ambitious goal was a dramatically boosted Cuban economy which could have used the increased foreign exchange to lessen its dependency on the USSR.

To pursue this target Castro and his circle tightened their grip on central economic decision making. They circumnavigated the national planning agency, JUCEPLAN, with their own 'Special Plans' to try and speed up production and circumvent bureaucratic bottlenecks. In the spring of 1968 the so-called 'Revolutionary Offensive' was launched, taking into public ownership virtually all the small businesses such as bars, restaurants and street food outlets, some 56,000 in all.

The 'new line' in the economy was an unmitigated disaster. In 1969 the sugar harvest was 4.5 million tonnes instead of the 9 million planned. In 1970 a huge concentration of resources on sugar to fulfil the plan resulted in the biggest harvest ever 8.5 million tonnes but only at an enormous cost to the rest of the economy. In a self-critical speech delivered on 26 July 1970 Castro pointed out some of the costs: milk output down 25%, steel bars down 38%, cement down 23%, fertilisers down 32%, tires down 50% and so on. The failure to reach the 10 million tonne harvest turned out to be a watershed in Cuba's economic development.

The 'left turn' in the economy was reflected in the Castroites' foreign policy. From the beginning of the creation of a degenerate workers' state in Cuba, Castro had been determined to have good relations with the bourgeois governments of Latin America (e.g. Brazil). But under the pressure of the US blockade Cuba began to support armed 'focos' in some of these countries.

This was never a revolutionary socialist strategy but rather an armed continuation of Castro's popular front policy. Castro never called for workers' self-organisation or for the arming of the masses. On the contrary, he sponsored petit bourgeois movements which acted in a self-appointed manner on behalf of the exploited and oppressed.

The Cubans' support for guerilla struggle in Latin America against the line of the official CPs became increasingly open from the end of 1965. The newly founded Cuban Communist Party, launched in April 1965, hosted the Tricontinental Conference in Havana at the start of 1966. Much to Moscow's disgust many guerillaist groups were given credentials, and Castro gathered many of the Latin American delegates to plan the launch of the Organisation of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS).

Castro launched a vicious anti-Trotskyist attack at the Havana conference. This was not surprising given his suppression of Posadas' 'Trotskyist' POR. What was more surprising was the open sympathy shown for OLAS, and even a desire to enter it, by other Latin American 'Trotskyists'.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) unconditionally supported Castro in this turn; Nahuel Moreno⁶ proclaimed himself a Castroite and said his objective was to create united Castroite parties throughout Latin America. In Bolivia, where Guevara was operating a doomed guerilla foco after he left Cuba in 1965, Guillermo Lora,⁷ leader of the 'Trotskyist' organisation, the POR, claimed that this foco was the vanguard of the Bolivian revolution.

Castro, needless to say, did not think in these terms. He envisaged OLAS as the organising centre for guerilla struggles in Latin America, in order to strengthen his diplomatic hand. Castro supported the guerilla split from the Venezuelan

CP in 1966.

Yet this attempt to break out of Cuba's isolation by 'exporting' revolution to Latin America, even if it meant attacking the Latin American CPs and alienating Moscow, ended in failure. After Guevara's death in Bolivia in 1967 the 'left turn' in foreign policy came to an abrupt end.

The disasters in Latin America quickly led to a turn to the right in foreign policy and rapprochement with the USSR. The Cubans supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and backed up their support for the Allende Popular Front in Chile and the left nationalist military dictatorships of Torenz in Bolivia and Velazco in Peru by calling on workers not to strike against these regimes.

The turn to the Soviet model

The 'leftist' economic policy continued for two more years. A right shift occurred when the 1970 economic debacle led to a dramatic turn towards the Soviet economic model and system of planning. In December 1970 a Cuban-Soviet Commission of Economic, Scientific and Technical Collaboration was created. This led the way in the restructuring and development of the Cuban bureaucratic apparatus under the guiding hand of the Soviet bureaucracy. The numbers of Soviet technicians increased dramatically; JUCEPLAN the central planning agency was upgraded in importance, the 'Special Plans' disappeared and 'voluntary labour' was no longer given an important place in the economy.

In mid-1972 Cuba became a full member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). At the end of the year the Kremlin agreed to postpone all payments of interest and principal on Cuba's considerable debts to the USSR until 1986-2011. At the end of 1973 the moribund CTC trade union organisation was revived. At its first congress for six years the CTC dutifully endorsed the principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his work'. The Stalinist translation of this meant a turn towards material incentives and privileges for chosen groups of workers acting as transmission belts into the working class for the new party line.

By 1973 JUCEPLAN was in a position to present the first fully-fledged Five Year Plan (1973-1980). A new 'System of Economic Management and Planning' (SDPE) was to be introduced in the second half of the decade. This was a system of planning modelled on the 1965 Soviet economic reforms, the major features of which included the decentralisation of many management functions at both national and local level, financial accountability and autonomy for state enterprises, and reliance on material incentives (and hence inequality of incomes) to increase production.

This greater integration into the economic orbit of the USSR and COMECON helps to explain how Cuba managed to take so many strides forward in the 1970s and early 1980s compared to the rest of Latin America. It exported sugar at inflated prices and imported oil at reduced prices. This enabled it to amass hard currency by re-selling excess oil.

Direct aid and loans were made on top of these subsidies. By 1977 Cuba received approximately \$10 billion in assistance from Moscow, of which about half had to be repaid. In June 1989 the Soviet Prime Minister, Nicolai Ryzhkov, announced that Cuba's debt to the USSR had reached \$34 billion. And this figure does not include the aid and trade with the rest of Eastern Europe.

While it is true that much of this aid was in the form of poor quality industrial goods—which as the Cubans are not slow to point out would be difficult to 'sell' elsewhere—the dependence of Cuba on aid and subsidised trade with the Soviet Bloc is dramatic. It is an Achilles heel of the Cuban revolution which is being dangerously exposed by the USSR's perestroika.

Castro's bureaucratic dictatorship

Alongside these changes in the economy went changes in the state structure itself. Here we have to destroy a persistent myth peddled by 'Trotskyist' fellow-travellers of the Castro regime. For example, one of the US sections of the USFI recently claimed that:

? . . the Cuban leadership is not Stalinist. While bureaucratic deformations exist inside the Cuban workers' state, they have not crystallised to the point that a distinct bureaucratic caste has arisen whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the Cuban people.?

Bewitched by the myriad forms of popular consultation inside Cuba, many on the left have taken this view. It is false. The Castro leadership does not yet suffer from the same crisis of legitimacy that dogged the Eastern European regimes, which had been imposed at bayonet point. But the Cuban workers have no more real political power than the Bulgarians or the Albanians.

The Cuban Communist Party has built and refined its monopoly of power over many years. The long-postponed first congress of the CCP met in 1975, ten years after the Party was founded. The CCP upgraded its direct involvement at almost all levels of the country's administration, and its role was gradually changed to that of supervision and control. A 'Socialist Constitution', drafted in early 1975 and 'discussed' throughout Cuba, was adopted by the congress.

The legislative body of the state, the equivalent of the Supreme Soviet in the USSR, was declared the 'National Assembly of People's Power', while 'Organs of People's Power' were established at a local and provincial level. The only thing these organs lacked was any semblance of real power!

The only popular vote is for municipal candidates to the Assembly. In 1984 about three-quarters of these were CCP members. As if this was not enough, to ensure conformity with Fidel's line, no opposition parties or campaigning are allowed, and the CCP has to approve all the candidates for the National Assembly that emerge from this first round of voting. Delegates to the Assembly are elected only by the successful municipal candidates. It is hardly surprising to find that in the National Assembly, votes on specific measures are invariably unanimous. In the local bodies the workers are only allowed to raise minor problems that do not challenge the bureaucracy's privileges.

The Assembly chooses the Council of State, whose President is both head of state and President of the Council of Ministers. Fidel Castro naturally fills both these positions and still finds time to fulfil his duties as First Secretary of the CCP, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces! His brother Raul is Second Secretary of the Party as well as being the highest ranking officer in the army. So as not to be left out, Raul's wife heads the Cuban Women's Federation!

There is no doubt that the Castro brothers stand at the head of an inner clique of the Stalinist ruling caste which rules Cuba, most of whom hail from the days of the guerilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra. Outside of the Ceausescu and Hoxha dynasties of the Balkans it would be harder to find a clearer example of a 'distinct' and 'crystallised' bureaucratic caste with interests 'diametrically opposed to those of the Cuban people.'

In the realm of the economy the planning agencies do not draw on the creativity and ingenuity of the masses through genuine workplace and workers' council organisations. The plan is composed without reference to the workers' own democratically determined needs and its results and adjustments are imposed from above. In classic Soviet fashion, managers make up the norms and figures they can fulfil. They lie and make deals with the local party bosses. They invent bonus systems guaranteed to pay out even at low rates of productivity.

JUCEPLAN tried to take these distortions into account, but because of the bureaucratic system, it could not do so. Its planning was, at best, carried out in partial ignorance and, at worst, completely blind. On top this inefficient system lay a growing, privileged bureaucracy able to obtain the goods and perks it considered necessary outside the rationing system and without resort to the black market which imposed on the rest of the citizens of Cuba.

From stability to renewed crisis

The first half of the 1970s saw the Cuban economy grow considerably. The new plans, concentrating primarily on sugar and the mechanisation of production, produced growing harvests in a period when the price of sugar was high. The integration of the economy into the plans of COMECON gave Cuba guaranteed export markets and the ability to make long term decisions. Rates of economic growth between 1971-75 averaged 6.3% a year and between 1976-80 around 4% a year.

Despite these impressive results Cuba, like the other bureaucratically planned economies, suffered from the chronic inefficiency and incompetence that went with a system which had deprived the workers of real political power over decision making.

In the 1970s it was common to see buildings left half-finished because of shortages in supplies. Major projects like oil refineries ran over production time by years. Transport problems were appalling, with the waiting time for buses running into hours. 'Finished' housing was often sub-standard, so state agencies were bribed to authorise its use. In 1988 in the province of Havana 50% of all soft drink and beer bottles produced were destroyed as unusable. Basic goods were increasingly rationed because of shortages, leading to a growing black market.

In the early 1980s it was estimated that one third of all agricultural produce went rotten due to inadequate transport, negligence and bad planning. Monitoring the journey of a batch of cabbages from field to dinner table revealed they had to get through twelve levels of bureaucracy before they reached a Cuban's plate!

The 1980s were a major test for the Cuban regime. Ronald Reagan's 1980 Presidential victory led to growing tensions between Cuba and the USA. Although Cuba, unlike the rest of Latin America, avoided the catastrophic recession of 1982-83, external factors exacerbated its economic problems. Sugar prices slumped on the world market from 25¢ a pound in 1980 to 4¢ in 1985. The value of Cuba's sugar exports fell from \$886 million in 1981 to \$171 million in 1985.

At the same time the USSR was no longer willing to accept Cuba's repeated failure to fulfil its production quotas. In 1984-85 Cuba spent \$100 million buying sugar on the world market to make up the quota. Droughts and hurricanes upset production and added to Cuba's difficulties. The fall in oil prices from the mid-1980s removed the final prop holding up the Cuban economy. In 1986 hard currency earnings were reduced by \$300 million.

The growing debt crisis

Cuba was faced with real difficulties in servicing its convertible currency debt. This had grown in the 1970s as Cuba borrowed from the capitalists to fund its development programmes. In 1969 Cuban debt was only \$269 million. By 1982 it had soared tenfold to \$2.9 billion and by the end of 1988 it had leapt to \$6.4 billion. Faced with the impossibility of meeting the debt, Castro announced in 1986 that hard currency imports would be halved in the following year. As a result the Cuban economy contracted by 3.7% in 1987.

While none of these economic blows were as bad as those suffered in the rest of Latin America they were a severe jolt to the prestige of the Party and the morale of the population. By the late 1980s the modest aim was to hold living standards at 1984 levels.

Even before the crisis Party congress of 1986, the strains were resulting in differences within the CCP. Recognising the onset of an economic recession, and realising that this implied new austerity measures for the population, the CCP leadership had to recognise the menace of the growing agricultural private sector and the bribery and corruption it spawned. The private sector might have improved the amount of agricultural produce available at high prices by diverting state crops, but they inflamed discontent among the workers. The private sector and black marketeers prospered while rationing was extended in state shops.

By 1989 Castro and his inner clique had already begun their policy turn. Their initial target was JUCEPLAN and what they described as the creeping dangers of 'market socialism'. When fully in force the SDPE would have institutionalised economic decision making, transferring it from Castro and his inner party group to JUCEPLAN and the managers of state enterprises. In 1984 Humberto Perez, economist and head of JUCEPLAN as well as Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, was demoted following the formation of a 'Central Group' which included Castro's entourage.

In May 1985 Perez defended the role of JUCEPLAN and argued that the implementation of necessary reforms had been hindered by 'mechanisms which conspire against the necessary and possible decentralisation of economic and technical decision making at enterprise level'.⁸ These 'mechanisms' were the Castro group!

One month later Perez was dismissed from JUCEPLAN. At the end of 1987 he was removed from the Central Committee of the CCP and publicly criticised by the Politburo.

What does 'Rectification' involve?

'Rectification' was launched with the closure of the 'Free Farmers' markets in May 1986. Years later a blue print or comprehensive model of what the 'Rectification' means has yet to be published. In a speech marking the thirty-fifth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks, Castro summarised many of the themes of Rectification.

He openly attacked the method behind the SDPE and its planned decentralisation as involving 'the negation of the party'. He also attacked the growth of private enterprise in the first half of the 1980s, based on peasants, street vendors, middlemen, truck drivers, housebuilders etc. These, he argued, represented a potential new 'bourgeoisie with capitalist attitudes'.

This 'spoiled lumpenproletariat', as he called it, 'was corrupting the masses'. He also attacked the incorrect use of material incentives which led to 'excessive wages' for work done and promoted labour norms which were too easy to fulfil. He bemoaned the decline in labour discipline and 'voluntary labour'. While the SDPE has been attacked it has also been made clear that Rectification does not replace the plan. The reality is that the bureaucratic plan and the market are in constant uneasy tension. At the same time as calling for a reinforcement of the plan, Castro has declared that plans cannot be 'strait-jackets'!

The major target has been the private traders. As in the USSR and China, bureaucratic planning has shown that it is incapable of increasing productivity on a long term basis, especially in agriculture. Its inability to produce the quantity of desired goods leads to constant switches of policy. First it encourages the market in order to stimulate productivity, then it restricts it when the capitalist sectors start to alienate the workers and threaten the Party's position.

Under Rectification Castro promised to expand the role of state agencies to replace the 'Free Farmers' markets, but the most likely outcome appears to be an expansion of the black market. There has also been a crackdown on private enterprise in industry. Between 1981 and 1986 63% of housing units were constructed privately. After 1986 self-employment was denounced along with private manufacturers.

To make up for the lost private production Castro has revived the 'Micro-Brigades' as embodying the new spirit of socialist commitment. They are like the shock brigades of the Stakhanovite era in the USSR of the 1930s. They work double shifts of ten hours each, the last ending at 3.00 am. They disregard labour legislation, imposing their own discipline on their members.

The experience of such measures suggest they will have only a limited effect as far as the vast majority of workers are concerned. Unlike the vanguard workers, the mass of the working class will not have extra privileges. The shock brigade policy leads directly to growing austerity, rationing and reduced bonuses. Because of strict new rules on bonuses, average monthly wages dropped from 203 pesos in 1987 to 182 pesos by mid-1988.

The whip of labour discipline is being cracked harder. Already managers in some areas of the economy, like tourism, have been given greater freedom to hire and fire workers. This is a sop to the foreign bourgeoisie—especially the Spanish—who Castro hopes will lead a legion of foreign investors to his door. For the workers the cost is clear: state registered unemployment has nearly doubled from 3.4% in 1981 to 6% in 1988.

Conflict with the USSR

The most dramatic aspect of Rectification is that it has happened at the same time as developments in exactly the opposite direction within the USSR and Eastern Europe. While Castro was launching Rectification, Gorbachev was launching perestroika and glasnost.

The economic impact of perestroika was of particular concern to the Cubans. By 1989, with its growing inability to

trade with the west in hard currency, Cuba was even more dependent on trade with the Comecon countries than it had been in the late 1970s. Eighty-seven per cent of Cuba's trade was with Comecon, 72% of it with the USSR.

The East European countries were increasingly demanding that trade be carried out in hard currency. Cuba's bus system was crippled for a period when the Hungarian factory which produced spare parts demanded to be paid in hard currency. Power failures are now even more common in Cuba as most of Cuba's electrical equipment is Czech in origin. Sugar mills using East German computer equipment are increasingly disrupted.

Even Soviet supplies have been irregular, either because of strikes or because the shipping companies now with greater financial independence from the state demand higher payments or payments in hard currency. Relations with Eastern Europe hit an all time low when Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria all signed a UN motion condemning Cuban violation of human rights after one of the CCP's recent crackdowns on dissent.

But Castro's fulminations against the restoration of capitalism are for domestic purposes only. The Cuban Stalinists' commitment to the idea of 'socialism in one country' is utterly solid, even if it means accepting the restoration of capitalism elsewhere! In describing the likely outcome of the elections in Hungary and Poland in 1989 as a 'victory for anti-socialist forces' Castro speculated:

'... are we perhaps witnessing the peaceful transition from socialism to capitalism? This is possible: we are not against it. We defend each country's and each Party's sacred right to independence.'

Castro's major criticisms are directed at what threatens him most: the possibility that the new Kremlin foreign policy will sacrifice Cuba on the altar of détente with the USA. In December 1988 Castro pointed out that:

'The news that there may be peace, that there may be détente between the USA and the USSR does not necessarily mean that there is going to be peace for us.'

Cuba has every reason to fear this, given that the USA has been stepping up its pressure on Cuba in the last period. The invasion of Panama was used to tighten the economic blockade. Cuban ships have been attacked by US coastguards on the pretext of 'drug searches', while Czechoslovakia under US prompting no longer allows a 'special interests section' of its embassy to represent Cuba in the USA.

All these pressures, together with thousands of petty harassments, are proof that the USA is serious about its aim of restoring capitalism. If it could crush Iraq on the other side of the world it will feel doubly confident that it can deal a decisive blow against Castro in the 1990s. Castro is right to fear the threat. Unlike the East European nations, there a large exiled Cuban bourgeoisie that for a third of a century has been seething with hatred for the caudillo that overthrew them.

This pressure has had a telling effect, especially in the realm of foreign policy. For years Castro has sought to accommodate himself to imperialism. He pressed the Sandinista regime not to transform Nicaragua into another Cuba. He urged the FMLN to create a national unity government with the bloody regime in El Salvador. He called on the Colombian guerillas to give up their arms and he advised the PLO to recognise the Zionist state of Israel. More recently, Castro went along with the wretched Angolan agreement to withdraw Cuban forces and accept the creation of a Namibian state acceptable to the South African apartheid regime.

Castro appeases imperialism

During the war against Iraq Castro voted in favour of the United Nations resolution that ordered an economic blockade to force Iraq out of Kuwait and get its monarchy restored. Moreover, he did not vote against the resolution which sanctioned the use of force. Unlike countries such as Algeria, there were no mass demonstrations in Cuba against the US led war.

Castro's moderation and dropping of even rhetorical internationalism will not decrease the appetite of US imperialism.

It will only encourage them to press home their diplomatic and economic attack, since the result of all this pro-imperialist diplomacy is to further isolate Cuba from the workers and poor peasants in the semi-colonial world.

If this capitalist pressure is combined with a dramatic decline in Soviet aid, especially oil, it would have disastrous effects on the Cuban economy, pushing living standards and productivity back years. Even now the CCP is calling on Cubans to be prepared for a 'special period in peacetime' if oil imports are cut from 12 to 8 million tonnes. All social development programmes will be halted—no further construction of schools, day care centres etc. Already rehearsals have taken place with dockers unloading by hand and clothing factories using footpedals to drive machinery. Plans have been laid to save energy by importing tens of thousands of extra bicycles from China, while 400,000 bulls and oxen are to be added to the country's 200,000 stock to replace tractors.

Would such a 'special period' produce the kind of mass opposition to the regime that has been seen in Eastern Europe? It is here that we have to take into account the limited amount of glasnost that has been seen in Cuba so far. With a ready-made Cuban bourgeoisie backed by the US State Department ninety miles away, Castro fears that the slightest opening in the realm of free speech would produce a deluge of propaganda, leading to his downfall.

But he also has the example of Eastern Europe to ponder. In the USSR what started as a bureaucratic initiative by Gorbachev to shake up the bureaucracy had developed by 1987 into a flowering of popular and independent organisations which allowed national grievances and working class discontent to come to the surface. These new organisations took on such a scope and power that the ruling bureaucracy could not easily contain them.

The lesson cannot have been lost on Castro. In the middle of 1989 Moscow News and Sputnik, two organs of Soviet glasnost which were always sold out as soon as they appeared on Cuban news stands, were attacked in the Cuban press as peddling 'bourgeois' ideas. Soon after, they were banned.

Castro has always tried to channel popular discontent with bureaucratism by adopting the mantle of 'scourge of the bureaucracy'. Castro can thus appear both as leader of the regime and as its major critic! In the eyes of many Cubans, especially the older generation who remember pre-revolutionary Cuba and the terrible conditions, Castro remains the popular leader of the revolution. The shortages, incompetence and inefficiency are often blamed on Castro's subordinates, the grey faceless bureaucrats. Castro carefully cultivates this view. Such criticism has to be kept within limits, never challenging the Party or its leadership's right to the monopoly of power.

Castro has even been prepared to sacrifice leading figures in the Party and state machines in order to preserve his reputation. Such campaigns are necessary to show the workers that even those in top positions are not immune from the new measures. They also ensure that the lower bureaucrats and any potential opposition elements toe the new line. The most dramatic example of this tactic was the arrest and execution in July 1989 of General Analdo Ochoa—one of Castro's right-hand men—along with three officers of the Interior Ministry, for corruption and drug smuggling.

Reverberations from Eastern Europe

The effect of seeing so many Stalinist dictators fall from power has made the CCP reflect upon its situation. In the run-up to the 1991 congress the Politburo has explicitly turned its back upon the need for 'unanimity'—once the touchstone of 'democratic unity'—and promoted the idea of a diversity of view. The limits of this discussion are sharply defined. In June 1990 the Politburo set out the parameters of the discussion: defence of socialism under the leadership of a single party.

This has all the hallmarks of the limited glasnost of 1985-87 inside the USSR. Can it burst beyond these boundaries? To date, the pre-Congress discussion has been confined to the existing institutions of popular consultation, although it is clear that they have been a forum for airing of grievances. Little pressure for change has been reflected in the CCP announcements. There has been talk of removing the restrictions on travel and broadening the scope of direct elections, but these are the only faint echoes of the mass movements of 1989-90 in Eastern Europe.

There are real obstacles in the way of a rapid extension of glasnost from below inside Cuba. There is the usual Stalinist

repression and harassment of any dissidents, a process that inhibits collective discussion and organisation outside of the established channels. But certain aspects of the situation in Eastern Europe are absent in Cuba. For example, there is little in the way of a stable pro-western intelligentsia.

Years of persecution and self-imposed exile (there are a million Cubans in the USA) have helped Castro by removing one transmitter of the bourgeois democratic virus. Apart from a handful of human rights activists there is no sign that the intelligentsia poses a serious threat.

Within the working class there is little evidence of a desire to break with the official trade unions. The reasons for this are not hard to fathom. A majority of older Cubans still identify and support the regime. Unlike some of the countries in Eastern Europe that compared their countries' performance with the advanced countries of Western Europe, most Cubans contrast their conditions with those of present day crisis-torn Latin America. Also Castro is the only Stalinist dictator still in power who was the leader of an anti-imperialist revolution. This gives him infinitely more moral and political authority than a Ceausescu or a Honecker.

Cuban youth and the USA

Many younger Cubans—and 50% of the population is now under 25—have their eyes fixed ninety miles away on the USA. Some are fired by the illusion that they too can follow their uncle and become a millionaire in Miami, a prospect cynically retailed by the CIA-funded Radio Marti TV station.

But many are genuinely aggrieved and impatient with the bureaucratism which ensures that many young couples have to wait years for the chance of their own home when they believe they can have it quickly in the USA.

Such false and real hopes make an explosive cocktail which could ignite given a dramatic drop in living standards. The CCP's response to any mass movement of discontent is clear; it endorsed the crushing of the Democracy Movement in Tiananmen Square. There can be no doubt that the Cuban Stalinists would mete out similar treatment to protesters in Havana.

It is possible, however, that the Cuban government will not be put under such enormous economic and political pressure, at least in the short term. The immediate threat of a dramatic cut off in all Soviet aid, or of an ultimatum to trade only in hard currency, seem to have receded. In January 1991 a new twelve month deal was signed between Cuba and the USSR which talks of a 'transition' period to allow Cuba to adjust to the coming changes.

The Castro regime has powerful allies within the Soviet military, the hand of which has been strengthened during the winter power struggles inside the Kremlin. A group of top Soviet generals recently visited Cuba and pledged their continued co-operation with the regime. Cuba has always been a major strategic gain for the USSR; the military will not abandon it easily.

Cuba still provides a huge sophisticated military base—the Lourdes installation—vital for electronic surveillance of the USA. Soviet long range reconnaissance aircraft fly from here along the eastern seaboard of the USA, while Cuban naval facilities allow the Soviet navy a strategic presence in the Caribbean.

To give all this up would enormously strengthen the USA in relation to the USSR in global military terms. The USA's destruction of Iraq in the Kremlin's own backyard is not lost on the Kremlin generals. This is the tragic result of waving the white flag in the Cold War. The USSR has gained little from its capitulation to the White House, so why needlessly surrender another pawn?

Whatever the outcome of the inter-bureaucratic power struggles in the USSR, it is clear that the gains made in the Cuban revolution—the smashing of the Batista dictatorship and the expropriation of the capitalist class—are in grave danger. The workers of Cuba have every interest in refusing to line up behind either Rectification or some kind of Cuban perestroika.

The twists and turns of the Castro regime can only be explained by the endemic problems which result from the application of Stalinist bureaucratic planning to a relatively backward economy.

Of all the degenerate workers' states only China has shown such dramatic swings of policy, as the Stalinist ruling caste has sought a way out of the intractable crisis of its system of blind planning and bureaucratic mismanagement. In both Cuba and China, the successful defence of the gains of the revolution, as well as the possibility of extending them, depends upon a strategy aiming at the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucratic castes. Power must be placed in the hands of the urban and rural workers.

Above all the crisis of bureaucratic planning must be resolved by mobilising the workers to seize control of the planning mechanisms and bend them to the democratic will of the workers' organisations' workers' councils. Only in this way can the inventiveness, commitment and imagination of the workers be harnessed to move towards the construction of a truly socialist society.

Notes

1. Latin America Regional Report Caribbean, 1.3.1990
2. NACLA, Vol 24 No2, August 1990, 'Cuba: facing change?'
3. Mesa-Lago, 'The Economy of Socialist Cuba?' (Albuquerque 1981); Max Azicri Cuba: Politics Economy and Society (London 1988) 121
4. Later the United Party of Socialist Revolution (PURS)
5. See The Degenerated Revolution, Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group (London 1982)
6. The leader of the powerful Argentinian USFI section
7. Socialist Action, October 1990, p20
8. Quoted in 'Cuba's Economic Counter Reform: Policies and Effects?', Carmelo Mesa-Largo, Journal of Communist Studies, Vol5 No4
9. Granma Weekly Review, 6.8.89
10. Quoted in New York Times, 11.1.89

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