

Cuba: Exceptional Case or Vanguard in the Struggle Against Colonialism?

By Che Guevara

[...]

...Some sectors, in good faith or with axes to grind, claim to see in the Cuban Revolution a series of exceptional origins and features whose importance for this great historical event they even inflate to that of the decisive factor . They speak of the exceptionalism of the Cuban Revolution as compared with the course of other progressive parties in America and conclude therefrom that the form and road of the Cuban Revolution are unique and that in the other countries of America the historic transition of the peoples will be different.

We accept that there are exceptions which give the Cuban Revolution its peculiar characteristics. It is a clearly established fact that every revolution has this type of specific factor, but it is no less an established fact that all of them follow laws which society cannot violate. Let us analyze, then, the factors of this purported exceptionalism.

The first, perhaps the most important, the most original, is that cosmic force called Fidel Castro Ruz, a name that in a few years has attained historic proportions. The future will accord our Prime Minister's merits their exact place, but to us they appear comparable to those of the greatest historic figures of all Latin America. And what are the exceptional circumstances about the personality of Fidel Castro? There are various features of his life and character which make him stand out far above all his compa?eros and followers. Fidel is a man of such tremendous personality that he would gain the leadership in whatever movement he participated in; and so it has been throughout his career from his student days to the premiership of our country and of the oppressed peoples of America. He has the qualities of a great leader, and added to these are his personal gifts of audacity, strength, courage, an extraordinary eagerness always to discern the will of the people; and these have brought him to the position of honor and sacrifice that he occupies today. But he has other important qualities, such as his ability to assimilate knowledge and experience in order to understand a situation as a whole without losing sight of the details, his immense faith in the future, and the breadth of his vision to foresee events and anticipate them in action, always seeing farther and better than his compa?eros. With these great cardinal qualities, with his capacity to bring people together and unite them, opposing the division which weakens; with his ability to lead the whole people in action; with his infinite love for the people; with his faith in the future and his capacity to foresee it, Fidel Castro did more than anyone else in

Cuba to construct from nothing the present formidable apparatus of the Cuban Revolution.

However, no one could assert that there were political and social conditions in Cuba totally different from those in the other countries of America, and that precisely because of that difference the revolution took place. Nor could anyone assert, on the other hand, that Fidel Castro made the revolution despite that difference. Fidel, a great and able leader, led the revolution in Cuba, at the time and in the way he did, by interpreting the profound political disturbances that were preparing the people for the great leap onto the revolutionary road. Also certain conditions existed which were not confined to Cuba, but which it will be hard for other peoples to take advantage of again because imperialism, in contrast to some progressive groups, does learn from its errors.

The condition that we would describe as exceptional was that North American imperialism was disoriented and was never able to measure accurately the true scope of the Cuban Revolution. Here is something that explains many of the apparent contradictions in North American policy. The monopolies, as is habitual in such cases, began to think about a successor for Batista precisely because they knew that the people were not compliant and were also looking for a successor to Batista, but along revolutionary paths. What more intelligent and expert stroke than to get rid of the now unserviceable little dictator and to replace him with the new "boys" who could in their turn serve the

interests of imperialism very well? The empire gambled on this card from its continental deck for a while, and lost miserably. Prior to our military victory they were suspicious, but not afraid of us; rather, with all their experience at this game, which they were accustomed to winning, they played with two decks. On various occasions, emissaries of the State Department, disguised as newspapermen, came to investigate our rustic revolution, but they never found any trace of imminent danger in it. When imperialism wanted to react, when the imperialists discovered that the group of inexperienced young men, who were marching in triumph through the streets of Havana, had a clear awareness of their political duty and an iron determination to carry out that duty, it was already too late. And thus in January, 1959, dawned the first social revolution of the Caribbean zone and the most profound of the revolutions in America.

We don't believe that it could be considered exceptional that the bourgeoisie, or at least a good part of it, showed itself favorable to the revolutionary war against the tyranny at the same time that it was supporting and promoting movements seeking for negotiated solutions which would permit them to substitute for the Batista regime elements disposed to curb the revolution.

Considering the conditions in which the revolutionary war took place and the complexity of the political tendencies which opposed the tyranny, it was not at all exceptional that some latifundist elements adopted a neutral, or at least non-belligerent,

attitude toward the insurrectionary forces. It is understandable that the national bourgeoisie, struck down by imperialism and the tyranny, whose troops sacked small properties and made extortion a daily way of life, felt a certain sympathy when they saw those young rebels from the mountains punish the military arm of imperialism, which is what the mercenary army was.

So non-revolutionary forces indeed helped smooth the road for the advent of revolutionary power. Going further, we can add as a new factor of exceptionalism the fact that in most places in Cuba the peasants had been proletarianized by the needs of big semimechanized capitalist agriculture, and had reached a stage of organization which gave them greater class-consciousness. We can admit this. But we should point out, in the interest of truth, that the first area where the Rebel Army, made up of the survivors of the defeated band that had made the voyage on the Granma, operated, was an area inhabited by peasants whose social and cultural roots were different from those of the peasants found in the areas of large-scale semi-mechanized agriculture. In fact, the Sierra Maestra, locale of the first revolutionary beehive, is a place where peasants struggling barehanded against latifundism took refuge. They went there seeking a new piece of land, somehow overlooked by the state or the voracious latifundists, on which to create a modest fortune. They constantly had to struggle against the exactions of the soldiers, who were always allied to the latifundists; and their ambition extended no farther than a property deed. Concretely, the soldiers who belonged to our first peasant-

type guerrilla armies came from the section of this social class which shows most strongly love for the land and the possession of it; that is to say, which shows most perfectly what we can define as the petty-bourgeois spirit. The peasant fought because he wanted land for himself, for his children, to manage it, sell it, and get rich by his work.

Despite his petty bourgeois spirit, the peasant soon learned that he could not satisfy his land hunger without breaking up the system of latifundist property. Radical agrarian reform, the only kind that could give land to the peasants, clashed directly with the interests of the imperialists, latifundists and sugar and cattle magnates. The bourgeoisie was afraid to clash with those interests. But the proletariat wasn't. In this way the revolution's course itself brought together the workers and peasants. The workers supported the demands against the latifundists. The poor peasant, rewarded with ownership of the land, loyally supported the revolutionary power and defended it against its imperialist and counter-revolutionary enemies.

In our opinion no further factors of exceptionalism can be claimed. We have been generous in stating those listed in their strongest form. Now we shall examine the permanent roots of all social phenomena in America, the contradictions which, ripening in the womb of present societies, produce changes that can attain the scope of a revolution like Cuba's.

First in chronological order, though not in the order of importance

at present, is latifundism. Latifundism was the economic power base of the ruling class throughout the entire period which followed the great liberating anticolonialist revolution of the last century. But that latifundist social class, which is found in all of the countries, generally lags behind the social developments that move the world. In some places, however, the most alert and clear-sighted members of the latifundist class are aware of the dangers and begin to change the investment form of their capital, at times going in for mechanized agriculture, transferring some of their wealth to industrial investment, or becoming commercial agents of the monopolies. In any case, the first liberating revolution never destroyed the latifundist bases which always constituted a reactionary force and upheld the principle of servitude on the land. This is the phenomenon that shows up in all the American countries without exception and has been the substratum of all the injustices committed since the era when the King of Spain gave huge grants of land to his most noble conquistadores, leaving, in the case of Cuba, for the natives, creoles and mestizos, only the realengos, that is, the scraps left between where three circular grants touched each other.

In most countries the latifundist realized he couldn't survive alone and promptly entered into alliances with the monopolies, that is, with the strongest and cruelest oppressor of the American peoples. North American capital arrived on the scene to make the virgin lands fruitful, so that later it could carry off unnoticed all the funds so "generously" given, plus several times the amounts originally

invested in the "beneficiary" country.

America was a field of inter-imperialist struggle and the "wars" between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, the separation of Panama from Colombia, the infamy committed against Ecuador in its dispute with Peru, the fight between Paraguay and Bolivia, are nothing but manifestations of the gigantic battle between the world's great monopolistic combines, a battle decided almost completely in favor of the North American monopolies following World War II. From that point on, the empire dedicated itself to strengthening its grip on its colonial possessions and perfecting the whole structure to prevent the intrusion of old or new competitors from other imperialist countries. All this resulted in a monstrously distorted economy which has been described by the shamefaced economists of the imperialist regime in an innocuous term which reveals the deep compassion they feel for us inferior beings (they call our miserably exploited Indians, persecuted and reduced to utter wretchedness, "little Indians"; all Negroes and mulattos, disinherited and discriminated against, are called "colored"; individually they are used as instruments, collectively, as a means of dividing the working masses in their struggle for a better economic future). For us, the peoples of America, they have another polite and refined term: "underdeveloped."

What is "underdeveloped"?

A dwarf with an enormous head and a swollen chest is

"underdeveloped," inasmuch as his weak legs or short arms do not

match the rest of his anatomy. He is the product of an abnormal formation that distorted his development. That is really what we are, we, who are politely referred to as "underdeveloped," but in truth are colonial, semi-colonial or dependent countries. We are countries whose economies have been twisted by imperialism, which has abnormally developed in us those branches of industry or agriculture needed to complement its complex economy.

"Underdevelopment," or distorted development, brings dangerous specialization in raw materials, inherent in which is the threat of hunger for all our peoples. We, the underdeveloped, are also those with monoculture, with the single product, with the single market. A single product whose uncertain sale depends on a single market that imposes and fixes conditions, that is the great formula for imperialist economic domination. It should be added to the old, but eternally young, Roman slogan Divide and Conquer!

Latifundism, then, through its connections with imperialism, completely shapes the so-called underdevelopment, whose results are low wages and unemployment. This phenomenon of low wages and unemployment is a vicious circle which produces ever lower wages and ever more unemployment, as the great contradictions of the system sharpen and, constantly at the mercy of the cyclical fluctuations of its own economy, provides the common denominator of all the peoples of America, from the Rio Bravo, (The Latin American name for the river called the Rio Grande in the United States) to the South Pole. This common denominator, which we shall print in capital letters and which

serves as the starting point for analysis by all who think about these social phenomena, is called **THE PEOPLE'S HUNGER**; weary of being oppressed, persecuted, exploited to the limit; weary of the wretched selling of their laborpower day after day (faced with the fear of swelling the enormous mass of unemployed) so that the greatest profit can be wrung from each human body, profits that are later squandered in the orgies of the masters of capital.

We see, then, that there are great and inescapable common denominators in Latin America, and that we cannot say we were exempt from any of those leading to the most terrible and permanent of all: the people's hunger. Latifundism, whether as a primitive form of exploitation or as a form of capitalist monopoly of the land, adjusts to the new conditions and becomes an ally of imperialism, the exploitative form finance and monopoly capitalism takes outside its national borders, in order to create economic colonialism, euphemistically called "underdevelopment," which results in low wages, underemployment, unemployment: the people's hunger. It all existed in Cuba. Here, too, there was hunger. Here the percentage of unemployed was one of the highest in Latin America. Here imperialism was crueler than in many countries of America. And here latifundism was as strong as in any brother country.

What did we do to free ourselves from the vast imperialist system with its train of puppet rulers in each country and mercenary

armies to protect the puppets and the whole complex social system of the exploitation of man by man? We applied certain formulas, which on some previous occasions we have given out as discoveries of our empirical medicine for the great evils of our beloved Latin America, empirical medicine which was soon adopted into the expositions of scientific truth.

The objective conditions for struggle are provided by the people's hunger, their reaction to that hunger, the terror unleashed to crush the people's reaction, and the wave of hatred that the repression creates. America lacked the subjective conditions, the most important of which is awareness of the possibility of victory through violent struggle against the imperialist powers and their internal allies. These conditions were created through the armed struggle which made clearer the need for change (and permitted it to be foreseen) and the defeat and subsequent annihilation of the army by the people's forces (an absolutely necessary condition for every true revolution).

Having already shown that these conditions are created through the armed struggle, we have to explain once more that the scene of the struggle should be the countryside. A peasant army, pursuing the great objectives for which the peasantry should fight (the first of which is the just distribution of the land), will capture the cities from the countryside. The peasant class of America, basing itself on the ideology of the working class, whose great thinkers discovered the social laws governing us, will provide the great

liberating army of the future, as it has already done in Cuba. This army, created in the countryside, where the subjective conditions keep ripening for the taking of power, proceeds to take the cities, uniting with the workers and enriching itself ideologically from contributions of the working class. It can and must defeat the oppressor army, at first in skirmishes, engagements, surprises; and in big battles at the end, when the army will have grown from its small-scale guerrilla footing to the proportions of a great popular army of liberation. One stage in the consolidation of the revolutionary power, as we indicated above, will be the liquidation of the old army....