

# **The Cuban Revolution & Its Leadership**

**A reply to a sectarian  
criticism**

**Doug Lorimer**

# Contents

<b>The Cuban Revolution &amp; Its Leadership .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. What Must Be Proven? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Stalinised From the Beginning? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Taaffe's View of Castro's Pre-1961 Politics .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. How Taaffe 'Explains' the Socialist Revolution in Cuba .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5. Concentration of Power 'In the Hands of a Layer of Privileged Officials'? .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6. Workers' Democracy in Cuba .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>7. The Castro Leadership's Struggle Against Bureaucracy ...</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>8. Taaffe's Criticisms of Cuba's Foreign Policy .....</b>	<b>57</b>

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# The Cuban Revolution & Its Leadership

## A reply to a sectarian criticism

*By Doug Lorimer*

Peter Taaffe's pamphlet on Cuba (first published in 1978 and reprinted in 1982) consists of three articles taken from the paper of the British Militant organisation (now called the Socialist Party), of which he was, and still is, general secretary. The first article presents an analysis of the revolutionary struggle in Cuba up to the expropriation of capitalist property and the establishment of a planned economy. The second article analyses the character of the group which led the Cuban socialist revolution, the central conclusion of which is indicated by the article's title: "Power in the Hands of [a] Bureaucratic Elite". The third article is an attempt to substantiate this view in the light of the foreign and domestic policies of this leadership group.

The basic conclusion of the pamphlet is set out at the end of the third article: The Cuban revolution has demonstrated the gigantic possibilities which flow from nationalisation and a plan of production. In the statistics which record the rise in health care, education, social security and the development of the economy it has been more than justified. It has also given a big push to the revolution in the Caribbean and in Latin America.

But because the revolution took place in a backward country with a leadership which based itself on a predominantly agrarian movement and with national limitations,

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This essay was originally written in 1999 at the request of Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan, following the LPP's expulsion from the English Socialist Party-led Committee for a Workers' International in 1998, as the initial contribution to a discussion on the Cuban Revolution between the Democratic Socialist Party and the LPP.

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bureaucratic degeneration was inevitable. Undoubtedly the Castro regime still has much more of a popular base than the Stalinist regimes in Russia and in Eastern Europe. But the development of industry will also mean the growth of the working class and with it increasing demands for workers' democracy. Moreover political revolution in Eastern Europe or the social revolution in Europe, America or Japan will have their repercussions in Cuba itself.

The victory of the socialist revolution in Argentina or Brazil, for instance, would have a dramatic effect on Cuba. In these countries the social weight of the working class is so decisive that the socialist revolution would develop along the lines of the Russian revolution. A victory of the working class in either country would detonate the socialist revolution throughout the continent and lead to a new revolution in Cuba — a political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy.

Taaffe's basic conclusion is that the task facing the Cuban proletariat in 1978 was the same as that facing the workers in the Soviet Union, i.e., to carry out an anti-bureaucratic political revolution. This political perspective is based upon his claim that the Castro regime represents a "bureaucratic elite" similar in all essential characteristics to the ruling bureaucratic caste in the Soviet Union, as analysed by Trotsky in his 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed*. ■

# 1. What Must Be Proven?

Before examining the evidence presented by Taaffe to substantiate this position, we should be clear on the criteria to be used by Marxists in assessing if this is actually the case. To justify calling for the revolutionary overthrow of the Castro regime by the Cuban proletariat it would have to be shown — as Trotsky did in the case of the Stalin regime in the USSR — that:

1. This regime represents a crystallised, petty-bourgeois social caste of administrators with institutionalised special privileges so far-reaching that the interests of this ruling stratum are in contradiction with the class interests of the Cuban proletariat.

2. In defending the institutionalised special privileges of this bureaucratic stratum, the Castro regime rules through totalitarian methods that politically atomise the working people of Cuba.

3. In its international policies the Castro regime places the narrow interests of this bureaucratic caste ahead of those of the Cuban proletariat, i.e., it seeks a class-collaborationist accommodation with imperialism that will leave this caste free to enjoy its special privileges without the threat of either imperialist-backed counterrevolution or the threat of a revival of political activity on the part of the Cuban proletariat stimulated by the example of victorious proletarian revolutions in neighbouring countries.

It is not sufficient to point to instances where the Castro leadership has made mistakes or taken wrong positions on world events. If this were the criteria for deciding that a leadership did not defend the general class interests of the proletariat of its country, then we'd have to conclude that such a leadership has never existed anywhere in the world. There has never been a revolutionary proletarian leadership — and this includes Marx and Lenin, not to mention any of their contemporary disciples — who have not made mistakes or taken wrong positions on events occurring in other countries.

A mere listing of bureaucratic deformations in the Cuban political system is also not sufficient to substantiate the conclusion that the class interests of the Cuban proletariat can only be defended and advanced through the revolutionary overthrow of the Castro regime. Lenin himself observed in 1921-22 that the proletarian regime he headed had bureaucratic deformations. But no genuine Marxist would have concluded that this meant that the defence of the class interests of the Russian proletariat at that time necessitated the revolutionary overthrow of the Bolshevik regime.

As in Soviet Russia, there has been a problem with bureaucratism, of privilege-taking, of corruption of individual officials, in revolutionary Cuba from the start. As early as 1962 the Castro leadership openly acknowledged and attacked these problems. But they are not the same thing as the *political triumph of a crystallised petty-bourgeois social layer* such as was represented in Soviet Russia by Stalin.

To convincingly argue that a political revolution is needed in Cuba it would have to be shown that the Castro regime, because of its social character and material interests, has failed to respond in a revolutionary manner to openings to advance the international struggle against imperialism and Marxists outside Cuba can be confident that it will act in a fundamentally counterrevolutionary manner toward revolutionary struggles in neighbouring countries; that any new revolutionary upsurge in Latin America in particular would not attract the support of the Castro leadership but would be met by hostility from this leadership since its basic foreign policy guide is the search for a class-collaborationist alliance with US imperialism directed against the victory of further proletarian revolutions in Latin America.

If these things could be demonstrated then it would be the duty of Marxists inside Cuba and abroad to work for the overthrow of the Castro regime within the framework of defending the social conquests of the Cuban proletarian-socialist revolution against a bourgeois social counterrevolution and attacks from imperialism.

Now it might seem that this is placing a heavy burden of proof on Taaffe (and anyone who subscribes to his policy regarding Cuba). It is a heavy burden of proof. And it *ought to be*. It is no small decision for Marxists living in capitalist countries that are militarily aligned with US imperialism (as are Australia, Britain and Pakistan) to call for the overthrow of a leadership of a post-capitalist country subject to an economic blockade and continual hostile political and military pressure by US imperialism. Moreover, this is a leadership that led the Cuban proletariat in overthrowing bourgeois rule and capitalist exploitation. Before Marxists anywhere in the world start calling for the revolutionary overthrow (i.e., forcible removal) of this leadership by the Cuban masses they have an obligation — if they want to be taken as serious revolutionary proletarian politicians and not sectarian doctrinaires or radical dilettantes — to convince

themselves that the facts backing up this evaluation would convince any honest proletarian revolutionist or anti-imperialist fighter, in Cuba or elsewhere, who objectively examined them. ■

## 2. Stalinised From the Beginning?

Taaffe recognises that the Castro team originated outside the international Stalinist movement, and that in order to lead the Cuban revolution the Castro team had to politically combat the opposition of the Cuban Stalinists — the Popular Socialist Party (which Taaffe misleadingly refers to throughout his articles as the Cuban Communist Party). However, he argues at the end of his first article that the Cuban workers' state was bureaucratically “deformed” from the moment of its birth, “with power concentrated in the hands of a layer of privileged officials” headed by Fidel Castro (and presumably, also Che Guevara). That is, he claims that the Castro leadership already represented a crystallised caste of privileged administrators when capitalist property relations were abolished in Cuba in October 1960. In the second article he repeats this claim, contrasting Cuba with Soviet Russia:

... without conscious control and management by the masses themselves, the development of a new elite is inevitable. Even in Russia with brilliant leaders like Lenin and Trotsky and the conscious participation of the working class in the running of society, bureaucratic degeneration was inevitable so long as the revolution was isolated in a backward country.

Before proceeding further, it should be noted that this confuses a number of distinctly different processes. It's true that, in the long-run, it's inevitable that if a proletarian revolution remains isolated in a backward country it will be overthrown by a bourgeois counterrevolution. However, it's not inevitable that the first stage of such a bourgeois counterrevolution will take the form of a bureaucratic degeneration of the leadership of that revolution. In fact, in Soviet Russia, the bourgeois counterrevolution took two different stages before this occurred — an openly capitalist-led military assault (the 1918-21 Civil War and imperialist intervention), followed by a wave of



counterrevolutionary petty-bourgeois revolts against the proletarian state power (the Kronstadt rebellion and a wave of peasant revolts in the countryside in 1921).

Continuing his argument, Taaffe writes:

The Bolsheviks envisaged that the Russian revolution would provoke the revolution in Europe which would then come to the assistance of Russia with economic aid, technicians, etc.

But the isolation of the [Bolshevik] revolution to a single country — and a backward one at that — led to the bureaucratic degeneration of Russia personified by the rise of Stalin. The masses were elbowed aside by the bureaucratic elite from any real say in the running of the country.

But in Cuba right from the outset management and control was concentrated in the hands of Castro and his supporters, the officialdom in the State machine, the governing party and army, etc.

This argument of course proves nothing — at least if we're arguing like Marxists and not anarchists. As he has presented the argument, Taaffe implies that the rule of a bureaucratic elite is inherent in the very existence of an “officialdom in the State machine”, in the “governing party and army, etc”. That is an anarchist, not a Marxist, thesis. It's the anarchists who claim that the Bolshevik revolution brought to power a bureaucratic elite because “right from the outset management and control was concentrated in the hands of Lenin and his supporters, the officialdom in the State machine, the governing party and the army, etc.”

No doubt Taaffe would rebut such an argument with conclusive evidence that “right from the outset” (i.e., in 1917-18) there was active involvement by the majority of Russian workers in “management and control” of industry and the “state machine” (“the governing party and the army, etc.”). But how would he answer the argument that by 1921 “management and control was concentrated in the hands of Lenin and his supporters, the officialdom” of the “governing party and the army” and therefore that by 1921 (if not earlier) “power [was] concentrated in the hands of a layer of privileged officials”? If he were to respond as a Marxist, Taaffe would point out that while privileged officials existed within the Soviet state machine, there was no convincing evidence that “Lenin and his supporters” in the Soviet state machine — the officials in whose hands political power was concentrated — had undergone a “bureaucratic degeneration” and become part of, and represented, this petty-bourgeois caste of privileged officials. And Taaffe would be correct. But why then does he fail to apply the same criteria of proof to “Castro and his supporters” in the revolutionary state machine in Cuba?

As indicated by the quote from the last of Taaffe's three articles, his argument is

that:

Because the revolution took place in a backward country with a leadership which based itself on a predominantly agrarian movement and with national limitations, bureaucratic degeneration was inevitable.

Therefore, there is no need for any convincing proof that a Cuban Thermidor occurred, no need to show how and when this took place, how the privileges were institutionalised and how they affected all the major social strata in Cuba. We just have to agree that the revolution took place in a backward country with a leadership that based itself on a predominantly agrarian movement and with “national limitations” (what this means is not clear, but I presume it means the Castro team wasn’t part of a revolutionary international), and we can write off the Castro leadership as bureaucrats from the moment they took power. It’s all so simple — or is it?

Taaffe provides no facts to support his contention that the Castro leadership represented a petty-bourgeois bureaucratic ruling stratum at the time capitalist property relations were abolished in Cuba (October 1960). Since Taaffe does not claim that the movement Castro led (the July 26 Movement — J26M — and its Rebel Army) was a Stalinist formation *before it took state power in 1959* (as, for example, the Chinese CP/People’s Liberation Army was at the time it took state power in 1949), he has an obligation to explain to his readers (with factual support) when and how this movement became Stalinised. Instead, he simply asserts that “in Cuba right from the outset management and control was concentrated in the hands of Castro and his supporters, the officialdom in the State machine, the governing party and the army, etc.”

Where did this “officialdom” (he means bureaucracy) come from? Was it the product of a merger of corrupted revolutionaries and privileged officials retained from the pre-revolutionary regime — as was the case with the Soviet bureaucracy? But in the case of Soviet Russia it took about six years for this process to occur, and a further six years for the Stalin-led bureaucracy to fully consolidate its hold on power. Taaffe, however, claims that a Stalin-type bureaucracy took power in Cuba “from the outset”, which means in 1959. This might make sense if he had demonstrated that the J26M/Rebel Army had the same social character as the CPC/PLA, i.e., that it was a formation dominated by a caste of privileged (military) commanders prior to the overthrow of the capitalist state power in 1959. But he does no such thing. And the reason he doesn’t is not hard to work out: there are simply no facts to support such an argument. ■

## 3. Taaffe's View of Castro's Pre-1961 Politics

According to Taaffe, up to 1961 Castro “had been no more than a radical middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”. To support this Taaffe claims that in an interview given to US journalist Herbert Matthews during the struggle against Batista, Castro said: “You can be sure we have no animosity towards the United States and the American people ... we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to dictatorship.” Taaffe does not tell us what he expects Castro should have said to a US journalist at that time.

Taaffe further claims that after the defeat of Batista, Castro declared on March 6, 1959 that he “had no intention of nationalising any industries”. Taaffe adds: “Perhaps this was a ‘crafty ruse’ merely meant to fool the landlords and capitalists? On the contrary, all the evidence shows that Castro and his supporters never started off their struggle with a clear socialist program and perspectives as had Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia.”

It's true that prior to 1961 the official program of the J26M was limited to that of a democratic revolution. It was most fully articulated by Castro himself during his five-hour defence speech “History Will Absolve Me!” at his trial in October 1953, following the raid organised by Castro (then a 27-year-old former law student) on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953. It called for the “restoration of public liberties and political democracy”, which had been suppressed by Batista's army coup in March 1952.

But Castro's program included far more than simply the restoration of democratic liberties. It advocated granting land to landless tenant farmers, making this land “not mortgageable and not transferable”. For wage-workers (who constituted 56% of Cuba's population), Castro proposed “the right to share 30% of the profits of all the large

industrial, mercantile and mining enterprises, including the sugar mills”. He advocated “the confiscation of all holdings and ill-gotten gains of those who had committed frauds during the previous regimes, as well as the holdings and ill-gotten gains of their legatees and heirs” (which, given the rampant corruption in Cuba, effectively amounted to a call for the nationalisation of most of the Cuban bourgeoisie). To implement this, he advocated special revolutionary courts to look into the records of all corporations and banks.

In addition, Castro advocated a series of laws such as “the Agrarian Reform, Integral Reform of Education, nationalisation of the Utilities Trust and the Telephone Trust [which were American-owned — DL], refund to the people of the illegal excessive rates this company has charged, and payment to the Treasury of all taxes brazenly evaded in the past”.

Castro also outlined in some detail from the prisoner’s dock what he considered to be Cuba’s six main problems: land, industrialisation, housing, unemployment, education and health care. Here is a section of his speech that indicates how he proposed to solve these:

It is not by statement such as Carlos Saladrigas [Batista’s nominee for the presidency in 1944 — DL], whose statesmanship consists of preserving the status quo and mouthing phrases like the “absolute freedom of enterprise”, “guarantees to investment capital” and “the law of supply and demand”, that we will solve these problems ... In this present-day world, social problems are not solved by spontaneous generation.

A revolutionary government with the backing of the people and the respect of the nation, after cleaning the various institutions of all venal and corrupt officials, would proceed immediately to industrialise the country, mobilising all inactive capital, currently estimated at about 150 million dollars, through the National Bank and the Agricultural, Industrial and Development Bank, and submitting this mammoth task to experts and men of absolute competence, completely removed from all political machinations, for study, direction, planning and realisation.

After settling the one hundred thousand small farmers as owners on land which they previously rented, a revolutionary government would proceed immediately to settle the land problem. First, the constitution ordains we establish the maximum amount of land to be held by each type of agricultural enterprise and would acquire the excess acres by: expropriation, recovery of the lands stolen from the state, improvement of swampland, planting of large nurseries and reserving zones for reforestation. Secondly, we would distribute the remaining land among peasant families with priority given to the larger ones, and would promote agricultural cooperatives for common use of expensive equipment, freezing plants and a single technical, professional directing

board in farming and cattle raising. Finally, we would provide resources, equipment, protection and useful guidance to the peasants.

A revolutionary government would solve the housing problem by cutting all rents in half, by providing tax exemptions on homes inhabited by the owners; by tripling taxes on rented homes; by tearing down hovels and replacing them with modern multiple-dwelling buildings; and by financing housing all over the island on a scale heretofore unheard of; with the criterion that, just as each rural family should possess its own tract of land, each city family should own its home or apartment. There is plenty of building material and more than enough manpower to make a decent home for every Cuban ... On the other hand, today there are greater than ever possibilities of bringing electricity to the remotest corner of the island ...

With these three projects and reforms, the problem of unemployment would automatically disappear and the work to improve public health and to fight against disease would be made much less difficult.

Finally, a revolutionary government would undertake the integral reform of the educational system, bringing it in line with the foregoing projects with the idea of educating these generations who will have the privilege of living in a happy land ...

Where will the money be found for all this? When there is an end to embezzlement of government funds, when public officials stop taking graft from the large companies who owe taxes to the State, when the enormous resources of the country are brought into full use, when we no longer buy tanks, bombers and guns for this country (which has no frontiers to defend and where these instruments of war, now being purchased, are used against the people), when there is more interest in educating people than in killing them — then there will be more than enough money.

Cuba could easily provide for a population three times as great as it now has, so there is no excuse for the abject poverty of a single one of its present inhabitants. The markets should be overflowing with produce, pantries should be full, all hands should be working. This is not an inconceivable thought. What is inconceivable is that anyone should go to bed hungry, that children should die for lack of medical attention; what is inconceivable is that 30% of our people cannot write their names and that 99% know nothing of Cuba's history. What is inconceivable is that the majority of our rural people are now living in worse circumstances than were the Indians Columbus discovered living in the fairest land that human eyes had ever seen.

To those who call me a dreamer, I quote the words of [19th century Cuban revolutionary democrat José] Martí: "A true man does not seek the path where advantage lies, but rather, the path where duty lies, and this is the only practical man, whose dream of today will be the law of tomorrow, because he who has looked back on the upheavals

of history and has seen civilisations going up in flames, crying out in bloody struggle, throughout the centuries, knows that the future wellbeing of man, without exception, lies on the side of duty.”

Taaffe dismisses this program — which it is doubtful he has even bothered to read — as that of a “radical middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”. But anyone whose ideal was the political system of US monopoly capitalism (moreover, as it existed in 1953 at the height of the McCarthyite witch-hunt) could not be called a “radical [!] middle-class democrat”: at best such a person could only be described as a liberal pseudo-democrat.

Upon what evidence does Taaffe base his claim that Castro’s ideal in 1953 was “democratic capitalist America”? Upon the fact that “in 1956” the J26M “stated that it adhered to the ‘Jeffersonian philosophy’ and the ‘Lincoln formula’.” Taaffe does not tell his readers what either of these is. The “Jeffersonian philosophy” that the J26M endorsed “in 1956” (actually it was in Fidel’s defence speech in October 1953) is that set out in the US Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, which states:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness — That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and institute new Government, laying its Foundations on such Principles, and organising its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes, and accordingly all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security.

The “Jeffersonian philosophy” amounts to the declaration that (as Castro summarised it in his 1953 speech) “resistance to despots is legitimate” up to and including their revolutionary overthrow. The “Lincoln formula” is well known: that government should be “By the people, of the people, for the people”. Together, the “Jeffersonian philosophy” and the “Lincoln formula” amount to the perspective of revolutionary democracy.

Taaffe disapproves of the fact that “Castro and his supporters” did not “start off

their struggle” with a publicly proclaimed “socialist program as had Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia”. But Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not build support among the Russian workers and peasants for their struggle against either tsarist autocracy or (after February 1917) the landlord-capitalist Kerensky government on the basis of a “socialist program” (a program for the wholesale expropriation of bourgeois property in industry). In an article entitled “The Tasks of the Revolution”, printed in the Bolshevik daily *Rabochy Put* of October 9-10, 1917 (September 26-27 in the old Russian calendar), Lenin provided a summary of the Bolsheviks’ program in seven points, headed as follows:

1. Agreements with the capitalists are disastrous.
2. Power to the soviets.
3. Peace to the peoples.
4. Land to those who till it.
5. Struggle against famine and economic ruin. (The main measure advocated under this point was that a “Soviet Government must immediately introduce workers’ control of production and distribution on a nationwide scale” so as to “establish unrelaxing supervision by the workers and peasants over the negligible minority of capitalists who wax rich on government contracts and evade accounting and just taxation of their profits and property”.)
6. Struggle against the counterrevolution of the landlords and capitalists.
7. Peaceful development of the revolution.

There is not a single reference to “socialism” or “socialist revolution” in this whole article.

Taaffe claims to agree with Trotsky’s 1938 *Transitional Program*. In his eagerness to “prove” that Castro in 1959 was “no more than a middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”, Taaffe seems to have forgotten what the *Transitional Program* said should be the immediate program upon which revolutionaries in semicolonial countries (such as pre-revolutionary Cuba) should seek to mobilise the worker-peasant masses:

The central task of the colonial and semicolonial countries is the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national independence*, i.e., overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely linked to each other.

It is impossible to reject the democratic program: it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it ... As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the “national” bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses

under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise ... Sooner or later, soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution.

Isn't this what "Castro and his supporters" did — mobilise the masses "under the slogans of revolutionary democracy", "oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie" and overthrow bourgeois state power, replacing it with a revolutionary state power that brought the "democratic revolution to a conclusion" and then opened an "era of socialist revolution"?

But this is not good enough for Taaffe. Why? Because they didn't carry out this struggle "with a clear socialist program", i.e., they didn't start out publicly proclaiming that they were "socialists" and that their ultimate aim was "socialism". If they had done this, then it's highly unlikely that they would have succeeded. That's because in the minds of the overwhelming majority of Cuban workers and peasants "socialism" was identified with the Stalinist police-states in Eastern Europe (remember that Castro started his struggle at the height of the Cold War — between the Kremlin's suppression of the East German workers' uprising in 1953 and Khrushchev's crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers' revolution). This identification was reinforced by the fact that the Cuban Stalinists (who called themselves the Popular *Socialist* Party) had nominated Batista as their presidential candidate in 1940, and two PSP leaders had accepted cabinet posts in Batista's government in 1944.

In October 1953, Castro began serving a 15-year prison sentence after his arrest following the failed guerrilla attack on the Moncada army barracks. In his account, Taaffe doesn't take too much space to cover the period following this. He writes:

... Castro was first imprisoned and then released only to go to Mexico to organise a guerrilla force which landed in Cuba in 1956. In an heroic three-year struggle they launched a guerrilla campaign which, with the support of the impoverished peasantry, resulted in the defeat of the overwhelmingly numerically superior Batista's *[sic]* force.

Taaffe thus does not bother to inform his readers of what changes, if any, Castro's political views underwent after his imprisonment in 1953. Taaffe avoids an examination of this issue because it would contradict his argument that up to 1961 Castro was nothing more than a "middle-class democrat" aiming to restore bourgeois democracy in Cuba. But Castro's prison diary provides evidence that he was shifting from being simply a revolutionary democrat toward becoming a revolutionary Marxist.

In an entry he made on December 18, 1953, Castro mentioned a number of books he was reading. Among these was Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* which Fidel described as "a modern Russian novel that is a moving autobiography by



a young man who participated in the [Bolshevik] Revolution". In the same entry, Fidel wrote: "I'm also studying Karl Marx's *Capital* in depth; five enormous volumes of economics, researched and set forth with the greatest scientific vigour" (Quoted in Mario Mencia, *Time Was on Our Side*, Havana, 1982, p. 21).

In an entry on January 27, 1954 Castro expressed some of his conclusions as a result of his readings. He wrote:

Human thought is unfailingly conditioned by the circumstances of the era. In the case of a political genius, I venture to affirm that his genius depends exclusively on his era. Lenin in the time of Catherine [the Great], when the aristocracy was the ruling class, would have been a champion of the bourgeoisie, which was the revolutionary class at that time. [ibid., p. 26]

In November 1953 Castro began reading Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables*, which was set during the 1848-52 revolution in France. Four months later, he made the following comment on Hugo's novel:

Impossible to express how much Victor Hugo stimulated me with *Les Miserables*. Nevertheless, as time goes on, I grow a little tired of his excessive romanticism, his verbosity and the sometimes tedious and exaggerated heaviness of his erudition. On the same topic of Napoleon III, Karl Marx wrote a wonderful work entitled *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Placing these two works side by side, you can appreciate the tremendous difference between a scientific, realistic view of history and a purely romantic interpretation. Where Hugo sees no more than a lucky adventurer, Marx sees the inevitable result of social contradictions and the conflict of the prevailing interests of the time. For one, history is luck. For the other, it is a process governed by laws. [ibid., p. 20]

On April 4, 1954 Castro made the following entry in his diary: "It's 11 at night. Since 6, I have been reading one of Lenin's works nonstop — *The State and Revolution* — after finishing *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*, both by Marx, all three of which are interrelated and of immeasurable value." (ibid., p. 21)

Later, in the same entry he added: "My ventures into the field of philosophy have served me well. After knocking heads a good while with Kant, I find Marx easier than the 'Pater nostrum'. Both he and Lenin had a terrific polemical spirit, and I'm having a fine time with them, laughing and enjoying my reading. Implacable and redoubtable with the enemy, they were both really model revolutionaries." (ibid., p. 22)

But if we are to believe Taaffe, these comments — that Marx and Lenin were "model revolutionaries", that Marx's and Lenin's writings on the state and revolution were of "immeasurable value" — were those of a "radical middle-class democrat

whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”!

In May 1955 Batista released all of Cuba’s political prisoners (including Castro) in an effort to win some popular support after he’d had himself reelected president in a fraudulent election held in February 1955. Castro departed for Mexico in July 1955, but he left behind in Santiago de Cuba a schoolteacher named Frank Pais to organise the underground resistance of the July 26 Movement. Shortly after arriving in Mexico, Castro recruited the Argentine revolutionist Ernesto “Che” Guevara to his movement.

On March 19, 1956 Castro publicly announced the existence of the J26M when he severed all ties with the radical petty-bourgeois democratic Ortodoxo Party (of which he had been a candidate in the aborted 1952 Cuban elections). In announcing the beginning of the J26M, Castro declared that it would be a movement “without sugar barons, without stockmarket speculators, without magnates of industry and commerce, without lawyers for big interests, without provincial [political bosses], without small-time politicians of any kind”. Rather, it would be “the revolutionary movement of the humble, the hope of redemption of the Cuban working class, the hope of land for the peasants who live like pariahs in the country that their grandfathers liberated, the hope for bread for the hungry and justice for the forgotten” (Quoted in Robert Taber, *M-26: The Biography of a Revolution*, Lyle Stuart, New York, 1961, p. 51).

Nineteen years later, in a speech made on October 7, 1975, Castro explained why at that time he and the other leaders of the J26M did not publicly proclaim themselves socialists, saying: “... it would have definitely been incorrect from all points of view to propose a socialist program, because such a program would have been inappropriate for that stage of the revolution’s development, which required a program to fit the national liberation stage, a program that would precede and create the conditions for socialism.”

In his report to the first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 1975, Castro explained why proclaiming the J26M’s ultimate goal as a socialist revolution would have been a positive hindrance to the revolutionary mobilisation of the Cuban worker-peasant masses:

Many of our citizens, including people of humble origin and condition, feared the word socialism and were even terrified by the word communism. This was the sequel to decades of perfidious and slandering propaganda against revolutionary ideas. Lacking any basic idea of the social roots of the nation’s problems and of the objective laws governing the development of human society, a sizable part of our people were victims of confusion and deceit ... The presence of a relatively large petty-bourgeois stratum in our society, together with cultural backwardness and illiteracy paved the way for the political work of imperialism and the ruling classes. A US colony economically, we

were one also ideologically.

Taaffe, however, from the comparative intellectual freedom of “democratic capitalist” England, is oblivious to all this. In his view, the Cuban revolutionists should have openly presented a “clear socialist program” — perhaps like the one he has presented for nearly a quarter of a century, i.e., with “socialism” being achieved through the election to parliament of a Labour Party majority armed with an “enabling act” to nationalise industry!

Fortunately for the Cuban working class, Fidel Castro, through studying the writings of Marx and Lenin, had assimilated the Marxist theory of the state and proletarian revolution, and understood that the working class could not simply take hold of the existing (bourgeois) state machinery and wield it in its own interests, but had to smash that machinery and replace it with revolutionary organs of state power (a revolutionary government resting on revolutionary armed forces). Moreover, Castro understood something else that eludes Taaffe — the transitional method of politically educating and mobilising the worker-peasant masses in an industrially underdeveloped country, a country that was lacking the political liberties of Westminster “democracy”.

Let us return to Taaffe's description of the “heroic three-year struggle” waged by the J26M and its Rebel Army against “the overwhelmingly numerically superior” Batista army and police forces. The first thing that strikes one about this description is its brevity. He covers it in no less than 31 words!

Taaffe's description is aimed at highlighting one aspect of the J26M's success (“the support of the impoverished peasantry”) to the detriment of all others. However, this poses a problem. How was the J26M — actually the Rebel Army, which consisted of no more than 300 guerrilla fighters by May 1958 — able to defeat the “overwhelmingly numerically superior” forces at the command of Batista (Batista's armed forces numbered 30,000 men) less than seven months later if they only relied on “the support of an impoverished peasantry”? The “impoverished peasantry” (i.e., landless, tenant farmers and semi-proletarian farm workers) constituted — though Taaffe disdains to mention this fact — only 700,000 people out of Cuba's 8 million inhabitants.

While Taaffe notes that “Cuba was compelled to concentrate on one main crop, sugar, for the American market”, he fails to draw his readers' attention to the obvious social conclusion — the great bulk of Cuba's rural population were plantation workers (agricultural proletarians), not peasant farmers.

Taaffe attributes the J26M's success to “the support of the impoverished peasantry” because he wants to downplay the key role played in the revolutionary victory by the J26M's mobilisation of the Cuban working class. In the paragraph after he castigates “Castro and his supporters” for not starting off their struggle with a “clear socialist

program”, Taaffe states:

Lenin based himself on the working class. He anticipated that workers would lead the poor peasantry in the struggle against tsarism. Castro and Guevara relied on the peasants and the rural population. The working class only entered the struggle through a general strike in Havana when the guerrillas had already triumphed and Batista was fleeing for his life ...

The fact that Castro came to power through a predominantly rural movement shaped the whole character of his movement. It was only a peculiar combination of circumstances which resulted in Castro — who to begin with never envisaged going beyond the framework of a capitalist democracy — presiding over the expropriation of the landlords and capitalists.

I’ll come back to this last fantasy — that some “peculiar combination of circumstances” could result in a “radical middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America” leading a socialist revolution — shortly. Here I want to take up Taaffe’s attempt to paint the J26M-led struggle against Batista as a peasant-based movement in which the Cuban working class played only a marginal role. Firstly, Taaffe himself has to acknowledge that the J26M did not rely solely on the peasants — “Castro and Guevara relied on the peasants and the rural population”.

Wage-workers constituted 56% of Cuba’s total labour force of 2.2 million in 1957. Rural wage-workers made up half of the working class (with sugar industry workers constituting 80% of the rural working-class). So, if “Castro and Guevara” relied “on the peasants and the rural population”, they were relying on at least half of the Cuban proletariat for political support, including the section of the working class that was regarded as the most politically conscious and militant — the workers employed in the sugar industry.

The 300 guerrillas who constituted the Rebel Army consisted of recruits from the cities (students and workers), and they relied on an extensive network of support organised by the J26M underground resistance in the cities and rural towns. It was through its urban underground network that the J26M organised two general strikes in the city of Santiago de Cuba (the country’s second largest urban centre) — the first at the end of November 1956 to distract Batista’s troops during the December 2, 1956 landing of Castro’s 82-man guerrilla force from Mexico, and the second in April 1958. Throughout 1957 and early 1958 the Rebel Army’s command centre was located about 80 km east of the city, in the Sierra Maestra mountains.

The mobilisation of the urban working class by the J26M underground resistance movement was crucial to the success of the Rebel Army over the vastly superior military forces commanded by Batista’s generals. It was the massive mobilisation of

support for the J26M from the urban working class — in the general strike called by Castro on January 1, 1959 — that led to the collapse of resistance by Batista's troops.

Taaffe dismisses the urban insurrection of January 1959 with the claim that the “working class only entered the struggle through a general strike in Havana when the guerrillas had already triumphed and Batista was fleeing for his life”. Batista fled Cuba at 2 am on January 1, 1959, handing over power to a military junta headed by General Eulogio Cantillo. It was the general strike/working-class insurrection in Havana on January 2 that enabled Che Guevara's tiny band of 300 guerrilla fighters to march into the city that same day without army resistance.

Nowhere in his account, which out of sectarian hostility to Castro denigrates the role of the Cuban working class in the anti-Batista struggle, does Taaffe explain how the tiny armed forces of the J26M (totalling 3000 guerrillas by December 1958) were able to defeat Batista's US-backed army (totalling 30,000 officers and men). If, as Taaffe claims, the January 1-2, 1959 general strike was irrelevant to the guerrillas' victory, why did they call it? More importantly, how was the allegedly peasant-based movement headed by Castro able to succeed in calling out almost the entire Cuban working class in such a general strike when the CTC (the Cuban Workers Confederation) was controlled by anti-Castro bureaucrats who were on Batista's payroll? Could such a thing be possible if the J26M had not built up an extensive urban underground organisation that carried out political propaganda, agitation and organisation within the working class? Unless one believes in miracles, the answer to this question should be obvious. ■

## 4. How Taaffe ‘Explains’ the Socialist Revolution in Cuba

Taaffe not only expects his readers to believe in miracles when it comes to explaining how Castro’s small guerrilla bands defeated Batista’s army, he expects us to accept an even more miraculous story: that due to a “peculiar combination of circumstances” a few hundred guerrilla fighters relying on “the support of the impoverished peasants” and headed by a “radical middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”, carried out a socialist revolution in the face of fierce opposition from Washington. Here’s Taaffe’s fairytale:

On the one side, was the utter bankruptcy of Cuban capitalism to show a way out of the impasse of society. At the same time, there was the colossal pressure of an aroused peasantry and working class. With the defeat of Batista, the peasants moved to occupy the land and the working class clamoured for wage increases and the reinstatement of those sacked under the previous regime. Thus in the spring of 1959, 6,000 workers of the Cuban Electric Company declared a slowdown in order to achieve a 20% rise in wages, and 600 workers who had been dismissed in 1957-58 began a strike before the presidential palace. The masses were armed and formed into a militia. Meanwhile, the representative of American imperialism, Eisenhower, panic-stricken by the radicalisation of the Cuban masses, sought to pressurise and blackmail the Cuban government into submission.

This came to a head over Russian crude oil which was to be delivered to Cuba under a trade agreement between the two countries signed in January, 1960. In June the three big oil companies (Jersey Standard, Texaco, and Shell), under pressure from the US government, refused to refine the Russian oil. But the Cuban government then “intervened” (a form of supervision) and put the oil through. The companies retaliated by refusing to deliver oil from Venezuela. Cuba then agreed to take all its oil from

Russia [Taaffe means the USSR — DL].

The Eisenhower administration hit back in July by cutting the remaining 700,000 tons of Cuban sugar due to be delivered under the quota agreement. This was calculated to bring the Cuban regime to its knees. But Russia immediately stepped in and agreed to take the 700,000 tons of sugar. At the same time, on August 6th, the Cuban Telephone Company, the Electric Company, the oil refinery [*sic*] and all the sugar mills — which up to then had only been “intervened” — were all nationalised. In the next four months, in a rapid succession of blows and counter blows, all Cuban and American big business was taken over.

The pressure of the masses, the weakness of Cuban capitalism, and the miscalculations and blunders of American imperialism, all combined to push the Castro regime into expropriating landlordism and capitalism. We thus witnessed in Cuba a verification of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution in a caricatured form. The capitalist democratic revolution could only be carried out against the resistance of the capitalists in Cuba and internationally. This in turn compelled Castro to lead on the masses and to go over to nationalise big business and establish a planned economy. There was no conscious foresight nor a worked out perspective, as with Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian revolution.

Now, there are a few obvious problems with this “explanation”. For example, Taaffe informs us that “The masses were armed and formed into a militia”. Did this just happen spontaneously, or did the Castro regime have something to do with it? Why did the Castro government respond to US imperialism’s economic blackmail by “intervening” in the oil refineries and buying Soviet oil, rather than capitulating to Washington’s pressure? Why did it continue to respond to Washington’s escalating economic embargo with more “interventions” (imposition of state control over industry) and then nationalisations, rather than capitulate to this pressure?

This was not how Kerensky (the Russian “radical middle-class democrat whose ideal was democratic capitalist America”) responded to similar economic blackmail from the Anglo-French imperialists and the Russian capitalists in 1917. The “circumstances” facing the Kerensky government were very similar to those facing Castro’s — colossal pressure from an aroused peasantry and working class following the tsar’s ousting, and the utter bankruptcy of Russian capitalism to show a way out of the impasse of society. Instead, the Kerensky government worked to demobilise the masses, stabilise the bourgeois army and police, and conspired with the army generals to drown the popular revolutionary movement in a counterrevolutionary bloodbath. It did nothing to impose state control over the capitalists to curtail their sabotage of production.

If the Castro leadership had “no conscious foresight” about what US imperialism and the Cuban bourgeoisie’s response would be to its attempt to implement the J26M program — which it will be recalled called for a radical agrarian reform, organisation of agricultural cooperatives on the sugar plantations, nationalisation of the US-owned Utilities (electric) Trust and US-owned Telephone Trust and “confiscation” by the revolutionary government “of all holdings and ill-gotten gains of those who had committed frauds during previous regimes, as well as the holdings and ill-gotten gains of all their legatees and heirs” — why then did the Castro government sign a trade agreement with the USSR? Why did the Castro government dissolve Cuba’s bourgeois army and police, arm the masses and form them into a popular militia?

Furthermore, other questions are raised by Taaffe’s account. For example, why was the US policy a miscalculation? Hadn’t it worked whenever the US imperialists had faced similar situations in the past (in Iran in 1953, and Guatemala in 1954) — and didn’t it work again in Chile in 1973? Mightn’t the answer have something to do with the difference in the character of the Castro leadership and those holding governmental power in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954 (and Chile in 1973), i.e., that in the latter cases the leaderships were non-revolutionary petty-bourgeois nationalists who based themselves on the capitalist state machine rather than the revolutionary mobilisation of the working class?

Taaffe attempts to counterpose Castro’s “unconscious” implementation of a socialist revolution to the “worked out perspective” of “Lenin and Trotsky”. But he gives his readers no description of what this “worked out perspective” was. Here is how Ernest Mandel summarised it in his 1968 book *Marxist Economic Theory*:

The program of the first Bolshevik government did not envisage the immediate expropriation of all the capitalists. It envisaged only the universal implementation of workers’ supervision of production, the workers having as a first stage to apprentice themselves to the task of management by checking on the capitalist managers. It further envisaged the nationalisation of the banks, after these had been previously merged into a single national bank; the progressive nationalisation of the chief monopoly-controlled sectors of the economy; the non-recognition of foreign debts; and the nationalisation of the land and subsoil, together with division of the land among the peasants. All these measures taken together would not have meant a qualitative overturn in the social structure of Russian economy.

This summary of the Bolsheviks’ “revolutionary democratic” program can be verified by Lenin’s article “The Tasks of the Revolution”, and his April 1918 article “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government”. Mandel went to point out that the “worked-out perspective” of “Lenin and Trotsky” had to be abandoned with the



outbreak of the Civil War in mid-1918:

... noncooperation, and then sabotage, on the part of the industrial and administrative circles; the unleashing of the White Terror, followed by the Red; the outbreak of a widespread civil war which tore the whole country in pieces during a period of three years; the intervention of foreign armies in this war — all these events upset the long-term projects of the Bolshevik government and pushed on to the path of rapidly changing the economic structure. The nationalisation of the banks, of wholesale trade, of all industry, and of all foreign property, and the establishment of a state monopoly of foreign trade, had created by the end of 1918 a new economic and social structure in Russia.

One could just as well apply Taaffe's method of analysis of the Cuban revolution to the Bolshevik revolution, for example: It was only a peculiar combination of circumstances which resulted in Lenin — who to begin with never envisaged going beyond the framework of a capitalist democracy (this by the way is how adherents of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution present Lenin's views before 1917) — presiding over the expropriation of the landlords and capitalists. On one side, was the bankruptcy of Russian capitalism to show a way out of the impasse of society. At the same time, there was the colossal pressure of an aroused peasantry and working class. With the defeat of Kerensky, the peasants moved to occupy the land and the working class clamoured for wage increases ... The masses were armed and formed into the militia (Red Guard). Meanwhile, the representatives of imperialism (Churchill, Poincaré, Wilson), panic-stricken by the radicalisation of the Russian masses, sought to pressurise and blackmail the Russian government into submission. They imposed a complete trade embargo and prepared a military intervention to crush the Russian revolution. The pressure of the masses, the weakness of Russian capitalism, and the miscalculations of imperialism, all combined to push the Lenin regime into expropriating landlordism and capitalism. We thus witnessed in Russia a verification of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in a caricatured form. The capitalist democratic revolution could only be carried out against the resistance of the capitalists in Russia and internationally. This in turn compelled Lenin to lean on the masses and to go over to nationalise big business and establish a planned economy.

Such a presentation of the course of the Bolshevik revolution was actually given by the Bolsheviks themselves. In his "Report on the New Soviet Economic and the Perspectives of the World Revolution" to the 4th Congress of the Comintern (1922), Trotsky observed that:

It is perfectly obvious that from the economic standpoint [i.e., from the point of view of a "worked out perspective"] the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is justified to the

extent that the workers' state is able to organise the exploitation of enterprises upon new beginnings. The wholesale, overall nationalisation which we carried through in 1917-18 was completely out of harmony with the condition I have just now outlined. The organisational potentialities of the workers' state lagged far behind total nationalisation. But the whole point is that under the pressure of Civil War we had to carry this nationalisation through ... had we been able to enter the arena of socialist development after the victory of the revolution in Europe, our bourgeoisie would have quaked in their boots and it would have been very simple to deal with it. In that case, we would have tranquilly taken hold only of the large-scale enterprises, leaving the middle-sized and small ones to exist for a while on the private capitalist basis; later we would have reorganised the middle-sized enterprises, rigidly taking into account our organisational and productive potentialities and requirements. Such an order would unquestionably have been in harmony with economic "rationality", but unfortunately the political sequence of events failed to take into consideration this time, either ...

When we assumed power, capitalism still straddled the whole world (as it continues to straddle the world to this very day). Our bourgeoisie refused to believe, come what may, that the October revolution was something serious and durable ... Every factory, every bank, every office, every little shop, every lawyer's waiting room became a fortress against us. They provided bellicose counterrevolution with a material base, and an organic network of communication ... For exactly this reason we did not approach the question from the standpoint of abstract economic "rationality" (as do Kautsky, Otto Bauer, Martov and other political eunuchs), but from the standpoint of the revolutionary war needs. It was necessary to smash the enemy, to deprive it of its sources of nourishment, independently of whether or not organised economic activity could keep up with this. [Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2, Monad, New York, 1972, pp. 226-27]

There were foreign socialists at the time who were extremely critical of many of the Bolsheviks' tactics and methods. But the genuine Marxists among them, despite their criticisms of the Bolsheviks' methods, were able to recognise that the Bolsheviks had acted as proletarian revolutionists. An example was Rosa Luxemburg, who wrote of the Bolsheviks that "it is clear that in every revolution, only that party is capable of seizing the leadership and power which has the courage to issue the appropriate watchwords for driving the revolution ahead, and the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation". Is there any justification for not saying the same thing of Fidel Castro and his comrades? They had the revolutionary courage and insight to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation and to act as proletarian revolutionists, as Marxists.

Taaffe's refusal to recognise this stems from a false conception of the dialectic of revolution in underdeveloped countries and from a hidebound sectarianism flowing from a semi-religious cult-like messianism, i.e., that the adherents of the CWI, i.e., his devout followers, are the only genuine Marxist revolutionaries existent anywhere in the world. ■

## 5. Concentration of Power ‘In the Hands of a Layer of Privileged Officials’?

Taaffe claims that from the “outset” of the Cuban revolution (i.e., from the very beginning of the Castro regime) “power [was] concentrated in the hands of a layer of privileged officials”; the Castro regime was “basically similar to” the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Taaffe informs his readers that the Castro regime armed the masses, creating a “200,000 strong workers’ and peasants’ militia”.

In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky pointed out that concentration of power in the hands of a stratum of privileged administrators in Soviet Russia was reflected in the relations between the armed forces and the masses: “The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers’ caste, crowned with marshals, while the people, ‘the armed bearers of the dictatorship’, are forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even non-explosive weapons.” Trotsky pointed out that a symptom of the usurpation of power by the Soviet bureaucracy was the abolition of the militia system: “The divisions of a militia through their very character come into direct dependence upon the population. This is the chief advantage of the system from a socialist point of view. But this also is its danger from the point of view of the Kremlin. It is exactly because of this undesirable closeness of the army to the people that the military authorities of the advanced capitalist countries, where technically it would be easy to realise, reject the militia. The keen discontent in the Red Army during the first five-year plan undoubtedly supplied a serious motive for the subsequent abolition of the territorial divisions”, i.e., the organisation of the Red Army on a militia basis.

If the Castro regime was “basically similar to” the Stalinist regime in the Soviet

Union, surely we would expect it to follow a similar policy in regard to the armed forces, i.e., to transform the 3000 guerilla fighters of the Rebel Army into a regular army divorced from the masses and serving as the ultimate guarantor for the “uncontrolled domination” of the masses by the ruling caste of privileged administrators. Yet, as Taaffe himself acknowledges, beginning in October 1959, the Castro government moved to arm the masses, creating a “200,000 strong workers’ and peasants’ militia”, into which the Rebel Army was dissolved!

Taaffe cannot avoid the evidence that the Castro government relied on the organised mobilisation of the worker-peasant masses to carry through the expropriation of capitalist property and the establishment of a nationalised, planned economy. Yet he does this in the most grudging manner possible, so as to fit in with his claim that “from the outset management and control was concentrated in the hands of Castro and his supporters, the officialdom of the State machine, the governing party and the army etc”. Thus the takeover of the factories, mills, agricultural plantations, and local administration by the workers is reduced to the acknowledgement that, “There was undoubtedly an element [!] of workers’ control in the factories in the first period of the revolution and every neighbourhood and street had a ‘Committee for the Defence of the Revolution’.”

However, what he gives with one hand, he takes away with the other. Thus, he tells his readers that, “The elements of workers’ control, the workers’ militia, etc, which existed in the first period of the revolution have been either weakened or eliminated altogether”.

By the mid 1980s the Territorial Militia numbered 1.5 million people in its ranks. The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) had a membership of half a million people in 1961; 3.2 million in 1970 (37% of Cuba’s population), and 5.4 million in 1980 (56% of Cuba’s population; 80% of its adult population).

Taaffe approvingly quotes the following comment from the French-Polish journalist K.S. Karol’s 1970 book *Guerrillas in Power*: “Cubans no longer boast about their workers’ militia or about their Committees for Defence of the Revolution. The latter now have a purely repressive function”.

Taaffe seems to be unaware that the CDRs were set up to *carry out a repressive function* — to organise the mass of workers and peasants to (as their name implies) repress counterrevolutionary activity, i.e., sabotage and terrorism. Was there anything like this under the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? These regimes did not rely upon the workers and peasants themselves to repress counterrevolutionary activity, but a small, highly privileged political police force (that could also be used to repress the masses). In reality, the functions of these

neighbourhood-based committees very soon became much more than simply a repressive one. They took over the tasks of ensuring public security (guarding factories, schools, etc.), combating hoarding and speculation of scarce goods, supervising the distribution of food and other necessities through the ration-card system. They organised mass vaccinations and blood donations, social security, cultural and sports activities — indeed the entire organisation of community services at the local level. The leaders of the CDRs — their presidents and section chiefs — are elected by neighbourhood CDR members. In 1970 there were 67,457 such committees (81,000 in 1980). Ten to 15 CDRs are grouped into a district CDR, whose leaders are elected by district assemblies of CDR members, at which all of the work of the CDRs in the district is discussed and decided on by the neighbourhood's residents.

As for the “elements of workers’ control in the factories” which Taaffe claims “have been either weakened or eliminated altogether”, these are described by US sociologist Maurice Zeitlin in his report “Cuba’s Workers, Worker’s Cuba, 1969” (introduction to M. Zeitlin, *Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class*, Harper, New York, 1970) and in chapter 1 of Chilean journalist Marta Harnecker’s 1975 book *Cuba: Dictatorship or Democracy?* (Lawrence Hill, Westport, 1980). These accounts show that workers’ control in the factories has increased, not decreased, since the first period of the revolution. Cuban workers, by law, are entitled to discuss the economic plan as it applies to their workplace. If the workers don’t think the plan is realistic, they can reject it and the whole matter has to be negotiated out between the workers’ representatives and the planning authorities. Any new proposal still has to be ratified by the workers’ assembly in the enterprise. Workers’ assemblies also vote on the production norms, i.e., the rate at which people are expected to work.

In the first of Taaffe’s two articles on Cuba, he asserts — without offering any concrete evidence — that the Castro leadership represents a “layer of privileged officials”. In the third article in the pamphlet, under the sub-head “Privileges”, Taaffe makes an effort to prove this assertion. He writes:

The privileges of this layer have existed from the outset of the Cuban revolution. But on a low economic and cultural base the differences between the workers and the peasants on the one hand and the bureaucracy on the other could not be as great as in Russia or Eastern Europe.

This, of course, is not true. China, for example, had a much lower economic and cultural base than Soviet Russia or the bureaucratically-ruled socialist states of Eastern Europe, yet differences between the living standards of the Chinese workers and peasants and those of the top echelons of the Chinese bureaucracy were vastly greater than between the top echelons of the Soviet bureaucracy and the Russian workers in

the 1960s and '70s. In 1956, the Chinese Stalinists imposed a system of ranks for state employees that included 30 grades, with the top grade receiving no less than 28 times the pay of the lowest grade. In addition to salaries, the higher administrators were given special housing (the mansions and luxury houses of the imperial officialdom and the big bourgeoisie), private servants, use of chauffeur-driven cars for personal and family use, special stores filled with consumer goods denied to workers whatever their income level. Here is a description from Chow Ching-wen, a top government functionary in Beijing in 1957 who fled to Hong Kong during the 1958-59 "Great Leap Forward":

The heads of departments and people of ministerial rank have special coupons for meat, game, fowl and other delicacies and are not restricted to rations. Every morning, long lines of jeeps and trucks are at the market to bring back food from the VIP's, and it is only after their needs have been satisfied that the people are allowed to buy what they can. Furthermore, every VIP has a chef of some renown to cook for him. This is perhaps one of the "achievements" the CC [Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party — DL] are most proud of. Every time I had a meal with a VIP, he boasted about his chef, who was formerly either the chef of some famous restaurant or distinguished household. Once at the home of one of the VIPs, I even tasted food prepared by the former chef of Henry Pu Yi, the last Emperor of the Ching Dynasty ...

When the VIPs of the CCP want to get away from the city (for them life should not be all work and no play), they go to the sumptuous villas which the capitalists, foreigners, and the reactionary politicians had built at the resorts ...

By special trains they arrive — the higher echelon of the Communist Government, with large families and an entourage of cooks, nurses, and doctors in tow. But as I have said, even with the members of the new aristocracy, there are differences in the extent of special privileges enjoyed. The highest of the high have whatever their hearts desire so long as it is for sale, in China or any country in the world. The scale of privileges comes down according to the positions the members occupy in the regime. But as long as one has power over someone else — whether it extends to the entire country or merely to the limits of a village or county — despotic rights come with it, and in material comfort one is sure to be better off than those over whom one has power. The high in office draw openly from the National Treasury for their expenses. The smaller despots get what they want directly from the people. [Chow Ching-wen, *Ten Years of Storm*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960, pp. 182-86.]

Canadian journalist John Burns gave the following description of his observations of the life of middle-ranking Chinese officials in a dispatch from Beijing printed in the Match 4, 1975 *Toronto Globe and Mail*:

Of course, senior cadres have expenses that workers do not. Typically, they will have an apartment of several rooms, perhaps even a house, for which they will pay as much as 50 yuan (\$28) a month, compared to the dollar or two paid by workers for their 2 rooms.

A tailor-made worsted tunic at 150 yuan (\$85) against a worker's 25 yuan (\$14) denims, is part of every cadre's wardrobe, and leather shoes, also de rigueur, run up to 40 yuan (\$22) a pair, 10 times what a worker pays for his plastic or canvas knockarounds.

All this, however, leaves a surplus. A cadre can put this on deposit at the bank, for a nominal interest rate of less than 1%, and many do. Deposits of as much as 5,000 yuan (\$2,860) are not unknown. He can also indulge in a few luxuries: a Rolex watch at 918 yuan (\$515) is the ultimate in cachet (a department store in Nanking, a city of less than two million, sold more than 100 of the next-best Omega model, at 650 yuan (\$365) last year) and black-and-white television sets at 450 yuan (\$260) are becoming increasingly popular (the same Nanking store sold more than 500 to individuals in 1974).

This was at a time when, as two Canadian Maoists, Pat and Roger Howard, reported that "many ordinary Chinese people were finding it more and more difficult to buy food and other daily necessities because of the disruptions in production and distribution due to interference by the four [i.e., the "Gang of Four" headed by Chiang Ch'ing — DL] in planning and production" (US *Guardian*, March 2, 1977).

Let's now return to Taaffe's argument that the Castro regime represents a caste of privileged administrators similar to that represented by the Mao regime. Here's the "evidence" Taaffe cites:

... even as early as 1963, K.S. Karol remarks that in one factory he came across an engineer received 17 times the wage of a worker!

Moreover, he cites other perks and privileges cornered by the bureaucracy, such as the "high class" restaurants, like "Monsenor"[sic], the "Torre", the "1830", the "Floridita", and others which charge colossal prices for meals. At the CP Party Conference in 1975 a decision was taken to allow Cubans to buy cars — which up till then had been the preserve of party and state officials!

This is *all* the "evidence" Taaffe cites to make his case: (a) that the French-Polish journalist K.S. Karol in 1963 found "one factory" where an *engineer* (a highly skilled worker) "received 17 times the wage of a worker"; (b) that there exist a number of "high-class" restaurants which "charge colossal prices for meals"; and (c) that the 1975 party congress decided to "allow Cubans to buy cars", which according to Taaffe "up till then had been the preserve of party and state officials".

With regard to this last piece of "evidence" of bureaucratic privilege, Taaffe leaves



out a few not irrelevant facts: (a) that Cuba does not have a car industry, and therefore has to import all its cars; (b) between 1959 and 1969, the Cuban government imported only 1000 cars (it imported 50,000 tractors during the same period); (c) prior to 1975 no Cubans (including party and state officials) were allowed to buy an imported car, these were all state property used for official government business or by the state-owned taxi services; (d) officials were not allowed to use a government car for personal or family business, but only for official government business.

As for Taaffe's second piece of "evidence" (the "high-class" restaurants which "charge colossal prices"), these would only be "perks and privileges cornered by the bureaucracy" if Taaffe could demonstrate that Cuban administrators received salaries which enabled them to frequent them often. Taaffe seems to assume that such restaurants could only exist for the benefit of high-salaried "party and state officials" (it doesn't seem to have occurred to him that these restaurants actually exist to milk dollars off Western tourists and visiting foreign businessmen).

Taaffe presumably thinks that because Cuban engineers have higher wages than unskilled workers this is evidence that there exists a "layer of privileged officials" — if an engineer gets 17 times as much as an unskilled worker, what must a factory manager get! The answer is — a lot less than a skilled technician like an engineer. In his study of the conditions of workers in Cuba in 1969, US sociologist Maurice Zeitlin explained that in 1961 the salary scales for different levels of skill that existed among employees before the revolution were frozen — that's why an engineer in 1963 could receive 17 times the wage of an unskilled worker. Zeitlin goes on to explain that under the new pay system:

Especially skilled technicians may receive higher salaries than administrators, but these are also within a narrow range of variation. At the textile plant in Ariguanabo, for instance, which is Cuba's most important cotton textile mill, equipped with modern machinery and employing 2700 workers, the administrator earns \$250 monthly. A section technical chief earns \$400 monthly. Skilled workers earn \$1.75 an hour, which amounts to about \$300 a month (figuring an eight-hour day, five days a week), while the lowest-paid peón or unskilled worker earns 55c an hour, or about \$95 a month. At the Venezuela sugar central in Cuba, the administrator earns \$300 a month, his assistant \$250; the least skilled worker 50c hourly, or about \$87 monthly, and a skilled worker \$1 hourly, or about \$173 monthly. These figures are typical of those in the other plants I visited and apparently is the pattern throughout industry.

Outside of industry, the new wage and salary scales have a similar pattern; the salaries of government officials range from \$200 or \$250 for typical functionaries to a high of \$700 a month for cabinet ministers. There are certain limited prerequisites of

office. Many government functionaries have drivers and cars assigned to them for use on government business ... Functionaries, especially those dealing with foreign visitors, also have expense accounts which allow them to indulge more often than other Cubans in meals at the few remaining plush restaurants frequented still by the wealthy who have not chosen to leave. Public property and accessible to all, such restaurants are a luxury few Cubans can yet afford.

In general, however, from what I could observe, Cubans in the highest positions in government and industry live simply, and the gap between their life styles and those of ordinary workers is no greater, and perhaps less, than that indicated by differential income levels. Expropriated country homes and private yachting clubs, rather than becoming the opulent quarters of a new elite of government bureaucrats and party officials, as has occurred in other Communist countries as diverse as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, are new restaurants, resorts, schools, and museums open to everyone. The mansions along Quinta Avenida (Fifth Avenue) in Marianao house scholarship students from worker and peasant families, or are being used as government office buildings ...

The egalitarian social reality of Cuba is most evident precisely where one would expect it to find it least evident, inside the factories, mines, and mills, in the social relations between production workers and administrative, technical, and clerical personnel. Informal social relations are direct, and there do not seem to be distinctions of status involving particular and subtle patterns of deference and obeisance to persons in authority.

Zeitlin goes on to cite the comments of a statistician at a paper mill:

I am a worker like other workers. The administrator is a worker among workers. You want to see him, you see him. You do not have to stand and mumble and hope that you will sometime see someone who will take your complaint to the front office. You enter, like a worker who knows he is the owner here, and you ask to see the administrator. Naturally, he has meetings and a great deal of work. He cannot always just stop and speak to you anytime you wish. This is just. But you know that there is a correct reason why he can't see you, and you understand. Usually, this does not happen. You just ask to see him and do, or anyone else whom you might want to see. There are no privileges.

Earlier in his report, Zeitlin cited the remarks of a black brewery worker, referring to the ration card system then in force throughout Cuba: "Everyone has his quota, according to his family's needs, no more or less. This, at least, is what I can see for myself. René [the plant administrator] stands in line like the rest of us. His wife and mine buy at the same store. No one has privileges now. What there is is for everyone."

Throughout the 1960s Cuba basically operated a system of “War Communism” — highly centralised administration and universal and equal rationing of most consumer goods. At the time Taaffe wrote his articles on Cuba — 1978 — the extreme shortages that existed in the 1960s had considerably eased. Here is how a Cuban-American Trotskyist described the situation in 1979:

Cuban wage scales nominally run from about 90 to 700 pesos a month. (Officially 1 peso equals US\$1.40). However, in practice, it is rare for anyone to earn less than 120 pesos, and the only group I heard of who earn more than 400 pesos are a few doctors who occupy special posts.

For example, at one warehouse I visited in the city of Havana, formerly owned by my father, wages range between 120 and 152 pesos a month. The salary of the top administrator is 163 pesos a month.

At the factory that produces sugarcane harvesting combines, production workers earn up to 154 pesos and the highest paid administrator receives 250 pesos.

This doesn't tell the whole story, however, because workers engaged in production labour — but not administrators — are entitled to incentive pay for surpassing the production norms for their job. The rate of incentive pay is 100 percent — if you produce twice as much, you get paid twice as much. In addition, all the employees, in this case including administrators, are entitled to an additional bonus of 10 percent of all their earnings during a three-month period if their factory, warehouse, or farm meets its goals for quantity produced, efficient use of raw materials, etc.

At the warehouse I visited in Havana, for example, the effect of these incentive pay plans was that many workers consistently had much higher take-home pay than the administrators. This has created a problem, in that many workers are unwilling to accept promotions to administrative posts because it would mean a cut in real income.

Disparities in the standard of living are further reduced because everyone in Cuba receives many essential goods and services either free or at subsidised prices. Health care and education are totally free. About two-thirds of the cost of child-care is subsidised, and fees are adjusted according to income, ranging from two pesos to forty pesos a month. Rent is no more than 10 percent of income, and usually is 6 percent., which represents a substantial subsidy. All workers get at least one meal, sometimes two meals, every day at their work places for fifty Cuban cents each, which represents a subsidy...

Other measures have been adopted to prevent the growth of special privileges for functionaries. For example, there is a big shortage of housing in Cuba, as well as an insufficient supply of TVs, refrigerators, and other consumer durables. After various experiments, the Castro leadership implemented a plan of distribution primarily through

workplace assemblies. The workers vote on who, among those who don't have a particular item, are most deserving because of their work performance. They are entitled to buy the scarce items ...

Being an administrator doesn't automatically bring preferential treatment. For example, the administrator of the warehouse in Havana that I visited had been without an apartment of his own since divorcing his wife two years before. He said that was because couples with children get priority for housing. (Workplace distribution applies only to newly built apartments.) [Jose Perez, "Cuba in the Twentieth Year of the Revolution", *Intercontinental Press*, December 3, 1979.]

If there were a privileged ruling group alien to the Cuban workers, surely this would be perceived by the workers. And surely the sudden increase in severe shortages of consumer goods as a result of the 35% shrinkage in Cuba's economic output between 1989 and 1993 (as the combined result of the US economic blockade and the collapse of the Soviet Union), would see a big rise in opposition by the workers to such a privileged elite. Doesn't the fact that no such opposition has emerged in Cuba, and the fact that even hostile commentators are forced to admit that the Castro leadership continues to enjoy a wide measure of support among the workers, tell us that this leadership is fundamentally different from the Stalinist regimes that existed in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China?

Indeed, this is the most glaring contradiction in Taaffe's "analysis" of the Castro regime. On the one hand, he tells us that it's "basically similar" to the Stalinist regime in the USSR; that it's a bureaucratic tyranny that suppresses all dissent; that under Castro "the dead hand of bureaucracy pervades everything"; that it's been responsible for decades of "mismanagement" and "tremendous waste"; that in the late 1960s it carried out a "Cuban version" of Mao's "Cultural Revolution" in which there was "the virtual militarisation of labour". And on the other hand, he tells us that, after all this, "the Castro regime still has much more of a popular base than the Stalinist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe" (as the events of 1989-90 revealed, the Stalinist regimes in European Europe not only lacked any popular base, they were hated by the masses).

How is this contradiction between the "reality" of life for the masses in Cuba (as portrayed by Taaffe) and their attitude to the Castro regime to be explained? Are the Cuban masses, like the workers and peasants of North Korea, denied any other view of what's going on in their country than the official media's? But ordinary Cubans are readily able to pick up radio broadcasts from Miami television and radio stations, and the US government's Radio Jose Marti (because the Castro regime doesn't jam these broadcasts). Moreover, Cuba is visited each year by more than a million foreign tourists — most of them from Canada, Italy, Spain, Mexico and Argentina.

Taaffe offers his readers no explanation as to why the “Stalinist regime” in Cuba has remained so popular. Perhaps this is because, if he tried to do so his whole “analysis” would be exposed for what it is — a sectarian-driven frame-up based on gross falsifications of the policies of the Castro regime.

There’s another rather glaring contradiction in Taaffe’s analysis: he’s forced to acknowledge that “In practically every field the living standards of the Cuban masses have outdistanced those of their Latin American counterparts” and that despite the inherited underdevelopment of its economy (which prior to 1959 was dominated by one product — sugar) there has been a considerable development of industry in Cuba.

Taaffe even gives his readers some facts to support this. Unfortunately, the figures he provides underestimate the real development of the Cuban economy since 1959. Thus he states that “between 1959 and 1965 industrial production increased by 50%” and “In 1975 the economy increased by something like 9%”. In fact, Cuba’s economy grew by more than 10% annually and industrial production by 9.5% per year in the period 1971-75. In the previous five years (1966-70) the economy grew at an annual rate of 3.9%, and industrial production by 7.5% per year. In 1961-65 the economy grew by 1.9% per year, and industrial production by 2.3%. This slow rate of growth in the 1960s is understandable if account is taken of the deliberate disruption caused by the imposition of the total US trade embargo in 1961. Moreover, it should be born in mind that between 1950 and 1958 the Cuban economy grew by only 1.8% annually (with a 2.1% annually increase in population resulting in a 0.3% per annum decline in average income). Cement production grew threefold between 1967 and 1975, while steel production in 1975 was 10 times its 1959 level.

Yet, according to Taaffe, throughout the whole period since the revolution, the Cuban economy has been marked by “mismanagement” and “tremendous waste”. Characteristically, Taaffe fails to account for the contradiction between this claim and Cuba’s actual economic performance. ■

## 6. Workers' Democracy In Cuba

Taaffe spends a considerable amount of space in his second article (which is headed "Power in the Hands of Bureaucratic Elite"), criticising "Mismanagement, tremendous waste and zig-zags in economic policy" in Cuba. These problems are attributed by him to the existence "of a regime where the 'decision makers' are not subject to mass criticism, election and recall". If only there was "workers' democracy" in Cuba, Taaffe argues, these problems would not exist.

The "decision makers" in Soviet Russia in Lenin's time were "subject to mass criticism, election and recall", yet there was still considerable "mismanagement", "waste" and "zig-zags in economic policy". No doubt Taaffe would explain these problems as resulting from the lack of administrative experience among the Bolshevik leaders and the Russian workers. But mismanagement and waste in Cuba, which were particularly acute problems in the 1960s, apparently had nothing to do with the inexperience in economic administration of the Cuban revolutionaries, the near-total departure of highly trained managers and technicians (most of whom were American) after the revolution, the dependence of Cuban industry upon American-made machinery (spare parts for which became unavailable with the US trade embargo). No, according to Taaffe, they are *all* attributable to the "absence" of workers' democracy, to the "decision-makers" not being "subject to mass criticism, election and recall". Taaffe goes on to argue that:

The real possibilities in a planned economy can only be decided on the basis of thorough going discussion among the masses who can add the necessary correctives, additions, etc. Without this discussion and a reliance on mass initiative to implement the plans, blunders and mistakes are inevitable.

This has proved to be the case in Cuba in relation to the sugar industry. Thus Castro

declared that Cuba would produce 10 million tons of sugar by 1970. Yet even given the vagaries of the weather — where agriculture is concerned — it was subsequently demonstrated that such a target would only have been possible on the basis of the mechanisation of and development of industry. Only this would allow the harmonious development of industry and agriculture together. Leon Trotsky showed in his criticisms of Stalin's blunders on agriculture that a correct correlation between industry and agriculture is impossible on the basis of a regime of bureaucratic absolutism.

The “blunders on agriculture” that Stalin's bureaucratic absolutist regime committed, and which Trotsky criticised, concerned the forced collectivisation of peasant farming (which produced a veritable civil war in the Soviet countryside and the death from starvation of millions of peasants). Continuing his attempt to show that Castro is a Cuban Stalin, Taaffe writes:

Without committing the same crimes as Stalin, Castro nevertheless attempted to substitute the massive use of voluntary and sometimes forced labour for Cuba's lack of industrial and technical means of realising the targets which had been set.

Taaffe simply throws in the reference to Castro's alleged use of “forced labour” “sometimes” to bolster his attempt to draw a parallel between Castro and Stalin. He provides absolutely no evidence to support this gratuitous remark. According to Taaffe:

... in the drive for the 10 million tons of sugar, over 400,000 Cubans were mobilised in the harvest of 1970. Industrial workers, housewives and youth were mobilised to bring in the harvest at the cost of an enormous disruption and dislocation of industry. Yet only 8 million tons of sugar were produced. In 1975 only 5.4 million tons were harvested and even by 1980 it is now planned to produce 8,700,000 tons: a clear demonstration of the sheer impracticability on the basis of the present regime of the earlier targets.

Taaffe is so blinded by his sectarian hostility to the Cuban revolutionaries that he blames the failure of the 1970 sugar harvest to attain the unrealistic target set for it not upon “Cuba's lack of industrial and technical means”, but upon the political character of “the present regime”; the implication being that a different “regime” (perhaps the sort of regime that Taaffe practices in the CWI; undoubtedly a model of “workers' democracy”!) would have been able to realise the 1970 target with the same level of “industrial and technical means”.

Taaffe's sectarian hostility to the Castro regime also blinds him to the implications of its ability to mobilise “400,000 Cuban industrial workers, housewives and youth” (actually several million Cuban urban workers were involved) on an entirely voluntary basis to plant, cut and transport sugar cane, i.e., that this regime enjoys enormous support and confidence among the Cuban masses.

Taaffe observes a studious silence about what conclusions the Castro leadership drew from the failure of the 1970 sugar harvest to reach its target and the disruption to industry which the mass mobilisation for it caused. The reason is because it led to a fundamental reexamination by the Castro leadership of many of the regime's political and economic policies. One obvious problem, which Taaffe has highlighted, was the lack of institutional channels for input into economic decision-making on a national scale by the masses.

In a historic speech given on July 26, 1970, Fidel Castro analysed the problems and took full leadership responsibility for the failure (something no Stalinist leader — whether it was Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Mao or Tito — ever did):

We are going to begin, in the first place, by pointing out the responsibility which all of us, and I in particular, have for these problems. I am in no way trying to pin the blame on anyone not in the leadership and myself. Unfortunately, this self-criticism cannot be accompanied by other logical solutions. It would be better to tell the people to look for someone else. It would be better, but it would be hypocritical on our part.

I believe that we, the leaders of this Revolution, have cost the people too much in our process of learning. And unfortunately, our problem ... one of our most difficult problems — and we are paying for it dearly — is our heritage of ignorance.

Castro went on to explain how he had begun to receive an education in economic management and planning from factory workers. How he would go into one factory or another, and the workers would explain how a certain machine was broken, or a piece was needed, or they needed a certain tool. These workers would not emphasise their own pressing material needs, but instead the need for certain investments — Castro called them “microinvestments” — to boost production:

And workers with torn shoes and clothing were asking for lathes, machine tools and measuring instruments — more concerned about this than with their other problems. Even in spite of the bad food supply, they were more concerned with their factory and production than with food. And this is really impressive! This is really a lesson for us! This is a living confirmation of the reality of the proletariat and what it is capable of. The industrial proletariat is the truly revolutionary class, the most revolutionary class.

What a practical lesson in Marxism-Leninism! We began as revolutionaries, not in a factory, which would have been a great help to all of us. We began as revolutionaries through the study of theory, the intellectual road, the road of thought. And it would have helped all of us if we had come from the factories and known more about them, because it is there that the really revolutionary spirit of which Marx and Lenin spoke is to be found.

Castro explained that he had been struck by the concrete, practical proposals of the



workers in solving the immediate economic problems facing the nation. One idea that had come up was of forming voluntary construction brigades — later they came to be called the “microbrigades” — from factories and other work centres to begin alleviating the housing problem. And once housing had been built, Fidel said:

The problem of distribution can be handled through the factories as well. And the workers should be the ones to make the decisions. They, better than anyone else, know which worker needs a home the most... This problem should never be solved through administrative channels...

We don't believe the management of a plant should fall exclusively to a manager. It would be worthwhile to begin introducing a number of new ideas. There should be a manager, naturally — for there must always be someone accountable — but we must begin to establish a collective body in the management of each plant ...

Why should a manager have to be absolutely in charge? Why shouldn't we begin to introduce representatives of the factory workers into the management? Why not have confidence? Why not put our trust in that tremendous proletarian spirit of men who, at times in torn shoes and clothes, nevertheless keep up production.

In August 1970, a few weeks following the July 26 speech, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) held a several-day meeting to which the leaders of the trade unions were invited. Accounts of what happened at that meeting were made in several speeches by Castro. At a rally celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Federation of Cuban Women on August 23, 1970, Castro reported on some of the immediate and long-range conclusions made by the PCC Political Bureau. One was the need to strengthen the functioning and role of the trade unions and other mass organisations. Another was the need to replace administrative by democratic methods of government:

... we have scores of problems at every level, in the neighbourhoods, in the cities, and in the countryside. We must create the institutions which give the masses decision-making power on many of these problems. We must find efficient and intelligent ways to lead them deliberately forward to this development so that it will not be simply a matter of the people having confidence in their political organisations and leaders and their willingness to carry out tasks, but that the revolutionary process be at the same time — as Lenin wished — a great school of government in which millions of people learn to solve problems and carry out responsibilities of government ...

We have been able to unleash in millions of people the energy, interest, and will to move ahead in spite of the fact that we are a small country. Now we must know how to channel that energy, guiding that formidable and extraordinary revolutionary mass movement toward the possibility of ever greater participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

This implies the development of a new society and of genuinely democratic principles — really democratic — replacing the administrative work habits of the first years of the revolution. We must begin to substitute democratic methods for the administrative methods that run the risk of becoming bureaucratic methods ...

This energy and strength of the masses must be converted into efficiency. This efficiency cannot be obtained from above: that efficiency can only be obtained from below. This is an idea which, if developed, can have tremendous possibilities in the regional, city, provincial, and national levels. These are the correct channels for the functioning of proletarian democracy and the guiding of the energy of the masses.

As a first step toward greater participation by the masses in running the country and the economy, during the later part of 1970 a series of meetings were held with workers involved in different branches of production all over the country. The first of these was a meeting of factory workers from the Havana area held September 2 and 3. The meetings served as a forum for workers to air their grievances and come up with solutions to the concrete economic problems facing the country. The September 2-3 Havana meeting included 12 hours of discussion from the floor. The meeting was observed by Castro. At the end of it the workers asked him to give his opinion of the discussion. Referring to the range of economic problems discussed, he said:

Administration on a large scale is a science. And we certainly do not have this kind of scientists. Therefore, the terrific amount of confusion, mistakes and snafus that exist in this field are almost understandable. In addition, there are problems of an ideological, political nature. Public administration is still deeply imbued with a petty-bourgeois spirit ... There is no doubt that this antiworker spirit, this scorn of the workers, exists among a number of administrators. Such things were revealed in this meeting ...

Now that we've abolished capitalism, who are the only exploiters that are left? Who are the ones who can exploit us today? Those who try to take privileges. Privileges can be a factor in exploiting the working people. We must always fight with everything we've got against any manifestation of privilege-taking.

This has been a constant theme of speeches by the Cuban leaders — that privilege-taking administrators create a demoralising atmosphere that leads to a decline of labour discipline, and that privilege-taking administrators foster favouritism, cronyism and corruption.

By 1973 substantial progress had been made in strengthening the mass organisations. The Communist Party's membership had increased from 55,000 in 1969 to 153,000. In a speech to functionaries of the party's Central Committee given in May 1973, Raul Castro outlined steps to demarcate and delimit the party's functions from those of the state. In this speech, Raul referred back to Fidel's remarks to the

## August 1970 Political Bureau meeting:

In one of his interventions in the previously mentioned meeting in August 1970, Fidel said, with complete correctness: "One cannot say that the working class is represented as a class if we're trying to simply have the party represent it. That is to say, that while the party represents the interests of the working class, it cannot be said that it represents the expressed will of the working class."

The party's leading position is conquered and maintained through struggle. This position is based on being the vanguard of the most advanced social class of society and acting as such: as the most faithful and determined representative of the interests of all the working masses. Its authority is not based on force nor on the possibility of using coercion and violence to impose its will and its directives. Rather it is supported in the confidence and the support that it receives, first of all, *from the class that it represents*, and secondly, from the rest of the working population. *This confidence and support are won through a correct and rational policy, through the party's links with the masses, using as its methods persuasion and convincing, and upheld by the force of its example and the correctness of its policy.*

But starting with these suppositions, we cannot take for granted, as we've already said, that the party represents the will of all the people and consider it to be the supreme organ of power. Because we would then be forgetting *the principles of proletarian democracy that, as we saw earlier, imply the participation of all the members of the working class (and not only its vanguard) and the other labouring classes in the exercise of the proletarian dictatorship, that is to say, in the running and governing of society.* This requires the corresponding institutions of power through which the working masses put that right into effect and can express and give value to their will. Already Lenin pointed out to us that "without representative institutions, democracy cannot be conceived of, much less proletarian democracy."

The preoccupation and orientation Fidel expressed in August 1970 has the same meaning, when he said: "The famous democracy of the recall of public officials, which is one of the postulates of Marxism — we will have to see how we are going to arrange to apply it on the national level. But the question ... is how we can begin with some rudiments of democracy, even if they are only rudiments."

According to our understanding, these representative institutions are indispensable — so that the revolutionary people, *considered as a whole*, as the entirety of all the country's working masses, manifest their will and can really participate in the government.

Between 1974 and 1976, utilising the CDRs as a basis, these representative institutions of workers' democracy were created on the local, city, provincial and national levels —

the Organs of People's Power. These are not legislative bodies on the parliamentary model, but working bodies that combine legislative and administrative functions. They are the same type of representative institutions as the early Russian soviets.

The structure of People's Power is built from the grass-roots up. Its basic subdivision is the municipality, of which there are 169 in Cuba. Depending on the area, a municipality might encompass several small towns, or in one large city like Havana, which has roughly 2 million people, each neighbourhood constitutes a separate municipality, and the city as a whole is a separate province. Each municipality is divided into electoral districts of roughly equal population (ranging in size up to a maximum of 3000 people), each of which elects one delegate to the municipal assembly. These delegates are elected by direct, secret ballot, and they must live in the area they represent. According to Cuban law, there must be at least two candidates for each seat in a municipal assembly, and this is established by subdividing each assembly district into two or more nomination areas. Nominations are discussed in mass meetings and decided by majority vote.

Once the candidates are selected in this way, their biographies are posted in the headquarters of the CDRs, stores, workplaces, and other areas where people gather. Sometimes meetings are held to discuss the merits of the various candidates. Because of the relatively small size of the nomination areas, voters are usually intimately familiar with the opinions of the candidates on various issues. This is all the more the case, since Cubans participate in these elections as members of their local CDRs, which serve as a channel for discussing all local problems of administration, and checking into the fulfilment of decisions that have been agreed to by neighbourhood residents' meetings. Voting takes place by secret, written ballot. All citizens 16 years and older are eligible to vote and run for office. Voting is non-compulsory and the ballot boxes are guarded by the Pioneers, the mass organisation of Cuban children.

Delegates have to report back at least every four months to meetings of their constituents. In addition, they must be available for individual meetings at least once a week. A delegate who turns out to be unsatisfactory can be recalled by the voters at any time. If the majority votes to recall, a new election is quickly held. Recall is not just a question of removing someone who may have proved incompetent, but often involves genuine differences of opinion. For example, in her book *Cuba: Dictatorship or Democracy?*, Marta Harnecker cites the case of one delegate who was recalled because he started to cover up for some minor bureaucratic abuses.

As a further safeguard against bureaucratisation of People's Power — again, one the Cubans have adapted from the example of the 1871 Paris Commune (as recounted in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*) — is that members of these representative

institutions receive salaries no higher than those of a skilled worker. The delegates are expected to carry out their functions in their free time, but where delegates have to work full-time (i.e., as members of the permanent commissions of the Organs of People's Power), they get paid leave from their regular jobs and receive the same pay as they were drawing before. In this way, elected representatives do not become a separate, privileged layer divorced from the masses who elect them.

The National Assembly of People's Power meets only for a few days every few months, delegating its powers between sessions to the Council of State and Councils of Ministers, which it elects. This is similar to the early Congresses of Soviets in Lenin's time which also only met for a few days with the task of running the government on a week-to-week basis being delegated to its Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars.

In each municipality there are between 40 and 200 delegates to the municipal assembly. This assembly elects from among its members an executive committee, which handles the week-to-week administration of the municipality. The executive committee selects, for example, the administrators of the various services run by the municipality. The local municipality assembly also elects delegates to the provincial assembly and delegates to the national assembly. (In 1992 the constitution was amended to provide for direct election by citizens at the municipal level.)

Taaffe regards this soviet-type system of workers' democracy (which institutionalised "mass criticism, election and recall" of the state officials) as simply a mechanism for "ventilating the accumulated grievances against the bureaucracy":

Experimental elections were held for "municipal assemblies" in the Matanzas province [in 1974]. Usually two candidates stood but sometimes as many as 15 participated in the election.

But the rub was that all candidates had to be members of the Communist Party, or constituent organisations of this party, like the Young Communist League! In other words the elections were a farce. Imagine the reaction of British workers if they were told that they could support candidates from only one party in shop stewards' or trade union elections!

I don't know where Taaffe got the idea that "all candidates had to be members of the Communist Party, or constituent organisations of this party, like the Young Communist League" (UJC). It is simply not true: of the 1014 successful candidates (out of 4712) in the municipal assembly elections in Matanzas province in June 1974, 46% were members of the party and another 13% were members of the UJC. In the 1976 elections for municipal assemblies throughout the whole of Cuba, of the 10,725 successful candidates (out of 29,169 candidates), 58.8% were party members and 16.4% were UJC members.

According to Taaffe, “With the development of the Cuban economy these differences [i.e., the alleged differences in living standards between the workers and the “privileged” administrators — DL] rather than disappearing will grow apace. But with the differentiation of Cuban society so also will grow the opposition to the stifling atmosphere created by the ruling privileged stratum of officials.”

The fact is, however, that there has been no growth in differentiation between the workers and the party and state leadership in Cuba, nor has there been a growth in opposition to “the stifling atmosphere created by the ruling privileged stratum of officials”, because no such “stifling atmosphere” exists; nor does a “ruling privileged stratum of officials”.

Since Taaffe asserts (without providing any tangible proof) that Cuba is ruled by a “privileged stratum of officials” similar to that which existed in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China he assumes that there *must* be a “stifling atmosphere”. But what proof of this does he provide? Again, it’s as shallow as his “proof” of the existence of a “ruling privileged stratum of officials”:

From a relatively liberal atmosphere in the first period, suppression of all dissent has become the norm. Thus in 1962 the works of Leon Trotsky were on sale in Havana and there was a flowering of culture and art. Now the dead hand of the bureaucracy pervades everything. Thus unorthodox writers, poets and artists like Padilla are now frowned upon by the regime. As in Russia, China and Eastern Europe, the toleration of freedom for artists threatens to provoke a movement of the masses for the same rights.

The Hungarian revolution began with the writers’ opposition gathered together in the Petofi Circle.

The only concrete evidence for Taaffe’s claims here is the Padilla affair. In March 1971 Herberto Padilla, one of Cuba’s best-known poets was jailed on unspecified charges. A few weeks later he was released after he wrote a self-criticism. There has been no repetition of such an incident. Taaffe, however, does not tell his readers anything about why Padilla was arrested. As the former *New York Times* editor Herbert Matthews observed in his 1975 book *Revolution in Cuba*, Padilla “was not arrested because he was a writer, but because of his activities against the Revolution. After all, his poems and play had been printed and even given an award.

“Padilla stated a truth in his confession when he said: ‘I knew that every skilful blow that I aimed at any aspect of the Revolution would increase my popularity with the so-called liberals and democratic journalists and writers’ in the West.

Matthews recounts that Padilla “told James Higgins, a freelance newspaperman, who quoted him in *The Boston Globe* of August 5, 1971: ‘Perhaps the best way to put it is to say that I was accused of damaging the Revolution on the cultural front by

shooting off my mouth incessantly to enemies of the Revolution.' He said to Higgins that he believed he had influenced K.S. Karol and René Dumont by 'my personal, bitter view of things, which reinforced their own cynicism' [about the Cuban revolution]."

Although the Padilla affair was widely publicised at the time, it should be noted that there have been no repetitions. In January 1979 — almost eight years after the Padilla affair — James Goodsell, a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* (a paper widely recognised for its close links to the US State Department), reported that "there is more freedom of expression these days in Havana than at anytime in this reporter's memory of the 20 years that Dr Castro has been in power". ■

## 7. The Castro Leadership's Struggle Against Bureaucracy

Taaffe dismisses the Castro leadership's campaigns against bureaucratic tendencies as demagogic:

Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Tito have all in their time denounced "bureaucracy". But they attacked the excesses of their system, making scapegoats of the most glaring and blatant cases of bureaucratic mismanagement, waste and greed, the better to defend as a whole the privileges of the caste that they represented. Castro clashed with the Russian bureaucracy when the interests of the Cuban state were threatened. Thus in 1962 and later in 1968 he denounced Aníbal Escalante as an arch bureaucrat.

Taaffe is either woefully ignorant about what was involved in Castro's struggle against Escalante (in which case he should have made an effort to ascertain the facts), or — what appears to be more likely — he has deliberately ignored the facts in order to use the Escalante case to frame-up Castro as the head of a Stalinist police-state regime.

Escalante had been a longtime leader of the Stalinist Partido Socialista Popular, one of the three political organisations that fused in 1961 to form the Integrated Revolutionary Organisation, the forerunner of the Communist Party of Cuba (formed in 1965). The other two organisations were the Revolutionary Student Directorate and the July 26 Movement. Escalante was given the post of organisation secretary of the ORI. He used this post to build up a corrupt personal machine of former PSP members and excluding from responsible posts people from the other two organisations. This was the reason why Castro denounced Escalante in 1962 in a nationally televised speech, later published as "Against Bureaucratism and Sectarianism". It had nothing to do with Escalante's political opinions, as the following extracts from Castro's



denunciation of Escalante demonstrates:

We reached the conclusion, we were all convinced, that Comrade Anibal Escalante, abusing the faith placed in him, in his post as secretary in charge of organisation, followed a non-Marxist policy, followed a policy which departed from Leninist norms regarding the organisation of a workers' vanguard party, and that he tried to organise an apparatus to pursue personal ends ...

Comrade Anibal Escalante had schemed to make himself the ORI. How? By the use of a very simple contrivance. Working from his post as secretary in charge of organisation he would give instructions to all revolutionary cells and to the whole apparatus as if these instructions had come from the National Directorate ... at the same time he took advantage of the opportunity to establish a system of controls which would be completely under his command ...

And being in a position to carry it out, since he also had the task of individually organising all the revolutionary cells, a policy of license was encouraged rather than one of discipline, restraint, strict adherence to standards on the part of the organisation's militants. Rather than this, a policy of permissiveness was encouraged. Since a correct policy, adjusted to those functions proper to a workers' vanguard party, did not fit with these plans, a policy of privilege was promoted. He was creating conditions and giving instructions which tended to convert that apparatus not into an apparatus of the workers' vanguard party, but rather into a nest of privilege, into one which tolerates favouritism, into a system of immunities and favours ...

Through the use of deception, the attempt was made to create conditions suitable for permitting the imposition of a tyranny, of a straitjacket, of an apparatus for the serving of personal ends which, later on, would wipe out the old and new values of the revolution ...

We have fallen into a problem of castes, not into one of classes, comrades. Let us not give up the principle of class in order to fall into a problem of castes, into that of titles of nobility, into that of privileges, into that of sectarianism, comrades. Every good Marxist, every good communist must understand this.

As can be seen from Castro's remarks and those quoted above from his September 3, 1970 address to the factory workers' assembly in Havana, unlike "Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung and Tito" he didn't just criticise "bureaucratic mismanagement, waste and greed"; he attacked the very essence of bureaucracy, i.e., privilege-taking administrators.

In his denunciation of Escalante, Castro located the danger of bureaucratism in the transformation of party officials into a privileged "caste". Yet Taaffe claims Castro's denunciation of Escalante was aimed at defending "the privileges of the caste" of state and party officials!

Taaffe implies that in denouncing Escalante as an arch bureaucrat Castro was simply making a scapegoat out of him in order to protect the rule of a bureaucratic apparatus. But Escalante *was* an arch bureaucrat — he was the Cuban Stalin. And thanks to Castro's decisive intervention, unlike his Soviet mentor, Escalante's power-grab was publicly exposed and his attempt to impose the tyranny of a bureaucratic apparatus was defeated. Castro acted in relation to Escalante in precisely the way that the bedridden and dying leader of the Bolshevik party had wanted Trotsky to act toward Stalin in early 1923 (advice that Trotsky failed to heed).

After the first Escalante affair, considerable advances were made in the building of a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class. The diehard Stalinists from the old PSP were excluded from the ORI, which was renamed the Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista (United Party of the Socialist Revolution). The members of the PURS were recruited according to a proposal made by Castro following the first Escalante affair: workers' assemblies were held in the factories and other workplaces to nominate candidates for party membership. This ensured that the membership of the party would be selected from among those workers who had earned the trust and respect of their fellow workers. In 1965 the PURS was replaced by the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC).

Why did the PCC not hold its first delegated congress until 1975? Castro alluded to the reasons in a lengthy section of his report to the first party congress dealing with the mistakes committed by the party leadership. He pointed that, "After the criticism of sectarianism [i.e., the first Escalante affair], most of the energies [of the leadership] went into building up and development at the ground level, but the Central Committee virtually had no apparatus." Furthermore, after 1970 the leadership's attention was focused on improving the functioning and role of the mass organisations.

During 1966-67 the PCC leadership made an intensive study of the problem of bureaucratism, drawing on Lenin's writings from the early years of the Soviet republic. Their conclusions were set forth in a series of editorials in the PCC daily *Granma*, written by PCC organisation secretary and former J26M leader Armando Hart. These began by citing Lenin's conclusion that "bureaucracy is always a purely and exclusively bourgeois institution". The second editorial analysed the danger of bureaucracy as a special stratum of the population in a post-capitalist society. It affirmed that, "with the triumph of the socialist revolution, bureaucracy acquires a new character" because "all of the formerly dispersed bureaucratic apparatus is vertically redeployed into the state apparatus and, to a certain extent, organised and strengthened ...

"In addition to a greater organisation and growth in size, *bureaucracy takes on a new character in its relationship to the means of production and, therefore, to political*

*activity as well.*" It explained the danger of workers becoming bureaucrats:

When a worker or farmer takes over an administrative post, he is in danger of being influenced politically and ideologically by the administrative job [of becoming] one more bureaucratic functionary.

*As long as the state exists as an institution and as long as organisation, administration, and policy are not all fully of a communist nature, the danger will continue to exist that a special stratum of citizens will form in the heart of the bureaucratic apparatus which directs and administers the state.* This apparatus has a given relationship to the means of production, different from that of the rest of the population, which can convert bureaucratic posts into comfortable, stagnant, or privileged positions ...

If we allow certain categories characteristic of the capitalist system to survive within the organisation and development of our economy, if we take the easiest way out, using material interest as the driving force in the construction of socialism, if merchandise is held up as the central core of the economy, if the presence of money remains omnipotent within the new society, then selfishness and individualism will continue to be the predominant characteristics in the consciousness of men and we shall never arrive at the formation of the new man.

And if such concepts prevail within society, if an individualistic and petty-bourgeois ideology survives, a bureaucratic mentality will likewise survive, together with a bureaucratic concept of administration and politics, *but with the aggravating factor that now this concept will prevail among a special stratum of men whose relation to the means of production and political decisions places them in a position of leadership.* Thus there is nothing strange about the fact that the desire to belong to this bureaucratic stratum of society is kept alive or that this becomes a material objective for those seeking comfort and privilege.

The editorial then raised the danger of the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolutionary party:

If the party does not win this battle over bureaucracy, if this danger is not eliminated through the formation of the new man and the application of an unyielding policy consistent with Marxist-Leninist principles, the party will end by bureaucratising itself. And a party which stagnates is a party in decomposition.

What does this mean? What occurs if the party organisation sinks into this bureaucratic morass? When that occurs, a special stratum consolidates itself in the administration and direction of the state and in political leadership, a special stratum with aspirations toward self-perpetuation that draws constantly farther away from the masses, divorced from fruitful productive labour and from those who perform it, to become a privileged body, incapable of impelling the people forward, incapable of

leading the consciousness of the people toward higher levels.

And when this occurs the construction of socialism and communism has already been abandoned.

Isn't this precisely the critique that Trotsky made of Stalin's regime? Interestingly, the editorial presents its analysis of the danger of bureaucratic degeneration not as a hypothetical possibility, but as something that has already been seen in the history of socialist revolutions.

The third editorial deepened the analysis of the problem of bureaucracy, explaining how it manifests itself in all spheres of social life and how it "corrodes" the revolution from within.

The fourth editorial outlined measures to combat bureaucratism, warning that: Past experience in struggle against this evil indicates that bureaucracy tends to operate as a new class. Certain bonds are formed among bureaucrats themselves, close ties and relationships characteristic of every social class.

They work hand-in-glove protecting each other against revolutionary rules and regulations. If the party and revolutionaries in general let down, if they lower their guard for a single moment, bureaucracy tends to spring up again, regulations are violated, and once more the same group installs itself in places of influence. And this occurs because bureaucratic functionaries have nothing to defend except their own positions and these they defend as would any class.

Two kinds of measures were announced by *Granma* to combat the tendency toward bureaucratisation of the Cuban workers' state. The first was a massive campaign to cut back the size of the state apparatus. Tens of thousands of functionaries were released for production work within a few months of the publication of these editorials. In some government departments, the staff was reduced by as much as 70%.

The second measure was an ideological campaign against bureaucratic methods of work and against petty-bourgeois attitudes which could be summed up as "looking out for number one".

Taaffe refers to these two campaigns, but consistent with his Castrophobic approach, he distorts their meaning beyond recognition:

Preceding this [i.e., the 1970 sugar harvest campaign] the regime launched the "Great Revolutionary Offensive" — a Cuban version of the "Cultural Revolution". Denunciations of "bureaucracy" and the virtual militarisation of labour, was combined with the proclamations about "moving towards communism" and a campaign to eliminate small businesses ...

The purpose of the campaign was to cut down the privileges of the bureaucracy to accumulate the necessary resources for industrialisation and the mechanisation of

agriculture and in a forced march to reach the targets which had been arbitrarily decided by the government.

Taaffe's equating of the 1967 Cuban campaign against bureaucratism with the Chinese Stalinist regime's "Cultural Revolution" is grotesque in the extreme. Mao did not denounce "bureaucracy" during the "Cultural Revolution". Rather he accused those in the ruling Chinese bureaucracy who favoured making modest improvements in the living standards of the workers and peasants so as to increase industrial and agricultural output as "taking the capitalist road". Large numbers of Chinese government functionaries were not transferred to normal production jobs — they were arrested, tortured and secretly executed or sent to rural prison-labour camps. The Cuban universities were not closed for three years and their students forcibly sent to work in the countryside, as was the case in China. Nor was all literature but the writings and speeches of the party leaders banned in Cuba. Nor were government functionaries or ordinary workers and peasants terrorised by roving gangs of army-backed leader-cult fanatics, as they were in China.

On January 28, 1968 Radio Havana announced that after a three-day session, the Central Committee of the PCC had decided to expel Anibal Escalante from the party. He and eight other former members of the PSP, plus 27 "accomplices", were arrested and put on trial. They were given long prison sentences. Here is how Taaffe presents the issues involved in this affair:

But behind the conflict with Escalante was the clash between two national bureaucracies. Escalante — a leader of the Cuban CP [Taaffe means the Stalinist Popular Socialist Party — DL] before it fused with the Castroites — was a pliable tool of the Russian bureaucracy, echoing their behind-the-scenes criticisms of Castro, denouncing his "ungratefulness" to his Russian benefactors, and his "adventurism" on the Latin American mainland. Yet the manner of dealing with him spoke as much against the methods of Castro as Escalante.

Escalante was accused of organising a "micro-faction", a crime which did not exist under Cuban law! Compare the attitude of Castro to that of Lenin at the time of the Russian Civil War. Lenin conceded the right of Bukharin, Radek and others to publish a daily paper which passionately argued against Lenin's views on the Brest Litovsk Peace Treaty and other related issues!

It's true that the main charge levelled in the public trial against Escalante and his codefendants was factional activity, which was not a crime under Cuban law. The procedure used against them was utterly out of line for dealing with factional disputes in a party built on the Leninist model. Taaffe presents the issue as though all that was involved was a difference of opinion between the Castro leadership and the Kremlin

over policy toward Latin America, with Escalante acting as the spokesperson within the PCC for the Kremlin's views. But much more was at stake than a difference of opinion on policy in Latin America.

This should have been obvious to Taaffe. The Stalinist rulers in Moscow were not in the habit of limiting their methods in disputes with the leaders of regimes that were economically and militarily dependent upon Moscow to "behind-the-scenes" criticisms — as the Kremlin's past behaviour toward Yugoslavia and China had already demonstrated.

Certainly, one of the issues behind the second Escalante affair was the dispute between the Castro leadership and the Kremlin over the "armed struggle" or the "peaceful" parliamentary road to socialism in Latin America. In August 1967 Cuba had hosted a major conference of Latin American left organisations at which there was a sharp exchange between Castro himself and the leaders of the Latin American Communist parties, which were backed by Moscow. Throughout the 1960s the Castro leadership had sought to mechanically transpose their own revolutionary experience and tactics as a model for all of Latin America (a mistake in method that Taaffe criticises but which he applies in his own dealings with revolutionaries outside of England) by equating revolutionary methods of struggle solely with "armed struggle" (which in turn they reduced to the single tactic of rural guerrilla warfare). In wake of the August 1967 OLAS conference, with the murder of Che Guevara in October 1967 in Bolivia the Cubans' guerillaist perspective and thus their revolutionary alternative to the Stalinists' electoral reformism was dealt a demoralising blow. (This was the reason why the Cubans had abandoned their support for the tiny guerrilla groups in Latin America by 1970, not as Taaffe implies, again quoting the cynic K.S. Karol, because "they decided to ... rally to the Soviet Union".)

The late 1960s were one of the worst periods for Cuba's economy. The US economic blockade had begun to have a serious impact, with growing shortages of spare parts for Cuba's American-made machinery and equipment. Food, clothing and many other goods were being rationed. Other items were only available rarely, and whether rationed or not, there were usually long queues at all the stores. These conditions had become a disincentive to work, especially in families with two wage earners. The extra money to be earned by a second wage earner was worth a lot less to the material well-being of the family than having that person available to go down to stores when scarce items came into stock. There was also growing absenteeism, even among those who kept a regular job, since they had more than enough money to buy what little was available. The net effect was that it was precisely those workers who were most loyal and dedicated to the revolution who ended up having to put in an extra effort (without

effective material reward) to make up for those who were frequently absent or who had quit working.

In 1967, as I've noted above, large numbers of government functionaries who had been made redundant were fired from their more cushy office jobs and administrative positions to increase the numbers of workers available for production. There were bound to be many of them who were resentful of the Castro leadership's anti-bureaucratic campaign.

It was in this context that the Castro leadership acted against Escalante for the second time. After his dismissal as ORI organisation secretary in 1962, Escalante had been given a number of minor diplomatic postings in Eastern Europe. When he returned to Cuba in 1964 he was appointed administrator of a state farm. He organised a secret grouping composed of his former political associates in the Stalinist PSP, including two members of the PCC Central Committee. Beginning in late 1966 this grouping began to work closely with the second secretary of the Soviet embassy. Raul Castro's report to the January 1968 PCC Central Committee meeting summarises a speech which this Soviet official gave to a meeting of Escalante's grouping:

The conditions have been created in Cuba for another Hungary; imperialism is working in an objective manner in accord with the concrete conditions of this revolution directed fundamentally at the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie; notice that there is great internal discontent; that it must be pointed out to this revolution that in Hungary it was not the peasantry that suffocated the uprising, but that confusion had been very widespread and the task of confronting the situation fell to the Department of State Security and that, nevertheless, here in Cuba even this department showed manifestations that the petty bourgeoisie was to be found even within that organism.

If Taaffe had bothered to check the facts of the second Escalante affair and think a little about the context in which it occurred he might have come to realise that the Castro leadership clearly feared that Escalante's *Stalinist* "micro-faction" could rapidly become a "macrofaction", particularly if it was actively backed by the Kremlin. The crackdown against Escalante's group was a preventive measure against this possibility. After the announcement of the arrest of Escalante, Moscow indicated its displeasure by sharply cutting back its supplies of vitally needed oil to Cuba.

Taaffe briefly mentions that revolutionary Cuba's very survival was dependent upon continued economic and military aid from the Soviet bureaucracy ("He who pays the piper calls the tune"), but he fails to take that fact into account when he assesses the political actions of the Castro leadership — a luxury that the Cubans could not. Thus, he implies that instead of acting swiftly to destroy the Escalante-Moscow conspiracy to "save" Cuba from a "bourgeois counterrevolution" (as the

Kremlin had previously “saved” Hungary by overthrowing the reform-minded Imre Nagy government), the Castro leadership should have allowed the Escalante group “to publish a daily paper” in which it could “passionately argue” for ... the Kremlin’s political and economic backing for their efforts to overthrow the Castro leadership! ■



## 8. Taaffe's Criticisms of Cuba's Foreign Policy

According to Taaffe, the Castro leadership's foreign policy is primarily motivated by a search for an accommodation with US imperialism so as to end the US trade embargo against Cuba:

The consolidation of the Cuban bureaucracy together with the easing [!] of the boycott was bound to result in a change in the foreign policy of the regime with attempts to find an accommodation with US imperialism and its cohorts in Latin America to the detriment of even verbal support for revolution in the continent.

Thus when the veiled military dictatorship in Mexico massacred more than 300 students in October 1968 not a word of protest was forthcoming from the Cuban government or Communist Party. The students had proclaimed their support of the Cuban regime but Mexico was one of the few capitalist governments to have maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba! The national interests of the Cuban State took precedence over "international solidarity".

Similarly there was stony silence in Havana when ten million workers in France occupied the factories and shook capitalism in Europe and the world to its foundations. Not even a message of support for their French counterparts emanated from the state controlled student movement, the UJC-FEU!

Now, unless Taaffe has information to the contrary, all the available evidence shows that in 1968 there was neither a mass revolutionary party in Mexico or France that could have been disoriented by the Castro leadership's failure to comment on the internal developments in these countries that Taaffe refers to. Does Taaffe actually believe that a message of solidarity to the French students from the UJC or the Cuban Federation of University Students would have changed the outcome of the May-June 1968 worker-student revolt? Does he think that a public protest by the Castro leadership

against the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico would have led to the overthrow and replacement of the PRI government by a revolutionary government? If he does believe either of these things then he is vastly more out of touch with reality than even his hyperbolic description of the impact of the May-June 1968 events in France would indicate.

What would have been the most likely outcome if the Castro leadership had acted as Taaffe thinks it should have? A statement of protest against the Mexican government's repression of the student demonstrations would most likely have resulted in a change in the Mexican government's policy — not toward the Mexican student movement, but toward Cuba! When the hangman's noose of the US imperialist blockade was being tightened around Cuba, the Mexican bourgeois government resisted Washington's pressure to join the blockade and refused to break off diplomatic and trade relations. Mexico was the only country in Latin America that maintained relations with revolutionary Cuba. In that context, the Castro leadership has not made any criticisms of the Mexican government.

Taaffe thinks that this proves that the Castro leadership puts the “national interests” of the Cuban state above supporting revolutions in Latin America. But this assumes that *commentaries* by the Cuban government on the internal affairs of Mexico (or other Latin American countries) can decisively affect the revolutionary struggle in those countries. This is an illusion that could only be held by someone whose “revolutionary” activity is largely confined to making abstract propaganda for revolution.

Furthermore, Taaffe is oblivious to the responsibilities that the Castro leadership has to the Cuban masses. This leadership *does* have to consider the “national interests” of the Cuban state, i.e., its ability to feed, clothe, educate, etc., the 10 million workers and peasants who live in Cuba (a “misfortune” this leadership's English critic is not burdened by ... because he does not have the responsibilities that state power brings).

The fact that the Castro leadership considers that ensuring that the US imperialist noose around Cuba is not tightened any further is more of a priority than making commentaries on the internal affairs of countries that have not gone along with Washington's attempt to strangle the Cuban revolution, does not in any way prove that this leadership's foreign policy is *driven* by the search for “an accommodation with US imperialism and its cohorts in Latin America” to the detriment of support for revolution in the continent.

Unlike Taaffe, the Castro leadership has done more than give “verbal support for revolution in the continent” — it has given direct material assistance to revolutionaries throughout Latin America.

Taaffe's articles appeared in 1978. A year after his judgment that the Castro

leadership had abandoned even verbal support for revolution in order to “find an accommodation with US imperialism and its cohorts in Latin America”, the Castro leadership mobilised the Cuban masses to give massive material support (within its limited means) to a revolution against one of US imperialism’s closest cohorts in Latin America — the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua.

According to Taafe, “At no time did Castro look towards the powerful working class in Latin America as the main agent for socialist change. Artificially attempting to transfer the guerrilla experience of the Cuban revolution to the Latin American mainland all hope was placed on the peasantry”. This is simply not true.

As I have demonstrated above, even in the “guerrilla experience of the Cuban revolution” the Castro leadership recognised the vital role of both the urban and agricultural workers to the success of the revolutionary victory of the US-backed Batista dictatorship. With regard to the “Latin American mainland” the Castro leadership has always stressed the need to mobilise the peasants *and the workers*.

In an interview he gave in 1971, during his visit to Chile, Castro said the following regarding the revolutionary role of the working class:

We believe that, in a revolutionary process, each separate thing can not be analysed separately. Every problem has to be analysed from the standpoint of the whole process

...

I'm telling you, as a matter of fundamental strategy, that if anybody has to “take care of the baby” it's the workers. It'll be up to the working class to take care of the baby, because nobody else is going to do it. It's the working class who'll have to nurse the baby, take care of it, protect it, keep it from getting sick, being contaminated and killed. This is because the revolution is the daughter of the working class ...

If we are to establish a priority it will be that since the revolution is the child of the working class it is the working class which is duty-bound to take care of the child, to defend it. And it is the working class, society's vanguard class, which has the strength to raise and defend the child. It is the working class which has the potential revolutionary reserves, the united working class! The strength of the working class lies in unity. And, of course, in Chile, the strength of the process lies not only in the unity of the working class — the working class must set the example — but in the unity of the maximum forces ...

A process is made stronger by unity in pursuit of a program, of an objective, of clearly defined goals. The objective of the working class must be clearly defined. This is of essential importance. Everything is subordinate to those objectives and to the strategy that will make it possible to reach those objectives.

And, in order to attain those objectives, the working class must unite as many

forces as possible from the other social classes. In the first place, the farmers, the students and the intellectual workers, and the petty bourgeoisie. We believe this alliance of classes should be as broad as possible ...

Therefore, revolutionary strategy — and there's no question about this — must make tactics subordinate to the attainment of the fundamental objective, which is the liberation of our peoples of Latin America from imperialist domination.

We believe it is most important that the workers in our countries understand these ideas thoroughly — a broad front in the struggle against the principal enemy. Keep in mind the most relevant example, the highest example of our times — the Vietnamese, their strategy, their tactics, their capacity for attaining unity, their wisdom in making tactics subordinate to strategy, in getting together all the elements needed for their main struggle.

This is all we can say to you in a general sense, for these problems cannot be discussed in a matter of five or even ten minutes. They call for a lot of reasoning and serious study. This is all we can say to you in terms of a broad outline.

In July 1973 Castro wrote a letter to President Salvador Allende, head of the reformist Popular Unity government in Chile, in which he urged Allende not to “forget the extraordinary strength of the Chilean working class and the firm support it has always given you in difficult moments. In response to your call when the revolution is in danger, it can block those who are organising a coup, maintain the support of the fence-sitters, impose conditions and decide the fate of Chile once and for all if need arises. The enemy must realise that the Chilean working class is on the alert and ready to go into action”. As we know, Allende ignored Castro's advice — at the cost of his own life and that of tens of thousands of Chilean workers.

According to Taaffe, “Castro underlined the nature of his regime with his support for the intervention of the Russian bureaucracy in Czechoslovakia in 1968”. What does Taaffe think would have happened to Cuba's vital supplies of food, oil, machinery and weapons if Castro had denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia? How does he think Moscow would have reacted if the Castro leadership hadn't given verbal support for its sending of 350,000 troops into Czechoslovakia? The security of Stalinist rule there was obviously of far more importance to the bureaucrats in Moscow than the fate of Escalante's little group in Cuba (and the Kremlin indicated its displeasure over the Castro leadership attitude to Escalante by sharply reducing vital supplies of oil to Cuba in early 1968).

Taaffe tells his readers nothing of what Castro actually said about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Is this perhaps because such information might reveal far more about the nature of the Castro regime than Taaffe would like his readers to

assume from the mere fact that Castro declared his “support” for this action?

Castro began his August 23, 1968 speech on the events in Czechoslovakia with the following comments:

As was announced today, we are appearing here tonight to analyse the situation in Czechoslovakia. We are going to make this analysis in the light of the revolutionary positions and international policy upheld by our revolution and party.

Some of the things that we are going to state here tonight will be, in some cases, in contradiction with the emotions of many; in other cases, in contradiction with our own interests; and in others, they will constitute a serious risk to our country.

Castro did not explain this last comment, but clearly it was a warning that what he was going to say might endanger the material support that Cuba received from the Soviet Union. Continuing, Castro said:

It seems to us necessary, in the first place, to make a brief analysis of our position in relation to events that have been taking place in Czechoslovakia.

Our people have a good deal of information about these events and although no, as we may say, official exposition of the position of our party regarding those events has ever been presented — among other things because the events are still in progress, and we are not obliged to analyse everything going on in the world every day — we were observing developments in the political process in that country.

A whole series of changes began taking place in Czechoslovakia at approximately the beginning of this year. It began with talk of, or rather the actual resignation of Mr Novotny as secretary of the party, although he continued on as president of the republic. This was followed by the desertion of an important military figure to the United States. Then a series of demands arose that he (Novotny) also abandon his post as president of the republic. And a series of events and happenings followed ...

A real liberal fury was unleashed. A whole series of political slogans in favour of the formation of opposition parties began to develop, in favour of openly anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist theses ... in short that the reins of power should cease to be in the hands of the Communist Party ...

As regards foreign policy, a whole series of slogans of open rapprochement toward capitalist concepts and theses and of rapprochement towards the West appeared.

Of course, all of this was linked to a series of unquestionably correct slogans. It was some of these slogans which won a certain amount of sympathy for the liberalisation or democratisation movement...

It was a situation in which everyone was trying to turn things to his own advantage — problems related to incorrect methods of government, bureaucratic policy, separation from the masses and in short, a whole series of problems for which they held the former

leadership responsible. There was also talk of the need to create their own forms for the development of the socialist revolution and the socialist system in Czechoslovakia.

Thus these tendencies were developing simultaneously — some which justified the change and others which turned that change toward an openly reactionary policy ...

Provisionally, we reached this conclusion: we had no doubt that the political situation in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating and going downhill on its way back to capitalism and that it was inexorably going to fall into the arms of imperialism...

So this defines our primary position to the specific fact of the action taken by a group of socialist countries ...

Nevertheless, it is not enough to simply accept the fact and nothing more — that Czechoslovakia was headed toward a counterrevolutionary situation and that it was necessary to prevent it. It is not enough simply to come to the conclusion that there was no alternative there but to prevent this, and nothing more.

Castro then dismissed out of hand the hypocritical attempts by the Kremlin to claim that its invasion had some legal basis and was not a violation of Czechoslovak national sovereignty:

What are the factors that created the necessity for a step which unquestionably entailed a violation of legal principles and international norms that, having often served as a shield for the peoples against injustice, are highly esteemed by the world?

Because what cannot be denied here is that the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak state was violated. To say that it was not would be a fiction, an untruth. And the violation was, in fact, of a flagrant nature ...

From a legal point of view, it cannot be justified. This is very clear. In our opinion, the decision concerning Czechoslovakia can only be explained from the political point of view and not from a legal point of view. Not the slightest trace of legality exists. Frankly, none whatsoever.

He then returned to the main theme of his speech: What had led to the crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

Quite logically this experience and this action constitute a bitter and tragic situation for the people of Czechoslovakia. That is why it is not enough to simply come to the conclusion that it was an inexorable necessity or even an unquestionable obligation, if you like, of the socialist countries to prevent such eventualities from occurring. We must analyse the causes, the factors and the circumstances that made possible a situation in which, after twenty years of communism in Czechoslovakia, a group of personalities — whose names, incidentally do not appear anywhere — found it necessary to appeal to other countries of the socialist camp to send their armies to prevent the triumph of the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia ...

Gentlemen, is it conceivable that a situation could occur, under any circumstances, after 20 years of communism in our country, of communist revolution, of socialist revolution, in which a group of honest revolutionaries, in this country, horrified by the prospect of an advance — or rather a retrogression — to counterrevolutionary positions and toward imperialism, could find themselves obliged to request the aid of friendly armies to prevent such a retrogression occurring? What could have happened to the communist consciousness of this people? What would have happened to the revolutionary consciousness of this people? To the dignity of this people? To the revolutionary morale of this people? If such a situation could arise some day, what would be left of all these things which, for us, constitute in essence the revolution? ...

What kind of communists would we be and what kind of communist revolution would this be, if, at the end of 20 years, we were to find ourselves forced to do such a thing in order to save it?

Whenever we have thought of outside help, the only idea that has ever come into our minds was that of outside help to fight against imperialist troops and against imperialist armies ...

Obviously, this is not the time to make or pretend to make that profound analysis. But we can cite some facts and ideas. Bureaucratic methods in the leadership of the country, lack of contact with the masses — decisive question for every true revolutionary movement — neglect of communist ideas ...

We can say — and today it is necessary to speak clearly and frankly — that we have seen to what extent these ideals and international sentiments, that state of alertness and awareness of the world's problems, have disappeared or are very weakly expressed in certain socialist countries of Europe ...

Those who have visited these countries, including Cuban students on scholarships, have often come back completely dissatisfied and displeased and have said to us: "Over there the youth are not being educated in the ideals of communism and in the principles of internationalism: the youth there are highly influenced by all the ideas and tastes prevalent in the countries of Western Europe. In many places the main topic of conversation is money and incentives of this or that type, material incentives of all kinds, material gains and salaries." As a matter of fact, an internationalist and communist conscience is not being developed in those places ...

A series of standards, a series of ideas, a series of practices incomprehensible to us, which have really contributed to slackening and softening of the revolutionary spirit of the socialist countries; ignorance of the problems of the underdeveloped world, ignorance of the shocking misery which exists; tendencies toward maintaining trading practices with the underdeveloped countries which are the same as those carried on by

the developed bourgeois capitalist world ...

All of us know that the leadership which Czechoslovakia had, generally, for 20 years was a leadership plagued with many vices: dogmatism, bureaucracy, and, in short, many things which cannot be presented as examples of truly revolutionary leadership

...

We must bear in mind that that leadership, with which we had relations from the very beginning even sold this country, at a high price, many weapons which were spoils of war seized from the Nazis, weapons for which we have been paying, and are still paying for today ...

Is there any doubt that this is outside the framework of the most elementary concept of the duty of a revolutionary country toward another country? On many occasions they sold us very outdated factories. We have seen the results of the economic concepts on which they base their business transactions, on which they base their eagerness to sell any old junk, and it must be stated that these practices led to their selling old, outdated junk to a country which is making a revolution and has to develop

...

Today we must state bitter truths, must admit some bitter truths. Let's take advantage of the occasion — not as an opportunity, but as a necessity to explain some things that would otherwise remain unexplained.

Castro then took the justifications cited by the Kremlin for its invasion of Czechoslovakia and turned them back on the Stalinists:

An article published in the newspaper *Pravda* pointed out the following fact in regard to Czechoslovakia.

It reads as follows: "The CPSU is constantly perfecting the style, the forms and the methods of constructing the party and the state. This same work is being carried out in other socialist countries in a tranquil process based on the fundamentals of the socialist system."

This statement is very interesting. It says: "Unfortunately, discussions concerning economic reform in Czechoslovakia developed on another basis. That discussion centred, on the one hand, around an all-encompassing criticism of all previous development of the socialist economy and, on the other, around the proposal to replace the principles of planning with spontaneous market relations, granting a broad field of activity to private capital."

Does this, by chance, mean that the Soviet Union is also going to curb certain currents of economic thought that are in favour of putting increased emphasis on market relations and on the free play of economic laws in these relations, those currents which have even been defending the desirability of the market and the beneficial effect



of prices based on the market? Does it mean that the Soviet Union is becoming aware of the need to halt those currents? ...

Our party did not hesitate to help the Venezuelan guerrillas when a rightist and treacherous leadership [in the Venezuelan CP], betraying the revolutionary line, abandoned the guerrillas and entered into shameless collusion with the regime ...

I ask myself, in the light of the facts and in the light of the bitter reality that persuaded the nations of the Warsaw Pact to send their forces to crush the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia, and — according to their statement — to back a minority in the face of a majority with rightist positions, if they will also cease to support these rightist, reformist, sold-out, submissive [Communist Party] leaderships in Latin America that are enemies of the armed revolutionary struggle, that oppose the people's liberation struggle ...

The TASS statement explaining the decision of the Warsaw Pact governments states in its concluding paragraph:

“The fraternal countries firmly and resolutely offer their unbreakable solidarity against any outside threat. They will never permit anyone to tear away even one link of the community of socialist states.” ...

In accordance with that declaration, Warsaw Pact divisions were sent into Czechoslovakia. And we ask ourselves: “Will Warsaw Pact divisions also be sent to Vietnam if the Yankee imperialists step up their aggression against that country and the people of Vietnam request that aid?! Will they send the divisions of the Warsaw Pact to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea if the Yankee imperialists attack that country? Will they send the divisions of the Warsaw Pact to Cuba if the Yankee imperialist attack our country, or even in the case of the threat of Yankee imperialist attack on our country, if our country requests it?”

We acknowledge the bitter necessity that called for the sending of those forces into Czechoslovakia; we do not condemn the socialist countries that made that decision. But we, as revolutionaries, and proceeding from positions of principle, do have the right to demand that they adopt a consistent position with regard to all the other questions that affect the world revolutionary movement.

Castro's declaration on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was thus not one of uncritical support. In fact, it was so critical of the policies of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that none of them reprinted it!

Taaffe asserts in the last article in his series that the “Carter Administration is prepared to recognise the Cuban regime once it abandons its intervention in the African continent”. That is the sum-total of what Taaffe has to say about Cuba's sending of 20,000 troops in late 1975 to help the newly independent government of the

former Portuguese colony of Angola repulse a US-backed invasion of that country by South Africa. Apparently, Taaffe does not consider that this action tells us much at all about the Castro leadership's approach to foreign policy, which is, according to him, oriented to "attempts to find an accommodation with US imperialism".

Like Taaffe, the US imperialists also thought that the Castro leadership's abandonment of the promotion of a strategy of guerrilla warfare in Latin America after the death of Che Guevara in 1967, represented a change in Cuba's foreign policy away from revolutionary "adventurism". They hoped that in exchange for improved trade and diplomatic relations Cuba would abandon attempts to aid revolutionary struggles abroad. In 1974 direct talks began in secret between the United States and Cuba. Washington made a significant concession as bait. The Ford administration lifted part of the trade embargo, allowing subsidiaries of US corporations abroad to trade with Cuba. The US rulers held out the promise of the full restoration of diplomatic relations and the lifting of the embargo on direct trade between the two countries if the Castro leadership joined in the US-Soviet detente.

On November 11, 1975 Angola became an independent country. Cuba had already responded to a request from the Angolan government for military assistance, sending 230 military technicians in October 1975. Washington told the Cubans, in private, that if they continued to aid the Angolan government the "normalisation" talks would be called off.

As the date for Angola's formal independence drew near, South African army units crossed over Angola's border from the South African colony of South-West Africa (Namibia). On November 4 the Cuban government received a request from Angola to send troops to defend the country's independence from the South African invasion.

In January 1977, the Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, published a long article on the Cuban role in Angola, based on numerous interviews conducted in Cuba. His account of the factors weighed by the Castro leadership and how they arrived at their decision to respond to the Angolan request is instructive:

[The Angolan request posed to the Cubans the question of] waging a regular large-scale war 10,000 km away from their country, at an incalculable economic and human cost and with unpredictable political consequences.

The possibility that the United States would openly intervene — and not through mercenaries or South Africa, as they had done until then — was, without doubt, one of the most disquieting enigmas. However, a rapid analysis showed that the US would at least think about such a move at length since it had just emerged from the Vietnam quagmire and the Watergate scandal. It had a president no one had elected; Congress

was attacking the CIA, which was fast losing public prestige; it could not openly appear as an ally of racist South Africa, not only in the eyes of the majority of the African countries but also in the eyes of the black population in the United States; and it was the middle of an electoral campaign and the flamboyant year of the Bicentennial. On the other hand, the Cubans were certain to receive moral and material aid from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, but they were also aware of the implications their action could cause in regard to the policy of peaceful coexistence and international detente. It was a decision of irreversible consequences and a problem too big and too complicated to be solved in 24 hours. However, the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party did not have more than 24 hours to make the decision, which it did, without vacillation, on November 5, in a long and serene meeting. To the contrary of what has been said, that decision was an independent and sovereign act of Cuba and it was only after it was taken, and not before, that Cuba notified the Soviet Union.

The first contingent of Cuban troops left on November 7, flying to Luanda in a special Cubana Airlines flight disguised as tourists. The next day, three ships left Cuba with an artillery regiment, a battalion of motorised troops, and artillery personnel. By the time they arrived in Angola on November 27, the South African army columns had penetrated 700 km into Angola and were 200 km from Luanda.

The Cuban army made a decisive difference in driving the invading South African imperialist forces out of Angola. In doing so, the Cubans struck a blow not for a bureaucratic caste of self-seeking, privilege-takers in Cuba, but for the anti-colonial revolution in Africa, and thus for the working people of the world, including the working class in Cuba. The defeat of the South African invasion in 1976 helped spur the anti-imperialist, democratic struggle in southern Africa.

The South African government continued its war against Angola for 12 years, until its army was decisively defeated by Cuban, Angolan and Namibian forces in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 (which paved the way for the winning of Namibia's liberation from South African colonial rule in February 1990).

As in Latin America in the 1960s, the Castro leadership, when it felt it could make a concrete difference decided to act with far more than verbal expressions of solidarity. They took an initiative which carried a big chance of provoking reprisals from the US. They knew their action in sending troops to Angola would put an end to any possibilities of "normalising" relations with Washington. They could not be sure if the US would escalate its attacks on Cuba. But that has never stopped the Castro leadership from acting in accordance with their view of their international responsibilities. Castro spelled this out on July 26, 1965:

As the revolutionary movement develops in Latin America, the imperialists will blame

us more and more. As the revolutionary movement develops in Latin America, the threats and dangers will increase. But we will not tell the peoples of Latin America because of that, “Wait don’t make the revolution, because it will endanger us”. No. We exhort the revolutionists of Latin America to struggle! We exhort the revolutionists of Latin America to follow our example, and we readily run the risk. We show the peoples of Latin America the possibility of revolution, and the threats and the dangers and the risks don’t bother us.

Naturally, we don’t want the fruit of our efforts destroyed, naturally. We have worked arduously for the wellbeing of our country, for the security of our country, for the future of our country, but we are not afraid of the danger because of that, we don’t flee from the dangers because of that. Although Cuba runs a risk, although the imperialists menace us, we want the revolution, we want the liberation of the peoples of Latin America; we don’t stop to look at our triumphs in an egoistic way; we don’t stop to enjoy our triumphs in an egoistic way; we want the peoples of Latin America to have the same triumphs as us; we want the peoples of Latin America to follow our example.

The response of the Cuban Communist Party leadership to the challenge and the possibility to do something to concretely aid the anti-imperialist struggle in Africa a decade later in 1975 proved beyond any doubt that their *revolutionary internationalist* attitude had not changed.

The Stalinist bureaucrats in Moscow, Beijing and Belgrade never used their armies in the way the Cubans used their’s in Angola. The Stalinists used their armies as border guards to defend the base of their institutionalised privileges. The Cubans used their’s to aid the workers and peasants in a battle against imperialist aggression 10,000 km from Cuba.

In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky pointed out that in any society the “army is only a copy of social relations”. Every Cuban soldier who fought in Angola — of which there were a total 300,000 over the 13-year-long war against South Africa — was a reservist who volunteered to join the battle in response to appeals from the Castro leadership transmitted through the neighbourhood Committees for the Defence of the Revolution. Only workers trained and inspired to act as proletarian internationalists could be mobilised in that way.

Taaffe deals so sparingly with the Cuban role in Angola because it provides conclusive evidence that his “analysis” of the Castro leadership is 100% wrong. His inability to recognise the proletarian revolutionary character of that leadership is testimony to his sectarian inability to practice — as opposed to merely talking (and lecturing others) about — the art of revolutionary politics.

In 1961, James P. Cannon, one of the founders with Trotsky of the Fourth

International, wrote:

The only revolutionary policy for [Marxists outside] Cuba is to recognise the revolution there, as it is and as it is developing as a socialist revolution — and to identify ourselves with it, and to act as a part of it, not as scholastic wisecracks standing outside the living movement ...

In exceptional circumstances, these people have changed Cuba and changed themselves. They have carried through a genuine socialist revolution, and armed the working population, and defended the revolution successfully against an imperialist-backed invasion. And now they openly proclaim themselves socialist ...

In my opinion, that's pretty good for a start — and I am talking here about the leaders as well as the masses who support them. If such people are not considered as rightful participants in a discussion, and possible collaboration in a new party and a new international — where will we find better candidates?

Trotsky, in the middle thirties initiated extensive discussion and collaboration with left-centrists who only talked about the revolution and even that not very convincingly. The Cuban revolutionists have done more than talk, and they are not the only ones on trial from now on. We are also on trial. What would our talk about revolution be worth if we couldn't recognise a revolution when we see it? ■

**This pamphlet is a defence of the Cuban Revolution and the line followed by the leadership team around Fidel Castro. It refutes sectarian criticisms made by British Socialist Party leader Peter Taaffe.**

**Doug Lorimer, a leader of the Australian Democratic Socialist Party, provides a convincing defence of the revolutionary, democratic, anti-bureaucratic and internationalist record of the Castro leadership.**

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