

# CONFLICT, CONSENSUS, AND THE NEW CUBAN POLITICS

Nita R. Manitzas

**T**HE IDEA of conflict is implicit in the theory and practice of modern representative democracy. The political-party system is, by definition, predicated on the existence of opposing interests in a polity; and contained conflict is a basic feature of national politics. The institutional trappings of a modern democratic state—bicameral legislature, independent judiciary, the intricate weave of constitutional checks and balances—reflect in their design the notion that there will always be divergent views and interests among the citizenry. The tacit assumption is that conflict is a “natural” attribute of human society; and the political institutions of the democratic nation-state have been expressly devised to contain conflict within routinized, non-violent channels and to ensure that no particular faction or bloc gains ultimate and arbitrary authority over all the rest.

For much of the twentieth century, the system has worked reasonably well in most of the so-called developed countries of Western Europe and North America. At least, there have been few instances of major breakdown and the citizenry of these countries have, by and large, been able to go about their business within a relatively stable political framework. Yet, the selfsame institutional apparatus, transplanted into Latin America, has failed notably to produce political stability. Although most Latin American countries originally drew up their constitutions along the lines of the United States, the political processes defined in these documents have taken only irregular root in the Latin American environment. They have not served to contain conflict within institutionalized limits nor to permit orderly change without political jolts and disruption. *Golpes de estado*, barracks revolts, electoral fraud, repressive dictatorship, presidential successions resembling musical chairs and, on occasion, massive civil strife have all been recurring features of the Latin American political landscape. The temptation, on the

part of many Latin Americans, has been to say that for them representative democracy does not “work”; and they have proceeded to look to corporative styles of government and other forms of authoritarianism as alternative solutions. There has been another kind of temptation in the developed countries, particularly in the United States; namely, to ascribe these political difficulties to economic backwardness and to prescribe as the necessary and prior remedy a healthy dose of economic development. Once the Latin American economies have taken off into so-called self-sustaining growth, the argument goes, stable political democracy will follow.<sup>1</sup>

But authoritarian government has proved a transitory medicine in Latin America. It may suppress tensions and conflict temporarily, but eventually they erupt. And economic development has also failed to materialize in the ways anticipated; Latin American economies typically progress in fits and starts, and in generally twisted patterns, no matter how diligently the economic planners ply their trade.

What is ignored in both diagnoses is that the stability and contained conflict of a modern nation-state depend, in the first instance, on a special and fundamental kind of consensus. It can perhaps best be summed up under the label of “nationalism”; that is, a shared identification and loyalty among the citizens of a state that supersedes any other allegiance. It presumes a common world-view among the members of a polity, a basic agreement on the ends of the state and the welfare of its citizens. It also presumes that the secular nation-state has become the ultimate claimant of a citizen's loyalty, outweighing in the last analysis the competing claims of class, ethnic group, religion and—in extreme circumstances—family. Finally, it presupposes, if it is to be operationally valid, that the majority of the citizenry are participating members of the effective national community. Whatever the inequalities of status or the differences in degree, they enjoy at least a minimum access to the principal institutions of the nation-state: to the economy, to the educational establishment, and to the polling booth. Within this framework, conflict can be contained, for it does not involve the ultimate questions of loyalty, identification, and basic value stance. (And, indeed, when such questions do come into play, as they did in the United States in the 1860's, it means the underlying consensus has broken down and conflict can no longer be held within normal institutional channels.)

---

Mrs. Nita Rous Manitzas is Program Adviser in the Social Sciences for the Ford Foundation, presently resident in Santiago de Chile. She is completing her dissertation in political science at Columbia University on the subject of the ideology of the Cuban revolution. This paper was presented in an address given at Vanderbilt University, on March 30, 1971, under the auspices of the Graduate Center.

In Latin America, if the institutional superstructure of modern representative democracy has at varying times been imposed upon the body politic, the underlying consensus of nationalism has yet to be achieved. There is, of course, in Latin America a kind of nationalism that looks outward to external enemies and gives a certain xenophobic character to politics; but nationalism as social value, as the glue that integrates and holds together a national citizenry, has yet to emerge on any broad scale. Class boundaries still cut more deeply than national boundaries; empathy with one's fellow citizens often extends no further than the limits of one's own status group; and parochial interests generally outweigh any larger loyalty to the national community. Moreover, the national community, effectively speaking, is itself narrowly circumscribed in most Latin American countries. Large groups of people continue to exist outside the pale of national society, with little or no involvement in the money economy, no access to education, and certainly no effective voice in their political destiny as citizens. It is a picture, in essence, of sub-national communities and loyalties. Class divisions, ethnic differences and other cleavages have been too rigid and unyielding to permit the emergence of an integrated, total national community and of any overarching national consensus. The Latin American nation-state may be a juridical reality, but it is not yet a social or political fact.

Prerevolutionary Cuba fit within this general pattern. By the standard indices of economic prosperity and social well-being—literacy, per capita GNP, hospital beds and radio sets per 1,000 inhabitants, and the like—Cuba in 1958 was better off than many other Latin American countries and far in advance of most African and Asian nations. Nonetheless, whatever Cuba's relative advantages, it had yet to achieve the status of full nationhood. The effective national community was still a restricted domain. Substantial segments of the Cuban population, especially among the rural lower class, led a marginal existence and were, to all intents and purposes, excluded from the mainstream of national life. Moreover, among those groups that did enjoy, to a greater or lesser degree, some access to the national power structure, there was neither common cause nor common consensus. While successive Cuban leaders might make lavish use of nationalist symbols and rhetoric, the basic fabric of Cuban society was sub-national in shape and texture. As the historian Ramon Ruiz has written:

"No coherent society existed in Cuba in 1958, no stable or well-knit structure but simply . . . 'a society in a state of emergence.' The individual components of Cuban life did not constitute a nation. While Cubans were profoundly nationalist, their society—a collection of pieces held together by circumstance and historical accident—encompassed economic conflicts, ethnic rivalries, and rural-urban differences that mocked the myth of nationhood."<sup>2</sup>

The lack of coherence and consensus in Cuban society was evident in the conduct of prerevolutionary politics. Cuban politics was, in essence, a sub-national sport. The affairs and activity of government, at any given time, reflected the interests of a particular class or of particular sectors allied together, rather than the interests of the national community at large. In the early years of the twentieth century, following Cuban independence from Spain, government was

the private precinct of the upper class, which was split between two rival camps: traditional Liberals and traditional Conservatives. Later, after the overthrow of the Machado dictatorship in 1933, portions of the middle class gained access to the reins of political power, supported by the more advantaged members of the labor community, especially the more powerful of the Havana unions. But if the power base was thus broadened, these new groups were no more inclined than their predecessors to share the riches and benefits of the nation with their less fortunate countrymen. The rural worker, the unemployed, the unskilled non-union laborer, and the indigent in general were still, by and large, written out of the body politic.

The depth of cleavage within Cuban society was further reflected in the intensity of political conflict and in the ways in which political differences were resolved. Lacking a basic, unifying loyalty to their national community or any implicit consensus about the role and goals of their state, the Cubans found it difficult to establish workable political "rules of the game." Political dispute was not limited to particular policies and tactics. Rather, it often involved the very gut issues of a polity, calling into play not only the temporary judgments and superficial biases of the participants, but their basic value sets, the visceral cluster of beliefs for which men are willing, in the ultimate instance, to make a life-or-death stand.

Under these circumstances, it was not uncommon for party rivalries to be settled by murder. And the resolution of political controversy in general was as often as not accomplished through violence (or through the intervention of the United States and a cadre of Marines). The first national election in Cuba after the departure of the U.S. occupation troops in 1902, a contest essentially between upper-class Liberals and upper-class Conservatives, degenerated rapidly into an armed confrontation—bringing a fresh influx of U.S. soldiers to the island. In subsequent years, the pattern would be repeated, with armed force becoming a fairly regular substitute for institutional process in the conduct of political affairs. By the mid-twentieth century, a variety of non-constitutional means of determining political succession—including armed uprising, general strike, and military coup—had become as common a way of replacing the head of state as elections.

Although there was a brief return to constitutional government in the 1940's, the leaders elected by popular vote, once in office, failed notably to deliver what they had promised their constituency. The focus of government remained essentially sub-national; political violence and terrorism continued; and the corruption that flourished under these elected administrations eroded even further whatever claims they might have had to political legitimacy in the eyes of the populace at large. Fulgencio Batista's coup d'etat in March 1952, following on the heels of this somewhat spotty constitutional interlude, did not come as any seismic shock to the Cuban polity; it was simply another step in a process of political deterioration that had begun decades earlier.

In sum, the institutional paraphernalia of representative democracy, superimposed on a pre-national social order, never took meaningful root in the Cuban political culture. The political institutions elaborated in successive Cuban

constitutions, even when they were permitted to function, did not serve to contain conflict. Moreover, manipulated or abused outright for narrow, parochial purposes by whatever groups were in power, they failed to acquire any widespread aura of legitimacy. When Batista fled Cuba on the New Year's Eve of 1959, he left behind very little in the way of ingrained political process or accepted, workable political institutions. Thus, when Fidel Castro descended from his guerrilla base in the Sierra Maestra, he found himself inheriting a political order that, at least in terms of institutional trappings, was virtually a *tabula rasa*. He could dispense with many of the niceties of constitutional rule because, in the first place, they had never been routinely observed in Cuba anyway and, perhaps more significantly, they had acquired little effective meaning for much of the population.<sup>3</sup>

### *The New Politics of the Cuban Revolution*

For those observers who were close to the Cuban scene in the early days of the revolutionary regime, Castro's political maneuvers presented a dizzying spectacle, a heady process of reform and radicalization that altered—within an astonishingly brief span—the entire fabric of Cuban society. In less than three years, he and his fellow *barbudos* managed not only to upend most domestic institutions, but also to reorient totally the pattern of the island's external relationships. In this initial swirl of events, much of what went on appeared unplanned, capricious, and often chaotic. Indeed, the *fidelistas* themselves were subsequently to admit that there was a considerable amount of trial and error (and, on occasion, sheer ineptitude) in their early programs and policies. There was much, moreover, that would seem to have been largely reactive to the ebb and flow of United States policy at the time. Nonetheless, with the advantages of hindsight and distance, one can discern a certain order and purpose in the general pattern of events. And one can also begin to imbue these events with a certain coherent theoretical meaning.

To derive such theoretical significance, one must first make the distinction between Cuba as a Communist "case," a fitting subject for studies in comparative Communism, and Cuba as a member of the so-called Third World, as a developing country within the Latin American orbit. From the latter perspective, the Cuban revolution, beneath its Marxist overlay, begins to emerge as a profoundly nationalist phenomenon. Castro's early attacks on the propertied classes in Cuba, the radical redistribution of income and social benefits in his first years in power, and the rampant egalitarianism that has subsequently characterized the revolutionary regime are importantly related, certainly, to the emergence of Marxist ideology in Cuba. At the same time, they also relate to the evolution of a new kind of nationalism on the Cuban scene. What the *fidelistas* were doing, in effect, with their early social reforms and their destruction of the traditional bases of property-ownership and privilege was to redefine the effective national community. The former "ins" of prerevolutionary society were stripped of their power; and the former "outs" were drawn into the mainstream of national life.

The seeds of this political strategy were contained in Castro's famous speech, "History Will Absolve Me," deliv-

ered at the trial following his attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953. At that time, Castro explicitly identified the constituency he chose to represent: the unemployed, the landless rural laborer, the subsistence peasant, the factory worker and the stevedore, the struggling, underpaid teacher, the disaffected intellectual and professional, and the small proprietor. In other words, he aligned himself with the lower strata of Cuban society, with those people who, in the pre-revolutionary setting, comprised the disadvantaged and, one might say, the "alienated" sectors of the population. These were, in sum, the mass of persons who, while enjoying a juridical claim to citizenship, were largely excluded from the national power structure and only marginally involved—if at all—in the effective national community. They also happened to make up the majority of the Cuban population.

At the time, Castro's position, clearly defined in his Moncada address was more populist than Marxist; it reflected more the influence of José Martí, the "Apostle" of Cuban independence, than any Marxian current of thought. (As Castro himself was to remark some years later, "It could be called Marxist if you wish, but probably a true Marxist would have said it was not.")<sup>4</sup> It signalled, at root, a commitment to extend the frontiers of the national community to include all the hitherto marginal groups in the Cuban population. And this commitment, essentially political in nature, was to become, once Castro was in power, a consistent thread running through the cumulative total of *fidelistas* oratory and policy. Confronting a fragmented, sub-national political order, Castro adopted a political stance and strategy that were importantly geared to erasing the former cleavages within Cuban society and to building a nationally integrated state.

In the early years of the revolution, the radicalization of the revolutionary process, Castro's public conversion to Marxism-Leninism, and his dramatic confrontation with the United States, culminating in the ill-fated assault on the beaches of Playa Girón, tended to obscure for most foreign observers the inherently nationalist content of the revolutionary experience. The Cold War dimension of the Cuban phenomenon, exacerbated by the missile crisis in 1962, polarized opinion on the Cuban "case" and made it difficult—certainly, in the United States—to treat the Cuban experience within the normal range of social science Theory and typology. With time, however, comes dispassion. And it should now be possible to look beneath the thick overlay of Cold War politics and to see the Cuban revolutionary process as, intrinsically, an exercise in nation-building. Within this conceptual framework, the basic question for the political analyst is not the ultimate "rightness" or efficacy of either Communism or Capitalism. Rather, the focus of inquiry should appropriately be the nexus between the *fidelistas* brand of politics and the related processes of national integration, national participation, and the emergence of a cohesive national community.

In both their ideological rhetoric and their explicit policies over time, one can find abundant evidence of the *fidelistas'* concern with national integration and with involving the mass of citizenry in the institutional matrix of Cuban national society. Equally evident is their concern with obliterating the grosser lines of difference and division among the Cuban populace. In this latter regard, it is significant to note that

the basic thrust of *fidelistas* politics is not directed to reconciling divergent interests and adjudicating dispute; rather, *fidelismo* has defined its role as one of eliminating the sources of conflict altogether.

An example of the essentially integrative and nationalist cast of the revolution can be found in Castro's approach to questions of social class. From the outset, the *fidelistas* stance on matters of class has varied importantly from the position of their more orthodox Communist colleagues. In the early stages of the revolution, for example, the old-guard Cuban Communists of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) spent a considerable amount of time defining and analyzing the class composition of the revolutionary movement, generally concluding that it was a four-class alliance involving the workers, the peasants, the petite bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. For orthodox Marxists of Soviet stripe, such distinctions were not simply a scholastic exercise; they were the stuff of which tactics and strategy are made.

The *fidelistas*, in contrast, following Castro's lead had little patience with such elaborate, multi-class constructions. They tended, rather, to a dualistic view of their society: on the one hand, the popular mass or, as Castro was prone to say, the "people"; and, on the other side, anyone who failed to unite himself unconditionally with this populist community. This dichotomy, in varying semantic guises, was an important thread in *fidelistas* oratory. Time and again, Castro would project an image of the Cuban world divided between two polar camps: between those who were for the revolution and those who were against it; between the working masses (including artists, professionals, and other "intellectual workers") and the *vagos*, or "loafers"; between the "humble" and the rich; between patriots and *gusanos*; between the exploited and the exploiters.

From the point of view of orthodox Marxism-Leninism, the Cuban position was somewhat heterodox. The conventional Marxist does not so lightly dismiss the finer lines of distinction among classes. In the context of nation-building, however, the *fidelistas* stance had an inherent logic. If nationalism and national integration were their ultimate concern, the purposes of Castro and his colleagues were better served not by calling attention to the class divisions within Cuban society, as the PSP was doing, but by blurring class lines within the larger concept of "the people." Hence, in place of the PSP's intricate class analysis, they tended to employ dichotomies that, at their core, were actually the definition of who was and who was not, a member of the new national community. In the *fidelistas* universe, of course, the national community and the revolution were posited as one and the same. Those who accepted the revolution were national citizens; those who did not were now the new marginals. Operationally, this distinction was facilitated by the fact that many of those in the latter category elected to join the exodus to the North American mainland and thus physically removed themselves from the Cuban community.

Even with the formal adoption of Marxism-Leninism as the official creed of the revolution, the *fidelistas* continued to measure their social order with a basically nationalist yardstick. To be sure, their rhetorical style changed: such stock phrases from the Marxist lexicon as "class struggle" and "dictatorship of the proletariat" now began to pepper their

public utterance. But operationally their posture remained more populist and integrative than narrowly Marxian. Many of the rigidities that characterized the early Soviet approach to class matters were not duplicated in the Cuban case. No matter how frequently they might echo the standard rhetoric on class, the *fidelistas* have been over time more flexible than the Bolsheviks in certain important respects, most notably in their acceptance of the individual citizen on his own merits.

In the first years of the Russian revolution, a person's class origin was generally an indelible scar. Thus, for example, the sons of former aristocrats were, by virtue of their class ancestry, automatically barred from most kinds of employment and from the higher rungs of the educational ladder. In extreme instances, whole classes of persons might be barred from the means of survival itself, as was the lot of the *kulaks*, or wealthier peasants, during the period of collectivization. In contrast, within the Cuban revolution, any individual—with the exception of former *batistianos*—has been eligible for membership in the new national community. The determining criterion is not class but commitment, the willingness of the individual to break free of class ties and interests, to accept the revolutionary ideology, and to participate in common effort with his fellow citizens. As Che Guevara remarked in mid-1960:

"But we must not . . . separate all men into either children of the working and peasant classes or counterrevolutionaries, because it is simplistic, because it is not true, and because there is nothing which educates an honorable man more than living in a revolution."<sup>5</sup>

This posture, less intransigent than that of the early Soviet leadership, reflects in part a certain voluntaristic cast of mind among the *fidelistas* and, in other part, their concern with uniting all Cubans who are willing within the fabric of national society. The basic stance is integrative, rather than exclusionist; and Marxist doctrine is used as the rationale for expunging class in Cuba, not for expunging any particular group of Cubans. Where Stalin recreated Marx as a Byzantine despot, the Cubans have cast him in a more nationalist role.

If they are more flexible than the early Soviets in admitting Cubans into the effective national community, the *fidelistas* have been, on the other hand, more unyielding on another point. The radical and uncompromising egalitarianism that characterizes Castro's brand of Marxism finds no match in present-day Russia or Eastern Europe. In their interpretation of Marx, the Soviets have made a clear distinction between an egalitarian and a "classless" social system. By abolishing private ownership of the means of production, they have, in their view, abolished classes in accordance with Marxist dictum. And it apparently troubles them not at all that, within their "classless" society, they have managed to erect a complicated structure of differential wage scales and other rewards that implies, at the very least, a considerable variation in the life styles of their population. Egalitarianism, in the Soviet glossary, is a "petit-bourgeois deviation."

In contrast, *fidelistas* ideology is starkly egalitarian. The Cubans seek to eliminate not only class *per se*, defined in the Marxian scheme basically by the ownership of the means of

production, but any and all cleavages that may cut through the fabric of their national community. Thus, for example, they predicate as one of their goals the eventual end of differential wage rates and, indeed, of all material differences that may separate citizen from citizen in a hierarchy of rank and privilege. While they admit this utopian vision lies somewhere in the future, it already finds certain reflection in Cuban reality: for instance, in the increasing number of services that are provided free to the population at large (e.g., medical care, public telephone service, funerals, and admission to sports events) and, somewhat in reverse, in the system of rationing that limits on an equal basis the access of citizens to those basic goods that are in shortest supply.

The radical egalitarianism of *fidelismo* is mirrored in many other facets of Cuban national policy. Its influence can be seen, for example, in the government's unremitting efforts to erase the more glaring differences between the conditions of urban and rural life. It can be discerned in Castro's strong emphasis on moral over material incentives; in his definition of the "new Cuban man," free of any materialistic or competitive ambitions; and in his practice of sending urban office workers and professionals to the countryside for their share of voluntary, manual labor.<sup>6</sup> It is further evidenced in the intention, recently proclaimed to universalize not only primary and secondary-level schooling, but also higher education—a notion that no other Western country has seriously contemplated.

In sum, the *fidelistas* are concerned with more than the elimination of class or even the leveling of material differences among the population. They seek to erase more subtle lines of social division as well and, as the end product of this process, to create a completely integrated and cohesive community. It is not enough, in their view, for citizens to be juridically equal or even to share the same level of material well-being. Cuban egalitarianism has a deeper dimension. The "new man" must actually share with his fellow citizens a certain measure of common experience and, through such experience, achieve a common identification and empathy. Thus, to cite a familiar example, it is not sufficient simply to narrow the income gap between manual and non-manual occupations; the non-manual worker, from the Cabinet on down, must actually engage on occasion in manual work (most typically cutting cane during the sugar harvest). And students must combine their formal course work with physical labor in the fields.

This practice is not, of course, unrelated to the Marxian concept of alienation. It can be seen, as well, as an explicit attempt to cut through the traditional Iberian disdain for manual labor in general, and rural, agricultural labor in particular. But it can also be viewed in another theoretical context: the Cuban strategy, the concern with common and collective endeavor, can be conceptualized as an attempt to leap the gap between the pre-national and national worlds, not through leisurely evolution, but rather—as we used to say of Superman—"at a single bound." It is an effort, in effect, to eradicate all conceivable divisions within society and, hence, all possible sources of conflict that may impede the emergence of a collective national consciousness.

Clearly, the social cost of such a massive and rapid transformation of the national community is high. The exodus of

Cubans who are either unwilling or unable to accept the new national ideology or to adapt themselves to the *fidelista* style of national mobilization is only one surface symptom of the tensions and problems generated by the process of revolution. At the same time, it is possible to suggest that, in net effect, the general direction of change in Cuba has been toward the condition commonly labelled as "modernism." To lightly dismiss Castro as just another nasty Caribbean *caudillo*, or to lump the Cuban experiment with traditional authoritarian regimes elsewhere in Latin America (adding only the pejorative prefix of "Communist"), is to ignore the theoretical significance of the Cuban occurrence.

The *fidelista* concern with forging a national community and a national consensus, an endeavor that is essentially political in nature, has conditioned much of their policy in the major institutional spheres of national life. In this respect, it represents an interesting variation on the orthodox Marxist-Leninist scheme, which defines economic matters as the basic variable in the progression of human affairs. It also differs from traditional developmental strategies elsewhere in Latin America, which, while rejecting Marx, also give primordial priority to the economic variable.

In recent years, to be sure, Castro and his companions have displayed an almost overweening concern for the development of the Cuban economy. This preoccupation was most notably reflected in their massive—albeit unsuccessful—campaign for a ten-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970. And even in the early, heady days of rampant social reform and innovation, they never dismissed out of hand the importance of economic advance. Egalitarianism, as they themselves admitted, would not be an especially attractive social doctrine if it meant simply the right to share equally in scarcity and deprivation.

The *fidelistas* have not, in other words, eliminated economic development from their calculation of major national goals and national priorities. It is, however, their rank ordering of these national priorities over the course of time that has given the Cuban revolution its distinctive flavor. In the early stages of the revolutionary process, national integration, national participation, and the redistribution of the island's material goods and social benefits took clear precedence over strictly economic considerations in the policy decisions of the *fidelista* leadership. Where other developing countries have looked to economic growth as the key to eventual social reform and political liberalization, Castro saw "social justice" and an integrated national community as the preconditions for realizing Cuba's economic potential. In the *fidelista* flight plan, it is not economic development that produces social openness; rather, it is social integration, social cohesion, and social "awareness" (*conciencia*) that open the way for Rostowian "takeoff."

This ordering of developmental variables was amply registered during the first years of the revolution in the *fidelista* approach to the major institutional areas of public life. Thus, for example, early policy vis-a-vis the Cuban educational establishment had much to do with notions of equality, "justice," and national community, and very little to do with such essentially technocratic concerns as manpower planning or the economics of education. Decisions on school enrollment and educational opportunity were not based on cost-

benefit analyses or weighed off against more immediately productive investments. Rather, educational policy was predicated in the first instance on the related propositions that no Cuban should be illiterate and that access to the educational establishment should be open to all citizens. Within three years after the *fidelistas* had arrived on the Cuban scene, the public education budget had been importantly expanded (from less than \$75 million in 1958 to over \$200 million in 1962)<sup>7</sup> and a nation-wide literacy campaign was underway across the length and breadth of the island. Cuba today has the lowest rate of illiteracy in Latin America and the highest proportion of school enrollment per capita anywhere in the hemisphere. In 1969, one-fourth of Cuba's total population, from pre-school toddlers to adults, was enrolled in some kind of formal school program.<sup>8</sup> These data, of course, tell us nothing about the quality of education in Cuba; but they say a good deal about the access of citizens to their national institutions and about the spread of the effective national community.

In much the same fashion, Castro's treatment of the Cuban economy in the early years of the revolution was heavily conditioned by essentially social and political imperatives. A major portion of public investment, for example, was distributive rather than productive in effect, funneled into new housing, hospitals, and schools rather than into the productive machinery of Cuban industry or agriculture. These investments were accompanied by legislation slashing urban rents, lowering the cost of public utilities such as lights and telephones, and throwing open the beaches and tourist facilities of the island to the urban and rural lower classes. In effect, the *fidelistas* regime was using the economy to extend the reach of the national community, enabling all citizens—beginning with the most deprived and hitherto isolated sectors—to benefit directly from the national store of goods and services.

As many critics of the regime, and even some of its friends, have been quick to point out, this populist spending spree was relatively short-lived. It was financed largely by existing reserves, inherited from the prerevolutionary period, rather than by any net leap in production and capital. Indeed, after an initial rise in the first year or so of the revolution, production actually began to decline in certain important sectors of the economy. The denouement was not long in coming: it comprised, among other things, hidden inflation, shortages, and the beginnings of a stringent rationing system. By defying conventional economic wisdom, the *fidelistas* brought down upon their heads a predictable economic price. Nonetheless, their manipulation of the economy did have an important sociopolitical consequence, drawing into the economic life of the nation large groups of persons who had been in the past only marginally connected to it.

A particularly significant feature of this early economic policy was the amount of social capital channeled to the remote, rural areas of the island. Today, visitors to Cuba remark on the shabbiness of Havana; it is the result of deliberate neglect, reflecting the decision of the *fidelistas* leadership to lavish the bulk of available resources on the outlying countryside. As Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, of the Cuban Central Committee, explained to a gathering of the International Organization of Journalists in January 1971:

“. . . I'm quite sure that your impression of Havana has been one of a slightly discolored city, with its buildings lacking paint; the sadness of the blackouts; and the crowding of the buyers in lines. Perhaps some of you knew the other Havana—painted, bright and gay. That city was, as Fidel said, 'the developed capital of an underdeveloped country.' We must never forget that, behind that Havana—which was nothing but a facade for our hidden poverty—there were 1,200,000 illiterates and 600,000 unemployed.

"Our capital today is the stagnant capital of a country in development. A decision had to be made, and that is what our revolutionary leadership did. Comrade Fidel described it in a single phrase: 'a minimum of urbanism and maximum of ruralism.' A minimum of attention to the old, all-powerful capital and maximum of attention to the cities, towns and countryside regions kept in complete backwardness by several centuries of colonialism and neocolonialism."<sup>9</sup>

This strategy, which has affected much of the government's investment policy, represents something more than a simple taking from the rich and giving to the poor. It is, as well, a calculated departure from the Cuban past and, as a matter of fact, from the Latin American norm. In most Latin American countries, the capital city has come to dominate the life of the nation, standing as an island of power, activity, and modernism in the midst of a traditional, generally stagnant, and provincial land mass. The *fidelistas* emphasis on the countryside is an attempt to reverse the tide. It is nothing less than a deliberate effort to correct the imbalances in the national landscape and to eliminate the grosser differences and, indeed, the alienation that earlier existed between urban Cuba and rural Cuba. Thus, in addition to raising the living standards of the rural population—a relatively simple matter of economic redistribution—the *fidelistas* also are bringing to the countryside certain intrinsic accoutrements of the urban life style and culture: secondary schools, television, factories, traveling symphony orchestras, and the like.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, there is a calculated commingling of urban and rural people: peasants are bussed to Havana for national holidays, and urbanites are sent to the countryside for the annual harvest; sons of Oriente farmers go to Havana for medical school training, and Havana high school students spend a part of each academic year doing agricultural work in the provinces.

Whether this array of policy and practice represents the optimum in terms of immediate economic efficiency is, certainly, a questionable proposition. In the context of nation-building, however, it has an intrinsic function: narrowing the social and cultural distance between the urban and rural populations. In this respect, it can be conceptualized as yet another facet of Castro's strategy for building an integrated, unified national community. There is no suggestion here of reconciling the differing interests of a rural "farm bloc" and an urban, industrial constituency; rather, the ultimate goal is a complete convergence of interest on the part of all citizens.

This vision of a unified national community, devoid of internal divisions and competitive interests, is matched by an idealized conception of politics as an essentially harmonious exercise, rather than a continuing process of controversy and accommodation. The idea of contained conflict, implicit in the workings of a modern, representative democracy, is alien to the *fidelistas* definition of their political universe. In their ideological formulations, they explicitly reject the premise

that conflict is a "natural" attribute of man and human communities. Rather, they see conflict as an artificial condition imposed on society by capitalism, imperialism, and the hierarchy of class and property ownership. And they define such conflict—deriving from "unnatural," anti-humanist ways of ordering human affairs—as irreconcilable. As long as society is divided among diverse classes and economic interest groups, so long as men are separated by ascriptive and material barriers, there is no chance either for reconciliation or for meaningful democracy. The dominant classes will simply manipulate the political apparatus of the state for their own ends—with or without electoral process—and will use it to impose their own will on the rest of the population. To speak of parliamentary democracy, conciliation politics, or contained conflict is, in the *fidelistas* view, either fatuous or purposely deceitful. Thus, for example, Castro ridiculed President Eduardo Frei's pledge to carry out a social revolution in Chile:

"What is really happening in Chile? Could it be that a revolution is really taking place? Could it be that the government of Chile is willing to confront imperialism, the oligarchy, the great industrial bourgeoisie, the banking and business interests? No. The first great error of these attempts is the belief in the possibility of conciliating the interests of the different classes, to believe that one can make a Revolution, or that one can even speak of Revolution with a spirit of conciliation among classes; to believe that one can conciliate the interests of imperialism and the interests of the Nation; to believe that one can conciliate the interest of the oligarchies and the interests of the peasants; to believe that one can conciliate the interests of the great bourgeoisie and the interests of the workers."<sup>11</sup>

It is a posture that reflects, certainly, the influence of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. But it also can be seen as a reactive response to the Cubans' own prerevolutionary past and their experience over long years with a fragmented, sub-national political order. Rejecting the concept and possibility of contained conflict, they do not believe the sufficient condition for a democratic system is the juridical equality of diverse people before the law and the marketplace; rather, they define as the democratic *sine qua non* the literal public equality of all members of a polity.

### Conclusions

In the sum of its parts, as some authors have noted, the Cuban phenomenon closely fits the theoretical construction of a "mobilization system."<sup>12</sup> The mix of elements—charismatic leadership, monistic ideology, the rejection of conflict, and the imperative that all citizens be actively involved in the revolutionary consensus—closely approximate the array of variables characteristic of the "mobilization" model in contemporary political theory. The Cuban experiment can, however, also be considered in another conceptual light. It is, in many respects, an exercise in "instant modernization," an attempt to compress into the span of a few years the long revolutionary process of social change that took place over more than a century in the modern nation-states of North America and Western Europe. The erosion of class lines, the opening of mobility channels, the elimination of ascriptive criteria for social selection, the emergence of national identification and consensus—processes that only grad-

ually worked themselves out along the Western continuum—have been legislated into being in less than a decade by Cuba's revolutionary leadership. They are the natural byproducts of Castro's radical egalitarianism, his uprooting of traditional social structures, and his deliberate strategies for forging a unified national community.

In this headlong process, implying the total reordering of Cuban society, Marxist ideology has had a significant instrumental function. Among other things, it serves to justify and legitimize many of the more cataclysmic measures of the revolutionary leadership by imbuing them with both an ethical and a rational significance. As a national ideology, posited as the single, official belief system for the community as a whole, it can function as a unifying, secular religion, replacing whatever may have been the diversity of traditional values and beliefs of the prerevolutionary order. Also, by positing an ultimate utopian goal, it can give a sense of national purpose to the citizenry at large, rationalizing present sacrifices in terms of a future good in which all will share equally. That Marx's utopian vision was essentially international in scale, does not lessen its effectiveness as an integrating concept when set, as in Cuba, within a national framework. On the contrary, the marriage of Marxism and nationalism would appear to produce a synthesis that has more immediate meaning and cogency for the Cuban developmental process than any strict reliance on the original Marxist text alone.

In conclusion, it is possible to suggest that the major element in the Cuban revolutionary process, viewed over time, is the creation of a new national community and the emergence of an underlying national identification and consensus. This progression, however, is not without inherent risks. If certain kinds of conflict have been defined out of existence, it is clear that other kinds of tensions are generated by the new arrangement of social and political variables. The failure of the ten-million-ton sugar harvest, the officially-acknowledged decline in worker productivity, and the necessity of enacting a stringent law against "loafers" are simply a few surface indications of deeper disjunction and problems that now are appearing in the matrix of revolutionary society. How well the revolutionary leadership comprehend these new tensions, and how well they will address them, are questions that are still open. Certainly, two diverse currents have been visible in recent times in the public pronouncements of Castro and his close associates: on the one hand, a tendency to prescribe greater militarization and to demand greater conformity in the mobilization of the population for national purposes; and, on the other hand, a suggestion that greater popular participation and democratization of the decision-making process should now be encouraged.

In some respects, these two diverse currents would seem to indicate that the Cubans may now be facing their political moment of truth. In their preoccupation with building a national consensus, the *fidelistas* have failed to institutionalize channels through which diversity, dissatisfaction, and differing judgments can legitimately be expressed. The boundary lines of permissible behavior, or permissible deviation from standard opinion, have not been clearly drawn. The dangers inherent in such a diffuse setting are that consensus, instead of becoming the basis for greater openness and flexibility, will be transformed into an ideological strait jacket;

that diversity of judgment will too easily be construed as heresy; that constructive criticism will too readily be equated with counterrevolutionary thought; and that the options open to the community, instead of progressively broadening, will be increasingly foreclosed. In sum, it remains to be seen whether the *fidelistas* will be able to use their new, consensual community as the platform for further modernization, or whether they will let it close in upon itself.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The basic line of reasoning has been somewhat sardonically summarized by Kalman Silvert as the "ricochet theory of development": "The implied unilineal set of faith runs somewhat as follows: a change in the 'economic base' necessarily affects the occupational stratification system; when persons find themselves in new occupations certified by formal educations, they feel themselves in a different class situation; the job plus the education plus the attitude create the middle class; persons in the middle class have a stake to defend in the community; they therefore organize special-interest groups and parties; these actions in themselves define a pluralistic society, which is the very essence of modern democracy. Conclusion: from industrialization all else flows automatically into the ultimate human freedom and dignity." (*The Conflict Society: Reaction and Revolution in Latin America*, American Universities Field Staff, New York, 1966, p. 259.)

2. *Cuba, The Making of a Revolution*, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1968, p. 142.

3. The political setting in Chile today, with its long tradition of due political process and constitutional governance, stands in direct contrast to the political order inherited by Castro in 1959. It will be interesting to observe how this difference will affect the Chilean experiment with Marxism.

4. Lee Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel*, Vintage Books, New York, 1969, p. 159.

5. Speech of August 19, 1960, in John Gerassi, ed., *Vencemos! The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto Che Guevara*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1969, p. 116.

6. Since the failure of the sugar harvest in 1970, there have been indications in the speeches of the leadership that material incentives—in kind, if not in actual cash—may begin to receive increased recognition as a means of stimulating productivity and discouraging absenteeism.

7. Armando Hart, "La Revolución y los Problemas de la Educación," *Cuba Socialista*, Año 1, No. 4 (December 1961), p. 39.

8. Marvin Leiner, "Cuba's Schools, Ten Years Later," *Saturday Review*, October 17, 1970, p. 59.

9. Speech delivered at the closing session of the 7th Congress of the International Organization of Journalists, January 11, 1971, *Granma*, Weekly Review, January 24, 1971, p. 5.

10. Officially, the revolutionary leadership do not admit to bringing an "urban" life style to the countryside. On the contrary, they are more prone publicly to extoll rural values and the simple virtues of the peasant. Urbanism, however, is more than density of population; it relates to a particular kind of "modernism." And in this sense, the revolution is indeed bringing to rural Cuba many elements of the "urban" condition.

11. Speech of March 13, 1966, *Granma*, Weekly Review, March 20, 1966, p. 4.

12. See, for example, Richard R. Fagen, "Mass Mobilization in Cuba: The Symbolism of Struggle," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. XX, No. 2 (1966), pp. 254-271.

The Graduate Center For Latin American Studies  
Vanderbilt University

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

October, 1971