

Socialist Man

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“To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.”

— Che Guevara, *Man and Socialism in Cuba*.

In the preceding articles, I have dealt with the quality of life in Cuba, the laying of the base of material production, international relations, and other facets of the Cuban revolution. But the most important aspect of the revolution is yet to be described: the creation of the “new man.” This act of creation is the heart of the Cuban revolution. Although there has been little formally written about it, except for Che’s small but important book, *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, the task of this creation is reflected in the daily lives and the daily consciousness of every participant in the revolution.

It is not easy to define in a hard-and-fast way the meaning of “new man”. Basically, it revolves around the creation of a new set of relationships between man and man, and between the individual and the collective. As Che describes it, “(The individual under communism) will achieve total awareness of his social being, which is equivalent to his full realization as a human being, having broken the chains of alienation. The concept does not imply the sacrifice or the suppression of the individual; rather, it means the extension of the individual, the fulfillment of the individual, through social involvement and a sense of collective self-definition.

In Cuba people on all levels of society realize that their individual well-being and advancement is dependent on collective well-being and progress. People no longer think in terms of individual competitiveness or individual advancement. Instead, people realize that in order to improve the quality of their own life, they must work cooperatively with others to advance the revolution. For example, while in Havana, I struck up a conversation with a revolutionary street cleaner. When I asked him how he liked the revolution, he told me that he had voluntarily given up some of his salary, as he realized that the revolutionary government could-not afford to pay him his former salary. He then ran down to me the production plans of the revolution, the various attempts at crop diversification, the various international deals that were in the works, etc., and explained that when these things came through, he would be able to get his former salary, and probably more. What impressed me about this conversation was not only the economic and political understanding which the street-cleaner demonstrated, but, more incredibly, his definition of his own advancement in terms of the collective advancement of the revolution.

Given this understanding, people define their life priorities in different terms than we are used to. They understand that the family, as an institution, serves capitalism by contributing to the atomization of people into small, fiercely competitive groups. So, although the Cubans value love and marriage and family as much as Americans do, they are willing to temporarily give these things up if their work demands it. Sometimes you’ll see situations in which married teachers have to serve at opposite ends of the island for a period of two years (not because of coercion, but because of the perception of the country’s needs)—and they do it willingly. On the Isle of Youth, there is no housing yet for married couples, so married couples usually see each other only the weekends—again, they do it willingly. In Cuba, the priority is not “me” and “my family” but the Cuban people and the revolution. People sacrifice so that the revolution can move forward, and with it their own destinies.

Finally, because of the obvious scarcities faced by Cuba and the need for total mobilization of economic resources, Cubans need to have discipline in production and consumption. Under capitalism, discipline in production is imposed through the work-income nexus; discipline in consumption is imposed through the use of money as a rationing device. Under the concept of the new man, the Cubans feel that these devices must be replaced by self-discipline. Although they realize that this will not be completely effective until the collective consciousness is more firmly established, they seek to speed up this process by abolishing these devices when and where this is possible. For example, although material incentives are still offered for extra production, this is becoming less accepted or approved of. Many of the workers in factories and state farms voluntarily give up their extra pay, orienting their work towards building the collective, not individual, welfare.

Also, the Cuban government is gradually attempting to abolish money as a rationing device in consumption, realizing that the use of money in this way leads to unhealthy social relationships and the possibility of the creation of privilege. Right now, rent in Cuba is free on all apartments built before 1956; by 1970, the government hopes to abolish all rent. Also, public telephones, former toll roads, tuition and supplies for students, medical care, and many other goods and services have been "liberated." As people learn to use these free goods in a context of the new social consciousness, they will learn to practice self-discipline. This discipline must come about as the result of consciousness, not coercion.

So—this article, necessarily sketchy and incomplete, marks the end of my formal reporting on Cuba. If readers have questions or comments, I would appreciate them writing me care of the Fifth Estate, as I have left many important questions unanswered and have not dealt with many areas of Cuban life. I will try to answer these in subsequent issues.

Venceremos!

fifth Estate

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