

Cuba Builds Socialism

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New Year's day marks the tenth anniversary of the victory of the rebellion (Fidel's terminology) and the beginning of the Cuban revolution.

This tenth year, just completed, will be remembered as the Year of the Revolutionary Offensive. It is not that the other nine years lacked the elements of a revolutionary offensive: this revolution has always been revolutionary and has always been on the offensive. But in 1968 a new height was scaled, made possible by the great transformations of character and ideology which millions of Cubans have undergone.

The revolutionary offensive was initiated in March 1968 with the nationalization of almost all small businesses in Cuba, excepting small farmers and some self-employed professionals. Many of these small urban businesses played a negative role as agents of black market activity or ' the case of some corner bars, hangouts or anti-social elements.

The nationalized small businesses did not play a fundamental role in the economy. They probably could have continued without undoing the basic gains of the Cuban revolution. Some people even argue that, economically speaking, the nationalization of these businesses was counterproductive. They say that small repair shops for example, played a positive role.

But even if in some cases these shops played economically useful roles, each and every one was a symbol of capitalist avidity and egotism. The elimination of this aspect of small businesses was the ideological motivation for nationalizing them.

For the essence of the revolutionary offensive is to root out all relations in Cuban society based solely on material incentive and selfish motives. It attempts to create conditions for the rapid emergence of a more highly developed social consciousness that channels itself into active and selfless participation in the transformation of the society. It has as its ultimate objective the formation of the new man.

The theoretical underpinning for the revolutionary offensive is the Marxist-Leninist principle that once the masses seize an idea it can become a material force. Few textbooks of economic theory take this into account. According to them it would have been more practical to allow the small businesses to continue. But the Cubans persist in believing that when the people understand the need for a measure they can withstand temporary adversity and can use their creative talents and energies to overcome obstacles.

The new man, Cuban leaders believe, will be the product of an intense ideological struggle linked with productive work and a cultural-technical-scientific education. No one expects the new man to spring full grown like some Athena from the head of Zeus. The formation of this new man will be a long and painful process during which conscious ideological struggle, rather than spontaneity, will prevail.

The idea is that while people fight the battle for abundance they will also develop a communist mentality. It is for this reason that material incentives are increasingly minimized in Cuba. If material incentives are stressed, if they are made the motive force of economic progress, this will lead to the entrenchment of retrograde ideas—acquisitiveness, avidity, selfishness.

When Cubans do use 'material incentives in production it is always accompanied by an intense ideological struggle to inculcate the idea that the greatest incentive of a revolutionary should be the collective well-being of his fellow man. This idea is brought home in a number of practical ways.

One of these ways is the growing number of free services provided by the government—aside from health and public schools. For example, free food is given to students in many schools and in all agricultural work sites. A quarter of a million young people receive everything-paid-for scholarships. All sports events are free. Public telephones are free. In 1970 rents will be eliminated.

Cuba is full of daily examples of how revolutionary ideas have already taken hold in the country. In the province of Camaguey there are 32,000 young men and women who left home voluntarily to work there in agricultural tasks for two or more years. The last three graduating classes of Havana University Medical School have signed pledges—unanimously—never to engage in private practice. More than 25,000 workers in Havana province have voluntarily renounced overtime pay. Every ministry, factory or other work center goes out to the countryside at least once a week to do agricultural labor. Many workers sign up for a week, two weeks, a month Or even for the entire sugar harvest.

Participation in productive labor has become the norm for the entire population. In 1968 the citizens of the city of Havana—until recently the least rural-minded of Cuba—created a huge Green Belt. In a recent project to finish up the planting of coffee and fruit trees, 150,000 -people worked for—several weeks and successfully achieved the ambitious goal set for the project.

The Cuban people are politically sophisticated and thus highly conscious of the whys and wherefores of their activities. There have been material shortages in the past years; next year will also be difficult in this sense. Yet the spirit of the people is as buoyant as ever. Cubans face the future with equanimity because they have been educated as revolutionaries in the course of these last ten years of victorious struggle.

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