

Précis

Cowie, H. R., *Revolutions in the Modern World*
(Thomas Nelson: Melbourne 1982)

- **Castro's Claims (P 223)**
 - In speech to UN Castro claimed that in coming to power he was met with dreadful standard of living conditions, and monopoly on everything by USA— wanted to be rid of “old capitalist and bourgeois state”.
 - Claims that “the attainment of power by the *Fidelistas* was significantly different, however, from all the previously different examples.” It was not just “one military leader replacing another. It was a people’s movement, promising not just a change in the exercise of power, but a true revolution in the sense of building a new society on socialist principles.”
- **Events in Cuban History (PP 224–5)**
 - Cowie shows how the American “rule” of Cuba, the Machado dictatorship and Battista dictatorship denied Cuba any freedom— background as to what Castro came to power from:
 - Platt Amendment became apparent as “a formula for continued American dominance of the colony.”
 - 1902–1959 “frequently disrupted by uprisings and military seizures of power.”
 - 1906–1909 ‘corruption in government was widespread’.
 - Machado resorted ‘to a rule of terror and suspension of freedom of speech and assembly.’
 - Battista ‘paid lip service to the principle of reform’— civil disobedience and sabotage by opposition groups, leading to civil war and eventually Castro.
- **Castro's character (PP 226–7)**
 - Had had revolutionary intentions for a long time— assault on Moncada Barracks on 26/7, sent to prison, then when released, retreated to Mexico to organise revolutionary invasion force, met Guevara, who was “dedicated to what he saw as the cause of anti-imperialism and socialist revolution.”
 - Trained with Guevara in gorilla warfare, revived 26/7 Movement, and “educated the Cuban people to expect a true social revolution rather than simply the replacement of one regime with another.”
- **The Revolution Itself (PP 227–231)**
 - “Revolution extended beyond seizure of power into a genuine social revolution that transformed Cuba... it acquired socialist and ‘world-communist’ characteristics, but these developed as the revolution proceeded, rather than influencing it from the beginning.”
 - Several Stages of Castro's Revolution:
 - 1st— Zealous nationalists in 26/7 Movement— “Patria o Muerte”— being educated in socialist objectives by Guevara,
 - 2nd— Emphasis shift to consolidation of power and practical tasks of redistributing land and building a more equitable society— pragmatic socialism.
Guevara claims revolution contradicts Lenin's revolutionary premises but is unique. (P227-8)
 - 3rd— Marxian socialist ideology— revolution acquired theory.
 - 4th— From 1965, “true communist” stage— exporting revolution.
 - Was a Social/Economic Revolution: After difficulties in first few years, better health and living standards achieved (cf. Castro speech to UN 1966) – eg. illiteracy almost wiped out.
 - Was a Moral Revolution— People educated to productivity and co-operation in sharing— *conciencia*— “and now the masses understand that riches must be created” (Castro)
- **Castro's Foreign Policy (PP 232– 235)**
 - Emphasis in revolution on “nationalisation of industries and confiscation of American investments.”
 - Turning against USA— “Patria O Muerte” applied again.
 - Seeks help from another superpower (USSR)— trade and defence ties— through Missile Crisis USA back away from Cuban affairs— thence animosity towards USA.
 - Castro sought from the beginning to rid Cuba of its continuing US dominance.
- **The Significance of the Revolution (PP 235–237)**
 - Claim that “Cuban revolution was first true communist revolution on the Marxist pattern because it was a genuine uprising by an exploited proletariat against capitalist overlords”: may not be true— does not exactly follow Bolshevik pattern.
 - Bulk of fighting done by politically conscious rural workers— not urban-based proletariat.
 - Castro dependent on own charismatic leadership and mystique associated with 26/7 Movement— preserved rural leadership— eg. wearing jungle fatigue uniform.
 - No feudal practise to rebel against— unlike other countries which experienced revolutions— no “ruling class” — all profit-making enterprises US-owned or dominated.
 - No loyalty to Church (Roman Catholic Church in Cuba)

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- No “mother power” to fight back with—unlike French and Dutch in Indochina, etc—however there was ‘former economic master’ (USA) to deal with.

Evaluation of Cowie's Views:

Cowie, here, has sought to give a brief overview of the nature of Castro's background (as well as Cuba's), the Cuban Revolution itself and what it accomplished, as well as his achievements and actions after the Revolution (for example his foreign policy), and finally the significance of the Revolution.

Though most of his points seem to point towards the view that Castro had a "solid" ideology, and his revolution did achieve many things, Cowie does give points for both sides. His focus on the "significance of the revolution" gives views against these facts, and points to the fact that this "revolution" was indeed not a revolution, for it did not follow a pattern, there was no urban-based proletariat, no feudal class, "mother power" or strong loyalty to religion to rebel against, and the fact that Castro preserved rural leadership after the revolution, all show that perhaps the uprising was not in fact a true "revolution". However, Cowie is quick to refute his arguments, and synthesises these counter-claims with the original claims. He recognises their flaws.

Cowie has covered a significant amount of detail in his article, and he has sought to cover many aspects dealing with Castro. He includes many primary sources in his article, and also uses some opinions of certain other commentators in the article, for example where he quotes Dunn in the section entitled "The Continuing American Influence." Apart from the end section, however, Cowie seems to keep a one-sided view of the entire situation, and does not seem to include anything to do with points against the revolution, for example, theories which claim that Castro had no true ideology, and his revolution achieved nothing. However, this fact can probably be explained on account of the article simply being an overview of the entire revolution and its circumstances. Apart from this fact, Cowie's view seems to be very informative, relevant, and useful as a source.