

Topic 3: The Rise and Rule of Single-Party States:

CASTRO:

Origins:

Long Term Factors:

- Cowie:

Ideology:

Main issue— what was Castro's ideology?

- **Castro's speech to the UN assembly**, (May 1, 1966) reveals strong social concern and strong nationalistic flavour (especially anti-American), and claims for itself a revolutionary intention, and expresses this in Marxist terms:

What did the Revolution find when it came to power?... 600,000 unemployed... three million without electric lights... three and a half million lived in huts and shacks... thirty-seven and one half percent illiterate... seventy percent of rural children had no teacher... eighty-five percent of the small farmers paying rents (thirty percent of their income)... public utilities, electricity, and telephone services all belonged to US monopolies... A major portion of the banking business of the importing business, and the oil refineries, the greater part of the sugar production, the best land in Cuba, and the most important industries in all fields belonged to American companies...

... we no longer have the old capitalist and bourgeois state. No! We now have the socialist state!

- **Cowie**, while underlining the genuine revolutionary intention of the 'Fidelistas', also recognises their strong nationalist and pragmatic roots (ie. mobilisation of popular support and victory):

In December 1956 the Castros, Guevara and eighty followers landed in Cuba dedicated to the seemingly hopeless task of deposing Batista by force, revived the 26/7 movement, and **educated the Cuban people to expect a true social revolution rather than simply the replacement of one regime with another...**

In the pre-seizure of power period, from 1953 to 1959, **the Fidelistas were primarily a group of zealous nationalists following a charismatic leader dedicated to overthrowing a military dictator... their motto 'fatherland or death' revealed their emphasis. They were operating outside the world communist movement and its bureaucracy and although Guevara was attempting to educate them to socialist objectives, their focus was upon victory through guerilla warfare.**

- **Guevara** insists on the true even unique revolutionary intentions of the *Fidelistas* movement:

This is a unique revolution which some people maintain contradicts one of the most important orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement expressed by Lenin:

‘Without a revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement.’... even if the theory is not known, the revolution can succeed... **The principal actors of this revolution had no coherent theoretical criteria**, but it cannot be said that they were ignorant of the various concepts of history, society, economics and revolution which are being discussed in the world today.

(Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution
Verde Olivo, magazine of the Cuban armed forces. 8/10/1960)

- **Cowie** maintains that the ‘revolutionary ideology underwent an unashamedly overt pragmatic change in the second phase (1959–62), and only became overtly Marxist in the third phase (1962–1965), and militant Marxist in the fourth phase.

It was in this second phase (1959–62), that Castro and Guevara launched into a policy of **pragmatic socialism** with a concentration on **equality of social justice** to be attained through education and social reforms.

The third stage was characterised by a deliberate and well publicised adoption of **Marxian socialist ideology as a national policy for development. The revolution had acquired its theory.**

From 1965, Castro moved to another stage— the ‘true communist’ stage of encouraging world revolution and the adoption of a party structure. **Castro had earlier functioned within the ‘26/7 movement’ aimed at liberation. Now he developed the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* and attempted to export the revolution.**

- **Suàrez** seems to play down the importance of communist ideology and its rôle in the Cuban revolution, and places Castro’s ideology in a context that is militarist and nationalist rather than socialist. Suàrez infers that Castro’s adopted ideology only went skin-deep, and that he simply adopted and adapted as he went along to suit the circumstances.

The Communists had thus become a very minor factor in Cuban politics by the time Fidel Castro picked them to serve as his instrument in the political, economic, and social transformations of the country.

When Castro joined the UIR at nineteen, the ‘action groups’ were tiny rudimentary in organisation... **moreover the action groups lacked any ideology, program, or doctrinal preoccupation.** They devoted all their energy to such activities as getting hold of arms... **This was the environment that formed Fidel Castro’s political personality.**

... to use his own words, (the Cuban leader) is ... ‘a man of revolutionary action’, who had **only the most superficial smattering of ideology** even in 1962.

First he was a democrat, then he was a humanist, later he was a socialist, (and then) a Marxist Leninist... **he has changed his main ideas in accordance with the circumstances.**

- **Suàrez** is cynical about the genuineness of the socialist intentions, implying that they were promulgated for purely pragmatic reasons and dismisses the ‘socialist program’ as ‘apocryphal’:

... once he was freed on May 15 1955 and realised that he had enough followers to undertake a new revolutionary adventure, neither he nor his followers mentioned it (the program) again until March 1959.

- **Aguila** is of the opinion that Castro's radicalism was deliberately hidden from view in order not to alienate the middle classes:

Castro's true intentions during the insurrectional period have been the subject of considerable debate. Some... his **nationalist appeal was designed to mask his more radical beliefs**, and to win him support from the Cuban middle class. Others maintain that **Castro's political ambitions led him to enter into informal private contact with communist elements, but he never accepted communist discipline...**

there is much evidence to suggest that **Castro may have conceived of a more radical revolution well before 1959, and that his public utterances on the need for representative democracy were deceptive.**

- **Perez-Stable** seems to suggest that:

The rallying cry of the Batista opposition— the restoration of the Constitution of 1940... the constitution symbolised the ideals of democracy, social justice and honest government... the July 26th Movement was unequivocal rejecting intervention... **the fidelistas called for change in a society where political and economic failures had considerably weakened the recourse to reform, and they used radical means to secure power.**