

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CUBAN STUDIES IN THE U.S.

- THE MAKING OF A MISSILE CRISIS: OCTOBER 1962.* By HERBERT S. DINERSTEIN. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Pp. 302. \$14.95.)
- REVOLUTION AND REACTION IN CUBA, 1933-1960.* By SAMUEL FARBER. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1976. Pp. 283. \$15.95.)
- ARMY POLITICS IN CUBA, 1898-1958.* By LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR. (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. Pp. 240. \$9.95.)
- CUBA: FROM COLUMBUS TO CASTRO.* By JAIME SUCHLICKI. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974. Pp. 242. \$7.95.)

Eighteen years and thousands of books and articles after the access to power of the revolutionary forces in Cuba on 1 January 1959, scholars continue to debate the origins of socialism in Cuba, the class roots of the Revolution, the role of the Communist party, the character of the Cuban revolutionary vanguard, the impact of historical U.S.-Cuba relations upon the subsequent development of the Revolution, and other related issues. The growth of the literature continues unabated. The early partisan, rather unsophisticated, and mostly journalistic accounts of the Revolution and its origins have by now been superseded by relatively sophisticated, scholarly, "objective" (although really no less partisan) accounts of the Revolution, its origins, and evolution. The four books considered here constitute a varied lot. Nevertheless, collectively, they can be used to raise some important issues about the present state of U.S. scholarship about Cuba, and to indicate some serious gaps in our knowledge and in our approaches.

Jaime Suchlicki's *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro* presents itself as an attempt "to summarize in a concise and readable fashion the major trends and events in the country's development" (p. ix). The intended audience seems to be the not-too-ambitious undergraduate. The explicit assumption is that "enough time has elapsed" to present a tentative analysis of the causes, development, etc., of the Revolution. The implicit assumption is that, based on existing scholarship, a "consensus" exists—or can be made to emerge—about the main outlines of the Cuban story.

However, under the mantle of "objectivity," Suchlicki proceeds to give us his view of Cuban history, strongly colored by a virulent anti-Communism that leads him to peculiar emphases, omissions, and interpretations: i.e., he does not list the Communists among the groups opposing Sumner Welles' 1933 mediation (p. 122) but spends two paragraphs expounding on the Communists' behavior during the 1933 strike (pp. 122-23); he labels the "anti-Americanism and non-intervention" of the student leaders as "usual Communist propaganda issues" (p. 124), when they properly belong to the nationalist, populist Cuban political tradition, etc., etc.

Suchlicki also seems highly prone to low-level psychologizing, especially when trying to deal with the ideological evolution of Cuban radical leaders. Thus, Mella embraced communism because “it offered him a cause for which to fight and an escape valve for his tormented personality” (p.114), and Castro’s “unhappy experiences at the university created in him the dislike for elections he evidenced after coming to power” (p. 144). Suchlicki joins the common pastime of reading into the thought of Cuban independence hero José Martí whatever fits his own ideology. Thus, a knowledgeable reader might be surprised to find Martí advocating friendly relations with the “Northern colossus”—the U.S. (p. 183)—and therefore Castro is accused of having broken with the “Martí-Chibas” tradition because of his anti-Americanism.

Treatment of the post-1970 changes in Cuba is particularly inadequate. Actually, the author writes in 1974 as if the process of institutionalization had not even begun. Post-1970 Cuban society is described as “increasingly militarized” (p. 211); and emphasis on coercion and sacrifice are cited on the ideological front (p. 211) as if prompted by some temporarily misplaced reading of K. S. Karol’s *Guerrillas in Power*. But my main objection to the book is to its basic assumption: that a “consensus” summary of Cuban history, covering the Republican years and particularly the Revolution, is possible and that Suchlicki has done the job.

Samuel Farber’s *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933–1960* begins by specifying the perspective from which the book is written. A commendable practice indeed. The author tells us that he writes as a “revolutionary democratic socialist.” He falls short of declaring himself a Trotskyist but any reader barely versed in leftist language should have no difficulty in identifying him as such. His view of the role of the vanguard party, of working class organizations, of socialism itself, identifies him clearly as an anti-Leninist writer. The question is the extent to which his ideological commitments lead him to misinterpret and/or distort the Cuban Revolution by forcing events into a preconceived mold.

Let us analyze first the book’s contributions. It is well written. Its arguments are cogently presented. It is one of the few books in the literature about the Cuban Revolution to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the 1933–60 events from a perspective that purports to be Marxist. Farber has pointedly identified—and attempted to correct—some of the deficiencies in the previous literature: (a) the failure to deal adequately with the pre-1959 society (p. ix); (b) the cavalier attitude with which most authors have approached the issue of the “class nature” of the Revolution, without acknowledging the thorny issues—methodological and conceptual—involved (pp. 4–5); and (c) the inadequacies of the very schematic views of the Cuban social class structure that are held by many “theorists of the Revolution” (Farber presents a rather sophisticated view of the Cuban oligarchy and middle sectors [pp. 98–101]).

However, Farber’s view of the prerevolutionary social class structure is still inadequate—particularly in his analysis (or lack of it) of the composition of the working class and rural sectors. It must be remembered that the organized working class in prerevolutionary Cuba was only a sector of the working class; that it was even a smaller sector of the oppressed classes in a society dominated

by unemployment and seasonal employment; that the organized working class included a labor aristocracy whose interests were in the preservation of the status quo or in bargaining for short-term goals and was a part of the prerevolutionary power *entente*; that the Cuban prerevolutionary labor leadership (including those who assumed labor control during the early years of the Revolution and the old Communist party leadership itself) had been thoroughly penetrated by an economist mentality.

My most serious objection to the book is precisely to its central thesis: that the Cuban Revolution should be considered as a "Bonapartist" revolution. Farber labels Batista, in 1933, as a Bonapartist conservative and Castro, in 1959, as a Bonapartist revolutionary (pp. 16–27). It is my opinion that the use of the "Bonapartist" label to refer to the first Batista dictatorship and to the Revolutionary regime obscures and confuses far more than it illuminates. What is meant by "Bonapartism"? As the concept was formulated by Marx in *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, a Bonapartist regime refers to "the paradox of a state power that appears not to express the rule of a social class at all, but to dominate civil society completely and to arbitrate class struggles from above."¹ Thus, in a historical situation where all social classes are equally impotent to impose their hegemony, the Bonapartist state emerges, with a person or group of persons of unlimited authority, practically unrestricted, at the helm. As Farber points out, "the concept of Bonapartism . . . became part of the Marxist tradition" (p. 19). Trotsky, in particular, employed the concept to explain the process of consolidation of Stalinism in *The Revolution Betrayed*.

How applicable is the concept to the Cuban situation in 1933, or in 1959? There are some obvious problems. A Bonapartist regime is typically seen as the result of an exceptional set of circumstances, of a crisis situation. In the case of the 1851 coup in France, the declining power of the bourgeoisie was not yet substituted by a strong enough working class or a peasantry capable of taking state power. However, if we take Farber seriously in applying the concept to Cuba in 1933 and 1959, it must be concluded that the Cuban social class structure was endemically afflicted by class paralysis leading to Bonapartist regimes. The phenomenon was not exclusive of the post-Machado Republic. López Segura, analyzing the social bases of the Liberal and Conservative parties in the early Cuban Republic and the roots of *caudillismo*, states that "un grupo de caudillos mambises . . . lideró la vida política cubana entre 1902 y 1933, llenando el vacío que se produce al no tener ninguna clase de la sociedad cubana suficiente peso económico y/o social para imponerse totalmente."²

But the label of Bonapartist thus applied loses its specific meaning and it simply becomes some sort of metaphor to refer to a quasi-constant in Cuban social history related to the peculiarities of the Cuban social class structure:

Its structurally weak, dependent bourgeoisie, a lumpenbourgeoisie, a political go-between for a foreign ruling class and the masses, a representative of foreign interests;

the precarious middle sectors that, for a long time in Republican history, lacked an economic base clearly distinguishable and independent from the state bureaucracy;

an underdeveloped and deformed working class (consisting, to a large extent, of seasonal agricultural workers, industrial workers closely tied to agricultural exploitation, or service workers);

weak rural sectors, some of them on the margins of the cash economy, others proletarianized by the impact of the liberation war and/or the influx of U.S. capital;

a large, amorphous lumpenproletariat.

But the situation could hardly be considered static throughout the sixty years of prerevolutionary Cuban Republic. A full analysis of this question is obviously beyond the scope of this essay, but a few comments can be made about the situations in 1933 and 1959.

The 1933 Revolution consisted of various interwoven "revolutions" that represent (a) the eruption into Cuban public life of middle sectors with a strong populist ideology and demanding a share of the state, considered as economic resource; (b) the revolt of the Cuban working class, particularly of the sugar workers; and (c) the revolt of the noncommissioned officers and rank-and-file soldiers of the army against the traditional army officialdom. The latter revolt frequently has been dismissed as less important (in class terms) than the others. However, it had profound social roots. It was the revolt of the lumpenproletariat in uniform. Together, these three revolts signalled the death of the first Cuban Republic. They also reflected the profound changes in the Cuban social class structure that had taken place during thirty years of dependent development.

The failure of the 1933 Revolution and the emergence of Batista are related to internal social factors, such as the divisions within the revolutionary forces, but primarily to *the* basic ingredient in analyzing Cuban Republican politics that Farber does not completely ignore but consistently plays down: the direct intervention of the U.S. through its ambassador, functioning as proconsul and holding the threat of military intervention. The Platt Amendment, grafted as an appendix to the Cuban Constitution, was grafted even more firmly on the Cuban consciousness as embodiment of the power relations between Cuba and the U.S. and the castrated nature of the Cuban Republic.

The 1933 situation was not a pre-Bonapartist one; the alliance of progressive forces (including radicalized fragments of the middle sectors, working class, and lumpenproletariat) had the strength to impose its rule over other Cuban social sectors, but not over the U.S. ruling class, not given the 1933 conjunction of international forces. Thus, Batista emerges as Cuban dictator; not as a Bonaparte above all classes, but as direct representative of the dominant class in the neocolonial Republic, the U.S. capitalists. Later, Batista's regime would evolve, as Cuban society further developed and the international context drastically changed. An analysis of the Batista "regimes" from 1933 to 1944, their internal roots, and their international roots is a task still to be performed.

Concerning the situation in 1959, Farber's analysis in Bonapartist terms could not be more misleading. Fidel Castro did not "achieve and maintain power while remaining independent from the control of any major social class because he obtained political support from first one class or group and then

another without linking himself irrevocably to any one of them" (p. 23). Fidel Castro, at the helm of the Cuban revolutionary vanguard which was the Rebel Army, achieved and maintained power because he obtained political support from a coalition of progressive forces in Cuban society (corresponding to his analysis of that society contained already in *History Will Absolve Me*, dating from 1953). This coalition of progressive forces, to which he linked himself irrevocably, included the vast majority of the Cuban people, the majority of the working class and the peasantry, and large sectors of the middle classes, joined by their common objective situation of oppression within the straightjacket of Cuban prerevolutionary political economy.

The collapse of the old institutional order in 1959 was not spontaneous. It was the consequence of the political mobilization of the masses of Cuban people, effected by a combination of military, paramilitary, and ideological means. The revolutionary consciousness of the masses in 1959 was still undeveloped. Even the leadership had to develop fast. They both did. Carrying through the Moncada Program—general as it was, populist as it was, given the concrete historical conditions of Cuba and its relationship to the U.S.—was bound to generate a radicalizing dynamic. In the changed international context of the early sixties, the alliance of progressive forces of 1959 could do what the 1933 coalition could not: first, maintain its unity, gain strength, and develop politically, even as the initial 100 percent consensus was inevitably lost. (Class consciousness of all classes was raised and the class struggle acquired violent proportions.) Second, the progressive alliance was able to challenge, defeat, and outmaneuver the U.S. in a protracted struggle for survival.

Farber is so obsessed by his particular view of the way a revolution *should* take place, full of romanticizing about the role of the organized working class, that he misses the drama of how a revolution actually *took* place, ninety miles away from the most powerful imperialist nation in history.

Louis A. Pérez's *Army Politics in Cuba, 1898–1958* is a model of careful scholarship. The key to many of the paradoxes that Farber unsuccessfully tries to solve, lies in the history of the Cuban army, which Pérez so effectively presents in his well written and engaging book. Pérez carefully documents the origins of the Cuban army: how the U.S. disbanded the Cuban liberation forces and in its place shaped first a rural guard (in charge of protecting property in the countryside) and later, after the 1906–1909 intervention, a permanent army. Thus, the military institution in Cuba could not claim organic ties to the liberation army. Instead, it was firmly linked—historically and otherwise—to extranational authorities. The Cuban army, from its inception, was an instrument for the defense of U.S. policy goals which preeminently included the protection of property.

The main conclusions of Pérez's study converge with the conclusions of current research independently being conducted by Cuban scholars in the island.³ He includes many intriguing insights worthy of further exploration. For example, his analysis of the challenge that labor activities in the twenties and thirties represented to the First Republic's political order, and the international dimensions of this challenge (pp. 60–62); his discussion of the social basis of the sergeants' revolt of 1933, including race discrimination in the army (pp. 15,

84–85), and the racial redress aspects of the revolt. Or his view of the role of Batista's army as a modernizing elite (p. 170) in the Cuba of the second half of the thirties, etc. A surprising omission is the failure to discuss the role of the army in the race war of 1912. But overall, Pérez's book represents a true contribution that provides some of the missing links in the puzzle of what happened in Cuba between 1898 and 1958.

Herbert S. Dinerstein's *The Making of a Missile Crisis* intends to analyze the development and influence of the perceptions and misperceptions that American, Soviet, and Cuban leaders brought to the missile crisis of 1962. The book is at its best when analyzing specific factors in the 1962 crisis, which is the subject matter of the second half of the book. The first half deals with the Guatemalan crisis (as background to the Cuban confrontation, insofar as it taught certain "lessons" to the U.S., the USSR, and the Latin American Left), with the evolution of the Cuban Revolution in general, and with USSR-Cuba relations in particular, until 1962.

This first section leaves much to be desired, as the book abounds not only in questionable interpretations but even gross errors of fact. For example:

Eusebio Mujal was not installed as head of the Cuban workers' movement by Batista (p. 23). Mujal became head of the CTC (Cuban Workers Federation) during the *Auténtico* era. (Communists were violently expelled from the labor leadership during the Grau administration, as the cold war followed the anti-Nazi alliance.) Mujal quickly joined the Batista bandwagon after the 1952 coup.

The "only active survivor of the major PSP" (old Communist party) leaders is not Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (p. 31). Furthermore, "the leaders of the PSP" were not expelled from "the Communist Party that Castro had formed." Many of the PSP major leaders such as Blas Roca, Arnaldo Milián, Nicolás Guillén, and, until their deaths, Lazaro Peña (1974) and Juan Marinello (1977) have occupied positions at the top echelons of the Cuban leadership.

It was not only "Batista's clemency" that "saved Castro from execution" (p. 27) after the Moncada attack. The role of Castro's captor, of religious authorities, and of expected public reaction, particularly in Oriente Province, have been abundantly discussed in the literature.

The account of the Hubert Matos affair is highly inaccurate, somewhat slavishly following Hugh Thomas' account. Even the text was carelessly revised and Matos (instead of Díaz Lanz) is attributed with flying a bomber over Havana (p. 50).

But the greatest weakness of this section of the book is its treatment of the complex relationship between the PSP and Castro's 26th of July Movement. Dinerstein does not even acknowledge the existence of certain basic items (no matter how flawed) in the bibliography about this issue, such as Andres Suárez's book on Castroist-Communist relations, or Maurice Zeitlin's dissertation about revolutionary politics and the Cuban working class (the dissertation contained important historical material later deleted from the published book).

The complex process of welding together the revolutionary forces is a story that still has to be told. The complexity of the problems involved is indicated by the fact that the Cuban Communist party as such was not organized until 1965, although it had been preceded by the ORI (Integrated Revolutionary Organizations) and the PURS (United Party of the Socialist Revolution). Furthermore, the First Party Congress did not take place until 1975, ten years later.

Two of the most serious gaps in the literature about the Cuban Revolution are thus glaringly apparent from the deficiencies in Dinerstein's book. We are lacking a serious, scholarly, comprehensive history of the first Cuban Communist party, its roots, and its evolution until 1958. We are also lacking an adequate history of the present Cuban Communist party and the process whereby it was born, in the midst of struggle, during the period 1959–75.

Methodologically, the greatest weakness of Dinerstein's book is in the use of *Noticias de Hoy* (the PSP's newspaper) instead of *Revolución* (the 26th of July organ) in his attempt to reconstruct the perceptions and positions of the Cuban leadership during 1959–62. *Hoy* was not the Cuban equivalent of *Pravda*, and to use it is misleading because it gives us those perceptions and positions through a filter.

We are currently at the threshold of a new stage in the development of Cuban studies in the U.S. The improved prospects for U.S.-Cuba relations are likely to provoke increased activity in the field. But also qualitative changes can be predicted. As the probability of in situ studies and collaborative research and publication projects between U.S. and Cuban scholars increases, it is likely that a new group of scholars will enter the field, challenging the dominance that emigré scholars have exercised so far. Or perhaps the shift towards a new generation of Cuban-American scholars, already discernible, will be completed. The trend toward more specialized, narrow studies, instead of "grand interpretations," will probably be sharpened. And, hopefully, the theoretical sophistication of future studies will improve. Thus, they may be more amenable to integration into general social science formulations and into the body of contemporary Marxist theory.

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1. David Fernbach, Introduction to Karl Marx's *Political Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 2:9.
2. Francisco López Segrera, "La economía y la política en la República Neocolonial (1902–1933)," in *La República Neocolonial*, Pérez de la Riva et al. (La Habana: Anuario de Estudios Cubanos 1 [1975], Edit. de Ciencias Sociales).
3. See Federico Chang, "Los militares y el ejército en la República Neocolonial: las tres primeras décadas," in *La República Neocolonial*, 1:185–207.