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Castro & the Cuban Revolution

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a review of

Juan Reinaldo Sanchez, *The Double Life of Fidel Castro*. Amberley Publishing, 2015.

“Until the end of my days, two questions will turn in my mind: why do revolutions always go wrong and why do their heroes systematically transform into tyrants who are even worse than the dictators they overthrew?” (264)

These final sentences in Juan Sanchez’s explosive revelations about his many years within the inner circle of the Cuban revolutionary leader illustrate both a profound query to be pondered by all who study revolutionary history and the naivete of an acolyte disillusioned with a man he formerly worshipped.

The incisive, personal revelations of Castro’s former first security guard were no doubt greeted with a certain glee in Western circles. The Cuban leader’s ruthless hypocrisy had been confirmed by one of the most intimate sources.

As I read Sanchez’s very accessible reflections, perhaps enhanced by his collaboration with Axel Gylden, full of details about Castro and his personality, peccadilloes and practices, I decided it would best be read accompanied by the perusal of a tome I

had begun four decades back when a member of the Brisbane Self-Management Group: anarcho-syndicalist Sam Dolgoff's *The Cuban Revolution—A Critical Perspective*. (Black Rose Books, available from ASR)

Begun, but not completed. I was more interested in Dolgoff's *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936–1939* in the '70s as we embraced the most recent and widespread effort to introduce social revolution in the midst of civil war. I also found the book's style somewhat turgid.

It is an intriguing exercise to read the two books together. One is centered around the quixotic, capricious life of a charismatic revolutionary leader. Sanchez reveals a first-hand description that only one so close could glean. There is admiration for the man despite his flaws. Sanchez is imbued with Marxist-Leninist propaganda. The lives of ordinary Cubans are ignored.

Dolgoff's work is a labor of love for the oppressed and exploited, redolent with detail about their poverty and humiliation under a tyrant. The courageous role of the Cuban anarcho-syndicalists is ever apparent.

We are introduced to Sanchez's rise from a poor background, his father a factory poultry worker, his mother a cleaning lady, to become in 1977 a member of "the creme de la creme of the Cuban army...the group of twenty to thirty handpicked soldiers in charge of Fidel Castro's round-the-clock protection" (Sanchez, 37) "I was often no more than a few feet behind him. He trusted me totally." (41) He anticipated queries as to why he did not question the hypocrisy of the regime before the late 1980s:

"one has to take into account my youth and the real hero worship we all felt for the hero of the Revolution...I was a soldier. Soldiers are trained to act and obey...not criticize." (40)

Certainly, his immersion in the "insane" Cuban education system "in the climate of the Cold War and Marxist thinking" during his pursuit of a Master's degree in law and "an equivalent degree in counter-espionage" (38) would have intensified his indoctrination.

Sam Dolgoff's life was vastly different. Born in present-day Belarus in 1902, he came to New York as a child. He followed his father into the house painting trade, but spent his long life as an anarchist activist and writer. Memory recalls my purchase of his *Bakunin on Anarchy* in the fervent '70s. Of similar social and economic origins to Sanchez, his commitment to social revolution took a very different path.

It should be remembered that soldiers and workers such as Sanchez believed that they too were the vanguard of revolution. When recruited by the minister of the interior to join the Department No. 1 protecting Castro, it was on the basis "that my 'revolutionary profile' was above suspicion." (Sanchez, 26) As an expert marksman and karate black belt he received regular promotion until he was selected by El Lido Maximo himself in 1976 to join Castro's personal escort.

While Sanchez received instruction in "basic intelligence techniques...psychological motivation...and...famous historical attacks" on national leaders and was rewarded with an apartment in Havana's center close to the Palace of the Revolution (34-36), Dolgoff, born almost half a century earlier, committed his life to a more modest lifestyle and radical commitment. He was a member of the Libertarian League and wrote widely, his notable publications including the critique of Castro's revolution and the aforementioned tomes on the Spanish revolution and Bakunin. He was also a co-founder of the Libertarian Labor Review, the forerunner of *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*.

Despite their significant later differences, in the 1960s he was a friend and fellow member of Murray Bookchin in the Libertarian League. Former Spanish Civil War Friends of Durruti fighter Russell Blackwell was also a member. Bookchin's admiration for the latter was unbounded ("decades later he spoke of no one except his grandmother with greater affection," Janet Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe*, 2015, 98) but was sufficiently close to Dolgoff to be inspired in the early '80s by a passage in Dolgoff's *Bakunin on An-*

archy where Bakunin claimed that, unlike provincial and national levels “effective control is quite possible...This is why municipal elections always best reflect the real attitude and will of the people.” (218–224, in Biehl, 240). A seminal moment in Bookchin’s thinking and political philosophy, but one perceived as dangerous by many anarchists, including Dolgoff himself, who were suspicious of majority decision politics at any level and perceived participation in municipal politics as “alien to anarchism.” (Ibid., 148)

In his obituary for Sam Dolgoff, Paul Berman wrote, “Of (his) several campaigns, possibly the noblest, certainly the loneliest, was the one he took up early in the 1960s on behalf of the persecuted libertarian leftists and trade unionists of Cuba.” (Village Voice, Nov. 13, 1990, 3) His detailed defense of the new oppressed and attack on a perverse regime in this book is ample and vivid testament.

The hypocrisy common to all revolutions “capturing the state on behalf of the people” is clear from Sanchez’s first chapter, where he describes accompanying Castro on the 90-foot luxury racing yacht “Aquarama 11,” “decorated in wood imported from Angola, (which) could hold its own against any of those moored in the marinas of the Bahamas or Saint-Tropez.” The irony befitting a disillusioned devotee is apparent: “Like all self-respecting yachts, Aquarama 11 had all mod cons: air-conditioning, two bathrooms, a toilet, television, and a bar.” (3; this in addition to Fidel’s lavish quarters) Their destination was the idyllic island getaway of Cayo Piedra, 45 minutes from the marina at Caleta del Rosario, “also housing one of his numerous vacation homes.” (4) Sanchez, who was a constant presence wherever “El Lider Maximo” went, states: “In addition, there were twenty or so other properties, including Punto Cero, his huge property in Havana...and La Deseada, a chalet in the middle of a swampy area in Pinar Del Rio province, where Fidel went fish and duck hunting every winter.” (10) In a later chapter entitled “A King’s Ransom,” Sanchez describes these properties throughout Cuba in detail as well as Castro’s control of the state companies and the enormous wealth generated from “the notorious reserva

ten years and tortured for the same “crime.” The hideous torment of being brought before a Castroist firing squad four times, four times cancelled. Jose Acena, libertarian activist in the brewery trade and one-time professor. The familiar theme of opposition to, indeed jailing by, the previous regime, bearing the scars of their torture. Twenty-year sentence despite extreme illness for attacking Castro’s excesses. Alberto Garcia, like Torres a young militant. Decorated for bravery with the July 26 movement. After the “Revolution” elected secretary of the Federation of Medical Workers. Thirty years’ sentence for the very same offense of vigorously condemning the new authoritarian rule. (Boletín Infomación Libertaria–Movimiento Libertaria de Cuba En Exilio, Miami, July-August 1962, Dolgoff, 131–133) Men who vividly exemplified Sam Dolgoff’s words to his son, Anatole, in his final days, “You know, the hardest thing in life is to stand fighting the wind.” They might well have also said with him, “That’s what we tried to do, that’s what we did.” (Anatole Dolgoff, *Left of the Left*, My memories of Sam Dolgoff, 2016)

Dolgoff’s work resonates with the vibrant courage and sacrifice of the persecuted libertarian groups and movement. He depicts in detail the perennial opposition between the authoritarian and libertarian in both aspiration, theory and practice, a battle begun in the International Workingmen’s Association between Marx and Bakunin and their supporters, illustrated in Russia, Spain, even China as well as other Communist satellites in the many years beyond. Sanchez describes his own “fortunate” life while offering intimate information of a dictator. The latter’s hardly a “double life,” but one consistent with any means to an end—one littered with hypocrisy, ruthlessness and ego. Dolgoff shows us the courage and ideals of ordinary men who refuse to be deluded. The gulf is enormous.

del Comandante,” his private account of money siphoned from national economic activity. Sanchez’s observation that Forbes magazine’s estimate of his wealth in 2006 as \$900 million is “more or less in the right ballpark” (193) is as revelatory as his description of the supposed social revolution: “One has to understand the Cuban reality that Fidel Castro reigns over his island of eleven million inhabitants like an absolute monarch.” Equally telling is the comment:

“Cuba was Fidel’s ‘thing.’ He was its master, in the manner of a nineteenth-century landowner. It was as though he had transformed and enlarged his father’s property to make Cuba into a single hacienda of eleven million people. He did what he wanted with the national workforce.” (184–5)

It is a portrait of indulgence that contrasts starkly both with Castro’s austere revolutionary image generated in the guerrilla days in the Sierra Maestra mountains and the increasingly impoverished lot of the supposedly liberated workers.

Dolgoff cites respected agronomist and economist Rene Dumont, an adviser to Castro, in observing, “Cuba’s shortages of food and other necessities are to a large extent due to the dogmatism of its leaders.” Dumont described the lack of training and preparation as well as ignorance of economics. The Orwellian response of the Castro government is laid bare: “The government is increasingly calling for more effort and sacrifice as well as the acceptance of increased authority” to resolve these pressing issues. (Rene Dumont, *Is Cuba Socialist?*, 1974, cited in Dolgoff, *The Cuban Revolution*)

Dumont’s economic insights should not blind us to his Marxist-Leninist convictions and his naïve belief that change can come from above, contrary to his own devastating dissection of the failure of the Revolution. (Dolgoff, 13–22)

Dolgoff notes the relatively progressive standard of living in Cuba before the 1959 coup, cautioning also that this is in comparison to the poverty-stricken nations of the Latin American

region. The average wage of Cuba was one-fifth the income of the U.S. (67)

Sanchez updates the decline of Cuban life as the regime moved into the 1990s. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union with the resulting loss of Moscow subsidies, the “already Spartan way of life...of ordinary Cubans” declined further; “households were surviving on the breadline while the GNP had decreased by 35%.” (16)

Dolgoﬀ’s contact with the libertarian movement in Cuba from the early sixties established an intimate knowledge of the workers’ experience of the acclaimed, in leftist circles, paragon of revolution. Castro’s friend, comrade and even mentor Che Guevara was a hero of the New Left—student radicals emulated his striking appearance in strident and well-intentioned zeal. The reality was so very diﬀerent.

Dolgoﬀ conducts a forensic scrutiny of the pro-Castro sources from the beginning of his study. My mind fleetingly recalled Chomsky’s similar reference to sympathetic accounts or writers to discover disconcerting truth—something he could have himself explored in relation to Castro. Dolgoﬀ cites at length contradictory evidence from writers such as libertarian Waldo Frank’s eulogistic “Cuba: A Prophetic Island,” Marxist-Leninist Adolfo Gilly, New York Times journalist Herbert Matthews and the earlier-cited Rene Dumont. The lengthy quotes I found heavy, disruptive and unappealing in the ‘70s now present as weighty, persistent evidence. Gilly’s assertions are illustrative, representative, and perhaps most precise:

“Statement: ...the people have no direct power...(p. 42)

“Contradiction: The state is the workers’ very own” (p. 46)

“Statement: ... there has not appeared in the Cuban leadership any tendency that proposes self-management (p. 40)

“Contradiction: ... in Cuba the masses feel that they have begun to govern their own lives...(p. 78)

interrogations and an attempt to murder him through the administration of fatal medication with the help of a kindly doctor, and was able to use his legal knowledge to receive just a two-year prison sentence. This perfect physical specimen was “physically and emotionally destroyed after two months, having lost over 65 pounds, going from 183 to 119 pounds.” (251)

Shadowed by state security on his release in 1996, numerous attempts to escape to Florida fail. Twelve years later, he succeeds, to re-join his family in Miami and find work as a political analyst of Cuba and an independent consultant in security. A happy ending after triumph and tribulation. He “feels no hatred, resentment or grudge” for his fallen idol, choosing to resent more Castro’s henchmen, those who informed or gave false testimony. He simply made the error of committing his life to a revolutionary who was seduced “by the fever of absolute power and contempt for the people.” (263–4)

Sam Dolgoﬀ and the Cuban anarchists would puke at this simplistic apology for a critique and excuse for the rape of their country and comrades. Did Sanchez exhibit the slightest concern for the anarchists imprisoned by Castro as early as 1962? In 264 pages the word anarchist is not even mentioned.

Bus driver Placido Mendez, survivor of imprisonment and torture under Batista, union delegate opposing Castro’s revolutionary perversion, jailed for 12 years. Antonio Degas, a CNT militant in Spain and anti-Batista conspirator, a worker in the motion picture industry, languishing in jail without trial, in urgent need of medical help. Their families plunged into further poverty. Alberto Miguel Linsuain, promoted to lieutenant while fighting with Raul Castro and the M26 rebels. Union delegate for the Food, Hotel and Restaurant Workers of Oriente Province. Arguments with the younger Castro, jailed without trial. Murdered or died in jail. All original supporters of the Revolution, all condemned for attacking the Marxist-Leninist clique and its totalitarian tentacles. Sondalio Torres, another brave fighter against Batista, jailed for

disillusionment graphically, but it seems his moral sensitivity is warped and many years delayed, when his discovery of Castro's cocaine deals are the catalyst for his initial dismay:

"It was as if the sky had fallen in on me. Stunned, incredulous, paralysed, I wished I had misheard or that I was dreaming, but alas it was true. In just a few seconds, my whole world and all my ideals had come crashing down. I realised that the man for whom I had long sacrificed my life, the man, the Lider whom I worshipped like a god, and who counted more in my eyes than my own family, was caught up in cocaine trafficking to such an extent that he was directing illegal operations like a real godfather...I no longer saw Fidel Castro in the same way." (Sanchez, 231)

The old deification and personality cult—Stalin, Mao—such a trap! You just can't trust the vanguard of the people! He keeps silent however despite his "feeling... of immense solitude."

There is real pathos in his description in the chapter "The Ochoa Affair" of the blackmail and execution of the four Castro loyalists including a "hero of the revolution," General Ochoa, who Castro sacrificed to divert attention from his primary role in the drug-trafficking. However, it is difficult to reconcile the author's horror and disgust with the claim in the following chapter as Cuba's economy collapsed further and thousands fled to Miami: "As for me, I was more than ever devoted to serving Fidel." (Ibid., 245) He proudly proclaims his promotion to "head of la avanzada," preparing all Fidel's trips both in Cuba and abroad. Contempt is the only response to his subsequent affirmation. "Focused on my work...solely focused on my professional success...I had chosen to forget the Ochoa affair."

It is therefore hard to feel any sympathy with the man's sudden fall from favor after his request to retire early at 45. Suddenly arrested, charged with being a counter-revolutionary, he harbored illusions of convincing his "master" of his innocence. Finally, he understands, "he treats human beings like so much detritus the moment they are no longer useful to him." Sanchez survived the

"Statement: ...the government...never allows dissent or criticism or proposals for change...nothing can be published without permission...(p. 28)

"Contradiction: There is no country today where there is greater freedom or democracy than in Cuba." (Ibid.)

Both Sanchez and Dolgoff destroy the Castro myth of the heroic revolutionary who overthrew Batista. The former's portrayal is a facet of the emerging unease and the final betrayal experienced by a member of the elite. He describes the "bitter failure" of the heroic 1953 Moncado barracks assault, Castro's subsequent jailing then amnesty. He notes the withdrawal of U.S. support for Batista's corrupt and increasingly discredited regime. He describes the "success (of the) publicity stunt" involving the brief kidnapping of the racing car driver Juan Fangio during the Cuban Grand Prix, "Batista's power...(falling) like overripe fruit," and Castro's long march with rapturous crowds lining the M26 (July 26 Movement) route from "east to west covering six hundred kilometres...(until) like a Roman emperor, he made his triumphant entry into Havana...Fidel standing in a jeep like Caesar raised up on a float." (Sanchez, 22–23)

Cuban anarchist Abelardo Iglesias was an active witness to the revolutionary efforts of the libertarian activists in Cuba before and after Castro's assumption and in Spain throughout the Spanish Civil War. He too derides "The myth of his alleged 'March on Havana' (which) captured the imagination of his deluded supporters (and)) must once and for all be debunked." He describes the surrender of General Cantillo of the fortress Santiago de Cuba and Oriente Province, Batista's appointment of Cantillo as chief of staff before his abdication and flight to Miami. The armed forces immediately surrendered and Cantillo transferred this command to the imprisoned Colonel Ramon Barquin. Barquin offered Castro this command. Entering Santiago de Cuba after peaceful occupation by his troops, Castro proceeded to appoint regional commanders and senior administration. (Iglesias in Dolgoff, 91–2)

Only then when all the power lay in his hands; when he was hysterically acclaimed all over Cuba; only THEN did Castro stage his massive publicity stunt, the fake 'March on Havana'...Castro could have flown directly to Havana in a few hours at most. But he deliberately arranged this ostentatious, garish display of power to fool the world into the belief that he had taken by armed force a city that voluntarily accorded him a tumultuous welcome.

"On January 8, 1959, Fidel Castro entered Havana, without firing a shot, acclaimed by delirious mobs, a military spectacle that had nothing to do with a victorious assault; a vulgar imitation of Mussolini's 'March on Rome.'" (Ibid., 92-3)

Nationalist and Communist or aspiring Fascist? Redolent of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. A double life indeed.

Dolgoft's critique is the fruit of many decades of political rebellion and insight from "the Left of the Left." In his chapter entitled "Anonymous Heroes of the Revolution," Dolgoft acknowledges "Castro's deservedly celebrated (but) ill-fated attack on the Moncado Barracks (July 26, 1953)," but scorns the fiction that his band was the primary catalyst for radical change. He reserves greater praise for the "daring assault of the Revolutionary Student Directorate on the Presidential Palace to kill Batista (March 13, 1957)" (71) in which all the attackers were slaughtered. He scorns Castro's deceit in "brazenly and falsely tak[ing] credit," points to the proliferation of rebellious groups not controlled by Castro, and Che Guevara's frustration (as a good Marxist-Leninist) with the July 26 Movement's "lack of ideological (and) lack of moral preparation of the combatants...(hence) the need to establish a rigid discipline, organize a high command." Castro prefigured the purges of later years by "announcing that crimes of insubordination, desertion and defeatism were to be punished by death." (Guevara, *Episodes of the Revolutionary War*, 23, 91, in Dolgoft, 75)

The irony of many revolutionaries is the privilege of their backgrounds. Castro's father was a rich landowner, not one of the farming laborers or city workers. The son attended an elite

orously asserts there were 489,000 agricultural wage workers, not 489,000 agricultural laborers (Guerra cited in Mintz, *Background to Revolution*, 1966, Dolgoft, 63-4).

That Castro did endeavor to spread his version of Russian-influenced Marxist-Leninism is evident in Sanchez's chapter entitled: "Guerrilla workers of the World, Unite." He observes "For the Left and extreme Left in Latin America, all roads led to Havana...Whether we like it or not, Fidel Castro is one of the most influential political figures in the history of Latin America." He is perceived as just behind independence figures Simon Bolivar and Jose de San Martin. (Sanchez, 105)

We may take immediate issue with Castroism being described as Left, let alone extreme left (extreme, yes, left, no). It is possible to ascribe to him significance as an inspirational continental figure who conspired with figures such as Chavez, the Ortega brothers, Carlos the Jackal and radical groups to oppose American imperialism. Sanchez's emphasis that Allende was not "Castro's man" is illustrative of his cynicism of democratic socialism as a Marxist pathway (events no doubt confirmed this). The export of revolution was nurtured at the Punto Cero de Guanabo training school. Recruits from aspiring revolutionary groups from 90% of South America including Colombia's M19, Peru's Shining Path, the Sandinista Front of National Liberation of Nicaragua learned Cuban methods during the '60s, '70s and '80s. Africa was also represented even after Guevara's ill-fated Congo adventure. The not-so-subtle arts of espionage, disguise, guerrilla warfare, sabotage and terrorism, interrogation and torture were absorbed. (94-5, 100)

The contrasts between the two books are many. Sanchez's tome is in many ways a self-indulgent narrative. We learn much about his own military accomplishments, fortunate life and career in the company of his hero. We learn little about the daily oppression of the people. This is a modern "Boys' Own Adventure" for older lads, perhaps not surprising that it was displayed in the "Men's Shed" section of the local library. Sanchez does display the stage of final

the collapse of the USSR forced families to live on subsistence levels. Politically aware and socially militant groups such as the anarchists persisted in brave defiance against suffocation of the press and the repression of civil liberties. The warnings to the international libertarian community as early as June 1959 are as ominous as they are prescient. Although cautiously hopeful, the caveats are telling:

“The doctrine of state socialism has, in Cuba as in so many other countries, had the most harmful effects. Many who sincerely desire a regeneration of society are unfortunately obsessed with the notion that a successful revolution is possible only under a rigid and authoritarian regime...The Communist Party of Cuba is just as dangerous for the Revolution as are the extreme nationalists and the upper echelons of the Church. Though small in number the Communists are skilful connivers, well-operated and totally unscrupulous; their counter-revolutionary potential must not be underestimated.” (Libertarian Association of Cuba to the International Anarchist Movement, Dolgoff, 122–3)

The same month, the anarchists were deploring the introduction of the agrarian reform “which gives priority to the mechanical as opposed to the human factors.” They exhort the power and passion of a peasantry united for a just and noble cause, seeing these exploited as the catalysts for the Russian and Chinese ‘revolutions.’ (127)

Dolgoff would assert that believing a “social revolution can take place in a small semi-developed country” dependent on resources from a powerful nation is as mythical as believing that a social revolution in Cuba “can be miraculously achieved without simultaneous revolution in Latin America and elsewhere, indeed ‘naïve and irresponsible.’” (23) Nonetheless, he cites with approval Ramiro Guerra’s emphatic views: “Cuba was precisely NOT a peasant country...The ‘swift progress of sugar plantation developments (had) transformed (the peasants) into rural proletarians.’” Guerra said the modern plantations created “factories urban in many ways.” He vig-

Jesuit school and became a lawyer. His first wife was “the upper middle-class Mirta Diaz-Balart...then...the teacher Dalai Soto del Valle.” (Sanchez, 42) Of course his mistresses included an English-speaking interpreter and an airline flight attendant. Truly a man of the people!

In contrast, the plight of the Cuban people is vividly depicted by Dolgoff and the numerous sources in the country. Veteran anarchists like Augustin Souchy and Abelardo Iglesias report on growing centralization in all areas of social and economic endeavour. Iglesias describes the militarization of all aspects of Cuban life. His portrayal of Castro is eerily similar to that of the man who originally worshipped him:

“The messianic obsession which dominates Castro’s personality also characterises his official behaviour. Even a brief survey of his political history leads immediately to the conclusion that we are dealing with a super-authoritarian, pathologically conceited individual, taken up with an insatiable lust for personal power.” (Abelardo Iglesias in Dolgoff, 96)

“My conclusion was that he was egocentric and loved to be the centre of attention. Another of his personality traits: it was absolutely impossible to contradict him on any matter whatsoever...In contradiction to what he said Fidel had in no way renounced capitalist comfort...his way of life resembled that of a capitalist without any kind of limit...(He) was extremely manipulative.” (Sanchez, 39–40)

This perception was the result of Sanchez’s having studied penal law at MININT Higher Institute in 1981, indulging in the dangerous task “of drawing up Fidel’s psychological profile.” He still worked for this man until the mid-1990s. Fidel was not the only one living a double life. Iglesias decades earlier mirrors the theme of Sanchez’s book in observing: “He is an unscrupulous political dilettante.” He illustrates this with his description of Castro’s daily wearing of “the conspicuous, colorful crucifix around his neck” in the mountains of Sierra Maestra and his order to his “Heroes of the Revolution” in

the cavalcade to Havana that they “display brightly colored medallions and other religious ornaments on their uniforms.” Iglesias commented on Castro’s understanding of the propaganda power of religious mysticism in a Catholic country and the impact of a supposed Messiah bringing deliverance. (Iglesias in Dolgoff, 96)

Augustin Souchy travelled through Cuba in the early days of the revolution. His insights are revealing and in style more sober than Iglesias’s denunciation a few years later. Nonetheless, his political concerns are evident. He cautions that the “de facto” government, if threatened or questioned, will “remain in office and carry out its program, resort to threats of outright violence. The inevitable consequence of this situation is revolutionary terror, whose classical representatives are Robespierre and Stalin.” (Ibid., 81) With his intimate and comprehensive knowledge of the cooperatives and collectives of the Spanish social revolution, he was in the ideal position to assess the progress of the Castroist “transformation.” He saw impending disaster:

“Moncado: ‘We decided ourselves to work collectively,’ declared one of the peasants, ‘Work together is so much easier than working alone. Before we worked because we were hungry, but now, we work because we really enjoy it. We share our income and expect good results.’ He beamed with joy...The sergeant finally arrived. He made no references to the cooperatives but spoke only about the orders he had received from his bosses, the higher executives of the INRA (National Institute of Agrarian Reform). Cuba is the only Latin American country in which agrarian cooperatives are managed by military personnel.” (Souchy, ‘We visit the New Rural cooperatives’ in Dolgoff, 82)

“Between Bayamo and Manzanillo: The city of Bayamo was one of the provision points for the rebels of the Sierra Maestra...the 8 cooperatives in the district consist of 11,858 hectares worked by 2,700 agricultural laborers...

“The army is inextricably interwoven into the entire INRA network...The district INRA headquarters called a meeting to arrange

the expansion of the facilities to include the manufacture of certain agricultural tools and equipment. (Besides) the workers, the meeting was attended by the district manager, two lawyers, and two army officers.

“The plans for the organisation of an industrial cooperative to be managed by the INRA were presented to the meeting. When the workers asked about wages, the managers replied that wages were of secondary importance and that to speed up the industrialization of Cuba, certain sacrifices will have to be made for the sake of the revolution. The workers plainly showed that they did not like the project. Finally, the exasperated administrator laid down the law: with or without the consent of the workers, the “cooperative” project will be organized as planned. The lawyers drew up the necessary legal documents and the cooperative was officially established.” (Ibid., 83)

“Statization of Manzanillo Shoe Factories:...After the Revolution conflicts broke out when the workers demanded labor laws providing minimum wages, social security and other benefits. Revolution came to the shoe industry. The employers voluntarily gave up ownership and decided to work together on equal terms with their former employees. The small workshops were consolidated into the newly organised Shoe Manufacturing Collective of Manzanillo...Unfortunately, this popular initiative of the shoe workers of Manzanillo was soon squelched. The Manzanillo section of the Manzanillo Communist Party was against free cooperatives which clashed with their authoritarian ideas. They therefore urged Russian-style absorption of the voluntarily collectivized workshops by the INRA. The proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the INRA bureaucrats, and the cooperative shoe industry was taken over.” (Ibid., 84)

Despite official propaganda, all facets of Cuban life suffered under the Communist Party’s tyrannical rule, the economic realm declined as Souchy and Dumont perceived in the early years, many years before the loss of 80% of trade with the Eastern Bloc after