
POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Castro plus 20

Cuba's Martial Apotheosis—By HUGH THOMAS



THE CUBAN REVOLUTION will be twenty years old this winter, for it was on the last day of 1958 that Batista flew out of Havana to cultivate his well-prepared garden in exile and in January 1959 that Castro came into Havana surrounded by, as it seemed, a handsome group of bearded young idealists. Twenty years! Could it be so long? Yet all the men whom Castro challenged, or made up to, from Kennedy to Khrushchev, Nixon and Figueres of Costa Rica, are now dead or retired. Only ex-President Betancourt of Venezuela remains, an active friend of the victims of repression everywhere, and of those in Cuba particularly. Castro, however, continues president and commander-in-chief, still only in his early fifties, for two decades a caudillo.

Cuba in the 1950s was a nation in limbo, halfway between being a rich country and a poor one. It was rich in the sense that its sugar had made a major contribution to the world's commerce, and to its stomach, for well over a hundred years. Cuba had all the technology and the sophistication associated with a country which has the great industriousness needed to market an internationally sought-after crop. Those skills had enabled Cuba to enjoy a good rail and road network and excellent international communications. Cuba was, of course, known too for her cigars, made from a tobacco grown in a tiny stretch of Western Cuba which produces a crop as much respected internationally as that grown on the *côte d'or* in Burgundy. Numerous cattle ranches, a large number of small farms producing winter vegetables for sale to the US western seaboard, and some valuable reserves of minerals in the east of the island also helped Cuba to seem a country with considerable economic promise. In addition, the Cuban middle class was large for a Latin American country and many of

its members had been educated in the USA. The Cuban *peso* was a strong currency and was interchangeable with the US dollar. Relations with the US were close and of very long standing: indeed, the US had played a decisive part in assisting the Cubans to break away from Spain at the end of the 19th century. The natural consequence was that the Cuban standard of living, measured by all the normal indices (doctors, cars, refrigerators, income per head), was among the highest in Latin America. In some departments of life, such as, for example, in numbers of televisions *per capita*, the Cubans were even in advance of some European countries. A lovely climate, attractive islands off-shore (so well described in Hemingway's last novel), a divinely beautiful sea, great forests, cities with Spanish colonial architecture fairly well preserved, charming and attractive, easy-going people who appeared to have almost solved the problems of living in a multi-racial state, caused Cuba to seem in the 1950s a "paradise" . . . as a doctor once put it to me nostalgically in Havana in 1962.

A "PARADISE"? Surely that cannot be true? I mention these things since, though there were many serpents in this garden, the charms should not be forgotten and usually are. The continuing appeal of Cubans and the Cuban countryside still, also, exercise a spell upon some visitors who take for a revolutionary achievement an indigenous part of the Cuban scene. I recall myself passing in 1969 an avenue of royal palms leading to a coffee farm in the company of a well-known US liberal editor, who especially admired the achievement of the régime in planting such a successful row of trees. But I expect those palms had been there for at least a hundred years.

The serpents in the garden were these: the Cuban sugar economy was quota-controlled and organised so greatly that the nominally independent sugar companies, US or Cuban or Spanish as they might be, had virtually ceased to compete

and seemed already like a bureaucratic department of state, rather than a part of the capitalist world. The Sugar Acts which called on the President formally to open the year's harvest were a prophecy of nationalization. Partly this bureaucratization was the fault of a restrictive trade union organization which had climbed (like England's) into a position of almost determining political power during the harsh days of the depression, and was powerful enough to keep wages for those with regular work relatively high, even with unemployment, and to prevent cane-cutting machinery from being used on the island. Julio Lobo, the last of the great sugar kings of Cuba, tried to import a cane cutter from Louisiana where (as in Australia) such machines had been in use since about 1910. After leaving his machine two years in a bonded warehouse on Havana docks, Lobo sent it back to New Orleans. Nor was Cuban sugar competitive enough to preserve its overwhelmingly important place in world sugar markets, though the demand for that commodity was greatly increasing (this failure was partly due to the desire of all manner of new countries to produce their own sugar rather than import it). The consequence was that, while (as the World Bank's perceptive report on Cuba of 1950 pointed out) the whole economy revolved around the price of sugar on the international exchange, the amount of sugar being produced in the 1950s was much the same as it was in the 1920s. Some encouragement of a diversified agriculture had been given but the monoculture seemed likely to last a long time, with all the limitations that that imposed on commercial and foreign policy. True, the level of US economic investment in Cuba in 1957 was a fraction of what it had been in the 1920s; the actions of unions had made the country less appetising for risk capital, while a conscious policy of "Cubanization" by some proprietors such as Lobo had increased the Cubans' own holdings very considerably. But the memory of the far greater US political and economic dominance during the early part of the century (when Cuba was really more a US dependency than an independent state) caused Cuban nationalism to take the shape of an anti-Americanism more deeply felt than in other Latin American countries because it was directed against so close a neighbour.

Furthermore, though Cuba seemed well off statistically, the eye of the most casual visitor suggested that the riches of the island were very ill-divided. There was a great contrast between the arrangements for health and education in the cities and in the country. Corruption, strong for several hundred years under Spain, affected most political and commercial enterprises; and, in that

respect, Cuba's democratic politicians of the previous fifty years (Grau San Martín, Prío, Zayas, Menocal, Gómez) had been as discreditable as the dictators (Batista and Machado). The judiciary, although some judges maintained independence, was also affected. Though there were no large landed aristocrats left (as there were, and are, in some countries of South America), the political life had never properly become articulated. In 1952, Batista's dictatorship had been established with nobody willing enough or determined enough to fight for a democracy both debilitated and corrupt. That political life was also dogged by a kind of gangsterism which if it now seems rather mild in comparison with that of Italy or Argentina today, nevertheless was certainly enough, combined with the corruption, to render the body politic much more like a victim of alcoholic over-indulgence than a working enterprise. Little help to anyone was given by the Church of Rome, whose prestige was modest and which seemed a largely Spanish institution, lamely staffed by Spanish priests. It ministered feebly to a society which was as irreligious as it was licentious.

IN THE LATE 1940s and 1950s, there was a widespread demand for an end to all these indignities. The socially responsible middle class was growing and, though the first leader of this movement (Grau) was a failure when he became president, and the second (Chibás) shot himself in a highly egotistical manner, Castro, while in the hills between 1956 and 1959, was able to gather this opinion to himself with great skill. When



"Ethiopian Armour"

Castro first took up arms to fight against Batista the few people who knew him admittedly regarded him as a survivor from the political gangsters who had dominated the University of Havana in the 1940s. But he soon established a rough suzerainty over a large alliance of people who hoped for a change to a more decent country, and overthrew Batista in a minor guerrilla war, assisted by a successful campaign of public relations. He reached Havana with a loyal army, but without an organised party and without a clear programme. He soon made himself prime minister, at the head of a nationalist government, which became weekly more anti-American. In May 1959, after four months as prime minister, Castro was still talking about the necessity for a "humanistic revolution" and criticising the communists. But by July, anti-communism had become virtually a crime of state, and in January 1960 Mikoyan paid his first visit to Havana. A full-fledged communist state was soon set up, largely, it would seem, on the initiative of Castro himself rather than (as is still sometimes alleged or, anyway, felt) because of the USA's mistakes and perhaps against the initial inclinations of the Russians. After 1968, the private sector of the economy was virtually restricted to agriculture.

Between 1960 and 1968, meanwhile, the USA sought, by a variety of inept means, to kill or overthrow Castro but, for the last ten years, has acquiesced in his existence. Up till about 1968, too, Castro was obviously hoping to extend his revolution into other countries of Latin America—he always felt Cuba rather small for his own ambitions—but that goal has been abandoned for the moment at least, while he

concentrates on assisting, where he does not instigate, Russian policy in Africa.

Since Castro still seems anxious to carry the message of his achievements across the seas, it is interesting to ask what these revolutionary achievements actually are.

THE FIRST QUESTION which must occur to the serious enquirer is how far are they really revolutionary at all?

This is not a deliberate echo of de Tocqueville's magnificent rejection of the received view of the importance of the French Revolution, but a simple recognition of the fact that the pattern of the Cuban economy has not changed since the 1950s. Of course, as in all communist states, the state plays the determining role in the economy but what that economy is itself dominated by is—in 1978 as it was in 1957—sugar. If anything, the monoculture has been increased.

For example, in 1957 Cuba exported a total of \$818 million worth of goods, of which \$654 million (79.95%) was accounted for by sugar. In 1976, the last year for which I have been able to find satisfactory figures, total exports were \$2,925 million, of which sugar accounted for \$2,590 million, or 86.1%. Early on in the régime's history, there was a great deal of talk about "diversification of agriculture", but from about 1968 (perhaps on Russian insistence) sugar has received the bulk of investment and attention generally. Nor has there been a very great increase in the amount of sugar produced. Total sugar production in the last few years has been around the 6 million ton mark, which is a slight increase on the average of the late 1950s, but still Cuba produced 7 million tons of sugar in 1952 and 5 million as long ago as 1925. Modern technology has increased the yield of sugar on the 1.2 or so million hectares now, as in the 1950s, sown with cane; and the revolution has managed to introduce cane cutters into the harvesting, for the unions have become part of the state's bureaucracy (a definite if not greatly publicised benefit to the economy), but there can be no doubt but that the revolution has preserved, even heightened, the extent to which the country depends on one crop. For that reason, if for no other, Cuba's foreign policy is as dependent on the Russians as it used to be on the USA. It is from Russian or other COMECON countries that the Cubans now gain, of course, their fertilisers, wheat, oil, and other essential imports. Cuba has been a part of COMECON since 1972 and one must assume, therefore, that the thrust of her economy is dictated by what that organisation wants from her and not what she (or her farmers) would really like to produce in different circumstances.



Some further indication of the innovatory success or failure of the Revolution can be gathered from looking at a number of other figures for agricultural products (See Table, p. 116).

Now between 1957 and 1975 the Cuban population increased from 6.6 million to 9.3 million (despite the emigration of about 500,000 people between 1959 and 1966), or 41%, so that the only items of Cuban agriculture which have really increased over the pre-Revolutionary figures in relation to population are: poultry, tomatoes, eggs, and fish—a clear picture of what the régime would like the population to eat or produce for sale abroad.

The most notable of these changes for the better is obviously fish, where the fine new Cuban fleet (well fitted out in Spain) now plays a part in Atlantic fishing on an international scale, alongside the far larger Russian fleets, with which the Cuban activity there is doubtless coordinated.

It is undoubtedly true that industrial activities make up a little for this far from impressive picture of things: notably steel, cement, and sulphuric acid. But even New Man cannot live on steel alone, and the modest rations which the ordinary Cuban has now to put up with must seem a comedown to a great many people who in the past could certainly aspire to, and in a

vast number of cases actually enjoyed, a much greater variety of food than is ever now available—a point made by the most outspoken of the contributors to Oscar and Ruth Lewis's account of Cuban testimonies in *Four Men—Living The Revolution* (1977).

This rationing, of course, puts Cuba a long way behind the countries of Eastern Europe, which seem indeed a cornucopia in comparison, as Eastern Europeans would be the first to agree (one even volunteered that to me in the 1960s, in the days when I was accustomed to go to Cuba when I could).

TURNING FROM the economy and standard of living to the political structure, it should not be forgotten that Cuban democracy, always halting and infirm, fell in 1952 not 1959, and the dictatorship of Batista was really the, as it were, forerunner of that of Castro, not its obverse. The chief difference between Batista and Castro was not that the first was ruthless and the second just; on the contrary, Batista's tyranny seems, from the angle of the present, a mild and indolent undertaking, an insult to responsible citizens no doubt, but far removed from the iron certainties imposed by Castro.

Batista, a mulatto, had been a popular figure in his youth, when he first staged the famous

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sergeants' revolt in 1933, and, between then and 1944, when he stepped down from a presidency to which he had been reasonably fairly elected in 1940, he seemed a progressive general, a foretaste of the present Peruvian régime more than of his own later system. He legalised trade unions and the Communist party, which served in his government. But, in the 1950s, Batista's interest in power was in its trappings.

A characteristic story is that when he issued communiqués announcing that he had been closeted with his generals all day discussing the fight against Castro, he had really been playing canasta throughout. He did not even have the energy to control his police, who committed numerous atrocities which he condoned, though probably did not inspire. The Castro régime paints Batista in propaganda as a tyrant for whom Gibbon would have exhausted his superlatives of denigration. But he was hardly as bad as all that. He presided, till the end, over a negligent, feckless, spendthrift but prosperous country where a great many minor crimes and acts of violence occurred without direct political significance. He paved the way for Castro in two ways: first, he established the rule that (to recall Halévy's thesis) if a gang of armed men could find a common cause they could easily enough "proclaim themselves the State", once they had captured the public buildings; and secondly, he continued (or completed) the destruction of what institutions there were in the country. This applied very strongly to the civil service and to the trade unions who, well organised as they were, put up no effective fight against Castro in 1959-60, since many of the leaders were compromised with the old régime. Batista's *coup d'état* in 1952 also divided the Army, fatally for himself.

IN PLACE OF THAT OLD RÉGIME, Castro established a state with himself as the "maximum leader", perhaps for life. The new Cuban Communist Party does not much differ in organisation from the parties in other communist states, and, with the important exception of Castro himself, the

¹ Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, the vice-premier, has been a communist since the 1930s; Leonel Soto, the Cuban Communist Party's international secretary, since about 1945; Sergio Aguirre, the ambassador in Moscow, has been a Party member since about 1940; Raúl Valdés Vivo, the journalist who was selected to write a history of the "Ethiopian Revolution" for mass diffusion in Cuba, was a communist student leader in the 1950s too; and Raúl Castro, the minister of defence, was a communist since about 1952.

leaders of the party are now mainly men who were communists before 1959 (this goes particularly, it is worthwhile and probably significant to add, for those who have been primarily concerned in Cuba's African adventure).¹

The Cuban Communist Party is still a bit smaller per head of the population than is normal in other communist states, and there are some other unusual institutions: for example, the committees for the Defence of the Revolution, an undertaking which began as a kind of neighbourhood snooping organisation (to see that those who had decided to leave the country did not illegally dispose of their furniture to friends instead of the state as they were bound to), has ended up as a galvaniser of civic action in support of the Communist Party proper. On the whole, Castro's own leadership seems more flamboyantly presented than other leaders of communist states, and he still has a gathering of old-time faithful, largely non-ideological warriors from the days of the civil war against Batista, as confidantes and bodyguards.

Whether this means any real independence of Castro from the Russians is difficult to say. On balance, I should guess that the bureaucratic and

TABLE (1000 metric tons unless stated)

PRODUCT	1957	1975	INCREASE OR DECREASE %
<i>Rice</i>	260	337.7	+ 29.6
<i>Beans</i>	17	5.0	- 70.6
<i>Potatoes</i>	104	116.8	+ 12.5
<i>Sweet potatoes & yams</i>	184	98.3	- 46.7
<i>Yucca</i>	186	84.8	- 54.0
<i>Malanga*</i>	250	32.5	- 87.0
<i>Tomatoes</i>	45	188.3	+ 31.0
<i>Pineapples</i>	102	22.2	- 78.0
<i>Citrus Fruit</i>	150	182.3	+ 21.0
<i>Plantains, bananas</i>	360	204.6	- 43.0
<i>Livestock—beef and veal for slaughter</i>	335	240	- 28.0
<i>Milk</i>	780	800	+ 2.6
<i>Eggs (million dozen)</i>	22	154	+600.0
<i>Pork</i>	42	44	+ 4.7
<i>Poultry</i>	14	56	+300.0
<i>Tobacco</i>	52	41	- 21.0
<i>Coffee</i>	44	27	- 38.6
<i>Fish, other seafood</i>	21	143	+580.0

* The old root vegetable very popular in the country in the past, but a symbol of backwardness.

ageing Soviet leadership look on Castro as an asset, a focus for attracting people in the propaganda-dominated Third World (and even in Europe), a source of original and daring ideas. Castro's part in persuading the Russians to interfere in Africa may yet be revealed. (This is, of course, a different matter from suggesting that Castro acts on his own in Africa as is optimistically, or pessimistically, believed by some.) Russian leaders must appreciate that Castro is still able to exert a very considerable degree of charm and diplomatic skill as shown by the fact that he is permitted to lead the "non-aligned" nations while Cuba also belongs to COMECON. If this skill failed, it does not take too much imagination to realise that the Russians would ensure his eclipse. Since 1970, when Castro's failures in Latin America were followed by the failure of the 10-million-ton sugar harvest, Cuba has, it must be realised, come under Russian direction more and more. Both the personnel and the organisational changes previously noted bear witness to that, and in 1971 the Cuban political police, the *DGI*, was apparently purged, to the Russians' benefit, by the *KGB*.

But having set up a powerful state, what has actually been done? First of all, the nation has been, as it were, whipped up, into one large, military camp. The military element in the

régime's propaganda, in which its leaders probably believe, is far more striking than in any other communist state. Castro surely believes it when he announces (*Granma*, 19 December 1976):

"As long as there is a revolutionary with a gun, no cause will ever be lost."

This military aspect of the régime has increased rather than slackened, as the years have gone by, even though the threat from the United States is plainly a matter of history, and no other North or South American state could attempt to unseat the Cuban régime by force of arms. Nor are there any armed enemies of the régime within the country. Castro appears in the press no longer as "Major Fidel Castro", "Doctor Fidel Castro", or the "Maximum Leader of the Revolution Fidel Castro", but as Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro. Reports of military manoeuvres or preparations are continuously prominent. The public has been endlessly fed with tales of the old guerrilla war against Batista and when a rest is needed from that epic, there is always the fight of the Cubans against Spain in the 19th century to fall back upon. (In this respect, as in some others, the revolution is presented to the Cuban people as the continuation of an apparently never-ending nationalist conflict.) In the last few

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years, for example, the role of the “apostle of liberty”, José Martí, has also been downplayed to the benefit of the “titan of bronze”, Antonio Maceo, rebel general and veteran of both Wars of Independence, “whose life was an everlasting dialogue with duty”, a man whose black blood would, we are led to suppose, have caused him to sympathise with (or perhaps even to lead) the Struggle against Imperialism in Angola or Ethiopia, or Zaire: “to honour him today is a battle cry: a call to revolutionary action; to take a stand; an appeal to the energy of man; and an invitation to victory. . . .”

THUS THE FIRST AND MOST STRIKING achievement of Castro’s state has been the creation of a nation in arms.

The mere size of the Cuban armed forces—190,000, plus 90,000 army reserves, 10,000 “state security troops”, 3,000 border guards and 100,000 militia—makes them far and away the largest military force in the Caribbean region except for the United States. Of Russia’s Eastern European satellites, only Poland has larger forces (and Poland has a population four times that of Cuba). “Military dictatorships” like Chile or Argentina have far fewer men under arms than Cuba has. This large force is also the most important institution in the nation, and has plainly played a large part in the economy, in supplying extra hands for cane cutting for example. René Dumont (author of *L’Afrique: Est-elle mal partie?*) pointed out the beginning of this “militarisation” of the Cuban Revolution over ten years ago and was called an agent of the CIA for his pains; but if a small Caribbean island which proclaims itself the Friend of Humanity also creates an armed service as large as that of Peter the Great, it is ridiculous not to notice it. The financial relations between Russia and Cuba on military matters are secret, as one would imagine. But basically the Cuban armed forces (like the police) are armed, clothed, and trained by Russia; and I expect that Cuba has made only a very modest contribution to the costs. “The more we go into these matters”, said Castro on 1 December 1976,

“the more grateful we feel to the Soviet Union which provided us with these magnificent weapons (APPLAUSE) and taught us how to use them . . . thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Soviet scientists, technicians and workers our weapons are also constantly being revo-

lutionised, and improved on” (*Granma*, 19 December 1976).

The unmistakable inference is that the Cuban army is interlocked with the Red Army, a factor which must at least be considered by anyone who wishes to suppose that Cuba has any independence of action available to it in Africa or indeed anywhere else.² Perhaps Russia indeed built up the Cuban army specifically for these surrogate activities.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, benefits to be gained from living in a regiment; and the régime’s achievements in health, social services, and education must be viewed in this respect. In these spheres, the Cuban régime has managed to achieve some things which no other Latin American government has done. Cuba is now a country with virtually universal literacy and access to education (whereas in the 1950s a third of the population could not read and write, and only about half those of school age went to school). Most people are now within reach of clinics and doctors, whereas, at least in the country, that was out of the question in the 1950s.

What, however, are these activities for? Slaveowners in the past looked after their stock of labour as well as landlords looked after their property, and for a very obvious reason. In Cuba, people are kept in good health, and are educated, specifically to serve the cause of the Revolution, to enable them to take part in the “heroic caravanserai” (a phrase of David Caute’s), to bear the flaming torch of revolution, to carry the gun wherever the Maximum Gunsmith determines. Travellers to Cuba are sometimes impressed by the morale of the doctors and educators whom they meet. But this is a morale of a nation whose leaders have been able to simulate a permanent war through an aspiration to permanent revolution.

One achievement of the revolution in Cuba can scarcely be gainsaid: that is, its great propaganda success among all those in Europe or elsewhere who, for a variety of reasons, need some flag to wave against the United States whenever they can find such a banner. The causes of the unpopularity of the US even before Viet Nam were diverse: jealousy must have played a large part; anger that the US should have superseded the Europeans as supreme power; fear of US technology; fear of the world state that the US, unfortunately perhaps, did not try to set up. However it arrived, hatred of the US led to a quite extravagant indulgence being afforded to Castro in his early days, and it continues. We do not need to travel far to find good examples of this tolerance: our own enlightened trade-union leader Clive Jenkins visited Cuba in 1961, and

² I have discussed elsewhere this aspect of the case: see *Survey*, Autumn 1978, and *ENCOUNTER*, February 1978.

asked a militia soldier if he wanted elections. "He looked at me and shook his machine gun: we've got these", he said. "At this point in time", said Jenkins (using an early version of *that* famous cliché), "I found this a convincing reply."

Within the regiment of modern Cuba there are of course, guardrooms. In camps or jails, there linger opponents of the régime from more or less every epoch, including, I imagine, some who opposed Castro's revolution by siding with Batista and somehow managed to escape being shot "up against the wall" in 1959. Most of the more prominent prisoners, however, are men of the failed "humanistic revolution" of 1959. They were people who constituted the essential supporters of Castro before he got to power and in his first months in Havana. They separated themselves from the régime in 1959-60; perhaps sided with the exiles operating from Miami, or perhaps not; but, at all events, hoped (and often did little more) for a liberal outcome to the Cuban revolution. This generation is symbolised by the heroic person of Major Hubert Matos, arrested in October 1959 when he was Castro's governor of Camagüey province, and since that time incarcerated. (Condemned to twenty years for being "anti-communist" in a trial in which Castro himself hectoring the magistrates, it is a commentary on the tragedy that the demand made by his patient wife is not so much for his "freedom now" as merely for his release when he has fulfilled his twenty-year sentence.) There are, of course, many others, driftwood they must now seem from one or other of the waves of the Cuban revolution. Yet, are they driftwood? Are they not perhaps the real victors of the Cuban revolution, the men whose names will be remembered in history as the heroes when Castro's *generals* are forgotten?

Numbers, details and whereabouts of most prisoners are difficult to establish, for Cuba refuses collaboration with *Amnesty* or other international organisations. A prisoner of US nationality, Frank Emmick (he was recently released, having been imprisoned for 14 years without a trial and only on suspicion), estimates the total as 40,000. For a large number of prisoners, conditions can be improved if the prisoner makes his obeisance to the régime by accepting attendance at a Marxist-Leninist course of study. In that case he can work in labour camps which are doubtless more tolerant places than those in Russia, if only because they are in the sunshine; and he can even spend week-ends of conditional liberty with his family. However, that choice has been refused by a hard core of prisoners and has not been extended to a number of others of special political importance, such as Matos.

Thrillers

Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre

Jerry Palmer

This fascinating study deals with the origins and development of what is arguably the most successful genre in popular literature. It tackles the questions: what is a thriller? why did the thriller emerge when it did? how does one account for its popularity? and is the thriller dead? These questions cannot be answered without an extended exploration of thrillers, their origins in other literary forms and their roots in social reality, and a consideration of the notions of the hero, of personal competitiveness and of conspiracy.

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THE RÉGIME has made much of the fact that its prisoners are not tortured under interrogation. Carlos Franqui, writing recently in *Cambio 16* Madrid (no. 333 April 23, 1978), a man who was for a number of years Castro's confidant and friend and who now lives in Europe, believes that, technically, that may be true if torture is defined as simply the use of physical assault to obtain information or confessions. But, he tells us (and other evidence suggests that that is the case) endless psychological terror is brought to bear on arrested persons, including day-upon-day incarceration in lightless rooms and simulated executions. (Frank Emmick has described a week passed in a refrigerated and absolutely dark chamber.) As for the prisons themselves, barbaric overcrowding and brutality by guards seem normal, as the French writer Pierre Golendorf made clear in one of the very few books as yet published on Cuba's Caribbean version of Gulag.

IT IS EASY ENOUGH to visit Cuba and draw the conclusion that the régime is popular. But that impression has been gained in innumerable dictatorships by now in the 20th century. Will we never learn that those whom travellers may meet would not speak critically of the system to those who might betray them by negligence or by design?

The pretence of enthusiasm in a crowd is also easy. In crowds, too, and again we should have learned that by now, people can be carried away. The number of independent-minded Cubans who established their position in life before 1959 and therefore might (if they could be reached) count on some international connections to assist them, even if only morally, grows daily less and less. As for the rank-and-file Cubans, doubtless the two short, sharp, and successful

³ A good indication of this is given by the greeting in Havana to Colonel Mengistu on April 26 last by a huge crowd of Cubans whose presence there was surely no more accidental than that of the Germans who went to Hitler's speeches. Colonel Mengistu began by shouting

Death to imperialists! (Shouts of "Death")
Death to capitalism! (Shouts of "Death")
Death to feudalism! (Shouts of "Death")
Long live socialism! (Shouts of "Viva"—)

This technique of exciting a response from a crowd in the form of a chorus was, of course, very intensely practised in Fascist and Nazi rallies.

⁴ Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny* (1962 ed.), p. 120.

wars against feeble enemies in Africa may have made the régime seem for a time popular. But how will the families of the dead greet the news of those killed on behalf of faraway causes of which they know nothing?

On this matter I reserve judgment; to find a hint of criticism from within of the Cubans for their actions in Africa requires investigation which more resembles cryptography than reading. Many warm-hearted Cubans no doubt have the same sort of half-moral, half-religious enthusiasm for the régime which Germans used to have for the Nazis, being dazzled by Castro's oratory, bewitched by his cleverness and capacity for survival, proud of his *machismo* on the international stage, pleased to think that the Cubans have ceased to charm the world with their cigars and their music but are terrifying it with their guns—as some Italians did under Mussolini.

More and more when thinking of Cuba, parallels with fascism come to mind, as they did once before in this journal—when Richard Lowenthal (ENCOUNTER, November 1969) compared Castro's revolution to that of D'Annunzio at Fiume. The attention paid to propaganda, the cult of leadership, the doctrine of endless struggle, the exaltation of nationalism and violence, the emphasis on carefully staged oratory, the deliberate exacerbation of tension before the leader speaks, the rhythmic responses of the crowd,³ the banners and the ferocious "opinions in arms" supported by mob intimidation, the mass rallies and the outrageous prisons—all those characteristic Castroist methods of the early days recalled Fascism, and many of those techniques have continued.

This régime seems indeed to have been more than anything the first fascist Left régime—by which I mean that it is a régime with totalitarian left-wing goals established and sustained by methods of fascism. Perhaps we should have realised as much when people who knew Castro in his days as a student recalled that he took a marked copy of *Mein Kampf* about with him, and others remembered that he had José Antonio Primo de Rivera's works in the Sierra Maestra. Hitler, at his trial in 1923 after the Munich putsch, said:

"You may pronounce us guilty a thousand times over, but the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to tatters the brief of the State prosecutor and the sentence of this court. For she acquits us. . . ."⁴

Castro ended his first famous speech at his trial in 1953 more briefly: "Condemn me: history will absolve me."

RELIGION

Evensong at Peterborough

By Philip Toynbee

ON ONE OF the wettest and foggiest days of early May my wife and I were driving from our house in the Wye valley to the house of a friend near King's Lynn. Neither of us had ever seen Peterborough Cathedral, so we started early enough to include it in our journey. We knew most of that cross-country route very well—the road along the suddenly-narrowing Severn between Lydney and Minsterworth; the ring-road round Gloucester; the sharp rise into the Cotswolds; the gentle countryside of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, ending so abruptly in the slashed soil, bulldozers, and new urbanisation of Milton Keynes. But this time we were travelling further north than usual, to skirt Northampton and Wellingborough; and we had just got a faint whiff of the fens when we were grabbed, so it seemed, by a great new highway which thrust us through the scattered industry, suburbs, and railway-yards of Peterborough.

We got no more than a glimpse of the old inner city before we saw the long, low-slung cathedral in front of us and an open gate into the close. There is something in every cathedral to take the breath away, and at Peterborough this comes as soon as you set eyes on the amazing west front with its three huge and equal portals, early Gothic in their perfect simplicity, and only slightly marred by a fussy little fifteenth-century porch stuck on to the base of the central arch. A notice on the porch-door told us that Evensong had already begun and would we please sit down until it was over. If we wished to join the service we could take our seats in the choir.

But to do this would have meant a rather ostentatious walk over the last, and pewless, section of the nave; so we compromised by sitting down on the foremost nave pew but one. The choir was half-way through a psalm as we sat down, the choirmaster hunched at the western end of the first decani stall, conducting with a passionate, almost agitated fervour. Between this surpiced conductor and ourselves a congregation of some twenty or thirty faced each other in the remaining stalls of the choir, and each row was neatly

terminated by two clerics in full canonicals—perhaps the dean and three of his canons.

Choir, congregation, and priests seemed to be islanded there, between the nave to the west, the aisles to north and south, and an eastern space of crossing, chancel and apse which we had not yet been able to see but which seemed to stretch almost as far beyond the celebration as the splendid late-Norman nave was stretching away behind our backs. As for us, although we are familiar with Anglican liturgies and have often attended Evensong in the chapel of a little convent across the valley from our house, it was impossible to feel that we were fully a part of those proceedings in the unknown cathedral.

This was not only due to our physical separation from the service, but also, I think, because a strange air of professionalism and remoteness enveloped those priests and choristers as they went so gracefully through the prescribed devotions for Saturday, May 6th, 1978 A.D. Both the real professionals and the congregation seemed like figures on a stage, so isolated were they from the rest of the cathedral, so brightly lit in the surrounding gloom.

A LONG LESSON from Judges was read by a priest on the decani side: we were reminded of how Gideon had been called by the angel to destroy the altar of Baal before attacking the hosts of Midian. Then everyone turned to the east to recite the creed; and after this an old hymn was sung, but to a difficult modern setting which needed even more passionate gestures from the choirmaster. A succession of prayers was then read aloud by a second priest, and when these were finished another of the celebrants read a lesson from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

At about 3.45 Evensong was gracefully brought to an end, and the choir filed westward towards us, smallest choristers in the lead, then wheeled with excellent precision to their right and disappeared up the north aisle and into the transept. The priests followed them, and finally the congregation began to break up with that air