

Lecturer: D.M.

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CUBA

In comparison to Argentina and Chile, Cuba entered the organized labor picture quite late but once the process had begun, it rolled on very rapidly and with strong political overtones.

1889 - First heavy influence from Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalists (Defined again as Anarchists who believed in trade unionism as a vehicle and in the strike as a method to destroy authority). Some were refugees from Spanish plots and uprisings gone awry. A number of Spanish refugees found employment as "readers" in Cuban cigar factories but instead of reading romantic novels to the workers in their boring toil they often read from Anarchist literature thereby planting the seeds of their own beliefs in new and fertile ground.

1890 - The tobacco and port workers were the first to organize in Cuba and their first serious strike was undertaken almost jointly since the second followed the first as a sympathetic reaction to their walkout. Spanish suppression of the strike was violent but this only served to contribute to the growth of the movement.

D.M. observed that the Communists have almost made a mystique out of labor martyrs to "create a spirit of combat". Revolutionary movements always see some advantage for themselves in suppression since a hard core always comes through and they represent the living heroes whereas the weaker if caught may be killed or imprisoned and they serve the purpose of providing the martyrs whose example can be used to gain new sympathizers. D.M. added that a school of real leadership is established when class combat breaks out in the streets for true leadership surfaces at such times and may otherwise go unrecognized.

1902 - Strike occurred because workers were being paid in depreciated Spanish currency when they wanted dollars. This is probably the first case of a strike called against depreciated money.

1908 - Another strike with tobacco, construction and port workers going out together.

During World War I there were many walkouts. The labor movement expanded rapidly among cigarette apprentices especially who were very poorly paid and usually much younger than the average worker. Employers, much as in Europe in the immediate post-World War II period, preferred to hire apprentices from whom they required the same onerous work and performance while paying less than to a full-fledged worker. Teaching a trade to the young had therefore become only a pretext for the hiring of apprentices. Cigarettes were a new industry in the WW I period.

Right after WW I, the Anarcho-Syndicalists and Socialists vied for supremacy in Cuba with the Socialists eventually winning out. Their leader, Diego Vicente Tejera, wrote out a program of demands for the improvement of general working conditions and the period was characterized by numerous strikes.

In the early 1920's many new trade union groups arose some of which were clearly modeled after American organizations., e.g. Hermandad Ferroviaria de Cuba (Railway Brotherhood of Cuba). Juan Arevalo was responsible for setting up both this union and the Federacion Maritima of Cuba.

In 1924 the Confederacion Nacional Sindicalista Cubana of Anarcho-Syndicalist inspiration was established which later turned Communist. It claimed some 71,000 members in the 1920's which for the period was a fairly significant size.

President Machado was elected in 1924 on an essentially pro-labor platform but once elected he proved to be unusually hostile to labor aims breaking strikes through police methods, etc. In 1933, Machado was overthrown following an Army ultimatum partially brought about by a strike called by students and workers. Only two years earlier, the same strike combination (workers and students) had been used to move Ibanez out of power in Chile. By this period, the majority of workers were no longer of Anarcho-Syndicalist inspiration.

Grau San Martin followed Machado and he granted such labor reforms as the eight hour day, freedom to organize, created arbitration and conciliation machinery. Then Batista took over and remained as the behind-the-throne power during the administrations of several presidents over the next seven years.

The CNOC (Confederacion Nacional Obrera Cubana) was dissolved along with other trade union groups and in 1935 (March) a labor reaction culminated in a violent strike which was suppressed. After 1938, Batista made a deal with the Communists. He allowed them to have their first daily newspaper, radio station and two cabinet posts in all of Latin America. He was, if the point can be under-stressed, something less than an unswerving anti-Communist. Furthermore, Batista was doing this a full seven years before Peron had begun to seek the help of the Argentine workers to achieve and maintain political power. In return for the political concessions, Batista bought labor peace from the Communists. These last soon claimed (1938-1939) approximately 220,000 union members. The Communists made the most of their opportunity. They tried to establish a Popular Front in labor. At the CTAL (headed by Toledano) in Mexico in 1938, they moved ahead by agreeing to the formation of a new labor central.

In 1939 there was a large meeting in Havana with over 1800 delegates present from more than 200 unions claiming (exaggerated) over 400,000 members. They set up the Confederacion de Trabajadores Cubanos which is still extant today except for the addition of the word Revolucionaria after Castro won out. The CTC's first Secretary General was Lazaro Peña and he is still the top man in Cuba's Marxist controlled labor movement. He affiliated the CTC with the CTAL. As a point of internal policy, he agreed that there should only be one union functioning in each industry for each region of the country.

The CTC held its second national congress in 1940 claiming 500,000 members, calling for social legislation and denouncing the Second World War as imperialistic. After Hitler's attack on Russia, the CTC drastically revised its position. In 1942 the CTC advanced demands relating to Conciliation and Arbitration boards. Minimum wage ceilings were set for urban workers.

In 1944 Grau San Martin became President again of the "Autenticos" (Similar to the APRA in Peru). The leadership of the CTC changed. Carlos Pro Soccarrios became Pdt. of Cuba (1948-1952). He was another "Autentico" and this caused a further shake-up in the CTC. The Communists decided it was time to form their own labor central while starting an intensive campaign to infiltrate the "Autenticos". In March, 1952, Batista took over again and both sides began to make concessions.

Democratic trade union elements tried to fight off Peronista infiltration (ATLAS). The CTC in 1954 called a special emergency meeting for purposes of self-purging. In the same year the transportation workers elected outstanding Communists as their principal officers. By 1957, Batista was again running the labor unions.

When Castro took over, he set up three trustees for labor and proceeded to isolate few labor leaders who dared raise their voice in protest against his regime. Castro was particularly concerned with gaining full control of the sugar workers union since they were the key to rural labor control. They were on the whole better off than their fellow cane cutters elsewhere in Latin America insofar as salaries during harvest season was concerned but they too had justified complaints concerning long periods of inactivity at other times of the year. During slack work periods they tended to pile up debts to be repaid at the next harvest. After Castro took power and the economic orientation of the country appeared to be veering away from traditional single money crop economy, many sugar workers migrated to urban centers causing considerable headaches to the new regime.

The Cuban peasantry was but to a slight degree composed of small farmers and Castro's initial thought had apparently been to break up large estates to create more small farmers. When it was realized that such action might harm levels of agricultural production, the basic pattern was maintained under State ownership. Some insist that Castro never had any real intention of breaking up large estates anyway.

D.M recommended Richard M. Morse, "The Heritage of Latin America" an article contained in Louis Hartz, The Founding of New Societies (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1964) pp. 123-177.

D.M paid particular attention to Francisco Suarez (1548-1614) as cited in Morse' article. He attributed following statements to Suarez:

"Sovereign power originates with the collectivity of men."

"People do not delegate but alienate authority to the Prince."

D.M then cited a number of recent books on Castro's Cuba including Theodore Draper's, Castroism, Myth & Reality. Also a recent one in the Spectrum series by John E. Fang, Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Also cited Boris Goldenberg's new book adding that author is an admitted former Communist and anti-Castrista.

In Nov., 1959, a trade union congress was held in Havana at which only 11% of the delegates were openly Communist. Violent verbal clashes ensued between minority and majority spokesmen and 25 out of 33 federations adopted anti-Communist programs. The gestures were futile. By the end of the year workers had "decided" not to have strikes, to give 4% of their wages over to the government as a "loan", etc.

Lazaro Peña has since 1961 been the Chairman of the Cuban Trade Union Congress.

Cuban law No. 407 gave the Ministry of Labor the right to take action against individual trade union leaders in what was deemed the public interest. Among those who failed to leave Cuba in time was David Salvador, probably one of the more able democratic trade union leaders.

By early 1960, trade union members in Cuba were even being urged to work overtime without pay. The last real brush with Castro's regime occurred in Dec. 1960 when members of the electrical workers union marched through the streets protesting the persecution of their leaders.

D.M. quoted from p. 250 of what was probably Poblete Troncoso: "Socialism from above, resistance from below", in describing reaction of Cuban workers. Said D.M., "Most dangerous opposition was from working class."

Castro has forced the purchase of trade union bonds by workers. A special campaign against the decline of productivity and an increase in absenteeism was begun on Oct. 23, 1961.

VENEZUELA

A country which although sizeable and the birthplace of Bolivar was, until very recently, quite backward. It has suffered long periods of despotic government including the regime of Juan Vicente Gomez which lasted from 1909-1935. Although he was almost illiterate, he was perhaps even more ruthless than Trujillo. Yet he helped the transformation of his country along when oil in great commercial quantities was discovered to make it all possible. Previous to its role as an important oil producer, Venezuela had always been a debtor nation. Now, it is one of the few in the world as a whole and one of two in all of Latin America (Mexico being the other possibility) in a position to claim the status of a creditor nation.

Before and during Gomez's regime there were almost no trade unions in the country with the exception of the small Federacion Obrera Venezolana which numbered about 20,000 members but had little influence or real strength. Gomez died in 1935 and his son-in-law took over bringing in a new constitution the following year which contained some real rights for workers. Several important unions were established in this period including the Confederacion Sindical Obrera de Venezuela and the Union de Trabajadores de Sulya. The first national congress of workers met in Caracas in 1936 claiming to represent 150,000. The Labor Movement of Venezuela created the political force (Accion Democratica Popular which is dominant today.

Between 1945-48, two Presidents of Accion Democratica, Romulo Betancourt and Romulo Gallegos (this last one of the great writers of all Latin America). In this period large segments of the working class became organized. About 1/2 belonged to the CTV which had a ten-year period of orderly and enthusiastic development until 1948 when a military coup took over.

All democratic institutions were shut down and the highest judicial tribunal was dismissed. In 1949 the police took over the headquarters and assets of the C.T.V. Within a few months, the C.T.V and 46 petroleum workers unions were dissolved by Government decree and many leaders escaped while some were imprisoned. This was an important development with parallels in other countries because exiled labor leaders were forced by circumstances to migrate, broaden their horizons and their knowledge of the international labor movement and draw lessons which they later, upon returning to their countries, used in their renewed status. Much of the present cooperation between Latin American labor leaders derives from this period of exile and "mixing". A good example of this is Auguste Malave V., Gonzalez Navarro and Pinto of Venezuela.

In 1952, Col Marcos Perez Jimenez, now in jail, assumed the top position in his country and persecution of the trade union movement became intensified. Arbitrary action of the most unrestrained kind characterized the period. The Petroleum Workers, for example, were forced in 1953 to sign an agreement with management. The Government then created a synthetic labor movement with a name which was very bad usage of Spanish (Movimiento Obrero Sindical Nacional de Trabajadores) which was later changed to Confederacion Nacional de Trabajadores.

The Communists, on the other hand, were allowed by Perez Jimenez regime to have almost a free hand in their organizing activities with Venezuelan workers. By 1958 the legitimate trade unions were in very acute difficulties and the Communists took fullest advantage of the situation by operating both above and underground. They played both ends against the middle in such a fashion that no matter who won out it would be possible for one of their "wings" to envelop the situation and take over. In 1958 Perez Jimenez was ousted and the trade union exiles came back. Opposition political elements favored the formation of a provisional government including elements of Accion Democratica, Social-Christian and other movements including the Communists who claimed to have been faithfully of the opposition. All this was happening at the very time when Castro was seizing power in Cuba. The provisional government was headed by Admiral Wolfgang Larizabal who quickly restored freedom to the trade unions.

New trade unions appeared in the form of Petroleum Workers Federation. Free national presidential elections followed in which Betancourt nosed out Admiral Larizabal. Just as at previous times workers have struck to show their opposition to a regime, so on this occasion workers struck to show their support of Betancourt as elected President and to make certain that the military would not mistake their position in case they attempted another power grab.

*****Note: On Mid-Term or final, one question due on strikes and their political effects.

It should be noted that the CTV contains COPEI as well as Accion Democratica members and even a few Communists. But it helped put through vital reform legislation, e.g. land reform, which helped to create a genuine power base for Accion D. with the peasantry. People in the rural areas appear to have been genuinely won over by reforms. In Oct. 1964, LEONI, Minister of Labor in the Betancourt Government, won election to the Presidency. Communists tried every trick in the book to block him and

The UTC in Colombia is now thinking of establishing itself as a Party. Should this develop it would constitute an interesting phase of evolution because until now the relationships between trade unions and parties have been of two kinds only:

- 1) The trade union is a creature and instrument of a party.
- 2) The party is a creature of the trade union.

and now, possibly in Colombia, a third phase:

THE TRADE UNION THAT IS OF ITSELF A PARTY.