



A Decade of Revolution in Cuba

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April 1959	May 17, 1959	1960–1962	June 1960	July 6, 1960	August 23, 1960
Castro visits United Nations in New York	Agrarian reform law introduced	14,000 Cuban children are sent without parents to the United States in Operation Pedro Pan	U.S. oil refineries refuse to refine Soviet crude, resulting in nationalization; more nationalizations follow	United States cuts Cuban sugar quota by 700,000 tons	Cuban Federation of Women (FMC) founded

Some fifty years on, the Cuban Revolution remains a powerfully polarizing symbol.¹ Ideologues on both the left and the right still invoke the Cuban Revolution as a story of good versus evil, as something that is vibrant or nearly dead, and seem largely incapable of imagining it in historical (as something that changes over time) or ambiguous terms. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara are Third World heroes, standing up to U.S. imperialism on behalf of the poor. They represent an evil form of authoritarianism, and drove almost 10 percent of the island’s population into exile. The Revolution taught the illiterate to read, provided healthcare to the poor, and reshaped the Cuban economy in spite of a crippling blockade. The revolutionaries were bumbling bureaucrats, relied on Soviet subsidies for decades, and ultimately made the island (once again) a haven for sex tourism in their effort to save themselves. Che was a model for the best kinds of youthful idealism and rebellion. Che was an incompetent ideologue who led a generation of naïve youths to their deaths.

Viewed together, these competing narratives provide a baffling portrait of revolutionary Cuba. When we add to that our current tendency to fetishize and massify star power, stories of the Revolution veer into the absurd. As Figure 8.1 attests, the complex ways in which ideology, youthful rebellion, and mass marketing have become embedded in narratives of the



Figure 8.1 Iconic Che cartoon

Source: Cartoon by Matthew Diffie. The New Yorker Collection / Cartoon Bank.

Revolution can leave us shaking our heads. The Revolution becomes an empty signifier—it can represent just about anything you might desire.

Then again, Bart Simpson on a t-shirt worn by Che Guevara, in a cartoon in the *New Yorker*, actually makes some sense. We understand how all these images are linked together because the Cuban government has taken a defiant attitude towards an imperial power through both its symbolic repertoire and its material acts for more than fifty years. Bart may be no revolutionary, but we can understand his resistance to unjust authority (Principal Seymour Skinner, Homer Simpson, and Nelson Muntz). Bart also shares a certain charisma with the icons of the Revolution. Like Castro and Che, he is quick-witted, intelligent, and a born leader for the weak, willing to stand up to bullies at risk to his own life.

Bart, of course, is a cartoon. Che and Fidel were idealistic revolutionaries, men willing to use violence in order to reshape Cuba in their image. Given this rather significant distinction, the fact that we can relate to Che and Fidel through Bart Simpson ought to give us

pause. It tells us something about how North Americans have made meaning of the events in Cuba since the 1950s, how they have made the Revolution into a legend that serves their narrative needs (a need, for example, for youthful rebel heroes or despotic villains). It tells us very little about Cuba.

If we are to move beyond this problem, we must seek to understand the Cuban Revolution, along with Che and Fidel, as phenomena in time. Unlike cartoon figures, the Revolution and its leaders lived through specific historical moments, and changed along with global historical events. Even if part of Che's appeal was that he died young in a failed Bolivian Revolution (1967), he did leave a complex imprint on the historical record, and was fundamentally a man of the 1960s. Bart Simpson, on the other hand, will forever be ten years old, and seems to live out of time. He is a simple and enduring symbol of the youthful rebel spirit, leaving no actual victims in his wake and is as relevant today as he was when he was created in 1987. Real people don't enjoy that luxury. They impact other's lives in substantive ways, and they either change with the times or get left behind, dead or forgotten.

If we are thinking about change over time, we might begin by asking a simple question: when was the Cuban Revolution? A literal answer would focus on the violent conflict during 1957 and 1958, when a guerrilla movement led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, Camilo Cienfuegos, Che Guevara, and others, fought Fulgencio Batista's regime to a standstill, helped discredit the government in the eyes of the United States (so that military support was cut off), and took their time while a broad opposition coalition came together to force Batista out of power. The Revolution, in this sense, was over on January 1, 1959, when rebels marched gloriously through the streets of Cuban cities.

With Batista gone, it was unclear what would happen next. The rebels were a loose coalition of different opposition groups, not a single army. The fluidity of the moment represented an opportunity for whoever might assert their control over the situation, and it was then that Fidel Castro's political and rhetorical skills became fully evident. In the weeks following January **first Castro** made dozens of speeches and public appearances, declaring over and over again both the end of tyranny and the beginning of some as yet unspecified process. He mostly avoided talking about agendas, and focused his energies on transforming himself into the undisputed savior of the nation.

This helps to explain a photo taken while Castro spoke at Camp Colombia, an old army barracks, on January 8, 1959, which became one of the most powerful images we have of these early days. It records a speech that was not unlike many he gave during his victorious descent on Havana, full of exhortations to unity, promises of real change, and vague threats to his enemies. At some point during the speech, doves were released in the crowd (rumors always had them descending from the sky). They flew through the air and settled on the podium. One even sat on Castro's shoulders (Figure 8.2). Critics claim the fix was in, that Castro had seed for the birds or that the spotlight trained on Castro attracted them to him. It did not matter. The doves, read popularly both as a sign of peace and of divine approval of Castro's role as *El Comandante* (the Commander), sealed some unspoken deal. Castro, as the Revolution, would save the Cuban people.²

Castro's words and deeds signaled the next phase of the revolutionary process, which linked consolidation of the new regime to the transformation of Cuban society. The cross-class alliances that overthrew Batista rapidly disintegrated as Fidel asserted power within the new coalition and implemented a radical egalitarian transformation. He announced

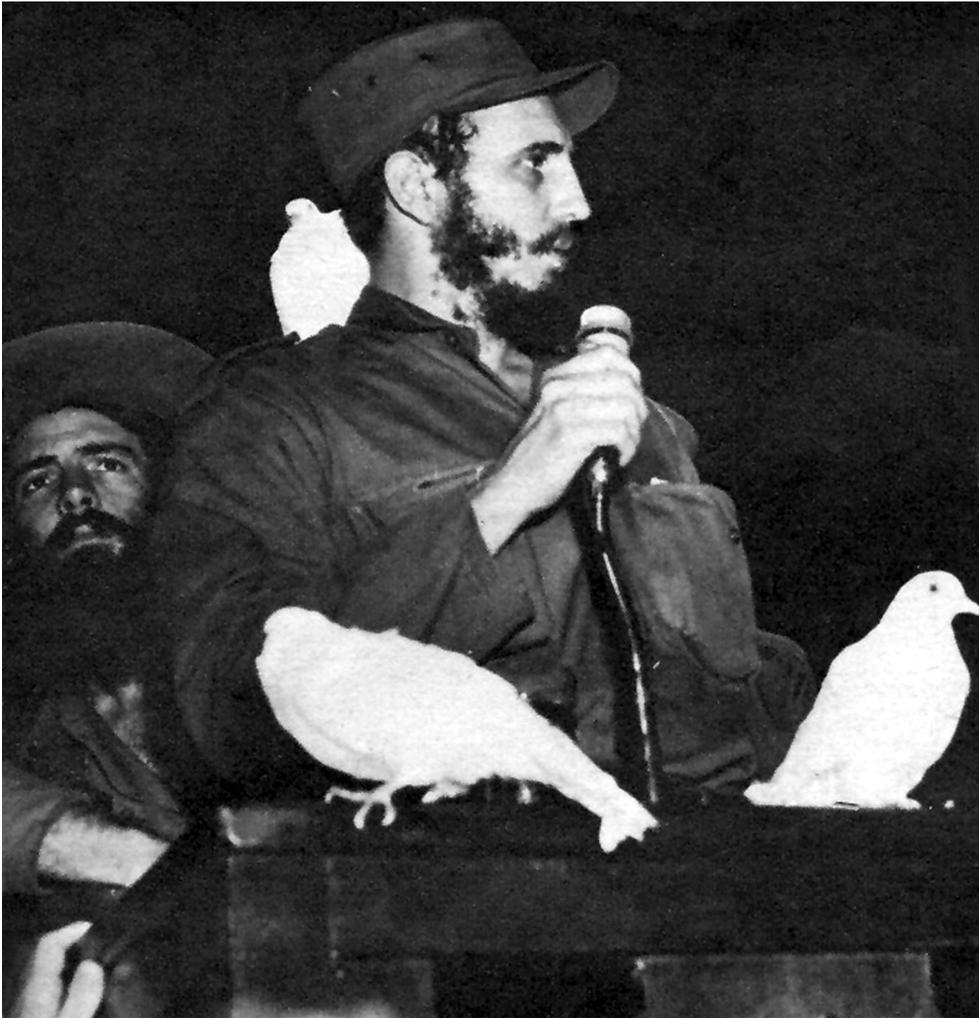


Figure 8.2 Fidel Castro and the doves.

land reforms, the nationalization of foreign property, and decided to build closer ties to the Soviet Union. He drove thousands of opponents into exile. At once radical and authoritarian, his government was simultaneously a revolution and a socialist regime intent on concentrating power.

The distinction between a regime and a revolution is not simply academic. The very term *revolution* implies a transformation, and has been used again and again across Latin America to denote moments in which the social and political order was overturned. The 1910 Mexican Revolution, the 1952 Bolivian Revolution, and the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution saw old systems collapse and new political actors create more inclusive political orders. At some point each of these new regimes also seemed less like radical transformative governments and more like entrenched power blocs defending their own interests. The “Revolution” in each of these cases then became an argument. If you could claim to represent

the Revolution, you were the legitimate heirs of the last popular upheaval, and thus the true representatives of the people. Mexico's *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI), for example, ruled the country as the heirs of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata for seventy-one years. This claim suggested that the Mexican Revolution had never ended, and that the best way poor people could see their interests served was to work with, and not against the state.

A similar, but even more powerful sentiment has long been attached to the Cuban Revolution. Even in 1959 Fidel insisted that the Revolution was not an event, but a process. Over time, the long-standing antipathy of the United States and the sense of incompleteness that has plagued the island have reinforced this claim. If you take the regime's rhetoric at face value, the Revolution is still not over, the battle is still being fought, and Cubans must remain loyal, forever, until victory.³

For more than half a century, this merging of Revolution–nation–regime has dominated everyday life in Cuba. It has shaped politics, social life, and even private affairs, leaving what was once one of the most dynamic and open societies in Latin America closed to most forms of political expression. Near constant surveillance, or at least a fear of surveillance, has produced a society where distrust is ever-present, where acts of criticism are carefully framed to avoid detection, and where individuals are acutely aware of their powerlessness.

As masters of political management, the regime has spent decades perfecting the craft of responding to growing disaffection by making limited concessions, and then rescinding those concessions just as quickly. Stressful moments may bring new busses or increased rations, restrictions on the entry into hotels might be lifted, or dollars (and even cell phones) legalized. These privileges may also be taken away in an instant. As long as the United States remains the enemy, Cubans must live in the Revolution, which links Cuban nationalism and Socialist revolution so seamlessly that to critique the Revolution is to be a traitor to the Cuban nation. And to do that is to opt for social and economic marginalization, the possibility of jail, and perhaps exile.

The threat may be constant, but the regime is not. There is little in the experience since the 1950s that suggests that the Revolution can be understood as a stable or singular phenomenon. Rather, the regime has taken a heterodox approach to changing Cuban society, keeping itself in power, coping with changing international circumstances, and dealing with their own successes and failures. Even Castro narrated different phases of the Revolution—the Push towards Communism during the 1960s (discussed below), the Retreat to Socialism of the 1970s (promoting soviet-style planning, material incentives, and limited private enterprise), the Rectification of the 1980s (when limited private enterprise was eliminated), and since 1989 the Special Period in a Time of Peace (the name seems fittingly empty of content). The only constant in Cuba's recent past has been the U.S. embargo, and the possibility of blaming all failures on the unflagging hostility of the U.S. government. One need not be too cynical to imagine that at critical moments of potential thawing in United States–Cuban relations, Castro actively sought to renew this enmity, as without it he would have no one to blame for Cuba's problems. How many of us recall that in February 1996 Castro shot down the Miami-based planes flown by *Brothers to the Rescue* (an anti-Castro group that was dropping pamphlets on the island) at the very moment when the Clinton administration seemed to be on the verge of Changing U.S. policy towards Cuba?

Making a Revolution

With an annual per capita income of \$353 in 1959, Cuba was hardly a poor country by Latin American standards. Cuba was, however, a highly unequal society, one of the most unequal in the Americas. Rural workers earned only about \$91 annually, leaving the country with a Gini coefficient of around 0.57.⁴ The economic instability of the sugar industry (almost one-quarter of the workforce was employed in sugar, leaving them idle four months per year) and foreign domination of the economy (among other things, 75 percent of arable land was foreign owned) exacerbated these inequalities, generating twin sets of grievances for ordinary Cubans. Though they relied on sugar and the United States for their livelihoods, both were also a source of misery.

The appropriate means to liberate the country from these dependencies were far from clear. While the M-26-7 (named for the origins of their movement in the failed July 26, 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba) under Fidel Castro grabbed most headlines and clearly led the opposition, Batista fell because of a concerted effort that included rural guerrillas, an urban underground, and striking workers. His fate was sealed when the police and military refused to support the regime in late 1958. A small minority believed that all the opposition needed to do was topple the dictator, and that further reform was unnecessary. Many more believed that they needed to establish stable democratic institutions, like those imagined in earlier political struggles (as recently as 1940). Most Cubans agreed that their political parties were hopelessly rotten, and needed to be remade with entirely new faces. There was likewise considerable popular support for limited economic and social reforms, especially those that would put foreign owned assets into the hands of Cubans.

The differing agendas proposed in 1959 were not easily reconciled, and any faction that managed to consolidate their hold on power would have to do so in a perilous setting. Too much change would alienate the United States and powerful economic interests. In the past the enemies of reform had been quite capable of scuttling even minor efforts (notably during the regime of Ramón Grau San Martín in 1933). Yet many revolutionaries were unwilling to settle for meager results, and could defend their interests with weapons. Eastern peasants demanded immediate land reform. Urban workers demanded immediate 20 percent wage increases, better working conditions, and more control of the shop floor. Others demanded rent freezes, housing, education reform, women's rights, and the removal of Batista era government officials.

In coping successfully with these various demands, Castro proved to be an extraordinarily savvy politician. He found ways to isolate (or execute) his rivals, to build a tight-knit and loyal following, to ensure his own survival, and concentrate power in his own hands. All of this he accomplished while also enacting concrete measures that responded to popular demands. The March 1959 Urban Reform Law mandated substantial rent reductions (50 percent for rent under \$100). Telephone and utility rates were reduced, wages increased, and the property of high government officials seized. The Agrarian Law of May 1959 restricted landholdings to 1,000 acres, with limited exceptions. Together, these reforms dramatically reduced poverty in the early years of the Castro regime. By 1963 Cuba's Gini coefficient had fallen to 0.28.

Reform meant confrontation with the United States, and here Castro again proved adept at turning circumstances to his favor. As it became clearer during 1959–60 that radical

reform meant a violent clash with the United States, the country grew increasingly polarized. Though much of the opposition was Cuban in origin, Castro managed to cast acts of sabotage, attempted assassinations, and any number of protests as the work of the CIA (in part, because sometimes they were). Cubans, he argued, must unify to confront Cuba's internal and external enemies. He also increasingly argued that the only way to do this was through an embrace of communism. As he convinced more and more Cubans that a liberated Cuba depended on his communist Revolution, he was also able to convince many that opposition amounted to treason.

With every successful confrontation with the United States, Cubans saw a leader who could defend their nation as no other ever had. He bravely went to New York and Washington, taking the rhetorical battle directly to the enemy. He survived their assassination attempts unscathed. And after the failed invasion at the *Playa Girón* (Bay of Pigs) on April 17, 1961, he could rightly claim to have repelled an American invasion. In the face of such a compelling heroic narrative, moderates who called for elections could be dismissed as bourgeois dupes, traitors to the Revolution who would allow an intractable enemy to weaken the nation by fomenting electoral discord. Dissent became criminal (100,000 suspected dissidents were in jail by the end of April 1961).

Radical economic policies had a similar effect on Castro's hold on power. By the end of 1961, Castro had nationalized 85 percent of Cuban industry. As more and more of the economy wound up in the hands of the state, the regime eliminated certain professions (including insurance, real estate, and law), and many of Castro's enemies and rivals lost their livelihoods. Without opportunities in Cuba, these potential opponents of the regime were increasingly inclined to consider exile. The pull to leave was exacerbated by the Kennedy administration's offer of asylum on exceptionally easy terms to Cubans, a policy designed to isolate the regime but which in fact made it easier for Castro to eliminate the opposition.⁵ With the opposition increasingly ensconced in Miami, revolutionary militants took over virtually all facets of the island's economic and political life.

Had the Castro regime been simply a run-of-the-mill authoritarian government, its success in consolidating its hold on the state and isolating or eliminating the opposition might have been viewed as an end in and of itself, or at the very least a propitious moment to begin stripping the country of its assets and opening off-shore bank accounts. This was not however, regime like those that then ruled Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. Castro wanted control, but he wanted to use that power to bring Cubans together to collectively remake, defend, and police their nation.

Democratic processes could have linked the masses to the state, but would also create opportunities for the opposition to upend the revolutionary process. Castro then needed structures that would empower the masses, but would do so in ways that limited the autonomy individual actors enjoyed in liberal democracies. He needed to control the process even as he created a system that allowed popular groups to participate. The way he did this was by creating a series of mass organizations whose members had access to the state to make their demands and participate in the political life of the nation, but required that they swear complete loyalty to the state as a precondition for participating. The first of these organizations, *Asociación de Juventud Rebelde* (Association of Rebel Youth, AJR), was created in March 1960. On the advice of Vilma Espín, a fellow M-26-7 fighter and then Castro's sister in law, the regime founded the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Cuban Federation of

Women, FMC) in August 1960. In September 1960, after a public rebuke from the (Organization of American States (OAS), the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, CDRs) were convened. The *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (National Small Farmers Association, ANAP) and *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* (Cuban Workers Confederation, CTC) were likewise turned into mass organizations around this time.

In the heady days of the early 1960s, these associations offered Cubans an opportunity to participate in a process that promised to liberate Cuba from its imperial past, and they attracted tens of thousands of members, who in turn provided critical support for the regime. By the end of 1961, there were 300,000 members in popular militias, and 800,000 in the CDRs. Explicitly charged with physically defending the country from invasion, these groups did much more. Together with other mass organizations they served as pressure groups, demanding any number of benefits from the state, and taking credit for revolutionary programs. They were also instruments for the dissemination of revolutionary fervor, charged with raising consciousness, administering healthcare, encouraging students to go to school and workers to go to work, and as always, ferreting out enemies of the Cuban people.

When the labor ministry introduced new laws mandating secure and safe environments for women, The FMC used these laws to attract new members and new support for the regime. By 1962 the FMC had 376,000 members, many of whom could directly attribute significant life changes to the Revolution. In 1959 one quarter of the women in the workforce were domestic servants, a category that ceased to exist after the Revolution. During the early 1960s FMC efforts helped 19,000 former household servants attend special schools and find new jobs. Tens of thousands were given scholarships, materials, and training to study for new professions, and over a thousand entered the revolutionary vanguard in public administration.

Utopias

Although often undertaken as practical efforts to shore up support for the regime, we should not underestimate the ways early revolutionary projects were linked to a utopian vision of what Cuba could become. Articulated most clearly by Che Guevara, the Revolution was a movement against history, an effort to remake the world. This made particular sense given the challenges the new regime faced. Utopian thinking seemed in some ways the only means to get out of the very real conundrums that Cuba faced as a monoculture society ninety miles away from a hostile super power. At first, the utopian thinking came in a plan to shift the country away from its dependence on sugar exports, to diversify and industrialize Cuba in order to ensure its independence. As Minister of Industry and a principal architect of the land reform, Che directed this transformation.

Either out of pure naiveté or simple desperation, Guevara chose to forgo the socialist phase of revolutionary reform and push Cuba directly into communism. With an eye towards the end of money, Che worked to eliminate cash transactions for food, transportation, and rent. Rejecting the suggestion that he keep market mechanisms in place in order to ensure productivity, Che insisted that Cubans could do away with the law of value, which allocated resources where they were productive instead of where they were most needed. His was a

program of centralized planning, a program in which the state would directly intervene in all aspects of the economy to ensure “balanced” development. He would rely mostly on the willingness of people to sacrifice for the common good in order to make this happen.

Under Che’s economic model, businesses would not be supported because of their viability or efficiency or their capacity to generate enough revenues to cover their costs. They would be supported because they were deemed intrinsically good. Centralized budgeting would allow the government to allocate funds based on ideological rather than economic (read bourgeois) reasons. Wage scales would be eliminated because all workers deserved the same income. Bonuses and overtime would similarly be banned. Even though material incentives were common in the Eastern Bloc, Che argued that they encouraged individualism and undermined the revolutionary project of creating “new men,” with new forms of consciousness. Hard work would instead be recognized with moral rewards—banners, flags, pins, and plaques rewarding the contribution of workers to the Revolution. These would in turn help foment widespread revolutionary consciousness, which Che understood as an essential ingredient in the battle against Cuba’s powerful enemies.

The gendered quality of this project was inescapable. Guevara’s new man was just that. For all its pretenses to feminism and nods to Vilma Espín and the FMC, the leadership of the M-26-7 viewed males, females, and their sexuality in extraordinarily conservative ways. As images of Castro in the fields cutting sugar cane attested, the Revolution was the work of strong-backed men—men who enjoyed a cigar, a strong drink, and took pleasure in the sensuality of revolutionary women (Figure 8.3). This image linked Castro’s physical strength to the survival of the Revolution against its enemies.



Figure 8.3 Castro cutting cane as a part of the 1970 Cuban sugar harvest

Source: Photo by Gilberto Ante/Roger Viollet/Getty Images

We see this both in the ways that Castro's heterosexual masculinity was fetishized, and in the fact that homosexuals were actively persecuted by the regime into the 1990s. In the *machista* culture of the Revolution, their attraction to males was linked to national weakness, decadence, and U.S. imperialism. The New Man could not tolerate homosexuals, narcissists who were supposedly obsessed with self-satisfying pleasure and debauchery; the essence of the counter-revolution.

Prostitutes likewise drew special ire from the regime. The sex trades were banned in the early revolutionary period, and former prostitutes were sometimes given opportunities to train for a new career. Like homosexuality, prostitution was linked to carnal pleasure, decadence, and U.S. imperialism (after all, North Americans were frequent sex-tourists in Cuba before 1959). The prohibition produced at least one memorable tale of a drug-dependent prostitute who turned her life around and received a university education as a result of the Revolution,⁶ but one supposes that not all prostitutes viewed the regime's efforts to outlaw their profession favorably. The sex trades had always been one of the few ways that poor, uneducated women could earn a decent living, and quickly returned to prominence in the 1990s when Castro embraced tourism as a means to earn foreign revenues.

These experiences remind us of the difference between imagining and actually creating a new man, or new society. The new Cuba was the vision of a revolutionary vanguard, and in creating the new society the regime invariably attempted to impose a series of practices on Cubans, some of which were unwelcome. The Revolution promised to liberate women, but drove millions (if you include domestic workers) out of work. Indeed, the end of domestic service, prostitution, and the flight of many middle-class women to the United States actually caused a reduction in the number of women in the workforce during the 1960s.

Later the Revolution would promise domestic equality under the Family Code (1975), which required Cuban males to do an equal share of the housework. Like the ban on prostitution and domestic service, it was a utopian idea, dreamed up by the vanguard, and its affect on actual Cuban women was quite uneven. Yet even if we mock these top-down reforms for their idealism we should not forget the substantive changes Cuban women saw in their lives during these years. In part because of the exodus after 1959, in part because the Cuban state did open educational and professional opportunities for women, and in part due to the efforts of the FMC, by the end of the 1960s Cuban women found it easier to pursue a career, to get a divorce, and to make their own reproductive decisions than women anywhere else in Latin America. All could visit a doctor if they were sick, and virtually none faced the kind of desperate hunger that had affected millions before 1959, and still affected millions in other parts of the region.

Dystopias

There is no question that some aspects of Cuba's experience during the 1960s are best read as comedies. It seems quaint to think that anyone ever believed that moral incentives—asking workers to be more productive because it is good, rather than because they would personally benefit—would ever work. Few people today believe that the state has the capacity to transform consciousness in even small ways, let alone direct the massive

transformation from individualistic thinking and towards the communist consciousness that Che envisioned. Our own awareness of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism in Eastern Bloc countries (and Cuba) long ago put the lie to that promise.

We need only examine the rate of absenteeism in Cuba during these years to see the problems in Che's theories. By 1967 the daily absentee rate at work was about 20 percent across the country, and 50 percent in some regions, including Oriente (the heartland of the Revolution). In part these rates were due to low morale, and in part ~~it was~~ due to the fact that mismanagement elsewhere left workers standing in long lines for food, provisions, and buses instead of working. Even accounting for these factors however, we are left with the clear impression that Cubans effectively went on strike to protest moral rewards.

It was not simply moral incentives that failed. Economic diversification failed. Industrialization failed. Centralized budgeting failed spectacularly. The government confronted food shortages as early as 1962, when it began rationing food, clothing and consumer items. By 1963 production volumes of any number of staple crops had plummeted and production across the economy had declined. The sugar harvest also fell, from 6.7 million tons in 1961 to 3.8 million in 1963. Facing pressure from the Soviets and an economy in chaos, Castro then turned his attention to increasing sugar exports in order to improve Cuba's balance of payments.

Even this was something of a disaster. As a part of a lurching series of policy shifts during the 1960s, Castro abandoned Che's management strategies in 1964 (Che himself went off to promote worldwide revolution), and committed most of the country's productive capacity to producing a ten million ton sugar harvest by 1970. Cuba had never had a harvest this large, and if successful, it would be an enormous victory for the Revolution. Road construction, manufacturing, port facilities, and agriculture were all refocused to serve sugar. Most other economic activities were neglected.

It may have made sense to prop up Cuban exports by reinvesting in the neglected sugar sector, but beyond emphasizing sugar, Castro also punished those sectors that might have dynamically supplemented sugar exports by selling to local markets. Renewed land reform in 1963 concentrated land in large state run export facilities (in sharp contrast to first land reform in 1959, which put land in to the hands of peasants). Working under the logic that, if peasants possessed land, they would work on it to the detriment of the state farm, the state increasing denied small-scale farmers access to land of their own. Those most negatively affected by this decision were some of the Revolution's most ardent supporters, peasants who had been providing a wide range of fruits and vegetables to a shortage plagued ~~the~~ domestic market since 1959.⁷

Fearing that small businessmen also represented a threat to the regime, Castro nationalized 57,000 small businesses in 1968. These were not pre-revolutionary holdouts. Most had been established since 1959. Among the prohibited businesses were street vendors who provided essential services, including sellers of fruit, bread, coffee, eggs, sandwiches, and other goods. These small businessmen and women worked in the space between the informal and formal economy, selling some goods they got from official sources and others they purchased on the black market; commodities grown on small farms and sent to market without the permission of the state. As such they also filled a critical need for Cuban consumers, because state cafeterias and stores could not meet the needs of the people. And with the formal sector unable to fill the void left by the absence of the informal economy, shortages

became worse after the street vendors were banned. Spare parts for cars, fresh fruit, and even coffee were increasingly available only through the underground economy. Minor protests flared here and there, and graffiti attacking the regime began to show up on walls in Havana.

Even the mass organizations that earlier helped legitimize the revolutionary state were failing by the mid-1960s, their initial promise having faded into bureaucratic intransigence, nepotism, and a tendency to abuse their power and spy on ordinary Cubans. Castro responded with new efforts to win popular support, including a much ballyhooed program called Local Power, and the comical sounding Campaign against the Bureaucracy (parodied in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film, *The Death of a Bureaucrat*). Local Power was (as most Cubans knew) mostly an illusion. By the mid-1960s the mechanisms that had once promised power to the people were chained to the state.

Workers, for instance, saw their unions wither away during these years. They lost the right to strike, and thus to demand higher wages. The grievance commissions that the government put in place to arbitrate work-place conflicts were abandoned in 1964, jettisoned because they sided with workers too often. They were replaced with work councils, which were indirectly charged with enforcing the will of the state and labor discipline. Workers were invited to work cooperatively with management in the councils, where their demands were set aside in favor of efforts to increase productivity, save materials, reduce absenteeism, promote voluntary labor, prevent accidents, and of course, cultivate a revolutionary consciousness. There would be no more bonuses, guaranteed sick days, or strikes.

In a tragically absurd combination of these initiatives, the very mechanisms created to improve the lives of Cubans sometimes did the opposite. During the late 1960s planning was impossible, as the principal planning agencies, JUCEPLAN⁸ and the National Bank, lost 1,500 positions in the Campaign Against Bureaucracy, and could not function because receipts, taxes, cost accounting, and interest were all abolished. The budget itself ceased to exist between 1967 and 1970, replaced by a series of *fidelista* mini-plans. Political control fell to an ever more vanguardist Cuban Communist Party (Fidel's version was founded in 1965), which spent most of its energies demanding revolutionary consciousness and self-sacrifice from Cubans. By 1970 the GDP was barely higher than it had been in 1965, and in per capita terms it was lower.

To be sure, more than mere incompetence hurt the Cubans. They faced the loss of professional technical expertise, and were not always up to the difficult task of reorienting Cuban trade away from the U.S. market and towards the Soviet bloc. The larger freighters that took Cuban sugar to Russian ports needed deeper harbors, more port facilities and warehouses. Inventory needed to be stored, and orders were not quickly filled. Cubans also had to deal with the challenges caused by bad Soviet parts and general shortages of spare parts for their U.S.-made cars, trucks, appliances, and more. Still, in simple terms, Cubans were worse off in 1970 than they had been in 1959. When it became clear that on top of all of this, the sugar harvest was going to fail to reach its goal (in the end it was 8.5 million tons), Castro appeared before an enormous crowd in the Plaza de la Revolución on July 26 to offer his resignation.

Cubans refused his offer, resoundingly. The question is: why? We might start with Castro's charisma. It is difficult to divorce the simple power of Castro's magnetism from his actual policies in the early years of his regime. He was rare among politicians for his ability to stir the crowd. Cubans also responded to his common touch, his willingness to get

down from his jeep and cut cane with the workers, his capacity to appear anywhere and everywhere, his tirelessness, and his simple ability to stir up feelings of fraternal (and later paternal) love. These qualities made certain failings worthy of forgiveness. Nonetheless, while Castro's appeal ought to inform our interpretation of these events, it does not fully explain why the crowd refused his resignation.

It may be that the crowd's response was some sort of common emotional catharsis, the expression of the sense that his failure was everyone's failure. While not exactly a democratic mandate for thirty-eight more years in office, we could interpret this as a sign of just how successful Castro had been in identifying himself and his revolutionary struggle as synonymous with the Cuban people. Still, even this is not enough to understand the enduring popularity of Fidel Castro in 1970 in spite of the repeated failures of the 1960s. To understand this we need to come to terms with the fact that millions of Cubans shared Castro's utopian dreams, his belief that Cubans had to remain ever vigilant in defending their nation against the United States, and his sense that many of these crises were the fault of sinister foreign elements.

We see this in more than just the crowd's response. Moral incentives, for example, produced high rates of absenteeism. They also inspired millions of Cubans to sacrifice for their country/revolution. Volunteer work, begun in October 1959 to prepare the Havana waterfront for a convention of travel agents, drew many millions of participants during the 1960s. Two hundred thousand Cubans volunteered for a teacher's brigade committed to reducing illiteracy during the 1960s, which reduced the adult illiteracy rate from 21 percent in 1959 to 13 percent by 1970. In 1970 alone 1.2 million Cubans left their jobs and worked in the sugar harvest.

Moral incentives may have been a planning disaster, but in many ways they were an ideological success. They highlighted the need for sacrifice, and acted as a means of linking the people's sacrifice to a national revolutionary project that would not otherwise succeed. When Cubans suffered some form of deprivation, they were doing the work of the Revolution. One could be proud, and ought not complain. Moreover, Cubans did believe that they were a poor people living on a rich island. Who could challenge the argument that, absent the negative impact of neo-colonialism and capitalism, Cubans would be prosperous, even as prosperous as the North Americans? And who could argue with the material benefits many poor people gained under Castro?

Their idealism spoke of a generational moment, framed both by the cold war and Cubans' long history of fighting imperial rule. Twenty years later their willingness to contribute to voluntary labor was not nearly as strong as it was early on, and Cubans would increasingly be noted more for their cynicism than their idealism. These however, were heady times. Most Cubans were willing to suffer, and suffer a great deal, if it would lead to a better world.

The Documents: Over Time

Knowing what would become of Cuba's revolution in the 1970s and beyond, it might be tempting to dismiss those cane-cutting revolutionaries as naïve. Like North American anti-war protestors, Mexican students who marched before the 1968 Olympics demanding

greater democracy, and the jubilant Czechoslovakians who celebrated the Prague Spring before the Soviet tanks rolled in, today the Cubans who sacrificed themselves in pursuit of becoming new men seem so very young, and so very distant. It is good to have this perspective, because it reminds us that the 1960s were a specific historical era in Cuba and elsewhere. This perspective also reminds us that the era was short lived. Cuba was not alone in growing increasingly conservative and authoritarian after 1970.

It is this shift that compels us to consider time very closely when we imagine the Cuban Revolution. Neither the Cuban state nor its enemies prefers this approach. The Cuban state represents the Revolution as timeless, as a single phenomenon that connects the M-26-7 Movement, the Bay of Pigs, and the idealism of the 1960s to the less than ideal present, holding that all the ideals of the era could have been accomplished if not for the implacable hostility of the United States. Its enemies prefer a stripped down and simplistic version of an unchanging evil, a totalitarian threat that is embodied by an unchanging Castro regime (even if Raúl has replaced Fidel). These images serve certain political ends very well. A dysfunctional relationship with the United States has reinforced the power of the regime for half a century (The 1996 Helms-Burton Act in the United States, for instance, strengthened the regime by mandating that U.S. relations with Cuba would not be normalized until all those who had lost property in the Revolution received full restitution). It has also provided a flash point for U.S. politics, creating opportunities for U.S. politicians to win votes in South Florida. What these images don't do is tell us much about what has changed over half a century. And they tell us almost nothing about how Cubans' perspective on their government has changed over time.

In order to attempt to capture some of this change, below we present five documents. The first comes from 1965, the second 1990, and the third, fourth, and fifth from the very recent past. The first is an iconic example of the optimism of the 1960s. The second, written in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, offers a perspective on the dashed hopes and dreams of that era through a meditation on the tensions between Cuba's New Man and the Cuba that has been lost through the exile of so many people. The final documents consider just what is left of the revolutionary dream after all these decades, and offer a perspective on the corrosive effects that five decades of authoritarian rule have had on life on the island.

Each document is in its own way a commentary on the tensions between idealist reform and authoritarian rule that first surfaced during the 1960s, and each is informed by a loyalty to something (Cuba, the Revolution) that over time became increasingly difficult to disentangle from the deleterious effects of one party rule. The author of the first document is no longer alive, but the authors of the other texts remained in Cuba, choosing their love of the patria and lingering attachment to the ideals of the 1960s over the freedom and prosperity of exile. That in and of itself should remind us that this era continues to offer a promise that we are well advised to take seriously.

Document 8.1 is a letter that Che Guevara wrote to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *Marcha*, in March 1965. The letter represents one of Che's signature intellectual accomplishments, written while on a tour of Asia, Africa, and Europe. While it seems clear in retrospect that the tour represented an effort by Castro to move Che out of the administrative responsibilities he had assumed in Cuba, at the time it also made a great deal of sense to promote Che as the face of the utopian project. This essay

contributed in considerable ways to building the legend of Che the visionary revolutionary, as it contains his clearest description of the New Man, the figure who promised to realize the revolutionary project. Because of this, this essay has long been read in contradictory ways; as an ideal to live up to, and as an impossibly naïve work of propaganda.

By the time Che wrote the New Man essay, a clear majority of those who remained on the island supported the regime, especially because of its success in defending the country from what Cubans understood as a foreign invasion. Those who spoke critically of the Revolution often found themselves in prison or forced out of the country, often the former leading to the latter. Once in exile in Miami, New York, or Madrid, their writing came to be characterized by bitter feelings of loss and a clear and unremitting hatred of Castro. Even if they had once been somewhat sympathetic to the reform agenda, in their stories the regime was violent, arbitrary, cynical, the worst kind of dictatorship.⁹

On the island these writers were often called *gusanos* (worms), an insult that suggested treason on their part. In the 1960s it was relatively easy to dismiss critics in this way, in part because the Revolution had such an array of genuine boosters who had remained in Cuba, including a new generation of artists, filmmakers, poets and writers who were producing brilliant and innovative work in support of the regime. These artists were not simple stooges for the regime. Much of their work was mildly critical of the government, mocking bureaucrats and demanding the best from the Revolution. They were tolerated because they were producing brilliant work, work that found an audience around the world, work that signaled the openness of the Cuban Revolution to self-criticism.

This happy state of affairs came to an abrupt end with the arrest of the poet Heriberto Padilla in 1971. Imprisoned, tortured, and forced to make a humiliating confession and name supposed subversives in his circle of friends, his experience had a deeply chilling affect on Cuban intellectual life. In its aftermath, the Cuban government began to exercise considerable control over the arts, and many of the intellectuals who had imagined themselves as revolutionaries during the 1960s increasingly found that there was no place for them in Cuban society.

Some chose exile. Others developed an increasingly sophisticated repertoire of strategies for critiquing the regime while remaining within the revolutionary fold. Jesús Díaz (who was only forced into exile after many years of critical work), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Senel Paz, the author of Document 8.2, wrote, produced plays and films, and generally skirted a fine line between art and politics in their work. The text presented here, which is an excerpt from Paz' brilliant short story, *El bosque, el lobo y el hombre nuevo* (The Forest, the Wolf, and the New Man¹⁰) had life both as literature and as the basis for one of the most important films in Cuban cinema history, *Fresa y chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate, released in 1993), which was directed by Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío. Published in 1990 and set in 1979, the story considers the relationship between a young, upright revolutionary student (the archetypal New Man) who is studying at the University of Havana and his urbane homosexual friend, Diego. They embody many of the conflicts between the new, revolutionary Cuba and the bourgeois elites of the *ancien regime*, with the crux of the story focusing on whether or not Diego can remain in Cuba. Diego is a fierce nationalist, and swears loyalty to the Revolution, yet his need to express himself freely ultimately leaves him with no choice but to emigrate. The selection here is drawn from the portion of the story where Diego elects to leave.

Paz set this story in 1979 largely because this was a moment when the ideals of the Revolution remained viable to many within and outside of Cuba. The Soviet Union was still supporting Cuba then, and Fidel's charisma had not faltered much during a decade of significant transitions away from the free-for-all of 1960s era reform (and its vast dreams, as embodied in Che's work) and towards a heavily institutionalized Revolution that was more closely aligned with the Soviet model. In 1979 it seemed that the Revolution still had life, and could promise better standards of living and greater equality, even if it could not promise the political freedoms, freedom of artistic expression, and rich intellectual life that many in the island's artistic and intellectual circles desired.

Most Cubans knew that some of the Revolution's accomplishments were illusory, that beneath all the bluster Cubans continued to struggle, continued to hoard dollars and rely on the black market for many of their necessities. Given the chance, many would choose exile over life on the island, as 125,000 did when Fidel Castro briefly lifted exit restrictions in 1980 (The Mariel boat lift). Even then, few could imagine just how crucial Soviet aid was to maintaining the Revolution. They would discover the extent of their dependence after 1989, when the collapse of the Soviet Union devastated the island's economy, bringing widespread hunger and devastation. For tens of thousands of Cubans their only escape from the disaster lay in shabbily constructed flotation devices that they hoped would deliver them to the United States. By the early 1990s, over a million Cubans were living in the United States.

Writing from 1990, Paz offered 1979 as a moment in which the choice between freedom and equality still seemed possible. From 1989 forward, Cubans were faced with different challenges. They had to determine how to revive the economy, were forced to open the island to trade and private investment, to reinvigorate the hotel and restaurant sector in search of hard currencies, and to turn a blind eye while sex tourism again flourished. By the end of the 1990s a taxi driver could earn many times what a doctor was paid, and many of the vaunted accomplishments of the 1960s seemed like distant history.

Yaoni Sánchez, the author of Documents 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, is a product of this "Special Period." She is also one of the most accomplished bloggers Latin America has produced since the advent of the form. Her work is featured on her own blog (*Generación Y*), on the Huffington Post, and elsewhere. Since beginning her blog in 2007, she has also been one of the most read critics of the Castro regime anywhere.

Except of course, in Cuba, where her blog has been repeatedly blocked, and where Cubans are often forced to learn what she is saying by hearing about it from abroad. In the past she furtively wrote her short postings on her own computer, put them on a thumb drive, and then emailed them from hotel computers and internet cafes to the friends who maintained her blog's German website. She would also use her time in cafes to download volumes of information onto flash drives and then take them home so that she could read the material she sought (she has long maintained that the thumb drive is an essential tool for social and political change in Cuba). Sánchez has been harassed and detained (at one point tweeting out her arrest even as it happened). So far she has refused to leave.

Her impact in Cuba is difficult to ascertain. In some sense she is like the critics long produced by the regime, tolerated to a point, and then forced into exile. This worked in the past in part because critics had access to relatively limited audiences, though it is not clear that this logic applies to people like Sánchez, whose work defies censorship in part because of the nature of the internet. At once funny, sad, and inspiring, and widely read on the

island and off, Sánchez seems to have succeeded in offering an alternative narrative to life in Cuba to the one posited by the regime. Having stayed (she ~~even~~ chose life in Cuba over life in Europe), she can authoritatively claim that she has remained staunchly loyal to the island even if she is a harsh critic of the Castros. Whether or not this points the way to an alternative future depends on her ability to continue to mobilize these new technologies, and whether or not they truly have the capacity to produce change.

Read together, Che Guevara, Senel Paz, and Yaoni Sánchez offer us three dramatically different visions of the promise and possibilities envisioned in the 1960s. Each must be read for the individual proclivities of the author—the fiery idealism of the revolutionary set against the prose of the storyteller and the pointed critiques of the blogger. Each should also be read for the time in which it was created. Guevara’s work could only be a product of the dreams of the 1960s. Paz hearkens back to the 1960s through his own ambivalent take on the New Man. Operating in two periods instead of one, Paz is also telling us something both about the height of the Revolutionary Man and his seeming demise in this story. Sánchez in turn gazes over the rubble of revolutionary reform with a cynicism that is very much of the new millennium.

In considering these texts chronologically, it is possible that we might create a larger narrative of the Revolution, of its birth, maturity, and decline. Then again, it is possible that these three different writers, each separated by decades from the other, are simply describing different worlds, or different places within the same world. This is the challenge we face when we try to sum up an experience as vast and contradictory as the Cuban Revolution.

Document 8.1 Letter from Major Ernesto Che Guevara to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *Marcha* (March, 1965)

Source: Guevara Internet Archive (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm>). Copyright: © Ocean Press, www.oceanbooks.com.au. Reprinted by permission.

I am finishing these notes while travelling through Africa, moved by the desire to keep my promise, although after some delay. I should like to do so by dealing with the topic that appears in the title. I believe it might be of interest to Uruguayan readers.

It is common to hear how capitalist spokesmen use as an argument in the ideological struggle against socialism the assertion that such a social system or the period of building socialism upon which we have embarked, is characterized by the extinction of the individual for the sake of the State. I will make no attempt to refute this assertion on a merely theoretical basis, but will instead establish the facts of the Cuban experience and add commentaries of a general nature. I shall first broadly sketch the history of our revolutionary struggle both before and after the taking of power. As we know, the exact date of the beginning of the revolutionary actions which were to culminate on January 1, 1959, was July 26, 1953. A group of men led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada military garrison in the province of Oriente, in the early hours of the morning of that day. The attack was a failure, the failure became a disaster and the survivors

were imprisoned, only to begin the revolutionary struggle all over again, once they were amnestied.

During this process, which contained only the first seeds of socialism, man was a basic factor. Man—individualized, specific, named—was trusted and the triumph or failure of the task entrusted to him depended on his capacity for action.

Then came the stage of guerrilla warfare. It was carried out in two different environments: the people, an as yet unawakened mass that had to be mobilized, and its vanguard, the guerilla, the thrusting engine of mobilization, the generator of revolutionary awareness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalyst which created the subjective condition necessary for victory. The individual was also the basic factor in the guerilla, in the framework of the gradual proletarianization of our thinking, in the revolution taking place in our habits and in our minds. Each and every one of the Sierra Maestra fighters who achieved a high rank in the revolutionary forces has to his credit a list of noteworthy deeds. It was on the basis of such deeds that they earned their rank.

The First Heroic Stage

It was the first heroic period in which men strove to earn posts of great responsibility, of greater danger, with the fulfillment of their duty as the only satisfaction. In our revolutionary educational work, we often return to this instructive topic. The man of the future could be glimpsed in the attitude of our fighters.

At other times of our history there have been repetitions of this utter devotion to the revolutionary cause. During the October Crisis and at the time of hurricane Flora, we witnessed deeds of exceptional valour and self-sacrifice carried out by an entire people. One of our fundamental tasks from the ideological standpoint is to find the way to perpetuate such heroic attitudes in everyday life.

The Revolutionary Government was established in 1959 with the participation of several members of the "sell-out" bourgeoisie. The presence of the Rebel Army constituted the guarantee of power as the fundamental factor of strength.

Serious contradictions arose which were solved in the first instance in February, 1959, when Fidel Castro assumed the leadership of the government in the post of Prime Minister. This process culminated in July of the same year with the resignation of President Urrutia in the face of mass pressure.

With clearly defined features, there now appeared in the history of the Cuban Revolution a personage which will systematically repeat itself: the masses.

Full and Accurate Interpretation of the People's Wishes

This multifaceted being is not, as it is claimed, the sum total of elements of the same category (and moreover, reduced to the same category by the system imposed upon them) and which acts as a tame herd. It is true that the mass follows its leaders, especially Fidel Castro, without hesitation, but the degree to which he has earned such confidence is due precisely to the consummate interpretation of the people's desires and aspirations, and to the sincere struggle to keep the promises made.

The mass participated in the Agrarian Reform and in the difficult undertaking of the management of the state enterprises; it underwent the heroic experience of Playa Girón it was tempered in the struggle against the groups of bandits armed by the CIA; during the October Crisis it lived one of the most important definitions of modern times and today it continues the work to build socialism.

Looking at things from a superficial standpoint, it might seem that those who speak of the submission of the individual to the State are right; with incomparable enthusiasm and discipline, the mass carries out the tasks set by the government whatever their nature: economic, cultural, defense, sports, etc. The initiative generally comes from Fidel or the high command of the revolution; it is explained to the people, who make it their own. At times, local experiences are taken up by the party and the government and are thereby generalized, following the same procedure.

However, the State at times makes mistakes. When this occurs, the collective enthusiasm diminishes palpably as a result of a quantitative diminishing that takes place in each of the elements that make up the collective, and work becomes paralyzed until it finally shrinks to insignificant proportions; this is the time to rectify.

This was what happened in March, 1962, in the presence of the sectarian policy imposed on the Party by Anibal Escalante.

Dialectical Unity Between Fidel and the Mass

This mechanism is obviously not sufficient to ensure a sequence of sensible measures; what is missing is a more structured relationship with the mass. We must improve this connection in the years to come, but for now, in the case of the initiatives arising on the top levels of government, we are using the almost intuitive method of keeping our ears open to the general reactions in the face of the problems that are posed.

Fidel is a past master at this; his particular mode of integration with the people can only be appreciated by seeing him in action. In the big public meetings, one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations summon forth new vibrations each in the other. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate in a dialogue of growing intensity which reaches its culminating point in an abrupt ending crowned by our victorious battle cry.

What is hard to understand for anyone who has not lived the revolutionary experience is that close dialectical unity which exists between the individual and the mass, in which both are interrelated, and the mass, as a whole composed of individuals, is in turn interrelated with the leaders.

Under capitalism, certain phenomena of this nature can be observed with the appearance on the scene of politicians capable of mobilizing the public, but if it is not an authentic social movement, in which case it is not completely accurate to speak of capitalism, the movement will have the same life span as its promoter or until the rigors of capitalist society put an end to popular illusions. Under capitalism, man is guided by a cold ordinance which is usually beyond his comprehension. The alienated human individual is bound to society as a whole by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value. It acts upon all facets of his life, shaping his road and his destiny.

The Invisible Laws of Capitalism

The laws of capitalism, invisible and blind for most people, act upon the individual without his awareness. He sees only the broadness of a horizon that appears infinite. Capitalist propaganda presents it in just this way, and attempts to use the Rockefeller case (true or not) as a lesson in the prospects for success. The misery that must be accumulated for such an example to arise and the sum total of baseness contributing to the formation of a fortune of such magnitude do not appear in the picture, and the popular forces are not always able to make these concepts clear. (It would be fitting at this point to study how the works of the imperialist countries gradually lose their international class spirit under the influence of a certain complicity in the exploitation of the dependent countries and how this fact at the same time wears away the militant spirit of the masses within their own national context, but this topic is outside the framework of the present note).

In any case we can see the obstacle course which may apparently be overcome by an individual with the necessary qualities to arrive at the finish line. The reward is glimpsed in the distance and the road is solitary. Furthermore, it is a race of wolves: he who arrives does so only at the expense of the failure of others.

I shall now attempt to define the individual, the actor in this strange and moving drama that is the building of socialism, in his two-fold existence as a unique being and a member of the community.

I believe that the simplest approach is to recognise his un-made quality: he is an unfinished product. The flaws of the past are translated into the present in the individual consciousness and constant efforts must be made to eradicate them. The process is two-fold: on the one hand society acts upon the individual by means of direct and indirect education, while on the other hand, the individual undergoes a conscious phase of self-education.

Compete Fiercely With the Past

The new society in process of formation has to compete very hard with the past. This makes itself felt not only in the individual consciousness, weighted down by the residues of an education and an upbringing systematically oriented towards the isolation of the individual, but also by the very nature of this transition period, with the persistence of commodity relations. The commodity is the economic cell of capitalist society; as long as it exists, its effects will make themselves felt in the organization of production and therefore in man's consciousness.

Marx's scheme conceived of the transition period as the result of the explosive transformation of the capitalist system torn apart by its inner contradictions; subsequent reality has shown how some countries, the weak limbs, detach themselves from the imperialist tree, a phenomenon foreseen by Lenin. In those countries, capitalism has developed sufficiently to make its effects felt upon the people in one way or another, but it is not its own inner contradictions that explode the system after exhausting all of its possibilities. The struggle for liberation against an external oppressor, the misery which has its origin in foreign causes, such as war whose consequences make

the privileged classes fall upon the exploited, the liberation movements aimed at overthrowing neocolonial regimes, are the customary factors in this process. Conscious action does the rest.

A Rapid Change Without Sacrifices is Impossible

In these countries there still has not been achieved a complete education for the work of society, and wealth is far from being within the reach of the masses through the simple process of appropriation. Under development and the customary flight of capital to "civilized" countries make impossible a rapid change without sacrifices. There still remains a long stretch to be covered in the building of the economic base and the temptation to follow the beaten paths of material interest as the lever of speedy development, is very great.

There is a danger of not seeing the forest because of the trees. Pursuing the chimeras of achieving socialism with the aid of the blunted weapons left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability and the individual material interest as levers, etc.), it is possible to come to a blind alley. And the arrival there comes about after covering a long distance where there are many crossroads and where it is difficult to realise just when the wrong turn was taken. Meanwhile, the adapted economic base has undermined the development of consciousness. To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.

That is why it is so important to choose correctly the instrument of mass mobilization. That instrument must be fundamentally of a moral character, without forgetting the correct use of material incentives, especially those of a social nature.

Society Must be a Huge School

As I already said, in moments of extreme danger it is easy to activate moral incentives; to maintain their effectiveness, it is necessary to develop a consciousness in which values acquire new categories. Society as a whole must become a huge school.

The broad characteristics of the phenomenon are similar to the process of formation of capitalist consciousness in the system's first stage. Capitalism resorts to force but it also educates people in the system. Direct propaganda is carried out by those who are entrusted with the task of explaining the inevitability of a class regime, whether it be of divine origin or due to the imposition of nature as a mechanical entity. This placates the masses, who see themselves oppressed by an evil against which it is not possible to struggle.

This is followed by hope, which differentiates capitalism from the previous caste regimes that offered no way out. For some, the caste formula continues in force: the obedient are rewarded by the *post mortem* arrival in other wonderful worlds where the good are required, and the old tradition is continued. For others, innovation: the division in classes is a matter of fate, but individuals can leave the class to which they belong through work, initiative, etc. This process, and that of self-education for success, must be deeply hypocritical; it is the interested demonstration that a lie is true.

In our case, direct education acquires much greater importance. Explanations are convenient because they are genuine; subterfuges are not needed. It is carried out through the State's educational apparatus in the form of general, technical and ideological culture, by means of bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Party's information apparatus. Education takes among the masses and the new attitude that is praised tends to become habit; the mass gradually takes it over and exerts pressure on those who have still not become educated. This is the indirect way of educating the masses, as powerful as the other, structured, one.

The Process of Individual Self-education

But the process is a conscious one; the individual receives the impact of the new social power and perceives that he is not completely adequate to it. Under the influence of the pressure implied in indirect education, he tries to adjust to a situation that he feels to be just and whose lack of development has kept him from doing so thus far. He is education himself.

We can see the new man who begins to emerge in this period of the building of socialism. His image is as yet unfinished; in fact it will never be finished, since the process advances parallel to the development of new economic forms. Discounting those whose lack of education makes them tend toward the solitary road, towards the satisfaction of their ambitions, there are others who, even within this new picture of over-all advances, tend to march in isolation from the accompanying mass. What is more important is that people become more aware every day of the need to incorporate themselves into society and of their own importance as motors of that society.

They no longer march in complete solitude along lost roads towards far-off longings. They follow their vanguard, composed of the Party, of the most advanced workers, of the advanced men who move along bound to the masses and in close communion with them. The vanguards have their eyes on the futures and tis recompenses, but the latter are not envisioned as something individual; the reward is the new society where human beings will have different characteristics: the society of communist man.

A Long and Difficult Road

The road is long and full of difficulties. At times, the route strays off course and it is necessary to retreat; at times, a too rapid pace separates us from the masses and on occasions the pace is slow and we feel upon our necks the breath of those who follow upon our heels. Our ambition as revolutionaries makes us try to move forwards as far as possible, opening up the way before us, but we know that we must be reinforced by the mass, while the mass will be able to advance more rapidly if we encourage it by our example.

In spite of the importance given to moral incentives, the existence of two principal groups (excluding, of course, the minority fraction of those who do not participate for one reason or another in the building of socialism) is an indication of the relative lack of development of social consciousness. The vanguard group is ideologically more

advanced than the mass; the latter is acquainted with the new values, but insufficiently. While in the former a qualitative change takes place which permits them to make sacrifices as a function of their vanguard character, the latter see only the halves and must be subjected to incentives and pressure of some intensity; it is the dictatorship of the proletariat being exercised not only upon the defeated class but also individually upon the victorious class.

To achieve total success, all of this involves the necessity of a series of mechanisms, the revolutionary institutions. The concept of institutionalization fits in with the images of the multitudes marching toward the future as that of a harmonic unit of canals, steps, well-oiled apparatuses that make the march possible that permit the natural selection of those who are destined to march in the vanguard and who dispense rewards and punishments to those who fulfill their duty or act against the society under construction.

Perfect Identification Between Government and Community

The institutionality of the Revolution has still not been achieved. We are seeking something new that will allow a perfect identification between the government and the community as a whole, adapted to the special conditions of the building of socialism and avoiding to the utmost the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy transplanted to the society in formation (such as legislative houses, for example). Some experiments have been carried out with the aim of gradually creating the institutionalization of the Revolution, but without too much hurry. We have been greatly restrained by the fear that any formal aspect might make us lose sight of the ultimate and most important revolutionary aspiration: to see man freed from alienation. Notwithstanding the lack of institutions, which must be overcome gradually, the masses now make history as a conscious aggregate of individuals who struggle for the same cause. In spite of the apparent standardization of man in socialism, he is more complete; his possibilities for expressing himself and making himself heard in the social apparatus are infinitely greater, in spite of the lack of a perfect mechanism to do so. It is still necessary to accentuate his conscious, individual and collective, participation in all the mechanism of direction and production and associate it with the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that the individual will realise that these processes are closely interdependent and their advances are parallel. He will thus achieve total awareness of his social being, which is equivalent to his full realisation as a human being, having broken the chains of alienation.

This will be translated concretely into the reappropriation of his nature through freed work and the expression of his own human condition in culture and art.

Work Must Acquire a New Condition

In order for it to develop in culture, work must acquire a new condition; man as commodity ceases to exist and a system is established that grants a quota for the fulfillment of social duty. The means of production belong to society and the machine is only the front line where duty is performed. Man begins to free his thought from the

bothersome fact that presupposed the need to satisfy his animal needs by working. He begins to see himself portrayed in his work and to understand its human magnitude through the created object, through the work carried out. This no longer involves leaving a part of his being in the form of labour power sold, which no longer belongs to him; rather, it signifies an emanation from himself, a contribution to the life of society in which he is reflected, the fulfillment of his social duty.

We are doing everything possible to give work this new category of social duty and to join it to the development of technology, on the one hand, which will provide the conditions for greater freedom, and to voluntary work on the other, based on the Marxist concept that man truly achieves his full human condition when he produces without being compelled by the physical necessity of selling himself as a commodity. It is clear that work still has coercive aspects, even when it is voluntary; man has still not transformed all the coercion surrounding him into conditioned reflexes of a social nature, and in many cases, he still produces under the pressure of the environment (Fidel calls this moral compulsion). He is still to achieve complete spiritual recreation in the presence of his own work, without the direct pressure of the social environment but bound to it by new habits. That will be communism.

The change in consciousness does not come about automatically, just as it does not come about automatically in the economy. The variations are slow and not rhythmic; there are periods of acceleration, others are measured and some involve a retreat.

Communism's First Transition Period

We must also consider, as we have pointed out previously, that we are not before a pure transition period such as that envisioned by Marx in the "Critique of the Gotha Program", but rather a new phase not foreseen by him: the first period in the transition to communism or in the building of socialism.

Elements of capitalism are present within this process, which takes place in the midst of violent class struggle. These elements obscure the complete understanding of the essence of the process.

If to this be added the scholasticism that has held back the development of Marxist philosophy and impeded the systematic treatment of the period, whose political economy has still not been developed, we must agree that we are still in diapers. We must study all the primordial features of the period before elaborating a more far reaching economic and political theory.

The resulting theory will necessarily give preeminence to the two pillar of socialist construction: the formation of the new human being and the development of technology. We still have a great deal to accomplish in both aspects, but the delay is less justifiable as far as the conception of technology as the basis is concerned; here, it is not a matter of advancing blindly but rather of following for a sizable stretch the road opened up by the most advanced countries of the world. This is why Fidel harps so insistently on the necessity of the technological and scientific formation of all our people and especially the vanguard.

Division Between Material and Spiritual Necessity

In the field of ideas that lead to non-productive activities, it is easier to see the division between material and spiritual needs. For a long time man has been trying to free himself from alienation through culture and art. He dies daily in the eight and more hours during which he performs as a commodity to resuscitate in his spiritual creation. But this remedy itself bears the germs of the same disease: he is a solitary being who seeks communion with nature. He defends his environment-oppressed individuality and reacts to esthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate.

It is only an attempt at flight. The law of value is no longer a mere reflection of production relations; the monopoly capitalists have surrounded it with a complicated scaffolding which makes of it a docile servant, even when the methods used are purely empirical. The artists must be educated in the kind of art imposed by the superstructure. The rebels are overcome by the apparatus and only the exceptional talents are able to create their own work. The others become shame-faced wage-workers or they are crushed.

Artistic experimentation is invented and is taken as the definition of freedom, but this "experimentation" has limits which are imperceptible until they are clashed with, that is, when the real problems of man and his alienated condition are dealt with. Senseless anguish or vulgar pastimes are comfortable safety valves for human uneasiness; the idea of making art a weapon of denunciation and accusation is combatted.

If the rules of the game are respected, all honours are obtained—the honours that might be granted to a pirouette-creating monkey. The condition is not attempting to escape from the invisible cage.

A New Impulse for Artistic Experimentation

When the Revolution took power, the exodus of the totally domesticated took place; the others, revolutionaries or not, saw a new road. Artistic experimentation took on new force. However, the routes were more or less traced and the concept of flight was the hidden meaning behind the word freedom. This attitude, a reflection in consciousness of bourgeois idealism, was frequently maintained in the revolutionaries themselves.

In countries that have gone through a similar process, endeavours were made to combat these tendencies with an exaggerated dogmatism. General culture became something like a taboo and a formally exact representation of nature was proclaimed as the height of cultural aspiration. This later became a mechanical representation of social reality created by wishful thinking: the ideal society, almost without conflicts or contradiction, that man was seeking to create.

Socialism is young and makes mistakes. We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and the intellectual audacity to face the tasks of the development of the new human being by methods different from the conventional ones, and the conventional methods suffer from the influence of the society that created them (once again the

topic of the relation between form and content appears). Disorientation is great and the problems of material construction absorb us. There are no artists of great authority who also have great revolutionary authority.

The men of the Party must take this task upon themselves and seek the achievement of the principal aim: to educate the people.

Socialist Realism Based on the Art of the Last Century

What is then sought is simplification, what everyone understands, that is, what the functionaries understand. True artistic experimentation is obliterated and the problem of general culture is reduced to the assimilation of the socialist present and the dead (and therefore not dangerous) past. Socialist realism is thus born on the foundation of the art of the last century.

But the realistic art of the 19th century is also class art, perhaps more purely capitalist than the decadent art of the 20th century, where the anguish of alienated man shows through. In culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give and all that remains of it is the foretaste of a bad-smelling corpse; in art, its present decadence. But why endeavour to seek in the frozen forms of socialist realism the only valid recipe? "freedom" cannot be set against socialist realism because the former does not yet exist; it will not come into being until the complete development of the new society. But let us not attempt to condemn all post-mid-19th century art forms from the pontifical throne of realism at-all-costs; that would mean committing the Proudhonian error of the return of to the past, and straight jacketing the artistic expression of the man who is born and being formed today.

An ideological and cultural mechanism must be developed which will permit experimentation and clear out the weeds that shoot up so easily in the fertilized soil of state subsidization.

21st Century Man

The error of mechanical realism has not appeared (in Cuba), but rather the contrary. This is so because of the lack of understanding of the need to create a new human being who will represent neither 19th century ideas nor those of our decadent and morbid century. It is the 21st century man whom we must create, although this is still a subjective and unsystematic aspiration. This is precisely one of the basic points of our studies and work; to the extent that we make concrete achievement on a theoretical base or vice versa, that we come to broad theoretical conclusions on the basis of our concrete studies, we will have made a valuable contribution to Marxism-Leninism, to the cause of mankind. The reaction against 19th century man has brought a recurrence of the 20th century decadence. It is not a very serious error, but we must overcome it so as not to leave the doors open to revisionism.

The large multitudes of people are developing themselves, the new ideas are acquiring an adequate impetus within society, the material possibilities of the integral development of each and every one of its members make the task ever more fruitful. The present is one of struggle; the future is ours.

Intellectuals Not Authentically Revolutionary

To sum up, the fault of many of our intellectuals and artists is to be found in their "original sin": they are not authentically revolutionary. We can attempt to graft elm trees so that they bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. The new generations will arrive free of "original sin." The likelihood that exceptional artists will arise will be that much greater because of the enlargement of the cultural field and the possibilities for expression. Our job is to keep the present generation, maladjusted by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and perverting the new generations. We do not want to create salaried workers docile to official thinking nor "fellows" who live under the wing of the budget, exercising freedom in quotation marks. Revolutionaries will come to sing to song of the new man with the authentic voice of the people. It is a process that requires time.

In our society the youth and the Party play a big role. The former is particularly important because it is the malleable clay with which the new man, without any of the previous defects, can be formed.

Youth receives treatment in consonance with our aspirations. Education is increasingly integral and we do not neglect the incorporation of the students into work from the very beginning. Our scholarship students do physical work during vacation or together with their studies. In some cases work is a prize, while in others it is an educational tool; it is never a punishment. A new generation is born.

The Party: Vanguard Organisation

The Party is a vanguard organisation. The best workers are proposed by their comrades for membership. The party is a minority but the quality of its cadres gives it great authority. Our aspiration is that the party become a mass one, but only when the masses reach the level of development of the vanguard, that is, when they are educated for communism. Our work is aimed at providing that education. The party is the living example; its cadres must be full professors of assiduity and sacrifice; with their acts they must lead the masses to the end of the revolutionary task, which means years of struggle against the difficulties of construction, the class enemies, the defects of the past, imperialism . . . I should now like to explain the role played by the personality, the man as the individual who leads the masses that make history. This is our experience, and not a recipe.

Fidel gave impulse to the Revolution in its first years, he has always given it leadership and set the tone, but there is a good group of revolutionaries developing in the same direction as Fidel and a large mass that follows its leaders because it has faith in them. It has faith in them because these leaders have known how to interpret the longings of the masses.

So That the Individual Feels More Fulfilled

It is not a question of how many kilograms of meat are eaten or how many times a year someone may go on holiday to the sea shore or how many pretty imported things can be bought with present wages. It is rather that the individual feels greater fulfillment,

that he has greater inner wealth and many more responsibilities. In our country the individual knows that the glorious period in which it has fallen to him to live is one of sacrifice; he is familiar with sacrifice.

The first came to know it in the Sierra Maestra and wherever there was fighting; later, we have known it in all Cuba. Cuba is the vanguard of America and must make sacrifices because it occupies the advance position, because it points out to the Latin American masses the road to full freedom.

Within the country, the leaders have to fulfil their vanguard role; and it must be said with complete sincerity that in a true revolution, to which you give yourself completely without any thought for material retribution, the task of the vanguard revolutionary is both magnificent and anguishing. Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality. This is perhaps one of the great dramas of a leader; he must combine an impassioned spirit with a cold mind and make painful decision without flinching. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealise their love for the people, for the most hallowed causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the terrain where ordinary men put their love into practice.

A Large Dose of Humanity

The leaders of the revolution have children who do not learn to call their father with their first faltering words; they have wives who must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives to carry the revolution to its destination; their friends are strictly limited to their comrades in revolution. There is no life outside the revolution.

In these conditions, the revolutionary leaders must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth to avoid falling into dogmatic extremes, into cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses. They must struggle every day so that their love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into act that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing factor.

The revolutionary, ideological motor of the revolution within his party, is consumed by this uninterrupted activity that ends only with death, unless construction be achieved on a worldwide scale. If his revolutionary eagerness becomes dulled when the most urgent tasks are carried on a local scale and if he forgets about proletarian internationalism, the revolution that he leads cease to be a driving force and it sinks into a comfortable drowsiness which is taken advantage of by imperialism, our irreconcilable enemy, to gain ground. Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary need. This is how we educate our people.

Dangers of Dogmatism and Weaknesses

It is evident that there are dangers in the present circumstances. Not only that of dogmatism, not only that of the freezing up of relations with the masses in the midst of the great task; there also exists the danger of weaknesses in which it is possible to incur. If a man thinks that in order to devote his entire life to the revolution, he

cannot be distracted by the worry that one of his children lacks a certain article, that the children's shoes are in poor condition, that his family lacks some necessary item, with this reasoning, the seeds of future corruption are allowed to filter through. In our case, we have maintained that our children must have, or lack, what the children of the ordinary citizen have or lack; our family must understand this and struggle for it. The revolution is made by man, but man must forge his revolutionary spirit from day to day.

Thus we go forward. Fidel is at the head of the immense column—we are neither ashamed nor afraid to say so—followed by the best Party cadres and right after them, so close that their great strength is felt, come the people as a whole, a solid bulk of individualities moving towards a common aim; individuals who have achieved the awareness of what must be done; men who struggle to leave the domain of necessity and enter that of freedom.

That immense multitude is ordering itself; its order responds to an awareness of the need for order; it is no longer a dispersed force, divisible in thousands of fractions shot into space like the fragments of a grenade, trying by any and all means, in a fierce struggle with their equals, to achieve a position that would give them support in the face of an uncertain future.

We know that we have sacrifices ahead of us and that we must pay a price for the heroic fact of constituting a vanguard as a nation. We the leaders know that we must pay a price for having the right to say that we are at the head of the people that is at the head of America.

Each and every one of us punctually pays his share of sacrifice, aware of being rewarded by the satisfaction of fulfilling our duty, aware of advancing with everyone towards the new human being who is to be glimpsed on the horizon.

We Are More Free Because We Are More Fulfilled

Allow me to attempt to come to some conclusions: We socialists are more free because we are more fulfilled; we are more fulfilled because we are more free.

The skeleton of our complete freedom is formed, but it lacks the protein substance and the draperies, we will create them.

Our freedom and its daily sustenance are the colour of blood and swollen with sacrifice.

Our sacrifice is a conscious one; it is in payment for the freedom we are building.

The road is long and in part unknown; we are aware of our limitations. We will make the 21st century man; we ourselves.

We will be tempered in daily actions, creating a new human being with a new technology.

The personality plays the role of mobilisation and leadership in so far as it incarnates the highest virtues and aspirations of the people and does not become detoured.

The road is opened up by the vanguard group, the best among the good, the Party.

The basic raw material of our work is the youth: in it we place our hopes and we are preparing it to take the banner from our hands.

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If this faltering letter has made some things clear, it will have fulfilled my purpose in sending it.

Accept our ritual greetings, as a handshake or an "Ave María Purísima."

PATRIA O MUERTE

[Fatherland or Death]

**Document 8.2 Senel Paz, "El Lobo, el Bosque, y el hombre nuevo" (excerpt).
Translated by Robert Forstg.**

The following weeks and months passed pleasantly enough until the Saturday when Diego cracked open the door when I arrived for tea and abruptly announced: "You can't come in. I have someone here who doesn't want to be seen and I'm having a wonderful time. Please come back later on."

I left, but only retreated to the sidewalk on the other side of the street so that I could see the face of the person who didn't want to be seen. Diego left the house shortly afterward—by himself. He seemed nervous, looking down the street in both directions before quickly scurrying around the corner. I rushed to catch up, and managed to see him get into a car with diplomatic plates that was partially hidden in a back alley. I had to hide behind the column of a building, because the vehicle suddenly raced away.

Diego in a car with diplomatic plates! I felt an unbearable heaviness in my chest. So it was true after all. Bruno was right, and Ismael was wrong¹¹ about such people needing to be analyzed on an individual basis. Not true. You can never let your guard down: Fags are natural born traitors: It's their original sin. I myself, on the other hand, am completely free of any duplicity. I could forget all about this¹² and be happy. For me, it had been nothing more than class instinct. But I couldn't manage to be happy. I felt hurt. It hurts when a friend betrays you. It gets you down deep. And it made me angry that I had once again been so stupid, that I had let myself be manipulated by another person. It really hurts when you have no choice but to recognize that the hard-liners are right, that you're just a sentimental sack of shit ready to make friends with anyone. I reached the boardwalk of Old Havana and, as is so often the case, I noticed that nature reflected my state of mind: The sky had suddenly become overcast, claps of thunder grew louder and louder, and the air was heavy with impending rain. I found myself heading directly to the university, in search of Ismael, but I realized in a moment of clarity (or whatever you want to call it, because I find it hard to credit myself with actually having clarity) that I wouldn't be able to make it through a third meeting with him—not with that clear and penetrating gaze of his. And so I stopped. My second meeting with Ismael had followed the elaborate lunch I had had with Diego that had replicated the meal described in Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, when I needed to sort things out in order to keep my head from exploding. "I was wrong," I had told him back then. "He's a good guy, just a poor bastard really, and it doesn't make sense to go on watching him."

"Weren't you the one who said he was a counter-revolutionary?" he responded sarcastically.

"Even as far as that point goes, we have to recognize that his experience of the Revolution hasn't exactly been like ours. After all, it's hard to be around people who'll only accept you if you stop being who you are. To summarize. . . ."

But I didn't go on to summarize anything. I still didn't trust Ismael enough to say what I was really thinking: "His actions reflect who he really is, and what he's really thinking. He conducts himself with an internal freedom that I can only wish that I had myself. And I'm someone who is committed to the cause."

Ismael looked at me and smiled. The difference between the clear and penetrating gazes of Diego and Ismael (to wrap things up with you, Ismael, because this isn't your story, after all) is that Diego's only pointed out how things really were while Ismael's demanded that, if you didn't like the way things really were, that you take immediate action in order to change them. That's why he was better than either of us. He made some casual conversation with me and, when we said our goodbyes, he placed his hand on my shoulder and said he hoped we would stay in touch. To me, this signaled the release from my duties as an agent, and the beginning of our friendship.

What would he think now if I told him what I had just found out? I went back to Diego's apartment building prepared to wait for him as long as I needed to. He came back in a taxi during a driving rainstorm. I followed him into the building and entered his apartment before he could close the door.

"The boyfriend already left," he said jokingly. "What's with that face? Surely you aren't jealous. Or are you?"

"I saw you get in the car with diplomatic license plates."

He was not expecting this. He suddenly turned pale, fell like a lump in one of his chairs, and looked down at the floor. When, after some time, he finally lifted his head, his face looked ten years older.

"Let's have it. I'm waiting."

Now it was time for the confessions, the remorse, the begging for forgiveness. He would give me the name of his counterrevolutionary faction and I'd go to the police—straight to the police.

"I was going to tell you, David, but I didn't want you to know so soon. I'm leaving."

"I'm going," in the way that Diego was now saying it, is something that has dreadful implications for us. It means that you're leaving the country for good, that he will blot you forever from his memory—and that you in turn need to blot the person saying those words from your memory. It also means, whether you like it or not, that you will be seen as a traitor. You know that from the beginning, but you accept it because it is part of the price of your ticket out. Once you have that ticket in your hand, you'll never convince anyone that you weren't thrilled when you got hold of it. But this couldn't be true in your case, Diego. What would you do with yourself far away from Havana, from the heat and filth of its streets, from the raucousness of its people? What could you possibly do in another city, my dear friend—in a city that could not lay claim to Lezama Lima, or where you could see Alicia Alonso dance for the last time every single weekend? In a city that didn't have bureaucrats and party hardliners to criticize, and without a loyal friend like David at your side?

"It's not for the reasons you suspect," he said. "You know that politics really doesn't matter to me at all. It's because of what happened with Germán's exhibition. You really aren't very observant, and you don't realize what a stir it caused. And they didn't fire him. They fired me. Germán reached an understanding with them. He rented a room and started working for Havana by making crafts. I admit that I went too far in defense of the works that were exhibited, that I didn't show party discipline and that I acted selfishly, taking advantage of my position. But so what? Now, with this record in my file, the only work I'll be able to get is in agriculture or construction. Now tell me, what am I going to do with a brick in my hand? Where would I put it? It's just a reprimand at work, but who's going to hire someone that looks like me? Who's going to go out on a limb for me? I know it's not fair. The law is on my side by all rights, I should end up getting a ruling in my favor and being compensated. But what am I supposed to do? Fight? I'm weak, and the weak have no place in your world. In fact, you act as if we don't even exist, as if the only reason we're weak is to torture you and to join the cause of those who've betrayed the Revolution. Life is easy for you people. You don't suffer from Oedipus complexes. You aren't tormented by beauty. None of you ever had a cat that you loved that you saw your father cut up so that he could make a man out of you. It's possible to be a fag and be strong at the same time. There's no shortage of examples of this. I have no doubt about that at all. But this isn't true in my case. I'm weak. I'm terrified of growing old. I don't have the luxury of waiting 10 or 15 years for you to re-examine your views, even though I am fully confident that the Revolution will eventually correct its mistakes. I'm 30 years old. At most, I have another 20 good years left. I want to do things, make plans, gaze into the mirror of *Las Meninas*, give a lecture on the poetry of Flor and Dulce María Loynaz. Isn't this my right? If I were a good Catholic and I believed in the afterlife, I wouldn't care, but I've been infected with your materialism after being exposed to it for so many years. This is the only life there is—there isn't anything else. In any case, this is most likely the only life we have. Do you understand me? I'm not wanted here. What's the point of continuing to run in circles? Anyway, I like being who I am and to spread my wings every once in a while.

"I ask you, as a friend: Who is it that I'm offending by doing this. They are, after all, my own wings."

Not all of his final days here were sad. At times, he seemed euphoric, flitting about among packages and old papers. We drank rum and listened to music.

"Before they come and take inventory, make sure you take my typewriter, electric burner, and this can opener. Your mom will find it really useful. Here are my studies on architecture and urban planning—quite a few, aren't there? And they're good. If I don't have the time, send them anonymously to the City Museum. There are accounts here of Garcia Lorca's visit to Cuba. It includes a very detailed itinerary and photographs of places and persons with captions that I wrote." A black man who I didn't recognize suddenly appeared. "You can keep the anthology of poems on the Almendares River. You can supplement it with some other poems about it that I have here, even though the Almendares doesn't inspire poetry any more. Look at this photo. It's me during the Literacy Campaign. And these here are of my family. I'm going to take all of them with me. This is one of my uncles, a very handsome man who choked on a *papa rellena*."

Here I am with my mother. She was a good-looking woman, wasn't she? Let's see, what else do I want to leave with you? You took all the papers already, didn't you? Send the articles that you consider the most digestible to the magazine *Revolución y Cultura*, where there might be someone who appreciates them. Choose topics having to do with the nineteenth century. They're more likely to be published. Give the rest of them to the National Library—you know to whom. Make sure you don't lose contact with that person. Give him a cigar every once in a while, and don't be offended if he pays you some compliment—it won't go any further than that. I'll also give you the name of someone at the Ballet. And these as well, David Alvarez: the cups that we've used to drink so much tea together. I'm entrusting them to you. If you have the chance some day, send them to me. Like I told you before, they're made of porcelain from Sèvres. But not because of that—they belonged to the Loynaz del Castillo family and they were a gift. OK, I'll level with you. I actually stole them. My records and books were already taken away. You already took yours, and the ones that are left are to throw the people taking the inventory off the scent. Find me a poster of Fidel with Camilo Cienfuegos, a miniature Cuban flag, the photo of Martí in Jamaica and the one of Mella with his hat. But move fast!: I want to send these in the diplomatic pouch, along with the photos of Alicia in *Giselle* and my collection of Cuban coins and banknotes. Do you want the umbrella for your mother, or the cape?"

I generally accepted everything in silence. But at times, a certain hope surged within me and I would give him back some of the items.

"Diego, what if we write to someone? Think about who it could be. Or I could go and ask to meet with some government employee, and you can wait for me outside."

He looked at me sadly, rejecting that line of thinking.

Don't you know some lawyer, one of those sympathizers with the exiles who are out there? Or some closeted fag who has an important position? You've done a lot of favors for a helluva lot of people. I graduate in June. By October, I'll have a job, and I can give you fifty pesos a month."

I stopped when I saw that his eyes were tearing up, but he always managed to pull himself together.

"I'm going to give you one last piece of advice: Pay attention to the clothes you wear. You're no Alain Delon, but you have a charm and a certain air of mystery that, regardless of people say, always tends to open doors."

It was me who couldn't find anything to say in response. I lowered my head and started rearranging his packages and looking them over.

"No, not that one! Don't unwrap it. Those are Lezama Lima's unedited manuscripts. Don't look at me like that. I swear that I'll never use them in an inappropriate way. Well, I also swore to you that I would never leave, and I'm leaving—but this is a different matter. I will never use them as a bargaining chip and I'll also never give them to anyone who could use them for political purposes. I swear by my mother, by that basketball player¹³—and by you. So there! If I can weather the storm ahead without using them, I'll return them. Don't look at me like that! Do you think that I don't appreciate my responsibility? But if I find myself in a tight spot, they could help get me out of it. You're making me feel bad. Pour me a drink and get out of here."

He did worse and worse as the date of his departure drew near. He had trouble sleeping and he lost weight. I was with him as much as possible, but he didn't say much. At times, I think that he didn't even know that I was there. Curled up in the big armchair¹⁴ in his apartment with a book of poems and a crucifix in his hands—for he'd suddenly become more religious—he seemed to have lost color and vitality. He listened to the low and smooth voice of Maria Callas. One day, I noticed him looking at me with a special intensity. "I know you love me. Has being my friend helped you? Was I disrespectful toward you? Do you think that I am hurting the Revolution?"

Maria Callas was no longer singing.

"Our relationship has been appropriate, yes. And I appreciate you."

He smiled.

"Don't evade the issue. I'm not talking about appreciation, but about love between friends. Please, let's not be afraid of words any more."

This was also what I had wanted to say, I suppose. But I have that problem of mine. So in order to be sure of my affections and of the fact that, at least in some ways, I was different—that I had changed during the course of our friendship—and that I had become the person that I had always wanted to be, I added: "I'd like you to come and have lunch with me tomorrow at El Conejito. I'll go early and get in line. You just need to get there before noon. It'll be on me. Or, if you prefer, I can come and get you and we can go together."

"No David. That won't be necessary. Everything has worked out just fine."

"Diego, I insist. I really want to do this."

"OK, but not El Conejito. Once I get to Europe, I'm going to become a vegetarian."

Did I really want—did I really need—to be seen with him? Is this what had to happen for me to be at peace with myself or some such thing? Well, I suppose that's true. He arrived at the restaurant at ten minutes to twelve, when people were crowded around the door underneath a Japanese umbrella. He was dressed in a way that allowed me to identify him from two blocks away. He shouted out my complete name from the other side of the street, waving his arm, which was adorned with bracelets. When he reached me, he kissed me on the cheek and started describing to me a beautiful dress that he had just seen in a shop window, and that he said would be perfect for me. But to his surprise—and mine, and that of the other people waiting in line—I got the better of him by defending a different style of clothing. That's one thing about us shy people: If we manage to shake off our inhibitions, we can be brilliant. The lunch thus turned out to be a kind of celebration of his technique for loosening up communists.

Turning to my literary education, he added other titles to my reading list. "Don't forget the Countess of Merlin. Start finding out about her. Your encounter with that woman will be something that will have people talking."

We finished up our desserts in Coppelia, and then made our way through a bottle of Stolichnaya back at Diego's place. It was all wonderful until we stopped drinking.

"I needed this Russian vodka in order to tell you two last things. I'll leave the most difficult for last. David, I think that you are somewhat lacking in initiative. You need to be more decisive. You shouldn't be a spectator, but an actor. I assure you that you'll do better now than you did in *A Doll's House*.¹⁵ Don't stop being

a revolutionary. You're probably thinking, 'Who is *he* to be talking to me like this.' But I do have my own moral standards. At one point, I told you that I am a patriot and a devotee of Lezama Lima. The Revolution needs people like you, because we can't let the *yanquis* take over. But your food, your bureaucracy, the kind of propaganda that you engage in, and your arrogance might bring it all to an end, and it is only people like you who can help (Cuba) avoid such a fate. It won't be easy for you. It will take a real emotional investment on your part. The other thing that I have to tell you—let's see if I can actually do it, because my head is bowed in shame, go and pour me the few remaining drops of vodka—is this: Do you remember when we met in Coppelia? I wasn't very nice to you on that day. I was with Germán, and when we saw you, we made a bet that I'd take you back to my place and get you into bed. We made the bet in dollars. I did it as a way of motivating myself to approach you, because I always had a respect for you that tended to make me freeze up. Spilling the milk on you was part of the plan. Your shirt and the Manila tablecloth hanging on the balcony were the sign of my victory. Of course, Germán went and spread the word—and afterward even more, now that he hates me. In some places lately, because I've only been spending time with you, they call me 'the Red Queen.' Other people think that this silliness of mine is nothing more than a cover, and that I'm really being sent to Western Europe as a spy. Try not to worry about it too much. These kinds of questions about a man don't really harm him. On the contrary, they lend him an air of mystery, and many women would willingly fall into his arms with the idea of getting back on the right track. Do you forgive me?"

I remained silent, and he interpreted this as a yes, that I forgave him.

"So you see, I'm not so good after all. Would you have been capable of such a thing, behind my back?"

We sat looking at one another.

"OK, now I'm going to make our last cup of tea. After this, you'll leave and you'll never come back again. I don't want any goodbyes."

And that was it. When I was back in the street, a long line of Communist Youth Pioneers blocked my way. They wore freshly ironed uniforms and each carried a bouquet of flowers. Even though flower-carrying Pioneers had for some time been a clichéd symbol of the future, the sight made me happy—maybe for that very reason. I stood looking at one of the boys, who stuck his tongue out at me as soon as he noticed. At that point, I told him (I told him, I didn't promise him) that I would go to all lengths defend the next Diego that crossed my path, even if no one understood what I was doing, and that I would not feel detached from my Spirit and my Conscience as a result of doing so. On the contrary. And that's because, if I understood things correctly, acting in that way would mean fighting for a better world not only for you, my young Pioneer, but for me as well.

At that point, I wanted to close this chapter of my life by thanking Diego in some way for everything he had done for me. I did this by going to Coppelia and asking for ice cream just the way he did.

And that's why, even though they had chocolate, I asked for strawberry.

Document 8.3 Yoani Sánchez, “Architecture of the Emergency” (October 11, 2009)

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yoani Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/arquitectura-de-la-urgencia/>

In the early morning they removed the first bricks from the exterior wall, to sell them for three pesos each on the black market. Like an army of ants, the poorest people in the area took over the old factory—now closed—and began to dismantle it. Some kids watched from the corner in case the police approached, while their parents sifted through the residue of the debris to extract the mortar. Deft hands knocked down during the day and carried away at night these construction materials that would allow them to build their own homes. After three weeks, all that was left of the enormous building was the floor and some columns standing in the vacuum. Everything that could be used had been moved to the territory of needs, had gone to support the architecture of the emergency.

On an island where to acquire cement, blocks or steel is comparable to getting a bit of lunar dust, destroying in order to build has become common practice. There are specialists in extracting clay bricks intact after eighty years of being embedded in a wall, experts in peeling off the glazed tiles from a demolished mansion, and adroit “deconstructors” who extract the metal girders from collapsed heaps. They use the reclaimed materials to build their own habitable spaces in a country where no one can legally buy a house. Their main “quarries” are those houses that have fallen down or workplaces abandoned for many years by the apathetic State. They fall on these with an efficiency in looting that one might want to see in the dozing bricklayers who work for wages.

Among these skilled recyclers, some have been killed by a collapsing roof or falling wall, riddled by too many holes in its base. But now and again lady luck also smiles on them and they find a toilet without cracks, or an electrical socket that, in their hurry, the owners of the demolished house couldn’t take with them. A few kilometers from the site of the looting a small dwelling of tin and zinc slowly begins to change. The tiled floor from a house that collapsed at Neptuno and Aguila streets has been added, along with a piece of the exterior railing from an abandoned mansion on Linea Street, and even some stained glass from a convent in Old Havana. Inside this house, fruit of the pillaging, a family—equally plundered by life—dreams of the next factory that will be dismantled and loaded onto their shoulders.

Accompanying the blog posting was the following YouTube posting: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFTOJOgvtvg>

In it, the Cuban poet *Amaury Pacheco*, reads his poem “Plan económico”. It goes like this:

*Economy! We have fulfilled the annual plan:
1,100 street hustlers; 2,000 young prostitutes; 8,000 opportunists.
Plus, 300 non-mentally disabled and the syndrome of mediocrity.
Economy! In times of a Havana that is unrecognizable,*

*By sweeping the house, you cleanse the economy.
Strong legs for the rocky path,
Legs that are only for the percentages of economic shame.
Shameful economy! Economy of shame! Economy of shame!*

Document 8.4 Yaoni Sánchez, "The Blackout Ends," February 9, 2011

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yaoni Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/termina-el-apagon/>

Seated in an armchair in a hotel with my laptop open, I note the slow blinking of the WiFi transmitter and watch the stern faces of the guards. This could be one more day trying to enter my own blog through an anonymous proxy, jumping over the censorship with a few tricks that let me look at the forbidden. On the bottom of the screen a banner announces that I'm navigating at 41 kilobytes a second. Joking with a friend I warn her we'd better hold onto our hair so it won't get messed up from "speeding." But the narrow band doesn't matter much this February afternoon. I'm here to cheer myself up, not to get depressed all over again by the damned situation of an Internet undermined by filters. I have come to see if the long night of censorship no longer hangs over Generation Y. With just a click I manage to enter the site that, since March of 2008, has not been visible from a public place. I'm so surprised I let out a shout and the camera watching from the ceiling records the fillings in my teeth as I laugh uncontrollably.

After three years, my virtual space is again visible from inside Cuba.

I don't know the reasons for the end to this blockade, although I can speculate that the celebration of the 2011 Havana International Computer Science Fair has brought many foreign guests and it is better to show them an image of tolerance, of supposed openings in the realm of citizen expression. It is also possible that after having proved that blocking a website only makes it more attractive to internauts, the cyberpolice have chosen to exhibit the forbidden fruit they so demonized in recent months. If it's because of a technical glitch that will soon be corrected, once again throwing shadows over my virtual diary, then there will be plenty of time to loudly denounce it. But for the moment, I make plans for the platforms www.vocescubanas.com and www.desdecuba.com to enjoy a long stay with us.

This is a citizen victory over the demons of control. We have taken back what belongs to us. These virtual places are ours, and they will have to learn to live with what they can no longer deny.

Document 8.5 Yaoni Sánchez, "In 2013: Reasons to Stay," January 1, 2013

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yaoni Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/en-este-2013-razones-para-quedarse/>

Someone has to be at the foot of the aircraft steps, saying goodbye and waving their handkerchief. Someone has to receive the letters, the brightly colored postcards, the long distance phone calls. Someone has to stay to look after the house that was once full of children and relatives, to water the plants they left and feed the old dog that was so faithful to them. Someone has to keep the family memories, grandmother's mahogany dresser, the wide mirror with the quicksilver peeling off in the corners. Someone has to preserve the jokes that no longer spark laughter, the negatives of the photographs never printed. Someone has to stay to stay.

This year, 2013, when so many await the implementation of Immigration and Travel Reform, could become a year when we say "goodbye" many times. While I respect the decision of each person to settle here or there, I can't help but feel sad for the constant bleeding of creativity and talent suffered by my country. It's frightening to know the number of Cubans who no longer want to live here, to raise their children on this Island, or to realize their professional careers in this country. A trend that in recent months has me saying goodbye to colleagues and friends who leave for exile, neighbors who sell their homes to pay for a flight to some other place. Acquaintances I no longer see, I learn some weeks later are now living in Singapore or Argentina. People who got tired of waiting, of postponing their dreams.

But someone has to stay to close the door, turn the lights off and on again. Many have to stay because this country has to be reborn with fresh ideas, with young people and projects for the future. At least the illusion has to stay, the regenerative capacity must remain here; the enthusiasm clings to this earth. In 2013, among the much that remains, one thing definitely must be hope.

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October 3, 1968	November 4, 1970	September 11, 1973	March 24, 1976	April 30, 1977	July 17, 1979
Juan Velasco overthrows government of Peru, institutes leftist reforms	Socialist Salvador Allende becomes president of Chile	Allende is overthrown in a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet	Argentine military overthrows Isabel Peron, begins Dirty War	Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo begin marching in protest of missing children	Somoza regime overthrown in Nicaragua, leftist Sandinistas come to power

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June 19, 1990	April 5, 1992	September 12, 1992	October 16, 1998	November 2000	April 19, 2005	April 7, 2009
Alberto Fujimori elected president of Peru	In self-coup, Fujimori shuts down congress and judiciary, and suspends the constitution	Sendero leader Abimael Guzmán captured	Augusto Pinochet arrested in London on charges brought by Spanish Judge Baltazar Garón, although eventually released due to poor health	Fujimori flees country after re-election because of corruption scandals	Adolfo Scilingo, only Argentine Dirty Warrior to ever confess, is sentenced to 640 years in prison for crimes against humanity by a Spanish court	A Peruvian court finds Fujimori responsible for the deaths of twenty-five Peruvians and sentences him to twenty-five years in prison

- 8 Socialist Education combined John Dewey's "action school" with left-wing principles.
- 9 Hayes, p. 58.
- 10 Listen to Cárdenas oil expropriation announcement at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GLFYQfgSK8>.
- 11 Literally, "A Peronist Day." The phrase was used among Perón's supporters for decades to describe a good day.
- 12 See Chapter 5.
- 13 As with translations of slang generally, in order to maintain the form and meaning, this translation is not literal. For the Spanish version, see the book's website www.routledge.com/textbooks/daswon, or www.todotango.com.
- 14 Clientelism involves politicians acting as personal agents for their constituents, providing favors and benefits in return for support. The Radical Party used this strategy to gain votes in working-class neighborhoods consistently during the 1910s and 1920s.
- 15 This is the term used in Latin America to describe military governments characterized by a committee of officers rather than one dominant leader.
- 16 Ten thousand people died in the earthquake, which remains the greatest national disaster in Argentine history.
- 17 It was originally called the *Fundación María Eva Duarte de Perón*.

8 A Decade of Revolution in Cuba

- 1 For a recent example of this, see Sean Penn, "Conversations with Chávez and Castro," in the *Nation*, November 25, 2008, and Roger Cohen "The End of the Cuban Revolution," in *New York Times*, December 5, 2008.
- 2 Thirty years later doves again landed on Castro during a speech commemorating the Revolution, causing a similar debate.
- 3 "*Hasta la victoria, siempre*" is perhaps the most important revolutionary slogan.
- 4 This is the measure economists use for describing inequality. Zero would be perfect equality. Most Western European nations have Gini coefficients of around 0.3; Latin American nations, where we see some of the greatest inequality on the planet, average around 0.5.
- 5 In the fifteen years after Kennedy announced that all Cuban exiles would be granted immediate asylum in the United States, 700,000 Cubans took advantage of this offer. Dentists, doctors, and technicians fled (20,000 out of 85,000 professionals), leaving the island's schools, hospitals, factories, and administration without expertise, but also open to control from revolutionary cadres.
- 6 Pilar López Gonzales was a protagonist in Oscar Lewis and his research team's study of life in revolutionary Cuba, the three-volume *Living the Revolution*. See Oscar Lewis, Ruth M. Lewis, and Susan M. Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, Campaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- 7 Small farms also generally provided little tax revenue, as small farmers were good at avoiding taxes.
- 8 Junta Central de Planificación.
- 9 See, for example, Lino Novás Calvo's *Manera de Contar* (New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1970).
- 10 It received the Premio Internacional de Cuentos Juan Rulfo in 1990, and the Premio de la Crítica Literaria in 1992. It has been published in twenty countries, eleven languages, and staged as a play on over fifteen occasions.
- 11 Fellow students of David's at the university, who debated the threat that Diego posed to the Revolution because of his homosexuality.
- 12 David refers here to the fact that he had earlier spied on his friend Diego, which he had fears was a form of betrayal.

- 13 Translator's Note: Earlier in the story, Diego related the story of his discovery that he was gay, as a result of an unexpected sexual encounter with a basketball player at the Catholic school that he attended as a boy.
- 14 Translator's Note: The armchair is referred to as the "la butaca de John Donne" in the Spanish original.
- 15 Translator's Note: The story opens with Diego watching David in a performance of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* by a university theatre group of which David is a part, and in which he spectacularly bombs.

9 The Terror

- 1 Maoists are communists who pattern their idea of revolution after the Chinese Revolution and Chairman Mao Zedong. They tend to be exceptionally doctrinaire and vanguardist, and follow a strategy of fomenting a rural revolution among peasants that is intended to surround and ultimately choke off the cities.
- 2 He overthrew himself. The term *golpe de estado* is the Spanish equivalent of the French coup d'état.
- 3 The 1984 report for the Conadep can be found in English at: http://web.archive.org/web/20031004074316/nuncamas.org/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_001.htm. The Rettig commission report can be found at: http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile_1993_toc.html.
- 4 Look no further than Werner Herzog's 1972 film, *Aguirre: Wrath of God*, to understand how this narrative can explain all types of modern holocausts.
- 5 One version of this narrative can be seen in Eduardo Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (Monthly Review Press, 1997). It was originally published in 1971.
- 6 ISI relied on high tariffs, subsidized inputs to industry (in several countries government monopolies in oil, steel, electricity, and transportation reduced production costs), and a labor force made compliant by a mix of wages and social spending (free education through university, health care, pensions, subsidized transport), along with occasional repression.
- 7 A classic example of this complaint can be seen in Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Child of the Dark* (New York: Penguin, 1962) which is based on diaries she wrote between 1955 and 1960.
- 8 See her book *Looking for History: Dispatches from Latin America* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 73–87.
- 9 *National Geographic*, Volume 170, 1986, p. 247.
- 10 Chamorro had published a story implying that Somoza had taken blood donated by Nicaraguans to help victims of the 1972 Managua earthquake and sold it on the U.S. blood market.
- 11 It was named for a phrase used by José Carlos Mariátegui to describe the prospects of a Marxist revolution.
- 12 Some beneficiaries also chafed under the seemingly arbitrary and overly bureaucratic nature of the government's programs.
- 13 See www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/informacion/discursos/en_apublicas08.php.
- 14 In Scilingo's case, he generated sympathy through his tale of following orders, of remorse, and of unfair treatment at the hands of civilian authorities. See Menchú's I, *Rigoberta Menchú, Partnoy's The Little School*, and Verbitsky's *Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior*.
- 15 Diana Taylor argues this persuasively in *Disappearing Acts*, 1997.
- 16 I draw this concept from Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- 17 Translator's note: Pensions paid to former congressional members at the level of current congressional pay.
- 18 Translator's note: The first session of the Peruvian legislature is between July and December, so the text (*para que ello suceda se necesitan dos primeras legislaturas ordinarias consecutivas*) means that