
DISCUSSION

Cuba's Past, Nicaragua's Future

"Who Killed the Spirit of '68?"—“No, the Spirit Lives On. . . .”



IF Peter Collier and David Horowitz (ENCOUNTER, September-October 1985) are surprised when their Left-wing friends are offended by the old adage, “Anyone under 40 who isn’t a socialist has no heart—anyone over 40 who is a socialist has no brain”, they are lucky to have any friends left—if they have. However, the sentiment does accurately reflect the intolerant

views that follow throughout their article.

In the rewrite of their own history (very Stalinist move this), they pick on poor battle-weary, bullied Nicaragua, and compare it with Cuba. Their analogy is correct; but their facts are wrong. Cuba was forced into the waiting arms of Russian Communism by America—does anyone really think that the Bay of Pigs was the first sign of America’s aggression towards Cuba’s new government? Kennedy had prepared America to invade Cuba in order to protect American financial interests long before she actually invaded. Russia on the other hand offered help, and Cuba, unsurprisingly, accepted. I often wonder how different Cuba would be now if it had been America that had offered help instead.

Nicaragua has shown a superhuman effort (and should we say tolerance?) in trying to court the Western democracies in friendship. And what do we offer in return? Financial aid to the *Contras*; sanctions; and dark mumblings about invasion—for which Grenada was a dry run. Nicaragua is not Grenada. Do Collier and Horowitz really think that Nicaraguans will swarm out in their thousands and welcome American troops with open arms? They are sadly deluded if they do.

Unlike Grenada, the Sandinistas are a democratically elected government, overwhelmingly supported by the population. The elections were overseen by many overseas spectators from the democracies, and not just starry-eyed Leftists but David Steel among others. It is a pity El Salvador failed to get the same world-wide appeal and approval. Support for the *Contras*’ fight against so-called “early signs of totalitarianism” will surely drive them towards it. Already President Ortega has been forced by American sanctions to go to Russia for help. Although it is not too late to keep Nicaragua in the democratic camp, time is running out and if we are to keep Nicaragua democratic, we must stop supporting the *Contras*; threatening invasion; or building sanctions.

The most puzzling feature of the article is the portrayal of

the *Contras* as concerned heroes of democracy. The facts belie this. The majority of the *Contra* are ex-thugs of the Somoza régime (a man, incidentally, who bombed his own capital city) not to mention the large proportion of hired mercenaries. Why no list of Sandinista atrocities? I suppose free elections; 80% of property still in private hands; and vastly improved welfare and education, would weaken their shabby argument rather than strengthen it.

With America interfering in so much of the world today, it makes me wonder whether if “Russia is the last of the old European Empires”, then is Europe having to make way for the new American Empire? In the same issue of ENCOUNTER, Nirad C. Chaudhuri says that non-Europeans subjugated in the past to European rule as a part of an empire (especially the British Empire) regard the Americans “as the heirs of the British and more dangerous because young.” America, with its historical belief in individual freedom and national self-determination, should feel insulted were it not for the rather large grain of truth that this fear holds.

Of all the examples cited, why no mention of Chile? In 1973, a democratically-elected government was ousted in a CIA-backed-and-controlled coup. All opposition was crushed (the figures and details of those killed would probably sicken even Collier and Horowitz if they ever take the trouble to check) and newly developed monetarist theories especially imported from Chicago were tried out on Chile’s economy—to its utter detriment. Pinochet’s presence in America and the unexpected US Naval exercises off the coast of Chile just days before the coup surely add up to more than just a coincidence: and the evidence continues to pile up. The paradox of America is that wherever she rushes in to defend democracy, democracy is practically always the first casualty.

SUSAN SONTAG’s quotation about Communism being simply Left-wing fascism may be true; but where does that leave Marxism? The Leninist-Marxist model that we know today is not the same as Marxism. Lenin preached strict control of the Party apparatus to take power and ruthlessly carry out the Party’s orders—issued by a small élite. Marx however said that power would come to the people as a matter of historical inevitability. There are many socialists in democratic countries who are democratically trying to bring this about, and far from limiting freedom, extend and secure it. Of course, the electorate if they so wish can dismiss these socialist governments at election time—and often do. You can no more

blame Marx for Lenin's ruthless foundation of 20th-century totalitarianism than you can blame Christ for the Spanish Inquisition or Christopher Columbus for the slave trade.

While applauding Collier and Horowitz's rejection of the "Left's revolutionary enthusiasms", why throw out the baby with the bath water? What is the matter with the Left's democratic enthusiasms? Has the cross-eyed Right offered them some higher truth that the cross-eyed Left failed to do? It seems to me that they have stayed on the extreme wings of the political spectrum, pausing only to change sides at half-time (or should I say at half life-time?).

THOSE WHO ARE determined to distinguish between dictatorships, either of the Left or the Right, are among the few allies these people have. If Viet Nam was wrong, is Afghanistan more so or less so? If the popular uprising in Poland was justified, was it justified in Iran—and if not, why not? If, as many must decide, one form of oppression is as bad as another, then the only conclusion left is that America and Russia share the same foreign policy, and to offer support to either side merely encourages its continuation. We must recognise the truth for what it is wherever we may find it. Failure to do so means that, like Collier and Horowitz, we perpetually delude ourselves.

Ian Williams

A Reply

THE REAL QUESTION is how people of seemingly good intentions can continue to support Marxist revolutions when those which have succeeded have such relentlessly appalling records. With pious intentions the "progressive" Left has unquestioningly supported some of the most murderous, repressive and economically disastrous social experiments in the 20th century. In the name of "social justice" successive generations of the Left mobilised in "Popular Fronts" have given their hearts and souls to Marxist régimes promoting slave labour, politically-induced famines, mass executions, and ethnic genocide on a scale unmatched in human history. At some point the bankruptcy of Marxism in theory, and the catastrophe of Communism in practice, finally strips the scales from the eyes of a few chastened radicals—like ourselves. But the die-hards remain, eternally innocent and wilfully ignorant. They learn nothing and forget everything. Worse, their ranks are continually swelled by the born-yesterday and the born-again.

Mr Williams's letter is a case in point. The heart of his apologia for the newest band of totalitarians to seize control of a hapless country is summarised in two points, which, supplemented by the slightest addition of uncontroversial detail, refute themselves. Mr Williams argues that:

- (1) "Cuba was forced into the waiting arms of Russian Communism by America";
- (2) "Support for the *Contras*' fight against so-called 'early

signs of totalitarianism' will surely drive them towards it."

This argument is vintage Leftism, in which America is blamed not only for dictators like Fidel Castro, but also for their brutal embrace of totalitarianism. This "argument" is absurd on its face. Castro long ago constructed a Soviet mini-state in Cuba and made himself a global agent of Soviet imperialism. This has meant not only supporting its reconquest of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and its current genocidal aggression in Afghanistan, but—more to the Nicaraguan point—providing a mercenary force for its expansion in such far-flung places as Ethiopia, where the Marxist plans of a sadistic ruler have resulted in famine and suffering on a vast scale (which only massive aid from the productive granaries and generous pockets of the capitalist West has prevented from being worse). Now add to this picture the modest salient detail: the current Sandinista rulers of Nicaragua (in programmatic statements both public and private) have declared Castro's Cuba to be their revolutionary model. Totalitarianism is the *aim* of the current Nicaraguan régime, not its last resort. That is why men like Eden Pastora, the guerrilla hero of the anti-Somoza rebellion, and anti-Somoza political leaders like Alfonso Robelo and Arturo Cruz (who, more than petty dictators like Borge, Arce and the Ortega brothers, *made* the Nicaraguan Revolution) are now exiled leaders of the *Contra* rebellion. It is easy and no doubt comforting to believe that the *Contras* are simply a band of renegade cutthroats who yearn for a *Somozcista* return. In fact there are more of Somoza's bullies in the Sandinista Revolutionary Watch Committees than in the *Contra* resistance. The resistance is increasingly composed of Nicaraguan democrats (denied the pluralism which had been cynically promised by the Sandinistas and then withdrawn when they reached power); peasants (dispossessed by the Sandinista collectivisation and threatened by conscription); and Miskito Indians (burned out of their ancestral lands). If Cuba is the model for Ortega & Co. and their aim is a Communist state, it is ludicrous to contend that US support for the anti-Communist forces is driving them in a totalitarian direction.

WHAT ABOUT THE PREMISE that the United States was historically responsible for Cuba's embrace of Soviet totalitarianism in the first place?

This is a "fall-back" position for some on the Left who are embarrassed by the way Castro has prostituted his young men into a mercenary force for Soviet imperialism—a desperate gambit to blame even this crime on the United States. But it also betrays a chauvinism endemic in the Left's attitude towards its Third World heroes. In this patronising perspective the Castros and Ortegas never get credited with the intention of their achievements. Even in rebellion, they remain objects rather than subjects of the historical drama, victims even in their triumphs.

To sustain this viewpoint requires, however, that historical reality be stood on its head. The publication in recent years of Carlos Franqui's indispensable memoir of the early Castro régime (supported by the historical work of other disillusioned Castroists like Maurice Halperin) has removed