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THINKING ALOUD

Fulbright and Cuba

By Theodore Draper

SENATOR J. William Fulbright's "great debate" speech of March 25 probably has more direct, immediate and practical relevance to Cuba than to any other part of the Communist world. When the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee advises us to distinguish between different Communist regimes elsewhere, one wonders why he should bother to kick in an open door. The distinction between China or Russia on the one hand and Yugoslavia or Poland on the other has been recognized for quite some time. But his views on Cuba represent a far more concrete challenge to present U.S. policy. A fair test of his entire position may well be how right or wrong he is about Cuba, though I do not mean to suggest that all of his other observations do not need to be discussed on their own merits. I happen to be largely in agreement with him, for example, on the issue of Panama. But I wish to limit myself to Cuba, not only for reasons of space but because it is far more crucial to the Senator's main theme of Communism.

Fulbright has called on us to base our policy on "objective facts" rather than on "cherished myths." The trouble is, of course, that one man's facts may be another man's myths. The first step, in such cases, is to define the point or area of disagreement as sharply and clearly as possible. Then we will at least know what we are disagreeing about, and others may make up their minds on the basis of the evidence.

Fulbright's entire argument rests on the fundamental premise that "the boycott policy is a failure." He evidently considers it a failure, without reservation or qualification, because it has not by itself brought down Fidel Castro's regime. And if this were the sole criterion of success or failure, he would be right. But is it?

Before trying to answer the question, it may be well

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to go back and put the boycott in some historical perspective. A turning point took place in Cuba in the fall of 1959. It was marked in October by the arrest of Major Hubert Matos, who had protested Communist infiltration of the Rebel Army; and in November by a shake-up in the Cabinet and in the Cuban National Bank, as well as by the first stage of the Communist takeover of the Cuban Confederation of Labor. These events did not come to pass overnight; they had been in gestation for at least five or six months. Still, looking backward, November 1959 stands out as a key month in the process of Cuba's Communization.

In that same month, a Department of Industrialization was formed within INRA, the so-called agrarian reform organization. This department was first headed by Ernesto Che Guevara, who has revealed that his group began a "search for offers" to displace the United States in the Cuban market. This "search" led to Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan's arrival in Havana in February 1960, and the first Soviet-Cuban economic agreement was signed on February 13.

Just before Mikoyan concluded the agreement, the United States made an effort—until now a closely guarded secret on both sides—to offer Fidel Castro's regime aid and cooperation. A high official of the U.S. Embassy in Havana asked the ambassador of a large South American country to act as go-between. Castro at first seemed to encourage the overture but, apparently after consulting Guevara and others, brusquely rebuffed the offer and went ahead with Mikoyan. (I did not get this information from a U.S. source, and it is a mystery to me why the entire story was not made public long ago.)

A few weeks later, Guevara, by now President of the Cuban National Bank, initiated the open crisis of 1960 by calling in the oil companies' representatives and delivering an ultimatum to them, without any possibility of negotiation, for the processing of a large percentage of Soviet oil, starting with two barge-loads that were already on the way. It was one of those moves that the Castro regime has repeatedly made to get a desired, hostile reaction which it then uses to carry

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out an aggressive policy as if it were a defensive one.

This is no place to rehearse all the events in the summer and fall of 1960 which, in October, resulted in the U.S. embargo on virtually all trade with Cuba. The significant thing for our present purpose was the Cuban reaction to the embargo. The Cuban leaders did not cry out that the U.S. was trying to ruin their country. They cried out that now the U.S. had finally made it possible for Cuba to flourish and to be free. The boycott, paradoxically, was hailed as Cuba's Declaration of Independence, the long-awaited economic liberation of Cuba.

Fidel Castro said that the United States could not hurt Cuba, that Cuba could obtain all it needed from the "Socialist countries" and "neutrals." Guevara gave assurances that the U.S. embargo would hurt the United States more than Cuba. The Cuban line was clearly expressed by the old-time Communist leader, Blas Roca: "Now Cuba has freed her foreign commerce from the monopoly of an imperialist power. Now Cuba has won freedom of trade with every country in the world."

At this time, Blas Roca was more than merely the top Cuban Communist. Negotiations were just then going on for the merger between Castro's 26th of July Movement and Roca's official Communist party. It was later revealed that the successful conclusion of these negotiations were celebrated in a public meeting on December 2, 1960, at which Castro and Roca symbolically appeared on the same platform. The "search for offers," the rejected U.S. offer, the expropriations, the embargo and the Communist-Castro merger were all interacting and interrelated.

IT WOULD be a mistake to think that the Cubans greeted the embargo with joy in order to hide their grief. For years, a "revolutionary" school of thought had taught that the United States was responsible for all of Cuba's ills, and that Cuba could get rid of them by getting rid of every vestige of U.S. influence and investments. The Cuban reaction to the embargo was the logical outcome of this intellectual conditioning. Rarely has a historical interpretation had more profound political consequences or such a clear-cut test of its practical implications.

It was now up to Castro to prove that, without the United States, Cuba could leap into the promised land of "accelerated industrialization," diversified agriculture and increased productivity. It was up to the Soviet Union to demonstrate that Cuba would be better off as part of a Soviet-bloc "international division of labor" than as an economic appendage to the U.S. It was up to the Communist world to show how Communism could be successfully applied to a Latin American outpost.

The method used was almost naively simple. Guevara has told how the Cubans imported experts who pro-

ceeded to make Cuban copies of East European techniques. Within a matter of months, however, the new order failed to live up to expectations. A rebellious peasantry developed in the middle of 1961. The program of "accelerated industrialization" virtually came to a halt by the end of the year. The sugar crop took a sharp drop in 1962 and an even sharper one in 1963. Agricultural diversification went backward instead of forward. For example, rice production had advanced to a high point of 181,000 tons in 1957, two years before Castro, and plunged to 95,400 tons in 1962, after three years of Castro. This year rice fields have been sacrificed to more sugar production in the frenzied drive toward a "socialist monoculture."



ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA

On February 25, Guevara made an important speech which further clarifies the Cuban economic situation. Among other things, Guevara emphasized that "supplies" (*abastecimientos*) have been the weakest link in the Cuban system. Imports from the Soviet bloc had fallen short of expectations by as much as 30 per cent, making it necessary to dig into the reserves of raw materials last year. According to Guevara, "almost all the factories depend on imported products," the shortages of which were, therefore, responsible for "the shutdowns, the periods of low productivity, the mechanical breakdowns which cannot be repaired in time owing to lack of spare parts."

The next great problem, Guevara went on, was the state of Cuba's industrial equipment. The new technicians, he said, were able to keep the factories going but were not able to take care of their equipment properly. "Today," Guevara added, "we are experiencing a very great strain in a number of factories which

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are already in difficult condition to operate, because the equipment has rapidly deteriorated, and we do not have the specialized technical equipment to enable us to change the situation, that is, to make new spare parts, to maintain the most complex units of production so that they would function perfectly." Guevara also made clear that the U.S.-made machinery in Cuba had broken down to the point of "very little efficiency."

Guevara traced another aspect of the equipment problem to what he called "the loss of discipline in work." This decline of "labor discipline" and "labor productivity" has long worried the Cuban leaders: Castro made a speech on July 1, 1963, in which he bitterly berated various categories of workers for doing less on their jobs under his regime than in the bad, old days. In truth, the Cuban workers have had only one way to "vote"—through their "labor productivity"—and despite all the propaganda about "emulation," the Cuban version of Stalin's Stakhanovism, it has been going down steadily in the past three years.

For over three years, the Castro regime has fed its people far more fantasies than food. The latest fantasies by Castro, offered last month, are that Cuba will within 10 years have a production of milk superior to that of Holland, and cheese superior to that of France. (Less than three years ago, Cuban Minister of Economics Regino Botí promised that by 1965 Cuba would be relatively the most industrialized country in Latin America and lead in per capita production of electric power, steel, cement, tractors and petroleum refining.) But the facts of life—the Soviet bloc's failure to live up to the import plans, the deterioration of equipment, the decline of labor "discipline" and "productivity"—have become more and more exigent and inexorable. Whatever the merits of Cuban cheese in 1974, the Cuban people are far more interested in what Castro in the same speech delicately called the "shortages" of 1964.

As Guevara has made clear, Cuba has entered a period of two to five years in which its main energies and resources will be devoted to increasing its production of sugar to 10 million tons by 1970. Almost everything else will have to mark time until the big push in sugar gets well under way. Since this year's sugar crop cannot be much larger and may even be somewhat smaller than the 3.8 million tons of 1963, the lowest figure in almost 20 years, the first step cannot be taken until next year. Only a totalitarian regime in control of all the means of communication and propaganda could have indoctrinated its people for so long against the old evil of gambling everything on sugar and then decide to do the same thing itself.

All this adds up to one thing: Castro desperately needs a breathing spell of at least two or three years. That is the purpose of all his maneuvering and diplomacy. He has worked his way into an economic

corner, and he cannot get out of it with Soviet aid alone. More than anything else he needs time, and he is willing to buy it from those whom he considers his worst enemies—if they will sell it to him.

The Cuban deals with Britain and France were only an advance payment. I still remember the tremendous splash made in the Cuban press in 1962 by new Czechoslovak buses, and I suspect that the British buses will temporarily alleviate but will not solve the Cuban transportation problem any more than the Czech buses did. Unless the British and French are willing to be truly prodigal in their credits to Castro on a wide range of products, the basic effect of these spot deals will be limited. I am inclined to believe that, thus far, these deals are more significant politically and psychologically than economically.

THE REAL question is whether the relatively small-scale British-French deals have opened the way for relatively large-scale U.S. deals. That is where Senator Fulbright comes in.

I have taken some trouble to sketch in the background of the boycott because I do not think it can be profitably discussed in a historical vacuum. What does Fulbright mean when he says that he is "not arguing against the desirability of an economic boycott against the Castro regime but against its feasibility?" He seems to mean that it is not "feasible" as a way of bringing down the Castro regime. If this is all Fulbright means, he may be permitted to score an easy victory. But was the boycott ever given such a mission? Obviously not, since there would have been no Bay of Pigs adventure if the boycott was supposed to accomplish the same thing. It would seem elementary to point out that the fact that the boycott has not by itself overthrown Castro does not mean that it may not have done other things of vital importance.

Unfortunately, Fulbright's own contribution to the debate suffers from imprecision and perhaps disingenuousness. He suggests far more than he says and refuses to carry his thought to its ultimate conclusion. His key word is curiously ambiguous—"feasibility." It implies that we no longer have to decide whether or not to maintain the boycott; the decision has been made for us by events. We do not have to decide any longer whether the boycott is desirable; if it is not "feasible," we need not concern ourselves with its desirability. He stops short of telling us what to do if, as he insists, the boycott is no longer feasible. He seems to believe that our allies' decisions have deprived us of all power of decision in this matter, as if the basic effectiveness of the boycott depended primarily on them rather than on us.

This is one way of begging the question. It provides a nice, pragmatic pretext for absolving us of responsibility for our own actions. It transmutes a hard

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problem of policy into the easy solution of an accomplished fact. It constantly plays with words that conceal as much as they reveal. When Fulbright tells us that the Castro regime is "not on the verge of collapse," is he trying to tell us that it is also on the verge of stabilization or has already stabilized itself? When he tells us that it is not likely to be overthrown by our policies, is it not also true that our policies can prevent it from being overthrown?

I detect in Fulbright's approach an unwillingness to face the consequences of his thought. If the Castro regime is not on the verge of collapse, it is surely not on the verge of stabilization. It has rather entered a dangerous period of transition which will determine its ultimate collapse or stabilization. The economic miracle which Castro and the Communists promised in Cuba has become an unmistakable mirage. If nothing else, the boycott left Cuba wide open to the Soviets and gave them a chance to show what they could do. The United States may be guilty of many things, but it cannot be held responsible for the missing 30 per cent of Soviet imports, the "difficulties" which Guevara has sportingly admitted came "principally from our side," the increase of workers' "absenteeism" and decrease of their "productivity."

Indeed, Fulbright could not have chosen a more unfortunate moment for his pronouncement on Cuba. Ever since Fidel Castro's long pilgrimage to Russia in May of last year, Cuba has been forced to reorganize its entire economy to lessen the burden on the Soviet Union. The new conscription law has militarized Cuba

beyond anything in its history. At the very moment that Fulbright was speaking, the trial of the former Communist informer, Marcos Rodríguez Alfonso ripped through the facade of monolithic unity and revealed top leaders at each other's throats. The Sino-Soviet struggle cannot go on very much longer without getting Castro into trouble, whatever he decides to say or do.

Since May 1963, Castro has objectively acted as a Soviet buffer against China; he has implicitly covered the Soviets' left flank by vouching for the Soviets' revolutionary zeal and by singing the praises of that "greatest capitulationist in history," Nikita Khrushchev. Castro's balancing act, which once tended to give aid and comfort to the Chinese, has in the past year swung far over to the Soviet side. Whatever gyrations it now makes, he cannot possibly please both sides and displeasing either one will be very painful and costly for him.

THE ONE THING that could now pull Castro through every danger threatening him would be U.S. "acceptance of the continued existence of the Castro regime," as Fulbright recommends. Fulbright seems to think that the critical question is whether Castro is a "distasteful nuisance" or an "intolerable danger." I do not wish to get entangled in the semantics of Castro's exact classification, but if he has become more of a "nuisance" than a "danger," it must be because he has made serious mistakes at home and suffered serious setbacks abroad. Every time a Communist power needs a breathing spell, however, it begins to make cooing sounds and dangle offers of trade. And just as predictably, a strange alliance of sympathizers and businessmen springs up. The *quid pro quo* is usually, as Hans J. Morgenthau recently put it, "idiotic." The Communist regime obtains the means of long-term survival and power; the West obtains short-term profits, if there are any, for a few impatient entrepreneurs.

This short-sighted view of the national interest is also characteristic of Fulbright's remarks on Cuba. In the case of Communist China, he stops short of demanding immediate recognition and poses at least one condition—"the abandonment by the Chinese Communists, tacitly if not explicitly, of their intention to conquer and incorporate Taiwan." Whatever one may think of this condition, it is something beyond a scramble for trade, but the possibility of a *quid pro quo* never even arises in the case of Cuba. Fulbright treats the boycott not as if giving it up were a deliberate political decision with serious consequences, which we can accept or reject, but as if it had already been decided for us by forces beyond our control. Consequently, we are asked not only to make a gratuitous gift to Fidel Castro's stability but to do so in the worst possible way.

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When the boycott was first established, as I have noted, Guevara gloated that it would hurt the United States more than Cuba. Commenting in Geneva on Senator Fulbright's speech, Guevara admitted that he had been wrong about the past but this did not prevent him from repeating the same propaganda line in the present. He conceded that at one time "the blockade was rather effective, particularly with regard to Cuban industries." But today, he claimed, the boycott was merely "a second-rate inconvenience for Cuba"; it was the cause of "more difficulties" for the United States by having provoked differences with its Western allies. If Fulbright has his way, then, the Castro regime is going to get what it wants from us and tell the world it is doing us a favor. Our Cuban policy has been a textbook of almost every possible mistake a great power can make, but this one would be the most bizarre.

It may be unnecessary for the United States to prove that it is not a "paper tiger." It is frequently necessary, however, to prove that it is not a "stupid tiger." In no area is the latter more necessary and more difficult than in the utilization of Communist conflicts, contradictions and crises. It is peculiarly characteristic of the U.S. politico-economic make-up that the least dangerous and most negotiable opportunities should be frittered away by permitting foreign trade and investment to take precedence over foreign policy. The Soviets ruthlessly use foreign trade and aid as an instrument of foreign policy; we more often use foreign policy as an adjunct of foreign trade and investment.

Ever since Castro declared himself publicly a Communist, his regime has hammered away at the thesis that all Communist revolutions are "irreversible." The mass acceptance of this idea is more important to the Communist world—and its rejection more important to the non-Communist world—than any other stake in Cuba or elsewhere. If it could be unshakably planted in enough people's minds, the ultimate victory

of world Communism would be insured whatever the outcome of the struggle within that world. It would, in effect, mean that Communism can only go forward, never backward.

Yet, if there is one place in the world where Communism can be "reversible," it is Cuba. Those who are willing at this stage to give up all hope and effort to bring down the Castro regime must take into account the total magnitude, the full enormity, of this decision. It is not right or just for them to wash their hands of all responsibility by pretending that the decision has been made for them.

To some extent, Fulbright evades the larger issue by the simple expedient of overlooking the fact that Cuba is and considers itself to be an integral part of the Communist world. When he assures us that the Castro regime is a "distasteful nuisance" rather than an "intolerable danger," he must be thinking of that regime *in vacuo* and not as the farflung and dependent outpost of a Communist world that is both a nuisance and a danger. Castro's position in that world is by no means simple or traditional, but it is just as wrong to take him out of it as to lose sight of his individuality in it.

Despite all this, I fully agree with Senator Fulbright that the time has come to stop clinging to "old myths" and to face "new realities," though his myths and realities are not mine. A reconsideration and reconstruction of our Cuban policy has surely been long overdue. Paradoxically, however, Fulbright's analysis of the problem of policy does not differ as much as he may imagine from that of former Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, the present Administration, or even Senator Goldwater. In a second article, I hope to show how all of them have thought within the same flawed frame of reference and have adopted a common set of options among which each has merely chosen a different one.

