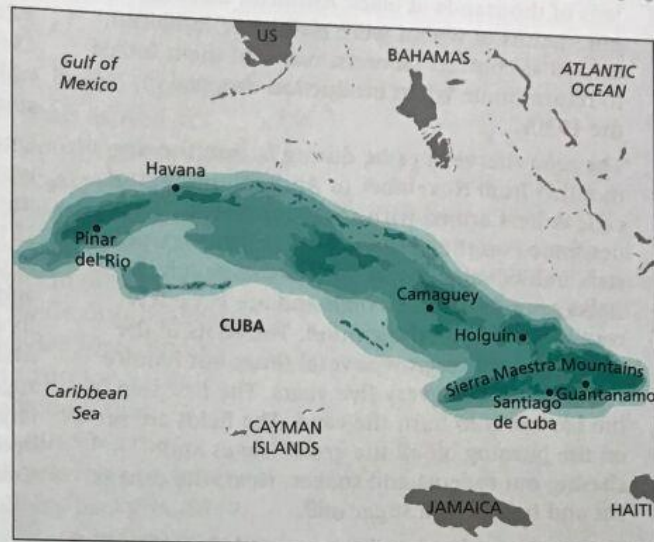




## The Cuban Revolution

On January 1, 1959, Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista boarded a plane and fled Cuba forever. A week later, Fidel Castro led the victorious 26th July revolutionary movement into Havana and took control. For the first time in Cuba in 100 years of revolutionary struggle, Cuba was truly independent. The Cuba Castro inherited was a land with a significant urban and rural divide, promoting the further division between mulatto and Afro-Cubans and the white urban-based elite, driven by the tyranny of a one-crop economy, the sugar cane industry that was Cuba's economic lifeblood. The revolution's success was the result of a historic process that had united Cubans to fight for their independence from foreign control for nearly a century. The overthrow of Spanish rule in the 1898 Spanish-American War, precipitating half a century of US domination and control of its own vested interests in the region, propping up successive administrations that culminated in the notoriously brutal and corrupt final term of Batista. Although Batista started out being progressive and popular, he returned to government following the 1953 coup that was marked by corruption and brutal, military-style dictatorship. Growing unrest, sparked home-grown insurgencies on several fronts, the most successful of which was the 26th of July Movement, led by Fidel Castro, who stepped in to fill the breach on Batista's hasty and final exit.

In 1959, Cuba's income from sugar still accounted for four-fifths of export earnings, but a vast income also came from tourism based on Havana's hotels, casinos, and brothels, especially during the years of **Prohibition** in the United States. By the end of the 1950s, Cuba had developed one of the leading economies in Latin America, with an annual income of \$353 per capita in 1958—among the highest in the region. Yet there were great economic disparities, and most rural workers earned only about one-fourth the average annual income. The majority of Cubans were illiterate and in poverty (especially in the countryside), suffering from an appalling lack of public services, unemployment and underemployment. Foreign investors controlled the economy, owning about 75% of farming land, 90% of the essential services, and 40% of the sugar production.



**Prohibition** in the United States was the period from 1919 to 1933, during which the sale, manufacture, and transportation of alcohol were banned nationally. Prohibition laws were also enacted in Canada under several provincial governments in the early part of the 20th century.

### The Cuban sugar cane industry

Sugar cane is not indigenous to Cuba and was first planted in the 16th century. It was not until the early 19th that world demand created the conditions for the dynamic expansion of the sugar cane industry, and in a few decades Cuba was annually producing half of the world's sugar supply.

Cheap labor was supplied by the 800,000 African slaves (mainly from the Senegal and Guinea Coast) imported during the late 18th and 19th centuries by Spain to work on plantations. When slavery was abolished in 1888, their descendants continued to be a mainstay of the industry.



Yet, as the industry grew, more labor was required. In the first decades of the 20th century, tens of thousands of black Antillean laborers, nine-tenths of whom were Haitian or Jamaican, arrived as contract laborers, many of them forced to return home when production dropped in the 1930s.

The *zafra* (harvest) came during *la seca* (the dry months) from November to April. Thousands of cane cutters armed with sharp machetes, descended on the *colonias* (cane fields) to cut each stalk individually. It was back-breaking toil. The stalks grow 2–6 meters high and are cut a few centimeters above the ground. The roots of the cane stalk will re-grow several times but require replanting about every five years. The first step in the harvest is to burn the cane. The fields are set on fire burning off all the green leaves and chasing out rodents and snakes. Next, the cane is cut and hauled to a sugar mill.

The work was hard and intense and the *zafra* lasts only four months followed by the *tiempo muerto* (dead months) when there was no work. Hacienda owners built villages for their workforce and encouraged the workers to stay on. These had two purposes: by keeping the workers and families close to the fields, it ensured an available labor force; and it kept large numbers of mulattos and Afro-Cubans out of the major cities. Nevertheless, many workers migrated to the cities looking for work. Sometimes they found manual jobs building roads, digging ditches or laying railroad track, but for most these were idle months living on credit

at the company store, until the next harvest. It was an endless cycle of grueling toil, monotonous unemployment and habitual debt. With the advent of steam engines in the late 19th-century to drive the mills (*ingenios*) and railways, the processing and transportation of sugar was done in ever-larger operations.

One-crop economies are particularly sensitive to world market prices. During the First World War, the price of sugar skyrocketed. Between 1916 and 1919, US companies secured ownership and control of production in half of the sugar mills in Cuba and controlled production of half the sugar crop. In addition, improvements in transportation—mainly railroad construction—and steam-driven sugar presses increased production, leading to larger-scale plantations and output. Wealth was becoming even more concentrated among the Cuban élites and US interests.



Sugar cane train outside a sugar refinery, c. 1900, Cuba.

In comparison to other Caribbean and Latin American countries, Cuba ranked near the top in most economic and social indicators like healthcare and education. The picture was, however, deceptively cosmetic, a mask that hid the seething frustration and anger of the Cuban people with the social, political and economic structures of the country that had remained virtually unchanged for a century. Frustration had reached the boiling point with the never ending stream of broken promises from corrupt politicians who catered to gangsters and foreign investors. The Cuban government had lost its moral authority with the Cuban people. The Cuban Revolution under Fidel Castro succeeded because he became that authority. His successful revolution made world headlines in 1959 and created the Cuban nation, giving meaning to its struggles for independence and equality, and transforming a troubled but essentially peripheral Caribbean island, once a US protectorate and ally into an independent player on the world stage. He became the most charismatic leader of the Third World, during its heyday, and survived the collapse of the Soviet Union itself as the longest-serving head of a Communist state. Whether for him or against him, successive Latin American

generations were profoundly influenced by the figure of Castro and his ability to combine socialism with nationalism, a model based less on Marxism than on the home-grown example of José Martí's *Cuba Libre* (Free Cuba) movement in the late 19th-century.

## Revolutionary beginnings

The illegitimate son of a wealthy plantation owner, Castro received the education and status to help him achieve his goals as well as experiencing firsthand the social contradiction of southeastern Cuba, in which a large proportion of the population were Afro-Cuban rural workers. Politicized at university in Havana, where he studied law, Castro's first introduction to activist politics came when, in 1948, he travelled to Bogotá, Colombia, with plans to disrupt the Pan-American Union Conference, when countrywide riots broke out in response to the assassination of the popular leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. On returning to Cuba, Castro intended to run for a seat in the Cuban parliament in 1952 but the US-backed coup, that installed Batista for his second presidential term, canceled the election. Sometime during this period Castro the reformer became Castro the revolutionary. For a man with no military background or training and from a wealthy family, the decision was a radical one.

### Fidel Castro (1926–)

Castro Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born into the Cuban plantation elite in 1927. He was the third of six children by his father, a *peninsular* and wealthy sugar plantation owner who could not marry Fidel's mother until Castro was 17 at which time he took his father's surname. The region where he grew up in the Oriente province of southeastern Cuba was dominated by the estates of the US-owned United Fruit Company, and Castro's companions were the children of rural workers. In 1945 he went to the University of Havana, entered the law school and entered politics. He became a student activist, joined the Partido Ortodoxo (Orthodox Party) and became a passionate advocate of Cuban nationalism, independence and anti-imperialism. A socialist, he initially denied his more overtly communist sympathies, so as not to offend Ortodoxo Party leader Eduardo Chibas, for whom he had a high regard. In 1948, Castro traveled to Bogotá, Colombia, where he gained firsthand experience of popular uprisings.

On returning to Cuba, Fidel married Mirta Diaz Balart. He intended to run for a seat in the Cuban parliament in 1952 but a US-backed coup installed Fulgencia Batista.

On July 26, 1953, at the age of 26, Castro led a group of 165 students in an audacious attack on the Moncada military barracks near Santiago, intended to spark insurrection against Batista. Poorly armed, with little military training, the attack failed. Castro and his brother Raúl were captured and jailed. The trial and the publication of his speech *History Will Absolve Me* made Castro famous. Castro was released from prison after he had served only two years of his sentence. Batista also promised elections but when it became clear

that they would not take place, Castro left for Mexico where he began to plan another attempt to overthrow the Cuban government. After building up a stock of guns and ammunition, Castro, Che Guevara and 81 other rebels arrived in Cuba on December 2, 1956. Met by heavy Batista defenses, nearly everyone in the movement was killed, with merely a handful escaping, including Castro, his brother Raúl, and Guevara. For the next two years, Castro succeeded in gaining large numbers of volunteers. Using guerrilla warfare tactics, Castro and his supporters attacked Batista's forces, overtaking town after town. Batista quickly lost popular support and suffered numerous defeats. On January 1, 1959, Batista fled Cuba. Manuel Urrutia became president of the new government and Castro was placed in charge of the military.

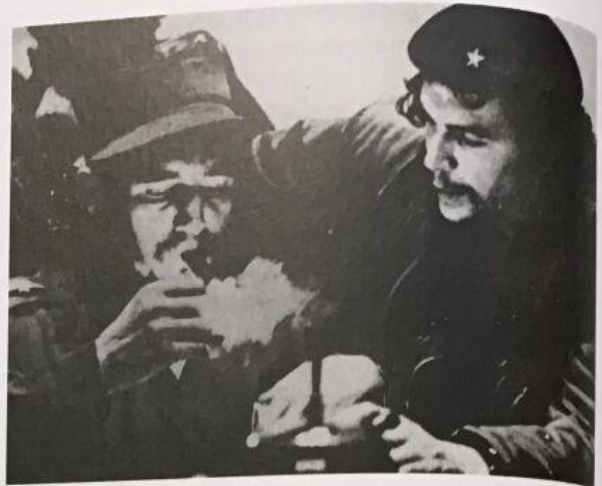
By July 1959, Castro had effectively taken over as leader of Cuba, a role that he would assume for nearly five decades of single-party rule. His regime initiated social and economic reforms, maintaining rigorous opposition to US interests, that saw Cuba established with economic and political ties to the Communist Bloc until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Castro achieved high standards in literacy, education, healthcare and welfare reform in Cuba, benefiting in particular the large Afro-Cuban population. His legacy is marred by political isolation, unsuccessful economic policies and repression of dissent. Castro retired from government due to ill health in 2006, handing over the leadership to his brother Raúl.



On July 26, 1953, at the age of 26, Castro led a group of 165 students in an audacious attack on the Moncada military barracks near Santiago. They faced 1000 well-armed soldiers. He hoped the action would precipitate a spontaneous uprising against Batista. He was wrong. Poorly armed, with little military training, the attack failed. The army, initially surprised, recovered quickly, opened fire and many young attackers were killed. Castro and his brother Raúl were captured and jailed to await trial. The trial became a public spectacle. Later, in jail, serving out his sentence, Castro made a record of his courtroom speech, "History will absolve me," later to become the manifesto for the *Movimiento 26 de julio* (the 26th of July Movement) as it became known. After 10,000 copies of the speech had been distributed, Castro became a national hero. In May 1955, he and his brother Raúl together with 18 followers were released from the Isle of Pines prison under the new General Amnesty law that Batista hoped would restore public favor.

Castro left Cuba in 1955, and went to Mexico to recruit, train and equip an invasion force. Like Martí, he planned to return to Cuba to fight again. His most important recruit was Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who along with Raúl became Castro's most trusted co-revolutionary. Guevara was a young Argentinean doctor, who like Castro was raised in middle-class affluence and was moved to reject his upbringing. Che was convinced that revolution (preferably communist) was the only hope of a better life for the oppressed peoples of Latin America. He became the heroic face of the revolution with his ragged beard and searing dark eyes, framed by his famous red-star beret. He also became its greatest martyr. (He was killed in 1967, fighting in Bolivia).

For the return to Cuba, Castro took exceptional risks, leaving the Mexican port of Tuxpán, Veracruz, on a boat called the *Granma* that was safe to hold



Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara in 1956.

#### Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928–1967)

"Che" Guevara was born in Rosario, Argentina, the son of progressive, middle-class parents of Spanish, Basque and Irish descent. An asthmatic all his life, Guevara studied medicine and undertook a trip through the Andes in the early 1950s, while still a student, through which he gained a direct knowledge of peasant conditions and political movements. He was in Guatemala in 1954, in the final months of the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz, and was witness to the invasion in June by a small group of Guatemalan officers, organized and funded by the US Central Intelligence Agency, which confirmed in him a life-long distrust of the United States. Later in 1954, while living in Mexico City, he met Raúl and Fidel Castro, and joined their 26th of July Movement. Between him and Fidel, he noted on first meeting, there was a "mutual sympathy." Right from the start, they were an effective partnership. Guevara provided Castro with broader horizons, a strong understanding of revolutionary experiments and political theory, as well as considerable first-hand knowledge of Latin America. Castro gave Guevara an immediate political cause. Guevara travelled to Cuba aboard the yacht *Granma* with the rebel army and became second-in-command to Fidel Castro, playing a major role in the successful two year guerrilla campaign that deposed the Batista regime.



Following the Cuban Revolution, Guevara performed a number of key roles in the new government. These included a focus on agrarian reform as minister of industries, serving as the national bank president, overseeing the revolutionary tribunals and later travelling the globe as a diplomat. He oversaw the training of the militia forces who repelled the Bay of Pigs Invasion and organized the deal to bring the Soviet nuclear-armed ballistic missiles to Cuba in 1962 that sparked the Cuban Missile Crisis. He was an enthusiastic writer and diarist, and published a manual on guerrilla warfare, along with a best-selling memoir about his youthful motorcycle journey across South America. Guevara left Cuba in 1965 to spread revolution abroad, first in Congo-Kinshasa, in Africa, and later in Bolivia, where he was executed by CIA-assisted Bolivian forces.

only 25 people, but carrying over 80 with armaments. On December 2, 1956, it landed in Playa Las Coloradas, not far from Santiago, where the arrival of the rebel army was intended to coincide with planned riots by mainland members of the movement. But after an event-filled voyage in which the boat almost sank, they landed in daylight, and almost immediately were attacked by the Cuban air force, killing most of the rebels. The landing party was split into two and wandered lost for two days, most of their supplies abandoned where they landed. Of the original band, only 12 eventually regrouped in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Castro and Guevara became international heroes when Herbert Matthews, a reporter from the *New York Times* was brought to the rebel hideout. In a series of articles and photos Matthews described a noble rebel band of freedom fighters, enduring hardships to fight oppression. In the United States, public sympathy for the rebels grew and support for Batista dwindled. Batista had his hands full dealing with the revolutionary unrest in the cities, orchestrated by other members of the movement, most notably Frank País, as well as rival groups. Oriente province was disrupted by strikes and acts of terrorism. Castro's forces were growing and launched a series of raids on the Cuban army, causing heavy casualties. In 1958, the rebels launched a three pronged assault that effectively cut the island in half. The United States government turned its back on Batista's pleas for help, and on January 1, 1959, Batista fled.

### The rule of Fidel Castro, 1959–70

On January 1, 1959, Castro triumphantly entered Havana leading the men and women of the 26th of July Movement to the cheers of adoring Cubans. Batista was gone and so was the vision of Cuba as a playground for rich North Americans and their business interests. The revolution had triumphed. Beside him stood the two men that he trusted the most, his younger brother Raúl and Guevara. Together this triumvirate would shape the course and direction of the revolution with Castro as supreme commander. On January 2, Castro began to govern Cuba and the future was uncertain. How long would he last in power if he challenged the United States? In that case, could the revolution succeed? Cubans had high hopes that Castro would bring meaningful change to their country. The 26th of July Movement had promised independence, democracy and an end to social injustice, but what form would it take? What were Castro's true intentions? How would the revolution turn out?

Castro's approach to these questions was based on improvisation and pragmatism. He would dismantle the previous government and create a new structure based on the ideals of the revolution. He appeared a moderate in those early days, installing the respected anti-Batista urban leader Manuel Urrutia as president. Urrutia appointed a cabinet of moderates and a prime minister, José Miró Cardona, and expected a rapid move to free elections. He would be disappointed.

#### Discussion point

##### The Cuban leadership

President Urrutia and prime minister José Miró Cardona both resigned from the revolutionary Cuban government within six months. Both cited differences with Castro in this period as in their future careers.



What does this say about Castro's leadership goals and the direction of the provisional government appointed in January 1959?

The new government, however, won the approval of the US who responded by officially recognizing the Urrutia government and dispatching a new ambassador. Castro remained in command of the rebel army and maintained an overall right of veto. In February, after Cardona unexpectedly resigned after serving only six weeks, Castro became prime minister—the effective head of the new government. The reasons for the changes in government were cited in the *Revolution* newspaper, regarded as the voice of the 26th of July Movement, as ongoing problems with “the dispersal of power.” This was confirmed by the Fundamental Law of the Republic passed in the same month that gave lawmaking power to the executive. In short order, Castro had become the legal leader of Cuba.

In March, Castro implemented three reforms that foreshadowed a move to the left. As a staunch Cuban nationalist, he took over management of the US-owned telephone company and cut rates; he ordered the forced sale of vacant urban lots at reduced prices to end speculation and slashed urban rents by 50%. This was just the start. Within the first two years the *fidelistas* (Castro’s inner circle of trusted revolutionaries) had laid the foundation for revolutionary changes to every aspect of Cuba’s social, economic, and political structure. By 1970, the socialist (communist) government was in total control with Castro as supreme leader and the last traces of old Cuba were gone. By 1979, Cuba was a communist Caribbean nation with strong economic and political ties to the Soviet Union. National sovereignty, economic independence from foreign control, full employment, equal treatment of all citizens regardless of race or gender; education, healthcare and democracy comprised the first wave of reforms. Castro delivered on all these promises (to some extent) except for democracy, which was permanently shelved after 1961.

### Political developments

The new sovereignty would be defended from foreign incursion and counterrevolutionary insurgents by a national militia of part-time soldiers. “Committees for the Defense of the Revolution” were established throughout the country and recruited 500,000 soldiers who owed allegiance to Castro—a huge military considering Cuba’s population was 6.7 million. The militia was, in effect, revolutionary and showed their loyalty to the spirit of the 26th of July movement. Like the French Revolution’s *levée en Masse* (conscription) it sent a wave of patriotism throughout the island, uniting Cubans to a common cause as never before. In effect, it created a new Cuban sense of shared nationhood. The country was militarized almost overnight. The committees controlled the country and would act as the government’s strong arm, keeping order and control during the coming years of change and turmoil, effectively eliminating counterrevolutionary activity, defined broadly as anyone who disagreed with Castro.

A common characteristic of major revolutions is the use of mass execution to purge any trace of the old order as symbolized by the *ancien régime* of pre-revolutionary France. During the French Revolution, thousands of aristocrats died at the guillotine, and in the Soviet Union, millions died under Stalin’s purges of counter-revolutionaries (real or imagined). By comparison, the summary



How does the Cuban Revolution compare to the French and Russian revolutions?

execution of 550 Batista supporters and officials seemed restrained by comparison, although still inviting criticism from within Latin America and the United States. Criticism of Castro's refusal to hold elections came from members of the Fidelista. The most famous dissident was Major Huber Matos. A central leader and trusted ally during the revolution, Matos wrote a letter against the growth of communist influence and Castro's cancellation of elections. He resigned from the air force in protest. Fidel resigned the premiership claiming a counterrevolutionary conspiracy. The response was predictable. Castro returned bowing to popular demand. Matos was put on trial and convicted for counterrevolutionary activity. He spent the next 15 years in jail and was often touted as a traitor to the people's revolution. The message was clear, critics of the revolution could expect harsh treatment. For many middle class Cubans, this was a crucial message and resulted in the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Cuba's best-educated and talented citizens to the United States. For Castro, this was just the price of revolution. This event foretold the end of dissent and the growth of censorship. Within the first 18 months the free press was suppressed and the academic autonomy of the University of Havana abolished.

In years to come, it was obvious that eliminating the middle class, though not a direct goal of the revolution was in step with Castro's vision of an egalitarian society. Those who fled, left behind large estates. The *Ministerio de Recuperación de Bienes Malversados* (Ministry for the Recovery of Stolen Property) confiscated the property of Batista and his supporters as well as dissidents (estimated at US\$25 million). The haul was lucrative and funded future ventures. Like a modern day Robin Hood, Castro took from the rich and gave to the poor. Lavish houses and mansions were converted into multi-family housing units that helped alleviate housing shortages. With his control assured, Castro called on the people to make the sacrifices needed to correct Cuba's historic wrongs and create a better nation for everyone.

Creating a sovereign Cuba in control of its economy was at the very heart of the revolution. Castro knew that he had to eliminate foreign control, making a clash with the United States inevitable. He made the first moves quickly. When several major oil companies refused to extend the newly installed government credit for oil imports, Castro cancelled Cuba's exclusive contract with these firms and bought Soviet crude oil to be processed in US-owned refineries in Cuba. When their management refused, Castro took over the refineries and sent the US companies packing. In retaliation, the US revoked the Cuban sugar quota that annually bought about 80% of the cane crop. Castro responded, in turn, by seizing all US property and utilities (electricity and telephone), sugar mills and nickel mines. The US responded with an embargo on all US trade to Cuba with a few exceptions like medicine. Next, Cuba's dependence on a one-crop sugar economy had to be changed. Promoting crop diversification and industrialization (ISI) was the responsibility of Guevara who implemented a four year plan to achieve these goals in 1961. A central planning agency was set up but was often ignored by Castro's "special" plans. Guevara's plan unraveled because of high costs and



the poor quality of goods produced as well as bad planning. He resigned in 1963 and shortly after departed Cuba to promote revolutions abroad. Meanwhile, the sugar industry had collapsed with crop levels at 50% of pre-1959 levels. Cuba's already meager supply of foreign currency was used up leaving the nation virtually bankrupt. The pace of industrialization could not be sustained. Soviet economic planners advised Castro to resurrect the sugar cane industry. Castro faced a classic economic riddle. To end Cuba's reliance on sugar exports, other areas of the economy required development. But the best source of income to fund diversification was the sugar industry. Any drop in sugar revenues would undermine efforts to end reliance on sugar production. As well, harvesting cane was labor intensive, taking the workforce away from the development of new industries. In 1963, Castro declared that 1970 would be the "Year of Decisive Endeavour." He promised a bumper harvest of 10 million tons, when yearly yields averaged 5.5 to 6.5 million tons. It was a bold move designed to deflect attention from the government's economic shortcomings, a tactic Castro would use often. It was also a national campaign to bring Cubans together under Castro's rule. The issue was how best to motivate Cubans.

Guevara believed that moral incentives should be used to create a new breed of Cubans who understood the need for personal sacrifice to promote the lofty goals of the revolution. Material incentives, wage diversification for example, served only to stunt the growth of the "New Man." Guevara's views were opposed by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, an economist who argued that for the economy to advance a new prosperity it must offer incentives, sound planning and adopt modern accounting practices. He believed Cuba's policy should be flexible and pragmatic, such as trading with nations who were ideologically different. But Guevara's preference for moral incentive (also distinguishing the Chinese from the Soviet model of material incentive) was, ultimately, to prevail. Guevara's drive to export Marxist revolution throughout Latin America led to his eventual resignation from the government, and search for new revolutions to lead.

The only real solution to Cuba's economic problems was the Soviet Union. The Soviets began wooing Castro in 1960 with a four-year 200 million-dollar deal to trade one billion tons of sugar per year in exchange for Soviet equipment. Castro had never been a Communist Party member and had made a point of keeping his distance. During the revolution, the Communist Party had criticized Castro for his bourgeois adventurism but by 1960 the two sides were holding secret meetings. Castro wanted to take control of the party and did so gradually. On April 15, 1961, shortly after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, he declared he was leading a socialist revolution under "the very noses of the Yankees."

Next he orchestrated the *Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas* (the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations) that brought the *fidelistas* and Cuban communists together formally in 1961. In March 1963 the IRO became the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC) and the final step came in 1965 with the creation of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC). Castro was First Secretary and placed *fidelistas* in key positions. The final act came in 1976, when

Cuba declared itself a communist state with Castro as head of state, head of the party and in control of key appointments. In 1960, however, Castro was playing a dangerous game with the superpowers, moving Cuba into the Soviet sphere at the same time that the United States was being ousted. This did not sit well in the White House and eventually led to the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and a 50-year US trade embargo.

### Land reform and nationalization

On May 17, 1959, shortly before signing the trade deal with the Soviets, the Agrarian Reform Law (ARL) was passed mandating the expropriation of large agricultural holdings and signaled radical alterations to Cuba's agricultural sector. The stage had been set by Guevara who stated in January that land redistribution was high government priority. The ARL was crafted by him as a means of dissolving the *latifundios* (large estates) that had been outlawed in the 1940 constitution but never enforced because of US ownership and control of the sugar industry, and Cuba's own reliance on cane profits. The majority of expropriated land belonged to large US corporations like Coca Cola or Hershey's Chocolate, comprising 70 to 75% of cultivated lands. The *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria* (National Institute of Agrarian Reform or INRA) was established to oversee the changes. The ARL set the maximum size of private farms at 30 *caballerías* (403 hectares or 995 acres). It abolished sharecropping and restricted foreign ownership. Nearly 100,000 Cubans received 27 hectares and the right to purchase 40 more if available. Cuba had a mixed farming system of small peasant farms cultivating 39% of arable land, 19% larger farms and 43% state-controlled cooperatives. All uncultivated land defaulted to state ownership. Eventually, all farms became *granjas del pueblo* (state farms) including 480,000 acres from US companies.

Compensation to foreign land owners was paid in 20-year Cuban government bonds with an annual interest rate of 4.5% based on the assessed value of the land at the time of the takeover. In other words, no compensation would be paid for 20 years based on land values significantly lower than pre-1959 levels. On June 11, the US government demanded immediate and fair compensation for US interests. A year later, in October 1960, in response to the US ending the sugar quota and imposing an embargo, Castro expropriated all US landholdings without compensation. This included public utilities, banking, transportation, sugar refining, mining and tourism (casinos) totaling over a billion dollars. In effect, in less than two years, Castro had evicted the United States without compensation and welcomed the Soviet Union as Cuba's new partner

Large sugar estates and cattle ranches became state cooperatives rather than being broken into less effective smaller parcels. In 1963, the Second Law of Agrarian Reform expropriated about 10,000 mid-sized farms (over 67 hectares) and the state controlled 70% of the land. Smaller landholders were controlled though a regulatory body the *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (National Association of Small Farmers, ANAP). Members were organized into cooperatives to control kinds and types of crops, prices and sale of land (only to the

government). The ANAP made these farmers de facto workers of the state and ensured total government control of agriculture. This did not alter Cuba's economic reliance on sugar cane exports, despite efforts to diversify crops. In 1964, the sugar yield recovered, increasing by 9% over the previous year's but was still well below the previous average. Production did not reach pre-1959 levels until the last years of the decade.

The nationalization of property also included the extensive land holdings of the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in the expulsion of the Cuban bishop along with hundreds of clergy. The final part of the initial period was providing a guaranteed wage for all Cubans. This was very popular. One out of every two Cubans worked in the sugar industry which meant that for at least half the year, half the population was unemployed. Now Castro guaranteed them an adequate yearly wage. The unforeseen result was a rise in the demand for food that created severe shortages. In 1962, the government imposed rationing which remained a constant feature.

Castro finished nationalizing in 1968 when he took over 56,000 small Cuban-owned businesses, including restaurants, laundries, garages and beauty parlors. All now became salaried employees of the state. By the end of the 1960s, Cuba had become a communist dictatorship with Castro as supreme commander. Materially, the life of the average Cuban had improved (despite food shortages) but rationing was a vast improvement on chronic starvation. Healthcare, improved nutrition, literacy and education, housing and year-round employment meant a better life for most. The revolutionary movement itself had been transformed from a rugged band of *barbudos* (bearded ones) into a modern authoritarian communist dictatorship supported by a technocratic bureaucracy and an obedient and capable military. The emigration of hundreds of thousands of dissidents meant that Castro's opposition lived in Miami, not Cuba.

### Castro's personality cult

Castro's carefully orchestrated persona was as a larger-than-life, paternal populist leader. A man of the people: a ragged, bearded hero in green military fatigues with flashing eyes, often seen puffing a big cigar, he was a man who could be trusted to do what was best for Cuba. By 1970, the revolution had become a powerful, centralized, bureaucracy.

Castro was the all-powerful dictator of a communist regime supported by loyal *fidelistas*, the military and the Soviet Union. He had made many improvements to the lives of average Cubans but had yet to significantly improve the economy. A learning curve to correct past mistakes known as *rectificación* was a constant theme during the first decade. The 1970s were a turning point, witnessing a paradigm shift from a revolution serving the people to a people serving the revolution. The next 10 years would be a time of consolidation and expansion of the government's control of the regime domestically. Internationally, Castro would attempt to export revolution throughout Latin America and Africa.

### Activity

#### Cuban Rectificación

The Rectificación Campaign launched by Fidel Castro in 1986 criticized the Soviet model of Marxism. How can it be viewed in relation to Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union?

Analyze Castro's statements from the period 1985–89 to come up with an assessment of his ideological model for Cuban reform.

The much-anticipated 10 million ton sugar harvest would show the world the progress of the socialized Cuban economy. "The year of Decisive Endeavor," as Castro called it, would deliver a 10 million ton harvest that would easily surpass the previous best of 6.5 million tons. The profits would fill Cuba's empty foreign exchange coffers and provide investment funds for industrial development. It was a bold plan. In 1963, Castro had ordered 10 million tons. The quality of the sugar cane was improved, new stalks were planted, new lands appropriated and thousands of volunteers came from the city to cut cane. All efforts were made to reach the goal. But the final tally was 8.5 million tons.

On 26 July 1970, Castro faced the nation, broadcasting before a large crowd in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución: "Let the shame be welcome," he cried. He offered to resign blaming himself for the failure to achieve the target output, but the crowds absolved him and cried no. The crisis passed. Castro had again used revolutionary rhetoric to deflect attention from his economic shortcomings. The failure resulted in closer economic and political ties to the Soviet Union.

### The new Cuban bureaucracy

The 1970s was a time of transition as the government adopted a more bureaucratic style of leadership. A new executive committee was formed. The government was reorganized with clearly defined lines of separation between the military, the bureaucracy and the communist party. The common element was that Castro personally controlled all three. The militia was folded into the army which was made into a professional fighting force and would soon find itself fighting in Africa.

The bureaucracy instituted a program of mass involvement in the government which included a larger role for labor unions. Tribunals enforced labor laws and workers rights, and workers were involved in planning production goals and targets. The planning process was computerized and a system of material incentives and merit pay was instituted. The incentives were commonly based on meeting production targets and merit pay was based on the nature of the employment; some jobs were considered more important than others, such as doctors and teachers. The results were encouraging: between 1971 and 1973, productivity increased by 20%. The efforts to systematize economic production combined with merit incentives resulted in a significant rise in the GDP from 3.9% to 10% annually. Subsidies from the Soviet Union played a significant role in funding many of these ventures. Yet all these changes had only reduced not eliminated the sugar one-crop economy. During the last years of the 1970s, economic growth fell to 4%. This was also a reflection of world economic decline during this period, but it also showed that Cuba had a long way to go.

The last major development in this transition came in 1976. A national referendum approved the adoption of a socialist constitution officially replacing the 1940 constitution. It provided for a system of elected municipal and provincial and national assemblies; most representatives were members of the Cuban Communist Party, the top appointments held by Castro and his inner circle.

### Activity

#### Photojournalism

The photographs of a controversial historical figure can be used by opponents and proponents to promote their message. Find a selection of contemporary photographs of Castro from the years 1959–70. Study the image he cultivates and write up a series of captions to describe the man and his politics.



Castro cutting Cane, 1960.

### Social and cultural developments

Many Cubans were opposed to the growing authoritarianism, while others grew tired of the economic problems and Castro's continued call for self-sacrifice. Discontent boiled over in 1980, when over 125,000 abandoned Cuba on a fleet of leaky, overcrowded boats mainly through the port of Mariel to make the 150-kilometre crossing to the United States. Social discontent was on the rise in the 1960s, directed at the increasingly authoritarian, anti-democratic nature of the revolution. As in the 1930s, a counterculture emerged singing *canciones de protesta* (protest songs). Folk artists became popular and were influenced by international protest movements in the 1960s. Artists praised the revolution and its advances but criticized its failures, authoritarianism and the restriction of artistic freedom. Silvio Rodríguez and Haydée Santamaría epitomized the new movement. Rodríguez denounced the faceless bureaucrats for ruining the revolution. His youthful followers dressed like hippies and decried the contradiction of encouraging revolution abroad and stifling expression at home. Santamaría was head of the Casa de las Américas Institute that promoted Cuban music. She tried to protect the young artists from state censure and encouraged them to express themselves. She organized cultural exchanges and music festivals and provided access to state radio and TV for these artists. Some singers were jailed for overtly criticizing the regime.

Following the failure of the 10 million tons, Cubans were given some leeway to vent their frustration through the music of the *Nueva Trova* (new ballad) movement. The government embraced the young musicians who led the movement and allowed them to participate in international music festivals and competitions. There were clearly defined limits to criticism regulated by the *Movimiento Nacional de la Trova* (National Movement of the Ballad, or MNT) and some songs deemed inappropriate or anti-social were banned. The MNT did, however, provide musicians with better equipment, training and recording opportunities. They walked a fine line between supporting and criticizing the revolution in their music.

Creative writers, journalists, filmmakers, visual and performing artists all faced a similar curtailment of their freedom of creative expression, if they were critical of the regime. For many

#### Heberto Padilla (1932–2000)

In 1968, Heberto Padilla, a respected Cuban poet who had grown disillusioned by the revolution's artistic dogmas and authoritarianism, created an international controversy with his book *Fuera del juego* (Out of the game), a collection of poems that criticized the government's strong-arm tactics. Padilla was awarded Cuba's highest literary prize by the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists. The government was outraged and forced the union to issue an appendix in the book that condemned it as counterrevolutionary. For the next two years, Padilla was under virtual house arrest and was forced to read a humiliating public retraction of his own writings. When it was exposed that he was writing a novel criticizing the government, he and his wife were imprisoned and, most likely, tortured. He became a *cause célèbre* in the international community as a symbol of oppression. His family was allowed to leave for the United States in 1979. International pressure resulted in Padilla's release in 1980. He was called a hero by President Reagan. The result of the affair was an end to the support for the revolution by many important Latin American and European writers. As a writer in exile he continued his criticism of Castro notably in the 1984 novel *En Mi Jardín Pastan Los Heroes* (Heros Graze in my Garden). He never returned to Cuba. Outside of Cuba he became a symbol of oppression but inside Cuba he was an example of what happened to those who were overly critical of the regime.



the only options were to be discredited and imprisoned or a life in exile. One such writer was the poet and novelist Heberto Padilla (1932–2000).

### Women and the revolution

Women fought with Castro every step of the way and made significant gains in a society where machismo dominated and controlled relations between the sexes. In 1960, the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Cuban Women's Federation, or FMC) was started under Vilma Espín to bring about a change in the role of women. It started by attacking attitudes and illiteracy and through creating support for a national healthcare system, in which many women might also find employment. Other programs included teaching women vocational farming skills. The FMC has successfully lobbied the government to pass legislation to assist women. In 1975, the egalitarian Family Code was enacted and made sexual equality in a marriage a legal and moral obligation. Both men and women were entitled to education or rewarding employment. The code mandated equal sharing of house chores and child raising and legitimized divorce (which had been virtually forbidden by the Catholic Church). Women started attending universities in growing numbers (by 1990, 57% of university students were women and the percentage is higher in medicine). Cuba's policies towards women remain some of the most progressive and successful in the region.

Throughout the period, the number of women in school and the workplace tripled between 1959 and 1990. Women were, however, under-represented in the ranks of the Communist Party and in government. Yet, compared to other Latin American nations during the same period, Cuba was the uncontested leader in promoting equal opportunity.

### Developments in education

Speaking at the United Nations in 1960, Castro boasted that the revolution would get rid of illiteracy within a year, a strategy never-before tried in the developing world. 1961 was proclaimed the "Year of Education." Responding to the inadequacy of schools in the countryside, Castro mobilized 100,000 students to teach in rural areas. They taught a million people to read and write. This gave Cuba one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America. The education of young people was part of Castro's early goals to create a revolutionary nationalism among Cubans: it worked to ensure, in particular, the loyalty of the first generation of the revolution. The results were impressive. In the first decade, the number of new teachers tripled and the number of schools quadrupled. Education was free for all Cubans. Most Cubans completed grade nine, illiteracy disappeared and Cuba became a nation of readers, publishing thousands of books each year. In 1973, for example, 800 new titles and 28 million books were published.

#### Discussion point

It is a characteristic of single-party regimes to impose limits on the freedom of speech and artistic expression.



To what extent is it necessary for a successful revolution to control the arts?

### Improvements in healthcare

Castro took the revolution in healthcare to the countryside. Healthcare stood beside education as a top priority. Thousands of new doctors (the majority of them female) and medical professionals were trained. Hospitals were opened in the countryside. Infant mortality decreased significantly and when combined with improvements in other areas including nutrition, food supply and housing Cubans enjoyed longer and healthier lives.

### Eliminating racism

In 1959, Castro called for an end to racial discrimination in the workplace and in cultural centers. Afro-Cubans were not proportionately well-represented in the early revolutionary movement, despite its progressive, liberal egalitarian agenda. One reason for this was that Castro, unlike Martí, did not forefront “the color question” or devise a political program that targeted this ethnic group, from the outset. Another problem was the high degree of support among Afro-Cubans for Batista, himself a mixed-race mulatto, who employed many blacks in the military and police forces, and supported their cultural organizations, later closed down by Castro, who did not want to encourage a separatist movement. Changes in the law did not, however, put an immediate end to racist attitudes. The growth of the Afro-Cuban and mulatto population, as well as the increase in mixed-race marriages, did contribute to a significant easing of racial tensions. Merit hiring and promotion, notably in the military, meant that Afro-Cubans held important positions in the government. During the 1970s, Cuba guaranteed the entitlement of all citizens regardless of gender and ethnicity to equal wages, education, healthcare and merit hiring. These were important developments in maintaining loyal support for Castro among Afro-Cubans.

### Activity

#### Spreading revolution in Latin America

The spread of revolutionary ideas by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara was promoted through publications and speeches. These included:

- Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1960) and *Guerilla Warfare* (1961).
- Fidel Castro's speech, *The Second Declaration of Havana*, given on February 4, 1962,
- Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution* (1967)

Research these texts and summarize their intention.

#### Questions

- 1 How do they serve as historical documents of the Cuban Revolution?
- 2 How important were they to the development of the revolution and its foreign policies?

**Activity****Castro and communism****The historical controversy**

In the discussion of Castro's gradual conversion to communism, historians typically fall into three categories. Read each and then answer the questions that follow.

**Historian A: Conspiracy theory** Castro was always a communist and intended to make Cuba communist all along. He had hidden the fact he was a communist during the revolution to avoid alienating many Cubans and US military intervention under the Platt Amendment. It is uncertain, yet likely, that he had a relationship with the Soviet Union beforehand. He did not reveal his true intentions until he was firmly entrenched in power and knew he could rely on the support of the Soviet Union to counter-balance invasion threats from the United States.

**Historian B: Conversion theory** Assumes Castro was converted to Marxism. The question is whether he converted to Marxism of his own volition or had his hands forced by the policies and actions of the United States. It seems credible to conclude that active US opposition to Fidel's reforms, notably trade embargos and support for Cuban refugees, drove Fidel to seek an alliance with the Soviet Union. Soviet support was not unqualified and was given only after Castro had implemented a series of pro-socialist programs in the first two years of the revolution.

**Historian C: Pragmatism theory** Fidel, Guevara and others have acknowledged that the actions of the United States did influence them to a degree but that the reform measures implemented by Castro were Cuban in design and largely unaffected by foreign intervention. Castro and the Fidelistas took advantage of their enormous popularity to swing the revolution in a direction that would eliminate the abuses that the 26th of July movement had fought to eradicate. Fidel's adoption of communism was more pragmatic than ideological, based on the conviction that Cuba's problems could not be solved by capitalism (or democracy) and that Marxism was the best and most viable alternative available. Castro's handling of the situation was "realpolitik" at its best.

**Analyzing the evidence**

- 1 What evidence is there to support each of these theories? Provide three facts, and/or statements from the Cuban leaders that historians could use to support each theory.

Theory	Fact 1	Fact 2	Fact 3
Conspiracy theory			
Conversion theory			
Pragmatism theory			

- 2 Which theory, if any, do you support? Discuss your reasons with reference to your sources and the views of other historians and social commentators. Be aware that historians rarely subscribe to one particular theory when constructing the past, and often like to take a "revisionist" approach.



## The impact of the Cuban Revolution on the region

Castro and Guevara both believed that the best way to protect Cuba was to encourage insurrection throughout Latin America. Guevara, the ideologue, believed that communist insurrection was the only hope for the oppressed people of Latin America and the world. He became the recognized face of Latin American revolution and was more popular than Castro. Support organizations sprang up seemingly overnight in virtually every country in the region. A spontaneous continental revolution that united industrial and rural workers, as well as peasant farmers against bourgeois capitalist élites and US hegemony did not materialize. The political élites feared the revolutionary impulses of the people. Some responded with repression, others adopted a mild reform program designed to quell the anger and others combined both approaches (repression and reform).

In reaction to the insurgents, governments, for the most part, adopted a hard-line approach. Armed services took an active role in established military governments that were stridently anti-communist. They were supported in their efforts by sizeable grants from within the region, particularly US, and used these funds to train and arm anti-insurgency forces trained by foreign operatives who were experts in this type of warfare. By 1961, these units were successfully resisting and eliminating guerrilla units that were following the tactics and strategies laid out in Guevara's handbook on guerrilla warfare. He advised taking to the mountains, creating a safe haven and enlisting the support of the peasants as the formula for victory. However, new counterinsurgency strategies that attacked rebel strongholds and the lack of peasant support successfully countered the strategy. The new Cuban government put some of its limited resources—its direct support—into backing campaigns in Argentina, Venezuela and Bolivia without achieving significant results. Successful export of revolutionary socialism had to wait for Allende's Chile (1971), the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the New Jewel Movement in Grenada (both in 1979). The *fidelistas* were able to agitate reform movements and establish small guerrilla cadres but they were unable to overcome the increasingly well-organized and often US-trained military-backed regimes that took control in many Latin American nations. Between 1960 and 1964, 10 juntas occurred in eight different nations. The fear of another Cuban Revolution was taken seriously and nations moved to suppress and eliminate the threat.

Cuba was isolated, cut-off and contained. Trade with other nation in the region dried up. In 1962, Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS). The nations of the region concluded that economic development and prosperity would greatly reduce the appeal of revolution. The 1961 OAS-initiated Alliance for Progress modeled on the Marshall Plan in Europe after the Second World War and an important foreign policy of US president J. F. Kennedy, was one such program aimed at development. But the OAS itself, with its US bias (its headquarters were in Washington DC) promoted vested interests and US-sponsored regimes. The price of

stability was compliance. Of the US\$100 million in aid intended to improve economic infrastructure and economic development, much of the expenditure went into training police and military recruits in riot control, intelligence gathering and counterinsurgency.

The threat of communism was further complicated by the perception of some military leaders that even minor reform measures like those included in the Alliance for Progress, were communist inspired. Opponents to the government were branded communist. Nonetheless, student protests, workers strikes, revolutionary propaganda condemning the status quo, threats of exile invasions and pro-Castro rallies became an everyday spectacle in Latin America and destabilized many governments but rarely with the intended outcome of establishing a revolutionary government.

For its part, the Cuban government put some of its limited resources—its direct support—into backing campaigns in Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua. With the exception of the much later success of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, these campaigns were for the most part unsuccessful. By this time, Castro's own allegiances, and cautionary model, had significantly changed, as evidenced by his statement at the annual Moncada celebrations on 26 July, attended by the Sandinistas in their first flush of success, a statement that would rightly be perceived as a caution:

Each country has its path, its problems, its style, its methods, and its objectives. We have ours and they have theirs. We did it in a certain way—our way—and they will do it in their way ... No two revolutions are the same. They cannot be ... Our problems are not exactly their problems. The conditions in which our revolution was made are not exactly the same conditions in which their revolution was made ... In other words, things in Nicaragua are not going to be exactly the same, or anything like what they are in Cuba.

The Sandinista victory was welcomed by Cuba, but its very existence created additional problems in relation to the United States and the Soviet Union. One similarity with the Cuban experience, was the threat of US intervention (soon to be realized), and Castro cautioned the Sandinistas not to antagonize them. He recommended they establish a mixed economy, a pluralist political system, and maintain good relations with the Catholic Church (more influential than in Cuba). He did not want Nicaragua to go the same way as Cuba and lose a large proportion of middle class support. Under US President Reagan's *contra* insurgency, however, Nicaragua was to experience the full brunt of a CIA-backed insurgency to weaken Sandinista defenses. Castro had promised to send teachers and doctors in his first speech to the Sandinista leaders, but this had to be followed up by military advisors and weapons.

The much less-publicized revolution in Grenada the same year, followed the Cuban model more exactly, and Castro felt a strong and supportive allegiance with its leader Maurice Bishop, who in a dawn raid on the corrupt regime of Eric Gairy invoked comparisons with the Moncada rebellion. The New Jewel Movement that led the revolution of March 1979, on an island with a population of only

### Activity

#### The Organization of American States (OAS)

The charter for the OAS, in its current form, was signed in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1948. Research the Organization of American States (OAS) and its membership in 1948–79.

#### Questions

- 1 Which regimes did the OAS support? Which countries and political parties were excluded from its intra-regional cooperation and investment programs?
- 2 What effect did the OAS have on stability in the region?
- 3 How did the OAS contribute to development goals?

100,000, was closely modeled on the Cuban example, a model, in Bishop's words, "of what socialism can do in a small country—for health, education, employment, and for ending poverty, prostitution and disease." Cuba was true to its word and provided support, also with the construction of an airport at Point Salines to help the small Caribbean nation develop its tourism, much to US concern at what they regarded as a Soviet–Cuban base. These threats and internal divisions within the revolutionary movement saw the end of Bishop's regime at the hands of his own movement in October 1983, and the subsequent US invasion.

Perhaps the most revealing complication of the Cuban model, and its international allegiances, however, was revealed in Cuban relations with Allende's Chile, from 1970. Castro was a long-time friend and supporter of Salvador Allende, the newly elected president and leader of the Chilean Socialist Party, who himself was possibly the warmest supporter of the Cuban Revolution within Latin America. Castro's problem was his newly established allegiance to the Chilean Communist Party that meant he could no longer show support for the revolutionary movement of Allende's. His relationship with Allende became strained and his presence on a state visit to Chile proved unsettling to the country's bourgeois democracy, contributing to internal opposition that ultimately led to the September 1973 coup in which Allende was deposed. As a Soviet-backed state, Cuba became increasingly isolated and turned its attention to the new states and allied regimes in Africa.

## Populist leaders in Latin America

Populism, in Latin America, was a response to the political, economic and social conditions and challenges nations faced during and following the Great Depression. It was founded on a charismatic leader who created a multi-class political alliance that represented the significant economic and social changes which had occurred in many Latin America nations because of industrialization and the growth of a prosperous and educated middle class and a rapidly organizing working class. Historian Robert Dix defines populism as:

... a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the working class and/or peasantry, but which does not result from the autonomous organization power of either of these sectors. It is supported by non-working class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology.

**Source:** Dix, Robert H. "Populism: Authoritarian and Democratic." *Latin American Research Review*. vol 20, no.2, 1985. p. 29.

In some nations populists challenged the long-standing agricultural elites and the Catholic Church for control of the masses. The military exerted an ever-increasing influence that often stifled meaningful change and in many cases resulted in regime change.

*"Give me a balcony and I will become President."*

José María Velasco,  
President of Ecuador