Chapter One

Chronology, Myths, and Phases

The Cuban Revolution directed by Fidel Castro transformed the political organization, economy, and class structure of Cuba. As the most radical social revolution in Latin American history it has inspired widespread sympathy and bitter denunciation. Many of its interpreters have displayed a strong ideological bias; as a result its origins and evolution are wrapped in controversy, exaggeration, and myth. One can best approach the controversies and myths by way of the comparatively solid ground of a summary chronicle, tracing the early development of Castroism and the first three years of the Cuban Revolution.¹

In the early hours of 1 January 1959 the Cuban dictator President Fulgencio Batista fled the country. Some forty-eight hours later the victorious rebels of the 26th of July Movement claimed control of Havana. These events, representing the culmination of a political struggle that had begun soon after Batista regained power in a coup d'etat of 1952, marked the end of the guerrilla war led by Fidel Castro. Castro enters Cuban history on 26 July 1953, the date of his ill-fated attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago, Cuba. "Castroism" may be dated from his famous "History Will Absolve Me!" speech, initially delivered at his trial in October 1953 and subsequently enlarged and amended during his imprisonment on the Isle of Pines. This speech made no effort to describe a detailed blueprint for social or economic reformation. It offered an indictment of Batista tyranny, a justification for armed violence, and a program of political reforms similar to those advocated by the Ortodoxo party, which then claimed Castro's formal allegiance. Castro was content to place himself within the general framework of Cuban left-wing politics and the revolutionary tradition of José Marti.

The beneficiary of one of Batista's periodic general pardons, Castro was released from prison and sailed for Mexico in May 1955.
Two months later, he formally proclaimed the 26th of July Movement. Within a year he had cut ties with the Ortodoxo party and other anti-Batista movements, and announced that Cuban salvation would be achieved through armed insurrection and the leadership of Fidel Castro. With some eighty followers, Castro then embarked in the leaky tub Granma for the Oriente coast in eastern Cuba. Ambushed by a detachment of Batista's soldiers, his "army" was reduced to a dozen men who found refuge in the jungle fastness of the Sierra Maestra. From this mountain redoubt Castro issued a call to arms in November 1956 and proclaimed the "Political-Social Manifesto from the Sierra Maestra" on 12 July 1957.

This manifesto was the only formal program signed by Castro before he came to power, and it offers the best illustration of Castroism in its guerrilla phase. Its tone was nationalistic, reformist, and vaguely socialistic, and its goals were free elections, constitutional government, agrarian reform, increased industrialization, and the exclusion of all forms of foreign intervention. Its demands found their origin in the past history of Cuban left-wing democratic, nationalist movements. The originality of the 26th of July Movement lay not in its ideas, but in its armed resistance tactics, its military command structure, the mystique of its leader, and its determination not to accept compromises that could endanger the independence of the movement. In December 1957 Castro censured a "Pact of Unity" fashioned by various anti-Batista representatives in Miami for its failure to prohibit compromise with any post-Batista military junta and its failure to denounce foreign intervention. After Batista was driven from Cuba, it should be the heroes of the Sierra Maestra who would maintain public order, reorganize the army, and establish a provisional government.

Castro had given warning to other elements of the anti-Batista opposition, and with the early days of 1959 he made good his claim to primacy for the barbudos (the "bearded ones"). Army generals, comparatively untainted by association with Batista, who hoped to fashion a mixed military-civillian junta quickly were cowed into submission and members of the Civil Resistance and the student underground (the Directorio Revolucionario) who expected to share power with Castro's guerrilla army soon were outmaneuvered. By 8 January 1959 when Castro completed his triumphal progress across the island of Cuba and entered Havana, the city was under the sole control of the 26th of July Movement and its soldiers. Castro's personal appointee, Manuel Urrutia, was installed as president and the regular army purged and melded with the barbudos to give Castro control of the armed forces. The next month saw two hundred leading Batistianos tried by revolutionary tribunals and executed, and on 7 February the new government vested all legislative powers in a council of ministers. A week later Castro replaced Miró Cardona as prime minister and for the first time assumed an official post of leadership in the provisional government.

In March, the new government decreed a 50 percent reduction in all rents, denounced the United States for the aid it had given the Batista dictatorship, and "intervened" the Cuban Telephone Company, a monopoly owned by private U.S. capital. In May, Fidel signed an agrarian reform bill in La Plata, the former rebel capital in the Sierra Maestra. A compromise between the competing agrarian reform ideas of land redistribution and national planning, the law of 17 May 1959 was more sweeping than the agrarian reform decree approved by the rebel chief in 1958, but it provided for monetary compensation in the form of twenty-year bonds at 4.5 percent interest. The advocates of state operation of the agrarian sector were appeased by the encouragement given agricultural cooperatives and the establishment of the state-run National Institute of Agrarian Reform.

June saw the first of several ministerial shuffles that reflected sharpening disagreement between the evolving moderate and radical factions of the provisional government. With the forced resignation of Urrutia as president in July and his replacement by Osvaldo Dorticós, the moderate faction suffered public defeat and Castro's position as Maximum Leader was emphasized. The moderates were those who continued to believe that social reform was possible under a regulated, mixed economy and a constitutional political system, and who expressed increasing fear at what they saw as the twin dangers of communist influence and totalitarian politics. Their leadership was impaired in the fall of 1959 when Major Hubert Matos was arrested and imprisoned and Major Camilo Cienfuegos died in an airplane accident. Matos and Cienfuegos had been rebel officers during the civil war and were figures of considerable popularity within the 26th of July Movement. With their eclipse, the influence of Raúl Castro and Ché Guevara increased and Fidel
came to view the moderates as counterrevolutionaries. By the late fall of 1959, the Cuban Revolution was still ideologically ambivalent, but anticommunism was officially denounced and the revolutionary regime became more centralized and more intolerant of dissent. Among the new wave of emigrés were many original supporters of Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement.

The year 1960 was proclaimed the Year of Agrarian Reform. It began with denunciations of the United States for its conspiratorial encouragement of bombing raids by Cuban refugees and with an invitation to Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan to open a Soviet trade exhibition in Havana. Mikoyan's visit was followed, on 13 February 1960, by the signing of trade and economic aid agreements under which the Soviet Union agreed to buy one million tons of Cuban sugar over each of the next five years and extend Cuba $100 million credit for the purchase of industrial equipment. Similar agreements would follow with other members of the Eastern bloc nations.

On 4 March 1960 the French ship La Coubre, engaged in unloading a shipment of arms, exploded under mysterious circumstances and Castro immediately blamed the Central Intelligence Agency. Two months later Cuba formally reestablished diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and when the Eisenhower administration in July canceled the balance of Cuba's 1960 sugar quota, Khrushchev promised that Russia would increase its sugar purchase by an equivalent amount.

Accompanying the deterioration of Cuban-U.S. relations in 1960 and the development of trade between Cuba and the Soviet bloc were a series of measures increasing the authority of the central government over organized labor, agricultural production, and private property. The Agrarian Reform Act of May 1959 was implemented in a fashion that brought 50 percent of Cuban lands under the direct management of the Agrarian Institute and favored state farms over the communally owned cooperatives. Foreign ownership of land was prohibited and in the summer and fall of 1960 several acts were passed confiscating privately owned enterprises, both foreign and domestic. By October 1960, the "economic heights" had been nationalized and many smaller enterprises as well. Cuba was not yet a socialist country but under the victorious radical faction of the revolutionary government it was already anticapitalist. U.S. oil companies in Cuba, which had refused a governmental order to refine Russian petroleum imports, were nationalized; compensation for confiscated U.S. investments was made dependent on continued sugar sales to the United States; members of the Cuban Communist party, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), were admitted to middle-level positions in various government ministries and agencies; and Cuba signed a five-year trade agreement with the People's Republic of China.

Summer and fall of 1960 also saw rising antagonism by the Castro regime toward the Organization of American States (OAS). When the OAS approved the Declaration of San José on 29 August, proclaiming that extraregional intervention endangered the security and solidarity of the Americas, Castro denounced the OAS as a tool of U.S. economic diplomacy. In his Declaration of Havana, he denied that the Soviet Union had any interventionist designs in the Western Hemisphere while announcing the intention of Cuba to continue to seek Soviet assistance. Castro excoriated the United States at a special meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in September, and the Cuban government subsequently increased its orders for military equipment from Czechoslovakia and other communist countries. When the United States embargoed all exports to Cuba, except for nonsubsidized foodstuffs and medical supplies, the Cuban government expropriated the last of the major enterprises owned wholly or partially by U.S. citizens. As 1960 ended, Cuba and the Soviet Union signed a joint communiqué whereby Cuba expressed support for the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and its allies and applauded their encouragement of economic development in the Third World.

The year 1961 would see an abortive U.S.-backed military invasion of Cuba, the formal proclamation of Cuban socialism, and Fidel Castro's pledge of adherence to a fidelista version of Marxism-Leninism. That year was designated the Year of Education, and on New Year's Day thousands of young Cubans left Havana to begin a grass-roots campaign to eliminate illiteracy in rural Cuba. Their success, if exaggerated, was remarkable and capped a series of earlier reform efforts by the revolutionary regime in the areas of housing construction, racial equality, and improved health and sanitary
services for the campesinos and rural poor. In foreign eyes, these social welfare achievements were overshadowed by diplomatic and ideological developments.

When Castro on 2 January demanded that the U.S. embassy in Havana be reduced from eighty-seven to eleven officials within forty-eight hours, the Eisenhower administration promptly terminated all diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba. This decision was supported by the incoming administration of John F. Kennedy, which fixed the Cuban sugar quota at zero for 1961, issued a White Paper denouncing Castro for his betrayal of the Cuban Revolution, and gave the green light to an armed force of Cuban exiles who had been trained by CIA personnel at a secret base in Guatemala. The exile brigade landed at Playa Girón in the Bay of Pigs on 17 April 1961 and was quickly defeated and imprisoned by the Cuban military under the personal direction of Fidel Castro. After the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Russia was emboldened to forge a more formal alliance with Cuba, and Castro proclaimed Cuba a socialist nation and promised a new socialist constitution. In July 1961 Castro announced the formation of the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (ORI), which would integrate the 26th of July Movement with the PSP and serve as precursor of a United Party of the Socialist Revolution. Castro defended single-party government as necessary to the continued momentum of a socialist revolution that would provide work, education, equality, and lifelong economic security for all citizens. Agricultural and industrial workers represented the Cuban people, and their approval of Cuban socialism made political elections irrelevant. The new Cuba had no use for parasitic bourgeois capitalism.5

By the year's end the United States had declared a total embargo on all trade with Cuba, the USSR had bestowed the Lenin Peace Prize on Fidel, Cuba had announced a four-year industrialization plan, and Castro had proclaimed "I am a Marxist-Leninist." Cuba was a socialist state possessed of a government nationalist and communist, totalitarian and populist.

Its radical evolution and political ambiguities assured that the Cuban Revolution would be the subject of controversy and widely contrasting interpretations. Around those controversies would grow the lichen of legend and myth. For if the early chronology of Castroism and the Cuban Revolution can be summarized with little difficulty, the relationship between events, the motivation of the revolutionary leaders, and questions of responsibility for the rapid transformation of the revolution have been the subject of continuing dispute and exaggeration. Any description of the Cuban Revolution in its early years must supplement chronological summary with an analysis of these myths and controversies.

One of the first myths was carefully cultivated by the leaders of the 26th of July Movement. This myth suggested that it was Castro and the barbudos alone who brought down Batista. They alone did the fighting and sacrificed their blood in the cause of liberation. This assertion was propagated in the United States by some of Castro's champions and was frequently associated with the legend that Castro's army was composed of campesinos and that his success was the result of a popular peasant rebellion. In point of fact, the war against Batista was fought by sections of all classes—peasant soldiers, middle-class intellectuals, university students, professional and business groups, and urban workers engaged in active and passive resistance.6 Castro's comparatively small army of bearded guerrillas fought well and courageously, but Batista was brought down by a wide spectrum of opponents and by the dictator's own failures.

The Cuban Revolution, like all revolutions, finds an essential part of its origin in the decay of the existing regime. The corruption, violence, and illegitimacy of the Batista government undermined its support with the urban bourgeoisie. The Cuban economy in 1957–58 exhibited "high-level stagnation," and Batista gradually lost the allegiance of the politically aware segments of the civilian population. Structural weaknesses in the Cuban economy went uncorrected and official terrorism inspired a general sense of civic outrage. One does not deny the historical importance of Fidel Castro or his skill as a guerrilla leader and propagandist by insisting that Batista contributed largely to his own defeat. The economic problems of Cuban society and the eroding coherence of Cuban political organization paved the way for Castro's victory.7 Castro's political skill was exhibited not in driving Batista into exile but in capitalizing on the confusion and weakness of other anti-Batista organizations and gaining unitary control of the new government within a fortnight after Batista's flight.
Another myth sees Batista and Castro as cause and effect: Castro the revolutionary as the creation of Batista the dictator. As with many myths, there is a small core of truth. Castro perceived Batista as a personal enemy as well as an obstacle to the redemption of Cuban society and sovereignty. But Batista did not make a revolutionary of Fidel Castro. The Batista dictatorship helped a member of the Ordoño party find the path of radical political expression necessary to his needs and temperament, and imprisonment by that dictatorship helped inspire an increasing impatience with the Ordoño and a determination to pursue a separate course of action. Yet Batista can no more be credited with Castro's self-image as a charismatic leader than he can be blamed for Castro's subsequent determination to sustain revolutionary momentum by means of an alliance with the Cuban communists. Batista inspired the 26th of July Movement; he did not fater the nationalist revolutionary temper of Fidel Castro or the latter's determination to reign as well as to lead.

A more significant and widely held myth holds that Fidel Castro was a communist from the beginning of his career as a Cuban revolutionary. This report was spread by some of Castro's opponents in Cuba and many of his enemies in the United States, including members of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. In its most extreme form, Castro was not only a communist by the date of his attack on the Moncada Barracks but was earlier employed by the Soviet Union as a communist agent in Mexico, when he was but twenty-one years old.8

Here is a myth that is not an exaggeration but a lie. Castro at twenty-one was a left-leaning student who disliked authority and had feelings of guilt and suspicion toward his own class, the Cuban bourgeoisie. He was a revolutionary in search of a revolution, but he was not a communist. By temperament a caudillo, and by the definitions of U.S. political history never a democrat, Castro only became a Marxist sometime between fall 1950 and fall 1961.

Castro himself is partially responsible for the myths surrounding his conversion to Marxist ideology. During a long speech on 2 December 1961 he declared himself a Marxist-Leninist and in parts of that rambling oration seemed to imply that he had long been sympathetic to socialist doctrine. These portions were inaccurately translated in early press reports and subsequently taken out of context by his enemies in the United States. It became a part of anti-Castro mythology that Castro acknowledged he had been a Marxist-Leninist for many years and had purposely concealed his communist identification the better to increase his support and confound his foes.9 Actually the chief theme of this confused and self-exculpatory address was that although he had always been a socialist intuitively, he was initially in thralldom to bourgeois values. Only by hard study and several stages had he come to a full appreciation of the superior wisdom of Marx and Lenin and the value of their teaching for the reorganization of Cuban society. Now he understood that Marxism was “the most correct, most scientific, the only true theory, the only true revolutionary theory.”10

In later speeches he would make little reference to his days of “bourgeois thralldom,” and those forays in autobiographical revisionism have assisted antagonistic interpreters determined to oversimplify the relationship of Castroism and communism. In the process these interpreters have granted Castro an unearned measure of ideological stability. The Castro of the 1950s was a man who thought mostly with his instinct and a man who worried little about doctrinal or ideological consistency. He was prepared at different times to make use of various slogans and appeals, showed a definite aversion to institutionalization of thought or program, and was inspired as much by the cult of action as by any political philosophy. His political program in the 1950s was composed of several disparate, even warring elements: Ordoño-style democratic reformism, apolitical nihilism, and an amorphous agrarian socialism. Essentially an activist, Castro was a political opportunist by necessity and sought to make a virtue of his lack of doctrinaire ideology.

From the beginning elements of continuity and consistency existed, but they centered about temperament and antagonisms, not doctrine. There was the will to dominate, a sense of messianic mission, a fervid patriotism, and a hatred of foreign domination over the culture and economy of Cuba. Fidel Castro was the first fidelista, and he saw himself as savior of Cuban sovereignty and the Cuban soul. He came to power with visions of radical reform and with a keen distrust of the United States and the power of U.S. capital, but he did not come to power with a Marxist program or ideology. His reading of Cuban history and his personal need
for battle had already determined that he would be an enemy of U.S. diplomatic influence and foreign investment, but he became a Marxist by gradual and distinct stages, first for pragmatic reasons and only later from self-induced ideological convictions. Those who insist that "Castro was always a communist" deny the complexity as well as the historical development of the Cuban Revolution.

The same may be said, if less certainly, of the various theories that proclaim Castro "the betrayer of the Cuban Revolution." The best known of these theories is that authored by the journalist-historian Theodore Draper and adopted by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. in the White Paper on Cuba he drafted for the Kennedy Administration in April 1961. According to Draper, Castro was not a communist when he came to power but by the end of 1959 he had determined to join forces with the Cuban communists as a means of retaining and enhancing his personal power. By calculated design he perverted a social democratic revolution into a communist, totalitarian dictatorship, transforming a movement that promised needed reform into a conspiracy that destroyed individual liberty and made Cuba a Soviet satellite. Under Castro's direction the revolution promised by the 26th of July Movement was aborted and betrayed.11

Draper is certainly correct in emphasizing that Castro's initial program called for representative democracy as well as social reform and made no demands for the nationalization of land and industry. His chronology, however, oversimplifies the stages of the revolution and accelerates Castro's gradual and erratic journey toward Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, Draper implies a measure of evil intent that is at best unproven. It is probable that Castro initially believed that he could achieve social-economic change and eliminate foreign interference by a revolution respectful of civil liberties and constitutional procedures and only later determined—as the result of a series of domestic and external developments—that one-party dictatorship and the support of Cuban communists and the Soviet Union were necessary to assure the fulfillment and momentum of a radical social revolution. What is at issue here is not the accuracy of Castro's evolving estimate of the requirements for radical social revolution but the question of conspiratorial design.

The initial program of the 26th of July Movement was suffi-

ciently ambiguous so that some of Castro's early followers were bound to feel betrayed however the revolution developed. That development was in the direction of increasing radicalization, and it was the moderate revolutionaries who lost influence, suffered economic injury, and felt betrayed. The Cuban Revolution did not originate as a clear-cut bourgeois revolution or peasant uprising or proletarian revolution, but as an amorphous set of reformist goals calculated to appeal to various groups and classes. Perceptions and expectations varied and for some supporters a sense of betrayal was inevitable.

It requires little effort to list a score of promises that Castro made and broke, but consequences are not proof of intent. Castro's goal was a transformation of Cuban society and the identification of social revolution in Cuba with the movement and person of Fidel Castro. Democratic methods and instruments were rejected and totalitarian ones adopted over the course of 1959–61, but Castro claimed that these changes were made necessary by the opposition of reactionaries at home and abroad and were required to ensure the integrity and progress of the revolution. Political pluralism was impractical for a fundamental restructuring of Cuban society; constitutional restraints must give way to the authority of the state and its revolutionary vanguard. True fidelistas would follow their leader, to the Left.

Some historians have claimed that Castro undertook one revolution and finding it insufficient for a restructuring of Cuban society proceeded to make another of socialist and totalitarian design.12 It seems more likely that there was a single revolution of several phases, whose methods and instrumentalities underwent a radical change that Castro had neither promised nor planned. An indigenous Latin American revolution "went communist" by gradual and perceptible stages.13 If in the process it was distorted, it was not necessarily betrayed.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of analyzing the Cuban Revolution as a historical development of several distinct phases. What is true of Fidel Castro and his revolution at one stage is not necessarily true at another. The Cuban Revolution evolved from a variant of democratic reformism to a variant of communism, and its radicalization is best understood when its early years are
divided into three separate periods. These periods cannot be given specific dates, but a logical three-part chronological division identifies as phase one, January–October 1959; phase two, November 1959–December 1960; and phase three, 1961 and spring 1962. Historians differ over the labels to be given these three phases. For the historian who sees Castro’s adoption of communism as the main theme of the Cuban Revolution, phase one might be labeled “from anticommunism to anti-anticommunism”; phase two, “from anti-anticommunism to procommunism”; and phase three, “from procommunism to communist.” The transformation of the Cuban Revolution during Castro’s first forty months in power was, however, more than a question of changing political doctrine; the process of radicalization altered the political, economic, and social structure of the island. The three phases might better be labeled “the polarization of the 26th of July Movement”; “the socialization of the Cuban economy”; and “the establishment of a fidelista communist state.”

January–October 1959: Polarization of 26th of July Movement

In its first ten months the Castro regime underwent both political and economic transformation, but it was in the political area that the more significant developments occurred. During this period there evolved a sharpening division between moderates and radicals within the 26th of July Movement. For most of the period Castro zigzagged between the two factions, serving as a balance wheel of sorts, but by October 1959 he clearly identified with the radicals. The rift between the moderates and the radicals concerned the rights of private property and the role of free enterprise, but also involved such questions as the desirability of elections, the function of political parties, and the relationship of the provisional government to the Cuban Communist party (the PSP).

The unexpectedly complete collapse of the Batista regime and the emigration of leading Batistianos had rendered leaderless and impotent the conservative Right. Rather to its surprise, the new revolutionary leadership found that initially it faced no organized opposition. This fact encouraged it to proceed more swiftly with agrarian reform and other social-economic measures and to ignore earlier promises about elections and the Constitution of 1940. Centers of dissent then developed within the ranks of the fidelistas, which in turn polarized the 26th of July Movement, triggered the first purges, and served as impetus for the radicalization of Castro and his revolution. The development of opposition fueled Castro’s antagonism toward the Cuban bourgeoisie, encouraged a renewed emphasis on the role of the Cuban peasants as prime supporters and beneficiaries of the revolution, and brought anticommunism into disrepute as the false cry of traitorous obstructionists.

The first “obstructionists” to be defeated were those who might be called the right-wing moderates. Advocates of a mixed economy and regulated capitalism, they favored modest land redistribution and continued private enterprise in the agricultural sector. They also favored the encouragement of U.S. public and private capital. They were disappointed by Castro’s refusal to ask for economic aid during his visit to Washington, D.C. in April 1959; they were disgruntled by the terms of the Agrarian Reform Act of May 1959 (wishing nothing more radical than the terms of the Sierra Maestra decree of October 1958); and they were angered by the forced resignation of President Manuel Urrutia in July 1959, which they attributed to the dictatorial ambitions of Castro. By July 1959 these right-wing moderates had been expelled from the movement and many fled to the United States.

Other self-assessed moderates, more centrist in view, assumed a posture of opposition less from devotion to private enterprise than from fears of communist influence and infiltration. Such early Castro supporters as Hubert Matos and Camilo Cienfuegos were angered by the growing influence of Ché Guevara and Raúl Castro and by the appointment of members of the PSP to the new bureaucracy. They disapproved of Castro’s anti-American speech at the UN in September 1959 and were disappointed by Castro’s refusal to appoint old barbudos companions to top political and military posts. Matos and Cienfuegos plotted to use the remodeled armed forces as a counter to Guevara’s influence and to compel Castro to reestablish the anticommunist position of the 26th of July Movement. By the end of October 1959 they, too, had been eliminated.

By that date, not only anticommunism but reformism was in disrepute within the central leadership of the provisional government.
The division of the 26th of July Movement had destroyed Castro's confidence in the movement as a sufficient agent for correcting social and economic ills. Castro was prepared to welcome support from members of the PSP as "truly revolutionary" allies and was determined to proceed with accelerated pace in the task of transforming Cuba's political economy and social structure. This would be largely accomplished in the revolution's next phase.

November 1959–December 1960: Socialization of Cuban Economy

Emphasis during the second period would be primarily on economic decrees and changes, but in the process of promoting the nationalization of mines, utilities, sugar companies, oil refineries, and over 50 percent of Cuban land, the Castro regime also assured further political polarization. The revolution assumed an increasingly class character, and class antagonism became class conflict. Deciding that a democratic government using voluntaristic instruments was insufficient to the task of restructuring the social-economic system, the revolutionary elite promoted political as well as economic centralization. Egalitarian goals demanded expanding authority for the revolutionary government over all economic sectors and institutions. Only a combination of political centralization and socialist planning could eliminate social injustice and every vestige of a colonialist economy.

This phase opened with a new shake-up of the government ministries and an appearance by Castro at the general convention of the major Cuban labor organization (Congress of the Revolutionary Confederation of Labor). At the convention, Castro demanded that PSP members, who were less than 10 percent of the membership, be given 50 percent of the posts on the Confederation council. Resistance by David Salvador and other anticomunist union leaders produced a compromise solution, but by January 1960 the leading anticommunists were purged from the council and by March 1960 Salvador was forced to resign his post. The reorganization of labor under PSP leadership was a clear indication that Castro had determined to use the apparatus of the Cuban Communist party as a means for committing organized labor to his regime and program.

While the Cuban bourgeoisie was converted into the domestic enemy, organized labor was to be allied with the campesinos as the source of working-class support for the revolutionary government and its evolving socialization of the Cuban economy.

The spring of 1960 witnessed the La Coubre explosion and heightened charges of collusion between U.S. agents and domestic subversives. There was extensive censorship of the press and further restrictions on the rights of political organization and dissent. By summer more PSP members were installed in lower-echelon government positions and preparations were being made for initiating a new series of economic decrees that would emphasize state economic planning. With the fall of 1960 came the expropriation of major industries and expanded direction and control by the central government over means of production. Private enterprise was now openly proclaimed an obstacle to the momentum of the revolution as well as to Cuban economic development. The Agrarian Reform Law was administered and revised to restrict land distribution in the form of small freeholds and to encourage the enlistment of peasant farmers in the cooperatives and state farms. By December, the second Organic Law of the Ministry of Labor gave strengthened powers to that body to regulate the wages and assignment of urban labor, and another decree, establishing the Higher Council of Universities, climaxed efforts by the government to limit the autonomy of institutions of higher education and the freedom of student organizations.

By the end of 1960 there was no longer any doubt that Castro had become convinced that in socialization of the Cuban economy lay the best path to effecting a revolution that would end Cuban reliance on U.S. capital and secure justice for the working classes. Taking advantage of the absence of a unified, progressive national bourgeoisie, Castro had proceeded to give the revolution a decided class character. It was a revolution for the working classes and a revolution that would be directed and controlled by a revolutionary elite. Leaders of the PSP were now a part of that elite, but the decision to attack private property and capitalist institutions was made by Castro and the radical wing of the 26th of July Movement, not by the Cuban Communist party.

Although Castro did not formally characterize the Cuban Revolution as a socialist revolution before spring 1961, the "economic
heights of the Cuban economy and most of the larger industrial and agricultural enterprises had been nationalized by the end of 1960. Cuba was not a communist state, however, in December 1960. It would become a communist state, of a special type, over the next sixteen months.


The year 1961 was a key year in the evolution of the political style and institutions of communist Cuba. Not only did socialization of the economy accelerate but the Castro regime was increasingly identified with the communist bloc nations, statist controls began to approach totalitarianism, and the formal establishment of a single-party political system combined the remnants of the 26th of July Movement with the PSP.

Castro did not announce the merger of the 26th of July Movement and the PSP until 26 July 1961, but during the previous winter and spring PSP members had become part of the revolutionary political command and in April Castro publicly declared the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. In his speech of 26 July Castro announced that the ORI would serve as the vehicle of the worker–peasant alliance, and the authority of the one-party state and its leadership was illustrated in a new Law of Labor Organization. On 2 December 1961 Castro delivered his famous speech announcing the identification of the revolution and its leadership with the faith of Marxism-Leninism. Cuba would be a communist state, but communism in Cuba would be joined to the fidelista mystique. That fact was made clear to all when in the following March Castro organized a purge of certain of the old communist leaders of the PSP, including its foremost ideologue Aníbal Escalante, thereby asserting Castro’s personal leadership of the apparatus of the Cuban communists.

In the final analysis, Castro joined forces with the Cuban communists and adopted the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism more from pragmatic than from ideological considerations. The communists would serve as the core of a one-party revolutionary dictatorship and help assure revolutionary momentum; revolutionary socialism would serve as a vehicle for guaranteeing economic development, as demonstrated by the example of the Soviet Union. Once persuaded that Marxist socialism was applicable to the needs of Cuba and compatible with the continued authority of the Maximum Leader, Castro then convinced himself of its doctrinal truth.

The role of Fidel Castro in each of these early phases of the Cuban Revolution has been emphasized because one of the most important elements of continuity in its evolution was the uninterrupted leadership of Fidel. Some students have called Castro the Kerensky and the Lenin of the Cuban Revolution. One might better say he was its Mirabeau and Robespierre. Castro and the revolution moved leftward in unison and at no point was Castro’s leadership and control seriously threatened. A broad-based, reformist revolution became by stages a radical, socialist revolution yet it remained throughout a Cuban, Castro-directed revolution. This was a remarkable feat, and it furnishes one explanation for the unique character of Cuban communism as well as the special nature of the Cuban Revolution.

Fidelista communism was guilty of numerous doctrinal heresies. It minimized the importance of Marx’s economic stages and implied that these stages could be telescoped and socialism achieved by way of a fast-paced revolution that relied more on the psychic transformation of man than on the achievement of certain levels of monopoly capitalism and proletarian oppression. It stressed what Guevara would call “the New Man” and put its faith in moral rather than in material incentives. But, most importantly, it insisted on combining communist dogma with fidelista charisma, favoring charismatic over bureaucratic sanctions. Castro served as legitimizing symbol for the Cuban Revolution, and never more so than when the revolution moved to the stage of a socialist economy and one-party authoritarian government. The paternalistic relationship of Castro to the Cuban working classes assured majority support for the new social order, as Castro linked communism with Cuban nationalism and gave Cuban communism a rural guerrilla mystique.

No other twentieth-century revolution in Latin America produced a leader who maintained the continuous command of Fidel
Castro. For that reason, and others, no Latin American revolution achieved the tempo or breadth of the Cuban Revolution, which effected a more radical social transformation than did earlier social revolutionary movements in Mexico or Bolivia. Cuba was, of course, less handicapped by the power of landed oligarchies or the vestiges of neofeudalism, and had already experienced considerable capitalist economic development, but the comparative social-economic transformations effected by the revolutionary movements in Cuba, Mexico, and Bolivia can only be understood by considering distinctions of leadership as well as national history.

When comparing the Cuban Revolution with communist revolutions in Europe, the most marked difference is that in Cuba the revolution was not the product of a communist clique or externally directed coup and was not beholden to the Red Army. The Cuban Revolution was directed leftward by the radical faction of the 26th of July Movement. Castro subsequently lost faith in the movement as a political vehicle and turned to the Cuban communists, but the latter were his instruments and not his masters. The revolution in Cuba was a radical, national revolution that only by stages “went communist,” and in this fact resides not only much of its special character but an important clue in explaining why its leftward course was accomplished with comparatively little opposition or bloodshed.27

Certainly it is true that the encouragement and asylum given by the United States to anti-Castro emigrés assisted Castro in ridding himself of opponents without the necessity for bloody purges. But U.S. immigration policy is not the primary explanation for Castro’s ability to effect a comparatively peaceful social revolution. Because his revolution began as an independent nationalist movement and because he was able at each stage to identify the revolution with Cuban patriotism and his own messianic leadership, Castro was able to transform Cuba into a communist state with at the very least the passive support of the majority of the Cuban masses. A political opportunist, Castro was also a Cuban patriot and charismatic leader—communism in Cuba would be both totalitarian and popular.

Castro’s revolution did not follow some inexorable internal logic or great master plan. It did move always leftward and in the process not only gained identification with “the Communist world” but discovered its own ideology. That ideology was a special Cuban blend of fidelismo and Marxism-Leninism.

So far this analysis of the early evolution of the Cuban Revolution and its various phases has emphasized domestic events and causes, which are most important in explaining the leftward course of the revolution. Of nearly equal significance, however, are the foreign policy problems and aspirations of the Cuban revolutionaries.28 No study of the transformation of Castro’s goals can ignore the influence on the Cuban Revolution of the United States and the USSR. Significant interaction existed between Castro’s domestic policies and his foreign policy. The most obvious example concerns Castro’s need for Soviet aid and his adoption of socialism.29

In a manner similar to his decision to seek the support of the PSP, Castro by the early months of 1960 decided to seek the aid of the Soviet Union. Castro first sought Soviet trade and later military supplies and still later identification with the Warsaw Pact nations as a means of sustaining his social revolution while counteracting real and anticipated injury from the United States. Initially he believed neutralism in the Cold War would be sufficient to the needs of Cuban self-determination; subsequently he opted for an alliance with the Soviet Union. That alliance would create a new form of dependence, but Castro and his fellow radicals were convinced it was a different and more malleable form of dependence.30 The Soviet Union, for its part, was less the pursuer than the pursued. Concerned with sustaining the “spirit of Camp David” and fearful that overt Russian support might lessen the appeal of Castroism in Latin America and inspire U.S. military intervention in Cuba, Khrushchev was wary of linking Russian prestige with a bearded Robin Hood whose revolution stood outside communist discipline and control. Khrushchev could see advantage in encouraging Caribbean revolutionaries to take a posture of defiance toward the United States; an America distracted by developments in its immediate sphere of influence was less likely to cause problems for the Soviet Union in other regions. But Khrushchev would tread cautiously as long as Castro’s success appeared uncertain.

It was thus Castro who was the initiator at each stage in the evolving relationship of Cuba and the Soviet Union. It was the self-assessed needs of revolutionary Cuba rather than the diplomatic
ambitions of the Soviet Union that would draw the Cuban Revolution into the power conflicts of the Cold War. That involvement in turn further polarized supporters and opponents of the revolution in Cuba and affected the future course of the Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, some historians, most notably Andrés Suárez, insist that Castro’s conversion to communism was primarily determined by foreign policy considerations, and the transformation of Cuba into a communist state primarily the result of Castro’s decision that he needed the support of the other nuclear power.\textsuperscript{32} Such a judgment exaggerates and oversimplifies. Suárez is correct, however, in emphasizing Castro’s emerging conviction that as a “national democratic” ally he could not be sure of Soviet support. That conviction, together with domestic requirements for sustaining revolutionary momentum, encouraged his conversion to socialism. Castro needed to increase his bargaining leverage with Moscow and saw the advantage of confronting the Soviets not only with a “national-liberationist” revolution but a revolution of socialist design and allegiance.\textsuperscript{33}

Cuba could lessen its isolation by inspiring a wave of revolutionary activity in Latin America or by gaining support from the communist bloc. By 1960 it was clear that there would be no wave of imitative revolutions in the Caribbean basin. Henceforth Castro would seek to strengthen Cuban ties with the USSR and other communist bloc nations and would use the PSP at home as witness and propagandist for the evolving identification of his revolution with socialist goals and programs.\textsuperscript{34} Concurrently, Castro became convinced that the socialist path offered the most likely route for Cuban economic development and the desired transformation of Cuban society. The need to obtain greater material and diplomatic commitments from the Soviet Union did not itself persuade Castro of the rightfulness of Marxist socialism for Cuba, but it did accelerate his conversion.

Similarly, the escalating animosity between Fidel’s regime and the United States encouraged both the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution and Castro’s search for Soviet support. Antagonism between Havana and Washington had direct impact on Castro’s Russian policy. That policy incited U.S. economic and diplomatic sanctions, which in turn drove Castro to seek additional assistance from members of the Warsaw Pact. The reinforcing effect of external and internal pressures helps to explain Castro’s election of a totalitarian, socialist framework for maintaining and expanding the Cuban Revolution.

The United States did not force Fidel Castro to adopt socialism or a revolutionary dictatorship or an alliance with the Soviet Union. American policy encouraged those developments, however, and was influential in determining the chronology of the stages of the revolution. Initially bewildered and erraticaly uncooperative, U.S. policy became more and more antagonistic. By 1961 antagonism had become open enmity. Castro capitalized on that enmity to speed the formation of a communist state at home and to forge closer links abroad with a Russian government now eager to promote a Soviet presence in the Caribbean.

The question of the relationship of the U.S. government to the Cuban Revolution requires further analysis. It frequently has been charged that an unwilling Castro was driven into the arms of communism and the Soviet Union by the calculated hostility of American policy makers.\textsuperscript{35} This interpretation is perhaps not as inaccurate as the counter-myth to the effect that the United States wished to be a cooperative Big Brother to the Cuban Revolution and was rebuffed times without number before being forced to recognize the Revolution as an implacable enemy.\textsuperscript{36} but it has proven more lasting. Initially, of course, this interpretation received support from Cuban revolutionaries as well as Castro sympathizers in the United States. Once Castro declared Cuba a socialist republic and announced his conversion to Marxism-Leninism, there was no further suggestion by the revolutionaries of Havana that U.S. policy, however evil its intent, had been the primary cause of Castro’s alignment with the Cuban communists and the Eastern bloc nations. The applicability of Marxism to the Cuban situation provided sufficient cause. Many Castro sympathizers in the United States, however, continued to insist that American enmity gave Castro no choice but to seek alliance with the PSP and Moscow.

America’s Cuban policy was neither intelligent nor successful. It was not, however, the primary cause of the radical course of the Cuban Revolution or of Castro’s convergence with the Soviet Union and Marxism.

Whatever the ideological bent of policy makers in Washington, it was virtually certain that there would be some degree of confron-
tation between the United States and the revolutionaries in Havana. Had Castro consented to a gradualist, democratic social revolution, that confrontation might have been limited and sporadic, but Castro came to power with vaguely anticapitalist and strongly anti-imperialist convictions and the large U.S. investment in the Cuban economy was a natural target. Significant change in the system of economic ownership and distribution required that U.S. private capital be expelled from its strategic position. Once the radical faction of the 26th of July Movement had decided in summer 1959 that the weakness of their internal opposition made possible an accelerated pace for social-economic change, they did not expect accommodation with Washington and saw advantage in displaying Cuban independence by severing diplomatic and economic ties with the United States. Accommodation would mean compromise and compromise would limit the objectives of the revolution. U.S. policy at several points helped the radical faction of the 26th of July Movement, but U.S. policy did not create that faction or its goals for the social-economic transformation of Cuba. It diminishes the importance of the Cuban Revolution and confuses the chronology of its evolutionary stages to view its radicalization as the product of actions done or left undone by the administrations of Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy.

For the cross-fertilization of animosity that developed in 1959-61, both nations were responsible. The initiative was taken as often by Havana as by Washington. Castro found U.S. antagonism a useful rallying cry for revolutionaries at home as well as an effective argument for support from abroad. Conciliation of the United States would not only undermine his authority among radical revolutionaries in Cuba but destroy his diplomatic leverage with Soviet bloc nations and lessen his appeal for potential revolutionaries in Latin America.

It is possible to accept two seemingly contradictory propositions: [1] Castro's revolution probably would have turned leftward whatever the United States did or did not do. [2] Although U.S. policy did not force Castro to establish a revolutionary dictatorship, a socialized economy, or a communist state, it did have very real influence on the evolution of the Cuban Revolution. Actions by the United States do not furnish the primary explanation for the course of the Cuban Revolution but they facilitated its radical transformation.

One must make distinctions between the magnitude of U.S. influence on Castro's evolving association with the PSP, with the USSR, and with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. American policy was probably most influential in determining the tempo and direction of Castro's Russian policy. On the other hand, it appears to have been least influential in Castro's decision to proclaim an identification with Marxist doctrine and was of only indirect influence on Castro's decision to acquire the support of the Cuban communists. When Castro elected to seek the support of Russia and the Communist bloc nations, his decision was determined in part by injuries received and anticipated from the United States. Quite possibly Castro's need for defense supplies and economic subsidy would have required an alliance with Russia at some point, but U.S. economic sanctions hastened the evolution and timing of the Cuban-Russian alliance.

More complicated is the story of U.S. influence on the hopes and failure of Castro's domestic opponents. Some of the earliest of those opponents were Cuban entrepreneurs closely connected with U.S. property investment in Cuba, and the issue of property protection was a major concern for self-styled "moderates" among the professional classes as well as large landowners and successful businessmen. The fears of Cuban and American capitalists were mutually reinforcing; both were quick to suspect communist infiltration of the new revolutionary regime. As the PSP received growing recognition from the Castro government, they concluded that the PSP was taking over the revolution.

Castro denounced the anticommunist rhetoric of Urrutia and Matos as the propaganda of suborned spokesmen of U.S. economic imperialism. Fidel successfully linked domestic dissenters with foreign enemies and in the process identified dissent with treason. Dissenters were fifth columnists, plotting in behalf of monopoly capitalists in the United States. His charges were exaggerated but effective in rallying support for the leftward drift of his revolution. Furthermore, they appeared to receive support from a U.S. immigration policy that welcomed Cuban refugees without restrictions or quotas. The availability of asylum in Miami did not create
the successive waves of emigration but it was a source of encouragement. While some opponents of Castro stayed in Cuba and hoped that intensifying American pressure would force a shift to the Right, other opponents fled Cuba and hoped to organize in the United States a counterrevolution backed by American arms and money.

The most important effect of U.S. Cuban policy was not in determining the program of the revolutionary elite but in helping Castro convince the Cuban people of the necessity of turning the revolution ever leftward. U.S. policy helped Castro persuade the Cuban masses that the United States was the enemy of the Cuban Revolution and that security for the revolution lay in nationalization of the economy and association with the brotherhood of socialist nations. Indeed, U.S. policy had effects diametrically opposite to its intentions, by furthering the centralization of the Cuban political system, facilitating the power of the Cuban revolutionary elite, and speeding the formation of the Cuban-Russian alliance.

To say that U.S. policy determined the evolution of the Cuban Revolution in 1959–61 is to perpetuate a myth; to say that U.S. policy had the unintended effect of accelerating that evolution in several important ways is accurate. Any study of U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution must begin then with an analysis of official diplomatic response, which, like the early history of the Cuban Revolution, is best analyzed by chronological stages. The next four chapters cover the evolution of U.S. Cuban policy from the oscillation of the Eisenhower administration to the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion.