

An Answer Regarding Cuba

Gaston Leval

1961

In June 1961, in the wake of the abortive April invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs, the French anarchist newspaper *Le Monde libertaire* published an article signed "Ariel" glorifying the Castro regime. It also criticised the French anarcho-syndicalist writer Gaston Leval for his lack of enthusiasm for the Castro revolution. This was his response.

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I have just read the article published by this paper's contributor, Ariel, regarding the Cuban revolution, which has now turned into a totalitarian counter-revolution, as recently remarked upon by our comrade Fidel Miro in *Solidaridad Obrera* (Mexico), and reported in most Central and South American anarchist papers, and by our American comrades who are aware of the facts and are none too sparing in their criticism of what they term their homeland's capitalist imperialists.

Ariel recommends to his readers the review *Esprit* which, as we know, is a progressive, pro-Moscow, Catholic publication, one with which Albert Camus had serious issues. He also urges us to read the relaunched *Bohemia* magazine published by the Castro-communist propaganda apparatus, a pale imitation of the original *Bohemia* whose managing editor—who fought against Batista and championed Castro at the time—has now been forced into exile. While quoting a travel writer, Ariel is careful not to compare that writer's claims against those of our comrades or people better informed than him. Remember, thousands of travellers of that sort praised the wonders of Stalinist rule while writing us off as counter-revolutionaries, that is until Khrushchev took it upon himself to put them straight in 1956.

Furthermore, according to Ariel, there are many political parties, but the people, who are on Castro's side, scorn them all. Why then does he fail to mention

that there is, above all, a communist party known as the Popular Socialist Party, which is formally recognised and is the real master of the situation and controls every aspect of life—political, economic, administrative, military, security and judicial? Why remain silent on that essential fact to which our Cuban comrades took exception over a year ago? Personally, I regard that as misleading his readers by omission.

Ariel repeats everything said by the communists—from whose publications and press releases he directly or indirectly quotes—that is critical of the Americans. South America's problems are more complicated than the cursory outlines presented to us might suggest. But those outlines have the merit of being readily understood by simple souls. Above all, they serve Moscow's totalitarian propaganda by continually attacking the United States. Now, not only do I contend that on closer examination we see that things are considerably more complicated, other South American comrades, friends of mine, say the same and not without reason. But that, as Kipling might say, is another story.

I am particularly eager to state that it is odious to argue that the bloody struggle waged by Castro and the communists in Cuba is the handiwork of wretches, traitors or sell-outs. We have no such right to vilify and besmirch men who previously fought against Batista, men who braved death and brave it still for freedom's sake. Here again, Ariel parrots what is said by the Cuban communists whose instrument Castro has become; he has no option but to rely upon them to establish his dictatorship. This has been demonstrated by—among others—Yves Guilbert in his splendid book *Castro The Infidel*. He confirms what those who have been monitoring, impartially, the developments in Cuba had already learned—after applauding the success of Fidel Castro and his fellow fighters, as did Cahiers du socialisme libertaire.

The upshot is that on 2 May last, Cuba became the first "People's Democratic Republic" on the American continent. That is to say, the first self-styled communist and totalitarian state in that part of the world.

That, it seems to me, should be enough to light the lantern for anyone truly keen to see clearly, as it is the culmination of a swift but determined trend in a very specific direction.

We are stunned in the face of assertions such as those made by Ariel when he says that, far from enslaving the trade unions, Castro has, instead, created them. Which illustrates the measure of his ignorance; the trade union and syndicalist movement has had a presence in Cuba since the beginning of the century: when Batista fell, most urban workers belonged to powerful labour organisations, but since they were loath to bend the knee to Castro, he resorted to the usual stunt of communists and fascists: making a show of launching brand new trade unions so as to dispense with the foot-draggers.

In Ariel's view, I made a "moral mistake" in denouncing the direction taken by the new Cuban regime. In which case we must give our blessing to the closure of all non-communist party papers and publications, the muzzling of the press when it refuses to submit to totalitarian dictatorship, the harassment of those who champion freedom, the right of assembly, association, freedom of thought and expression of thought, the closure of free cultural centres, the take-over of trade unions and authentic cooperatives. As for the fact that there are no longer any political parties, that is no sort of proof that freedom prevails there. For a start, let us reiterate that the Communist Party, which now has everything under its control, exists and rules throughout together with its Russian, Czechoslovak, Chinese and East German "experts" and let us add that when the disappearance of the parties is matched, as it has been, by the disappearance of everything free or libertarian (whether these be such in their essence or in their doctrinal characterisation) it makes a fool of people to argue that the current stage of the Cuban revolution is headed in the direction of a libertarian regime.

In the articles I published in *Cahiers su socialisme libertaire*—which Ariel attacks—I presented the evidence to back up my claims. For instance, I quoted the circular sent by Mexican comrades who had made an on-the-spot visit, and who insisted that we "mention, in anything you write, the actual names of the Cuban comrades in a position to inform you, as their freedom and even their very lives are at stake." Which was enough on its own to sum up what was going on on that unhappy island. Ariel ignores this, just as he ignores the fact that children are militarised from the age of seven years and, from that age, are put through Marxist training courses, as are the army and the militias.

It is for the sake of such as him that comrade Marcelo Salinas wrote in the February issue of the last Cuban libertarian publication (which has just disappeared) *Solidaridad Gastronomica*, an article entitled: "Makes us want to spit!"

"More than one of the people I am talking about have the effrontery to pontificate at some distance about something about which they know nothing, and sit in judgment of those who are at the heart of events and thus well placed to know about them; and there are quite a few who venture, between faux pas and faux pas, from one piece of advice to the next, to call for an alliance between our forces and the forces of the greatest enemy that freedom and the rights of the individual have ever encountered in human history."

Marcelo Salinas, an old libertarian militant with whom I used to be in contact (and I say 'used to be' because no one is in a position to correspond with our Cuban comrades any more) was not only the editor-in-chief of *Solidaridad Gastronomica* but general secretary of the Cuban Libertarian Federation, now reduced to silence.

And, given a choice between the testimony of Stalinists and their tools, and that of my friends, the latter is my first stop. At the very least, I take it into account.

Ariel contends that they are building a people's socialism in Cuba. In his view—and he appears to know nothing about the social teachings he is talking about other than the matters upon which he comments—”nationalising” everything by means of an enormous state agency by the name of the INRA amounts to establishing socialism! The Cuban ”cooperatives” are about as socialist as Russia's kolkhozes. Our authors have always rightly declared that state capitalism was worse than private capitalism because, besides being exploitative it abolishes freedom, and removes any possibility of defending oneself. It seems Ariel has yet to discover this. Or at any rate we can only imagine so. The contrary would be worse. Expropriating private capitalism and the big landowners and issuing weapons to the people is not enough to usher in socialism. Nor is it enough that one has the people behind one. Peron had the Argentinean people behind him. Still does. Any skilful rabble-rouser can carry the masses with him. The point is knowing where he is leading them.

At present, in Cuba, they have been led in the direction of a totalitarian state. And you are not going to persuade us that that is the route to human liberation.”

Gaston Leval (June 1961)

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