



R. Bruce McCollm

REVOLUTION'S END

Carlos Franqui knows what the American Left has yet to learn:
The Cuban Revolution is a fraud. But then, he ought to know—twenty
years ago he sold the myth of the Revolution to the world.

Carlos Franqui and I met in February in the back room of a Spanish bookstore off New York's Union Square, an area now given over to drug-pushers, junkies, and bag ladies. For Franqui, it was his first trip to the United States since his exile from Cuba in the sixties. Ostensibly here to promote the publication in English of his *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* and attend a conference of Latin American writers, he used the occasion to see some of his former colleagues from the early days of Castro's Revolution. The interview's translator, Ricardo Alonso, now a professor of Spanish at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, was the ambassador of Castro's Cuba to the Court of St. James before he defected to the United States in the early sixties. The man who introduced me to Castro's former confidante was Raul Chibas, the former head of the anti-Batista Ortodoxo Party before the Revolution and a friend of Castro's during his days as a law student at the University of Havana.

Early supporters of Castro's Twenty-Sixth of July Movement, like Franqui, saw a Cuba dominated by a monoculture based on a sugar economy and badly run by an inept, colossally stupid *caudillo*, Batista, who was kept in power by the United States. Moved by the plight of the *guajiros*, or peasants, and inspired by Cuba's long history of aborted attempts at reform, the Movement, led by Fidel Castro, became radicalized and embarked in a fit of machismo on a guerrilla war waged from the mountain strongholds of the Sierra Maestra. Out of their miraculous success was created the myth of the Cuban Revolution.

Twenty-one years later, the results of the Cuban Revolution closely resemble the Movement's critique of the Batista regime, the differences being Cuba's total dependence on the Soviet Union and a *caudillo*

who now protects himself in a suit of Marxist-Leninist armor.

Carlos Franqui was born to peasant parents in 1921; from his early childhood he had to work alongside his parents in the sugar-cane fields. He was involved in Cuban politics from the time he was a teenager, first joining the youth movement of the Cuban Communist Party in 1939 and, later, being one of its most militant members during his days as a student at the University of Havana. He quit the Party to become one of the first members of the Twenty-Sixth of July Movement in Havana. After he met Castro in 1947, he joined the future Cuban leader in a futile expedition to unseat the Dominican Republic's dictator Trujillo. From 1955 until his imprisonment by Batista in 1957, he was the editor of *Revolucion Diario*, the organ of the Castro movement. After an exile spent in Mexico, Latin America, and the United States, Franqui joined the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra and became the director of *Radio Rebelde* and the Movement's newspaper, *Revolucion*.

When Castro came to power on New Year's Day, 1959, he entrusted Franqui with the archives of the Revolution and appointed him the organizer for the

Cultural Congress of Havana. From the early days of the Castro government, Franqui used his extensive contacts among Europe's *illuminati* to bring a number of intellectuals to idolize the Revolution. Among the pilgrims were Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote *On Cuba* after a Franqui sponsored trip, and Simone de Beauvoir. Through his talents as a publicist, Franqui brought all of Europe's major artists to Havana to participate in a variety of activities ranging from lectures to art shows.

But, by the late sixties, Carlos Franqui had become a "questionable person" in Cuba because of his public opposition to Castro's dictatorial methods and his strident advocacy of artistic freedom. In 1968, after Castro supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Franqui broke with the regime and went into exile. Now based in Italy, Franqui published his *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* in 1976 and is working on a follow-up volume dealing with the Castro regime until 1968.

Although much criticized by America's Cuban community for his unrepentant leftist positions, Franqui, nevertheless, has been instrumental in breaking the taboo on the left against criticism of the Castro regime. For years, Cuba has enjoyed total immunity from criticism as a member in the pantheon of progressive states. Among Europe's Left and America's left-liberal elements, Havana has been the last stop of the leaking vessel transporting those in a perpetual search for the "successful social experiment." While supporting himself by selling the original lithographs of two of his best friends, Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, Franqui in exile re-established his contacts with the Spanish Left, the refugees from Prague's Spring, and other Eurocommunists to persuade them not to look to Castro's Cuba as the last progressive holy site. Ironically enough, he was instrumental a few years back in persuading people like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir to condemn the Cuban government for its repression of artists. ➔



Carlos Franqui

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The importance of Franqui's *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*, soon to be published by Viking Press, cannot be underestimated in light of the chronic Marxist disease of falsifying history. When Franqui broke with the Castro government in 1968, his face disappeared from all the official photographs. The picture of Castro's first meeting with Nikita Khrushchev reveals Franqui as a grayish blur between the two leaders. He has suffered a similar fate in the official photograph of Castro's victorious entourage in Havana, a fate he shares with Huber Matos, the recently released former army commander, who also has been obliterated from the Cuban peso.

When Franqui left Havana, he managed to smuggle out of Cuba the letters, documents, and various reports which had been in the revolutionary archives. His diary, a sort of *The Sorrow and the Pity* in print, is the rarest of historical documents—a sure preventative against that peculiar amnesia which fogs the brains of those who use history for their own polemical purposes. Through Franqui's montage of the Cuban Revolution—a montage which reveals, among other things, Castro's early obsessions with Alexander the Great, Robespierre, and his favorite, Napoleon; his admiration for Argentina's strongman, Juan Perón; and Castro's and Guevara's fawning admiration for Stalin's book, *The Fundamentals of Leninism*—one gains an untampered look at the rise of Castro's brand of *caudillo* Communism and its aftereffects on Cuban society.

What follows is the first interview ever given by Franqui to an American journalist and is said to be the first time he has spoken openly about the conditions in Cuba today.

Q: *We are now some 20 years past the Cuban Revolution and from all indications it appears that Cuba is in dire straits.*

Castro admitted as much in his speech of December 27th to the National People's Government Assembly. In it he called attention to the diseases devastating the sugar and tobacco crops and even stated there would be a wholesale lay-off of factory workers. He also promised to send "voluntary brigades" to Siberia to cut timber for the factories on the island. And Castro's firing of his cabinet last year seemed to be a fairly dramatic demonstration of Cuba's problems.

CF: I wouldn't call these two events particularly important. Yes, they indicate severe problems. But they are ploys Castro uses to deflect people's attention away from the real problems in Cuba. When there is some crisis or another, he usually does something dramatic to exert further control over the government. He's fired his cabinet many times.

Actually, the problems you describe are very old. Their seeds were planted in 1961—they are endemic to the system. But even so, things in Cuba have gone way beyond anyone's wildest predictions, especially now that there are all those Cuban troops in Africa.

Q: *At what point would you say that Cuba came to be dominated by the Soviets to the point of losing any semblance of independence?*

CF: I left in 1968 after Castro supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. That was unforgivable. But the change had begun a few years before, and really crystallized around 1967, when Ché Guevara died in Bolivia. He died so alone and isolated after years of fighting for the Cuban Revolution. Many, many Cubans would have followed Guevara in Latin America if Castro had allowed them to. But he didn't. And now there are over 100,000 Cuban soldiers stationed all over the world.

Q: *How do you relate the Cuban activities in Angola and Ethiopia to this abandonment of Guevara? Many people*

who have followed the Cuban Revolution over the years speculate that Castro had Guevara killed over a disagreement about the role the Soviets should play in Cuban affairs. What accounted for that split?

CF (shrugging his shoulders): I doubt very much that Castro physically had Guevara killed. But he most certainly made sure he wouldn't succeed. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, Guevara wanted to create a revolutionary movement in Africa and Latin America totally independent from the Soviet Union. As early as 1965, at an international congress held in Algiers, Guevara denounced Soviet imperialism. He charged the Soviets with opposing all independent revolutions.

Q: *Jonas Savimbi, the President of UNITA [The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola], the group fighting the Cubans in Angola, was at that Algiers meeting. He claims that Guevara told him not to send his men to Cuba for training because the Soviets would then control his movement.*

CF: Yes, that's very possible. At that time, Guevara was becoming increasingly anti-Soviet. If you look at his diary, you realize that Guevara wanted to create a base in Latin America for a continental revolution. He also held similar ideas for Africa. Now it appears that Cuba is taking this position, although not independent of the Soviet Union, as Guevara would have wanted. In fact, Cuba is only taking this position because the Soviet Union, not Cuba, wants to play on the United States' international weakness. It amounts to a new form of Soviet imperialism.

Q: *From Castro's point of view, then, what is to be gained by Cuba's involvement in Africa?*

CF: Well, from his point of view, it is a matter of fleeing forward. By now, he has a highly developed military apparatus. It's one of the most powerful in Latin America and extremely large for such a small country. This is something he didn't have in the early sixties. Now, whenever his own problems at home get grave, he uses this apparatus to project a powerful international image. This is also why he plotted for so long to become the leader of the non-aligned movement. Between this and his extensive involvement overseas, he is able to camouflage the tremendous economic, political, and social crises at home in Cuba.

Of course, a small country like Cuba can't pretend to do what a superpower like the United States and the Soviet Union can do without severely affecting the population. But it is characteristic of Castro that when there is a military confrontation, the Cuban people will be made to suffer.

Q: *Since the Revolution, the Cuban economy has been plagued by every conceivable problem. How have these economic problems affected the Cuban people? And what has caused them?*

CF: The Revolution has meant 20 years



of waiting in line for the Cuban people. It is incredible to think that the 20 main national products of Cuba have been strictly rationed for the past 18 years. There's sugar, meat, milk, coffee, tobacco, cigars, rum, oranges, mangoes . . . Everything has been totally rationed. Even the basic foodstuffs like bananas, cassava, black beans, rice, and beverages are scarce. After 20 more years of the Revolution, it's doubtful whether there will be enough food.

Besides, the distribution system has totally fallen apart. Cuba is a country of empty roads. After the Revolution, the government embarked on a huge road-building program. It was supposed to be an impressive project and in many cases it actually was. There are large eight-lane highways in Cuba—but no one travels on them. What few buses there are break down and there aren't many cars. It is extremely difficult for people, let alone consumer goods, to get from one place to another.

More important still, labor productivity is way, way down.

Q: The productivity problem has been blamed by Cuban government officials on the workers' laziness and the material shortages in the factories. Others say this represents a type of passive resistance.

CF: It is totally insufficient to blame lazy workers for these problems. The failure of the economy certainly indicates a passive resistance against the government. But it also means that the system lacks any productive capability.

The Cuban worker gets up before dawn and has to walk to get a bus to work. Sometimes the bus comes on time, sometimes the worker has to wait hours, and many times the bus doesn't even show up. And even when the worker does get to work, he has to wait hours, sometimes until the early afternoon, for the bricks, wood, or whatever he is working with to show up at the site of his job. Raw materials don't arrive on time, if they arrive at all. Even the final product gets lost, especially in agriculture. Sugar and tobacco just rot. Dilapidated farm machinery rusts in the fields.

Under these conditions, work becomes an absurd obligation. How can you feel excited about work when you can't even do your job? Why should you work when you don't get anything for it, especially when you see government officials enjoying extraordinary privileges? On top of all that, the system doesn't allow profits or the free discussion of labor problems, and it refuses to replace unfair administrators.

Q: What is the government doing to combat this malaise? When this situation occurred in the Soviet Union, they instituted a law against social parasitism. It calls for prison sentences against such things as absenteeism, voluntary unemployment, and working in an occupation deemed anti-social. Is there a similar law in Cuba?

CF: Yes, but I don't think it's a Soviet law. It actually dates back to the times of Spanish colonialism.

In 1971 Castro announced a "new revolutionary law," the Anti-Loafing Law. It prohibited loitering, laziness, social parasitism, and absenteeism. But it was not revolutionary at all. It is the same law used by the Spanish governor Miguel Tacon in the 1830s. He was one of the most repressive governors in Cuban history. Tacon in Spanish means "the heel of the boot." That's how this man is remembered in Cuba. The Tacon decree was against practitioners of black magic, homosexuals, poets, and blacks. After Castro's speech, he used this so-called revolutionary law indiscriminately. He jailed over 100,000 people in his tropical gulags. The minimum rehabilitation period was three years.

So we Cubans say that the "heel of the boot," that is, Tacon, has been resurrected in Castro.

Q: In light of all these things you've mentioned, how much of the Cuban political bureaucracy is still behind Castro?

*CF: The political apparatus is totally demoralized. Oddly enough, both the Miami exile community and Raul Castro [Cuba's former Minister of Defense] use the same word to describe the situation. They say that in Cuba there isn't socialism, there is *sociolesmo*. Roughly, it means that there are little partnerships here and there, private alliances.*

But there is more to the malaise than that. Whatever national dignity we regained with the Revolution has been lost with our total dependence on the Soviets. Moreover, the price paid by the Cuban people for the continuing African wars has been extremely high. After so many years, the Cuban people are fed-up with promises. After 20 years, they no longer have any hopes in Castro's system.

Q: You aren't suggesting that Castro's government will fall?

CF: No, of course not. It is totally naive to think that Castro and his system will fall, at least in the near future. The political structure is too strong: Over a half million people work for the secret police alone. For any change to come about, protest and dissent will have to increase, of course, but this in turn will intensify the repression. This has already happened. In the past few years, a great number of people have been freed from Cuban prisons, but thousands more have been brought in to take their place. The question is whether the present dissatisfaction will lead to a stronger protest or just die away. The responsibility lies with the youth. The youth rebellion will either escalate or be crushed by the government.

Q: Recently, the former Havana Hilton and a number of train stations have been bombed. Industrial sabotage and the use of arms against government targets have been reported on the rise. Is this the work of an organized underground or a spontaneous protest?

CF: It is very difficult to know. It may be a personal vendetta or a spontaneous protest. I don't think it's well organized because I don't think you can be organized and escape detection by the secret police.

Each rebellion has its different look. Now, more than ever, the young people are in open rebellion against the system. They register this rebellion by wearing blue jeans, which are prohibited, by listening to jazz and rock and roll, which have been outlawed, and by wearing long hair, which is enough for one to lose one's job. Such demonstrations of rebellion may seem inconsequential, but they are not.

Actually, now that I think about it, everyone in this room, except me, would be subject to arrest. He [pointing to the photographer] is wearing red, which in Cuba is a serious offense. Red in Cuba isn't the color of Communism but is a sign you are a member of an African cult.



Alonso would be arrested for his sideburns. They're too long. Raul [Chibas] for his beard. And you—well, for everything.

Q: *There are differing interpretations of the Cuban prison system. No one, not even Amnesty International and the International Red Cross, has been able to determine the number of political prisoners in Cuba. Yet, they certainly exist. Could you explain for me the different types of prisons in Cuba and what role the prison system plays in that society?*

CF: Well, first of all, you have to remember that Cuba is *matushka*. It is the mother prison, totally surrounded by water. Many people trying to escape from Cuba have disappeared. They have been either killed by sharks or arrested by Cuban patrol boats. Others have capsized at sea. Truly, the Cubans fleeing the island are the precursors of the Vietnamese boat people. So far, nobody knows exactly how many Cubans have died this way, but we're working on a census and trying to find out.

There are, of course, many forced labor camps in Cuba. If there is something good about these prisons, it's their formidable names: for instance, New Sunrise and The Future. It shows the Cubans still maintain their Goya-esque sense of humor.

Q: *What about these camps? Are they different from one another?*

CF: There are different types of prisons. But it is important to remember that nine million Cubans are treated like prisoners. They are totally restricted in terms of movement. A Cuban citizen must carry an identification card or internal passport called an RD-3 card. It lists where you work, where you live, where you come

from. Things like that. Anyone found without this card is sent to jail. This is a kind of imprisonment without the prison itself. And recently the effort to jail anyone without this card has intensified.

This system is so pervasive it even applies to the animals. [Everyone in the room laughs.]

Q: *I can't let that pass by without comment. How does it apply to animals?*

CF: Even animals need internal passports now.

Q: *Now, wait a minute. What is an animal passport?*

CF: Every animal—farm animal—in Cuba has a tiny little metal plate identifying what it is, when it was purchased, and by whom. When an animal dies or is eaten, a peasant must go to the police station and report that animal number so-and-so has died and of what causes. Then the animal is taken off the police lists. If you don't report the animal's death or his sale, you will be fined or jailed.

The whole system was created to control the black market. The black market is the only way the Cuban people can survive. So a peasant will sometimes trade a chicken or another animal for something he needs. But he is supposed to buy everything from the government. This animal identification was created to curtail this trade. The only animal exempt from this law is the pig.

Q: *Why should the pigs be exempt when you're going to list everything else?*

CF: Pigs are exempt now because they are diseased and dying by the scores. Pork used to be a major food staple for the people. Now, there are very few pigs left.

Q: *I'd like to ask you more about the physical prisons you mentioned earlier,*

the ones with the sardonic names. The Future, for instance, sounds like a bad joke.

CF: I told you their names are quite incredible. There is also the East Compound in Havana. East as in East Bloc. That's a work compound. Some of the prisoners there refuse to wear their prison uniforms and have lived in their underwear for years. They are the *plantados*. [*Plantados* is a Cuban prison slang expression for people who refuse to be re-educated. One of the *plantados* was Huber Matos, one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, who has recently been released.]

Apart from these prisons, there are punishment or disciplinary camps for prisoners who must undergo political re-education courses. Then there are the prisons with open doors. They aren't much different from the rest because you can't escape the island anyway.

Finally, you have the gulag. These are forced labor camps for functionaries and so-called "misled revolutionaries." They are forced to work on different projects under the worst conditions.

Q: *And what is the role of these prisons within the system?*

CF: Theoretically, the prisons are considered schools in the system. In that way, they are part of the first of the Revolution's "two pillars": national education and health. But, we also look upon them as part of the second pillar. The police are doctors tending to the sick. The patients are the deviates from the revolutionary ideology. And the executioner's squad is for the terminally ill. The whole prison system in Cuba is a vast pharmacy. For the terminally ill, the prescription system has some 61 remedies or charges that can bring about a death sentence. Recently, even people who distribute pamphlets with grievances against the government are said to be terminally ill and receive the death penalty.

Q: *After being an important participant in the Revolution and now a severe critic of the Castro government, what is your summary impression of Cuba today?*

CF: You can see all of Cuba during the sugar harvest. Look out on a field with sugar cane. Some cutting the cane are from the local jails, some are from the concentration camps, some are voluntary workers, some are military personnel, and some are peasants. In Cuba, all those working on the sugar cane harvest look like they are doing the same thing. In a way, they are. All of them are there under different circumstances. Today, when one gets down to it, Cuba is still an island of sugar and slavery.

I want the readers of this interview to know one thing: Russian Communism and Castroism are a cancer of history. I certainly have no nostalgia for the Cuba of the past. But what came later is nothing more than a disease. I have nothing more to say.

Q: *Thank you.*

CF: My pleasure. □



W. Scott Thompson

THE PHONY WAR

Talk is cheap. Weapons are not.

In his autobiography, the German physicist Max Planck observed that "a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." A depressing thought—but does it also apply to politics? Perhaps not. There have been, after all, notable conversions throughout history, and more recently than on Saul's journey to Damascus. Little more than a year ago Henry Kissinger discovered that, now that we had lost it, nuclear superiority brought all manner of benefits, something he had tried to deny while in office. And Jimmy Carter, who had been born again some years before in any case, revealed to us recently that his view of the Russians has been changed more by their invasion of Afghanistan than by anything else of the past three years.

There is perhaps good reason to suspect the authenticity of this last conversion, but even if it is true we still have good reason to doubt whether it is going to make an important difference in the way Jimmy Carter conducts foreign policy. For one thing, with much of his response to Afghanistan, especially with his rhetoric about the need for military preparedness, he is manifestly reacting politically to those who, vindicated by Afghanistan, demand a realistic foreign policy grounded in a credible military deterrent. Of course, he has done this kind of thing before. Last summer Carter opposed the Senate on defense increases because he thought he had the votes for SALT II. When he saw he didn't, he proposed to cut a deal with Sam Nunn for an increase of 5 percent. When Afghanistan finished the burial of SALT II, Carter retreated to his previous posture: the fewest increases in defense spending possible. Not a cent has been added since the invasion; in fact, cuts are now coming, owing to the effort to pare the budget and reduce the deficit.

But there is more to the fecklessness of

Carter's converted self than the rhetoric and gesture of political expediency. In fact, it is the Russians themselves who, retroactively, give the lie to Carter's new "hard line." During the flap that began over Africa in the summer of 1978, after Carter gave his one hard-line speech prior to Afghanistan, *Pravda*, in the most important editorial during Carter's term, said,

It seems that "firmness" and "hard line" have become extremely popular words in America and have turned into the latest craze. Especially on the eve of . . . elections.

But, it went on,

firmness and courage are useful qualities for any political leader. But only if they are directed toward good goals and combined with political wisdom, the ability to be guided by higher interests and to separate them from petty short-term advantages, and the ability and desire to look into the future and assess the consequences of one's present actions in advance. Moreover, courage in politics is by no means the same thing as bravado and the readiness to resort to strong expressions and brandish a club. Political courage consists in something else—the ability to set and consistently follow a principled political course, and the ability to control one's emotions and show restraint and discretion. . . .

No matter the source, it has seldom been said better.



Edward Luttwak has written that strategy is the opposite of the usual (and peculiarly Anglo-Saxon) practice of isolating "the practical problem at hand." It is, rather, to connect the "diverse issues into a systematic pattern of things," and then to "craft plans—often of long range—for dealing with the whole," something which Jimmy Carter, as *Pravda* observed, is unable to do. The Soviets clearly have a strategy. They abet revolutionary movements all over the world (including the Western Hemisphere), they threaten our access to essential minerals through proxies in Africa, and now they threaten our access to oil from the Persian Gulf—all against a background of growing strategic superiority. We, on the other hand, still react to the "problem at hand," which is why we are concerned with a so-called Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), which, incidentally, isn't rapid, isn't deployed, and isn't a force.*

The irony is that without a comprehensive strategy, and I think it clear (for reasons I shall address in a moment) that even after Afghanistan Carter has no intention of adopting one, addressing "the problem at hand" becomes both more difficult and more dangerous. This is precisely the case with the Persian Gulf. To draw a line beyond which the Soviets will not be allowed to go, as Carter has done, without the means of enforcing the claim, is pure bravado. Until we have land-based forces alongside the Persian Gulf and a much larger Navy there (in my analysis, at least the equivalent of four carrier task forces), the Soviets will have no trouble overcoming any response of ours. And if we cannot react with naval firepower, can we escalate to theater nuclear weapons? Given the proximity of the Soviets' Backfire Bomber, this would be still worse, even if the escalation were to end there. Nuclear war, should it come to that, would of course be worst of all. The strategically superior Soviets could implement their

*A senior KGB official, in an interview with *Die Welt*, put it best: "Rapid deployment force! What is 'rapid deployment'? I believe we have demonstrated that in Afghanistan."

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