

What Cuba Faces Now

By Saul Landau

Five Cuban intelligence agents sit in federal penitentiaries across the United States because they infiltrated anti-revolutionary groups in Miami intent on doing violence in Cuba. These five men represent a long line of those who have acted from an understanding of their roles in the protracted human historical drama. The Cuban Revolution did for radical youth of the 1950s what the Bolsheviks did for their youth decades before. You could play a role in history and see the results. And in the early stages they looked very good. The more cautious Mensheviks and the more radical Bolsheviks agreed that it was absurd to think of building socialism in one country. In 1917, attempts to duplicate the overthrow of capitalism failed in Europe, but socialism did develop in the largest landmass in the world. The Soviet Union endured as a painfully inefficient state-directed economy for some 70 years before it imploded.

In 1959, Cuban leaders echoed similar sentiments. A revolution on one island? The actions of guerrillas of the mountains and the underground were rooted in a larger revolutionary context – one supplied by Bolívar, O'Higgins and the other Latin American liberators. Cuba began to “export” revolution – at least ideas of revolution – to Caribbean islands and to the South and Central American countries as well.

By 1960, given the predictable response of Washington to any sort of disobedience, Cuba had taken its first steps toward partnership with the no longer revolutionary Soviet Union. In doing so, it got caught in the seamy fabric of the Cold War. Fidel learned of the revolution's “junior” status during the 1962 missile crisis, when Soviet Premier Khrushchev neglected to inform Cuba's leader of his decision to withdraw the missiles. But what other major power would have written a comprehensive insurance policy for the island?

By the early 1970s, after failing to achieve a 10-million-ton sugar harvest to gain extra foreign currency, Cuba had little choice but to adopt Soviet models in return for guaranteed aid and advantageous trade. Its graduates returned with advanced degrees, its population became

literate, skilled and healthy, and, in 1975, its soldiers showed how a small island nation could play a strategic role in helping maintain the fragile independence of Angola. Twelve years later, Cuban troops helped liberate Namibia and South Africa by routing the apartheid army in the battles of Cuito Cuanavale.

In the 1970s, Vietnam won its independence, as did Laos. In Africa, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau joined Angola in freeing themselves from Portuguese rule. Nicaragua and then

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tiny Grenada joined the revolutionary coterie. But in the early 1980s the empire began to reverse revolutionary success, and the USSR began its steep decline. The Sandinistas could not contain the U.S.-backed Contra forces, and Grenada's revolution decomposed in its own inner circles. The ultraleft cabal that murdered Maurice Bishop, its leader, opened the door to a U.S. invasion in 1982.

By the mid-1980s, the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions had already begun to morph into capitalist economies, run by Communist parties claiming adherence to socialism. Cuban socialism, however, refused to compromise its basic principles. Now, having survived the unflagging hostility of the world's most dangerous and most capitalist neighbor, the United States, and Soviet collapse, Cuba's basic model persists; indeed, it underwent a smooth transition in February 2008, when its National Assembly chose Raúl as the new president to replace a convalescing Fidel.

In the Special Period that followed the

demise of the Soviet Union, Cubans had to violate basic ethical tenets in order to survive. By 1991, the state could no longer guarantee an adequate diet for all citizens or maintain other subsidies, as Cuban foreign trade plunged by 70 per cent and standards of living fell. Buying and selling illegally to get certain goods became daily behavior patterns, hardly a stimulant for maintaining high socialist morale.

Cuba legalized the dollar and adopted foreign tourism as its dubious money earner. As it did so, the gang of violent, Florida-based exiles attacked tourist sites and, in one of the hotel bombings in Cuba, killed an Italian tourist.

Since the U.S. government did nothing to stop the terror attacks, Cuba sent its agents to Miami disguised as defectors (the five now imprisoned, plus twelve others) to discover the attack plans of groups like Brothers to the Rescue and Alpha 66. Even after Cuba had passed on to the FBI material gathered by its infiltrators, the Bureau busted the sources – the five – not the perps. The men were convicted and sentenced to long terms.

The media don't understand Cuba, nor do they try. Understandably, U.S. public opinion remains murky on the subject. How did Fidel remain in power for nearly half a century? For one thing, the United States willingly imported his opposition and continues to do so. Current U.S. policy directs its officials to cultivate dissidents in Cuba for the purpose of destabilizing the regime, but Washington then grants these supposed troublemakers visas to join the exile ranks in the United States. Washington shares with the violent exiles an obsession with one person that makes it difficult to think clearly. Facts rarely enter policy discussions.

Studied ignorance has contributed to vociferous rhetoric and policies, such as limiting travel to Cuba for Cuban Americans, that make little sense, except for the small hard-line Cuban exile gang in South Florida, whose families have left the island. U.S. ineptitude, however, does not solve Cuba's problems. Aging Cuban revolutionaries, no matter how frustrated by the vicissitudes of daily life, can boast about accomplishing their goals. Cuba won its independence and has defended its revolution over 50 years against constant U.S. aggression. Cuba established a system of social justice and rights – the right to eat and to have housing, medical

care, education, etc. Cubans danced on the world stage as liberators of parts of Africa, slayers of the Monroe Doctrine, and purveyors of emergency medical teams that saved Pakistanis, Hondurans, and many others from the aftereffects of natural disaster. Cuban doctors rescued the vision of countless Third World people. Cuban artists, athletes and scientists have etched their names on honor rolls throughout the world.

However, those who do not land good jobs, despite possessing good education, high skill levels and good health, feel they deserve more. Over the past decade, I've met dozens of Cuban youths who shrug and claim: "I don't see much future for myself here." This is a sign of sagging morale. Cuba also faces a dramatic shortage of teachers (8,000 officially) and an agricultural system that cannot yield enough food to meet the government's commitments for each citizen's ration book allocation. Indeed, Cuba had to import a good percentage of its food needs from the United States. The terrible hurricanes of 2008 have exacerbated this situation. In addition, Cuba's wage structure does not reflect productivity or even fairness.

To offer younger generations that sense of optimism that frames the future as bright opportunity rather than dark uncertainty, Raúl Castro has initiated a reform process including democratizing the party itself, recognizing the need to reflect diverse opinions. He has promised to address the multiple issues that have gone unattended. He will need to mobilize younger Cubans in the task of discussing and solving Cuba's pressing problems, which will be difficult. He has surrounded himself with old comrades in their mid-70s or older. Men like Machado Ventura or Ramiro Valdez have earned reputations for being less than flexible. The government will likely enjoy a windfall of oil revenues in the near future from reserves discovered off Cuba's coast. Money does not, however, provide the cure for low morale among sectors of Cuba's youth. And even though an Obama administration might ease some of the imperial pressures on the island, Cuba will still need help from around the world to stem overactive imperial impulses to punish disobedience. **CP**

Saul Landau's *A Bush and Botox World* was published by CounterPunch / AK Press.

Resuscitating the debate over education

From Dewey and Lippmann to Today's Neoliberal Onslaughts on Public Schools

By Danny Weil

During the early 20th century, not all activists and public policy makers were enthralled with the functionalism proposed and implemented in the early industrial schools. John Dewey, a prominent progressive educator and philosopher during the early part of the twentieth century, proposed a more serious democratic form of education. Dewey argued against reducing schooling to mere functionalism – boring and repetitive tasks designed to prepare students for future work under capitalist relations – just as many educators

The horrifying "Race to the Top" fund, spear-headed by leaders like Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his philanthropic billionaire cronies, must be challenged with a clear set of ethics and values.

today argue against standardized testing. Dewey's argument against social functionalism was that the role and purpose behind education should be to prepare students to live fully in the present, not simply to prepare them for the future.

Dewey argued that for schooling to be merely a preparatory institution for future market needs rendered schools and schooling dehumanizing and denied children the opportunity to find relevancy, identity, and meaning in their lives. Dewey wrote, in *Education Today*:

"The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his future. We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each pres-

ent experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything."

Walter Lippmann did not agree. He was a journalist and contemporary of John Dewey, as well as a speechwriter for presidents. In the 1920s, Lippmann was in his mere 20s while Dewey was in his 60s. Lippmann promoted, like many of his heirs do today, an idea grounded in the imposition of social governance by intellectual managerial elites. These autocratic elites would administer or govern society by applying scientific management to democracy in an effort to maintain orderly control, something Lippmann was thoroughly convinced the public could not achieve. This is the clarion call we hear today from Bill Gates, the Walton Family, Ely Broad and other neo-functionalists, busy revamping education in the reflective image of corporate capitalism. Of course, in such a society there would be little need for citizenship education. Lippmann's view of education can be summed up in his book *The Phantom Public*, where he declares:

"The usual appeal to education can bring only disappointment. For the problems of the modern world appear and change faster than any set of teachers can grasp them, much faster than they can convey their substance to a population of children. If the schools attempt to teach children how to solve the problems of the day, they are bound always to be in arrears. The most they can conceivably attempt is a teaching of a pattern of thought and feeling which will enable the citizen to approach a new problem in some useful fashion. But that pattern cannot be invented by the pedagogue. It is the political theorist's business to trace out that pattern. In that task he must not assume that the mass has political genius, but that men, even if they had genius, would give only a little time to public affairs."

Disagreeing vehemently with