

The Red and the Black

JOHN GERASSI, Ed.: *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Ernesto Che Guevara*.
New York, Macmillan, 1968.

JOHN CLYTUS: *Black Man in Red Cuba*.
Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1970.

ELIZABETH SUTHERLAND: *The Youngest Revolution: A Personal Report on Cuba*.
New York, Dial Press, 1969.

Reviewed by William J. Parente

THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE of the Cuban Revolution in coming to grips with the historic problem of race relations has significance throughout the hemisphere. As North American educators can testify, the attraction of Communist Cuba as a "new" society is very great for an increasing number of college-age radicals. Unlike all other Communist states, Cuba is a truly multiracial country, with a black population numbering between 35 and 45 percent of the total. As one Cuban haughtily puts it in the Sutherland volume, ". . . the Cuban Revolution is the only one worth watching right now except for China—and Cuba is even more interesting than China because the population is more racially mixed."

The racial situation in Cuba, then, approaches the dimensions of that in the United States and other American republics. Friend and foe alike must inevitably ask whether the Cuban form of socialism can significantly improve race relations. Similarly, it is apparent that the militant revolutionary strategy for Latin America espoused by the Cuban regime and personified by Che Guevara continues to stress racial inequality as a fundamental justification for rebellion, and its elimination as a

primary goal of any new revolutionary government. The three books reviewed here shed considerable light both upon the nature of this militant racial propaganda and upon the Castro regime's efforts to resolve Cuba's own racial problem.

AS EARLY AS 1921, the newly-established Soviet journal on nationality problems, *Zhizn natsional-nostei*, foresaw that the collapse of colonial empires would serve to "arouse nationalist passions among the peoples of the yellow and dark continents even more than the defeat of the Entente's counter-revolutionary plans against Soviet Russia." Indeed, the author—M. Pavlovich—specifically urged ". . . the awakening of the dark tribes of the Sudan, South Africa, and South America."¹

It was Castro's Second Declaration of Havana (February 4, 1962) which most effectively raised this theme again—and this time from within the American hemisphere. In attacking the "neo-

¹ No. 14 (112), July 16, 1921, p. 1.

colonialist" Alliance for Progress, Castro related it to the racism which had decimated the "32 million Indians, who extend from the United States border to the limits of the southern hemisphere, and the 45 million mestizos, who for the most part differ little from the Indians." To these victims of racial oppression he added "the 15 million Negroes and 14 million mulattos of Latin America, who know with horror and rage that their brothers in the North cannot ride in the same vehicles as their white compatriots, nor attend the same schools, nor even die in the same hospitals." He concluded by asking:

How are these disinherited racial groups going to believe in this imperialism, in its benefits, or in any "alliance" with it (which is not for lynching and exploiting them as slaves)? What Alliance for Progress can serve

as encouragement to those 107 million men and women of our America, the backbone of labor in the cities and fields, whose dark skin—black, mestizo, mulatto, Indian—inspires scorn in the new colonialists?²

Among the virtues of John Gerassi's exceptionally well-annotated collection is the light it sheds on Che Guevara's contribution to the formulation of this aggressively militant racial propaganda of the new Havana regime. Indeed, as early as August 1961, six months before Castro's address, we find Guevara, in a speech delivered at the Punta del Este conference of the Organization of American States (OAS), linking a denunciation of President Kennedy's proposed Alliance for Progress with con-

² *The Militant* (New York), March 5, 1962.

Reviewers in this Issue

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KARL M. SCHMITT—Associate Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas. He co-authored *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1968), and the forthcoming *The Politics of Assassination* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall).

ARPAD J. VON LAZAR—Associate Professor at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He is co-author of *Reform and Revolution: Readings in Latin American Politics* (Boston, Allyn Bacon, 1970) and author of *Latin American Politics: A Primer* (Boston, Allyn Bacon) to be published this year.

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demnation of “the existence of discrimination against the Negro and the excesses of the Ku Klux Klan” in the United States. He also charged that the technical development plans of the OAS’s Economic and Social Committee were racist and colonialist because—unlike the Cuban model—they stressed health facilities before industrialization:

I get the impression that what is intended is to make the outhouse a fundamental thing. This improves the social condition of the poor Indian, the poor Negro, the poor man who leads a subhuman existence. “Let’s build him an outhouse and then, after we build him an outhouse, and after he is educated to keep it clean, then he can enjoy the benefits of production.”

As in the case of the Peace Corps later, American foreign policy was damned if it did help, and damned if it didn’t, and the exacerbation of racial sensitivities was from the beginning part and parcel of the Cuban response.

The Guevara collection is of interest, too, for its frequent exhortations urging elimination of racial discrimination within Cuba itself. However, with regard to the progress—or lack of it—being made by the Castro regime in this direction, the other two volumes under review are of greater value because they provide independent reports, from widely differing perspectives, by foreigners familiar with both the old and the new Cuba.

JOHN CLYTUS is an American black nationalist who spent three years in Cuba from 1964 to 1967. Having served in the United States armed forces and experienced racial discrimination in our society, Clytus first worked unsuccessfully for the election of a “Communist [Independent Progressive Party] candidate in San Francisco” and then left for Cuba to see if communism had solved the race problem there. Since he had not been invited, his reception was not warm, although he eventually secured work as a teacher of English to clerks in the Ministry of Foreign Commerce and as a translator for *Granma*, the party newspaper.

Clytus reports that he soon discovered the absence of blacks in leadership roles not only in the government bureaucracy, but also in the party—a point confirmed by Sutherland:

... not only were the minister and the vice-minister of the ministry [of Foreign Commerce] white, but so were all of the supervisors in all of the offices. It didn’t take much longer to find that out of the seventeen or more ministries in the country, the top two jobs in each were held by whites.

Similarly, although *Granma* gave the greatest prominence to stories of racial unrest in the United States, Clytus found that this and other journals effectively censored any effort by the black third of the Cuban population to create a sense of separate black identity. Eventually, his faith and interest in the Cuban experiment foundered on this traditional Communist attitude. “Communism, with its benevolent method of ending the racial problem by condensing all races into one-big-happy-human-race,” he writes, “would ring down the final curtain on black consciousness.” Clytus explains his return to the United States on the ground that here at least he can protest publicly against racial injustice and openly advocate black nationalist aspirations. (The Cuban Communist attitude observed by Clytus recalls Soviet Africanist I. I. Potekhin’s strictures against the “negritude” concepts of Senegalese President Leopold Senghor and Pan-Africanist attitudes generally:³)

ELIZABETH SUTHERLAND (MARTINEZ) is a journalist whose articles have appeared in *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *The Guardian*. As this might suggest, her attitude towards the socialist experiment in Cuba is sympathetic, but it is not uncritical, nor is her book lacking in candor on the racial question. The volume is actually a remarkable documentary of political conversations which the author had with Cubans of all classes during a visit to the island in 1967. As a visiting journalist, she had access to Cuban intellectual circles—something denied to Clytus for the most part. As a result, her coverage of the island’s race situation is considerably more complex and sophisticated than his.

Herself a mulatto, she is as sensitive as Clytus to the racial epithets that persist among the Cuban lower and middle classes. She also notes the lack of black faces in magazines and the general refusal of Cuban society—both black and white—to accept negroid features or black cultural values as the equal of their traditional white European counterparts. But she is a realist with respect to the rate at which progress towards racial equality can be achieved—even in a socialist society. For her, the important distinction is that “where the previous society’s institutions and authority had all stood

³ *Kommunist* (Moscow), No. 19, October–December 1964, pp. 36–48.

behind racism, the [Cuban] Revolution stood against it.”

There have clearly been problems. Three days after Castro’s historic declaration of March 22, 1959, on “The Rights of the Black Man in Cuba,” he was forced to go on television to put down rumors of interracial marriage and “to pressure people that the Revolution wasn’t going to tell anybody whom to dance with.”

Miss Sutherland acknowledges that “white supremacy, another old idea rooted in Cuba’s past society, is probably the most delicate and muddled issue that can be raised about the island today.” Here we do not find the rash claims heard in foreign socialist circles that the Cuban race problem has been solved.⁴ The 1931 census showed that although Cubans of color constituted well over a third of the population, they owned only eight percent of the total land in terms of money value. The social as well as economic results of such disparity could hardly be removed by *any* regime in a single generation.

There have also been achievements, however. Illiteracy, traditionally high among the black population of Cuba, was reduced to less than four percent in the early years of the regime. Housing, also a problem for blacks, was given priority second only to industrialization. The immediate integration of schools has already produced thousands of black technicians and bureaucrats who eventually can move into higher positions—provided both the regime and the people have the will to make it so. The public forms of racial discrimination—segregated beaches, restaurants, hotels—have been eliminated by government decree. In many ways these forward steps have coincided both chronologically and tactically with the struggle against racial discrimination in the United States. The difference in Cuba lies in the regime’s policy of nationalization, the lack of intervening state, local and private agencies to temporarily frustrate the will of the national government (for example, in school or union policies), and a more focussed national will than in our own system of checks and balances.

APART FROM THE QUESTION of public policy, the less tractable attitudes of the Cuban people at large with regard to the race problem are also similar to those prevailing in the United States. Miss Sutherland writes:

Of the many old ideas embedded in that prerevolutionary scene, those which in 1967 seemed hardest and most vital to solve fell into three areas of human relationship: class, race, and sex. Outside these broad categories lay many prejudices which were primarily by-products of, rather than rooted directly in, the past structure of Cuba’s society. . . . But old ideas in the area of class, race and sex relations—these seemed to present the Revolution with its most difficult and long-range challenges.

“How, in the case of Cuba,” the author asks, “can you change men’s attitudes toward women, women’s attitudes toward themselves, white attitudes toward blacks, and black attitudes toward blackness? How, in short, do you change what is commonly called ‘human nature’?”

These are fair questions—and they are questions which non-Communist societies also may well ask themselves.

At the conclusion of her lengthy section on Cuban blacks (“Colony Within the Colony”), Miss Sutherland quotes from a statement adopted by 1400 intellectuals for the 1968 Cultural Congress in Havana. The statement acknowledges that “racism is not, historically, a product of modern imperialism; it is an ideological vestige of the past that imperialism inherited and shaped to its own ends of domination and exploitation, turning it into an essential part of its own system to such an extent that a prior condition for the disappearance of racism is the disappearance of imperialism.”

Such a statement reflects a more sophisticated analysis than earlier Communist theory, which saw capitalism as the creator of racism. It must be said that there is much in Sutherland’s report, as well as in the Clytus volume, which suggests that the problem of race is indeed rooted in “human nature” rather than in either capitalism or imperialism—unless one chooses to interpret the latter term as including the broadest kinds of human domination over other humans. To the extent that this is what is meant by “imperialism,” then indeed, American and Communist policy may be said to be “converging” in a mutual struggle against racial discrimination in their societies.

⁴ Cf. Harry Ring, *How Cuba Uprooted Race Discrimination*, New York, Pioneer Publishers, 1961.

Old Doctrines and New Classes

R. A. HUMPHREYS, Ed.: *Tradition and Revolt in Latin America and Other Essays*.
New York, Columbia University Press, 1969.

LUIS E. AGUILAR, Ed.: *Marxism in Latin America*.
New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.

LUIS MERCIER VEGA: *Roads to Power in Latin America*.
New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1969.

Reviewed by Karl M. Schmitt

DESPITE THE APPARENT commonality of subject matter suggested by their titles, these works range from historical observations of mixed merit to incisive analyses of contemporary Latin American social and political phenomena. The first is a collection of previously published historical articles and essays by the “dean” of Latin American historians in Great Britain; the second is a collection of documentary materials on communism and socialism from the late 19th century to the present, with an introduction by the editor; and the third is a series of essays or, perhaps more accurately, an extended essay on social relationships in contemporary Latin America and their implications for politics and government.

For those primarily interested in power relationships, ideology, and the “revolution” in Latin America today, the Humphreys collection has little to offer. The scholarly core of the work consists of four articles on British commerce and Anglo-American rivalries, largely in the Caribbean, during the 19th century. These are solidly researched and well-written pieces on some little-known aspects (at least in the United States) of British interest in Latin America. The rest, however, contribute little to historical scholarship, although they include two charming essays on early historians of Latin America—the Scotsman William Robertson and the American William Prescott. The primary reason for the republication of these essays, apparently, was the desire of the Institute of Latin American

Studies of Columbia University to pay homage to this distinguished British historian. It has done so handsomely.

OF MUCH GREATER contemporary interest is Mr. Aguilar’s collection of Marxist writings from and about Latin America from the 1890’s to the late 1960’s. For the most part, they consist of speeches and essays authored by Communist party members or documents of party conferences (including some emanating from Fidel Castro’s Cuban Communist Party), but they also include some writings by independent Marxists and Socialists. The editor has divided his 36 selections into six sections, all but the last of which cover well-defined chronological periods such as the Popular Front era and the aftermath of Castro’s Cuban revolution. The last section Aguilar has dubbed “Criticism and Self-Criticism.” Although a certain repetitive sameness runs through many of the pieces, particularly those from groups that took their directions faithfully from the Soviet Union, the chronological treatment serves to bring into focus the interesting shifts in the posture of Latin American Communists. Even more interesting and important, perhaps, are the writings of Marxist deviationists—Jose Carlos Mariategui of Peru, Anibal Ponce of Argentina, and Jose Revueltas of Mexico.

The editor’s introduction is indispensable for the purpose of tying these various selections to-