

*Cuba's Search for
The Institution of Social
Democracy*

The Search

by

Lionel Martin

DL
Jun 27
1970

FA-77

A search on a national scale has been initiated in Cuba. It is not for any member of the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdom. It is a search for something more amorphous and undefined than that - a search for the institutions of socialist democracy.

In Cuba there is no written constitution that defines the characteristics of each institution and its relation with the people. Nor are the institutional forms of reaching decisions defined by national law. The mutual relationship between the people, their mass organizations and government organs has evolved in practice. When shortcomings became apparent both the internal and external relations have been changed. Institutions have been founded when there was need and institutions have been abolished. They have been centralized and decentralized in accord with factors such as efficacy and initiative. In short, the institutions of Cuba have been in flux, in a constant process of transformation. It is for that reason that no rigid definitions on a juridical level exist. If they had existed they probably would have had to be violated in the course of socialist transformation. The Cubans believe that adequate institutions will only be discovered through the trial and error method of practice, taking into account foreign lessons but basing all change on their own reality.

Fidel Castro said three years ago: "...when we elaborate schematic representations of that which we have created, they will not be the product of our imagination. They will be the

product of reality."

Certain General definitions have been presented regarding the institutionalization of Cuban society. The principal one refers to the need for greater mass participation in the solution to problems that the society faces. In his speech to the Cuban Federation of Women (August 23, 1970) Prime Minister Castro said that:

"We have to advance more in ~~xxxx~~ ideological development, in the field that refers to how we assure that the masses might be greater and greater participants in this process and that they participate more and more in the decision-making."

However, Castro left open-ended the exact form in which this participation would be achieved.

As a fundamental factor, it was pointed out that the mass organizations of the Cuban Revolution such as the Committees for Defense of the Revolution, Federation of Cuban Women, Association of Small Farmers etc. have a membership of three million out of the eight million population of Cuba. This means, Castro remarked, that "we have tapped the energy, the interest, the will of millions of persons... Now we have to channel these energies, that formidable and extraordinary revolutionary movement of masses toward the possibility of greater participation of the masses in the decisions that affect their own life." He went on to say that this amplifies the development "of a new society ~~xx~~ based on truly democratic principles."

A recent example, in practice, grew out of Castro's July 26 speech. In that speech he analyzed in critical terms the situation that existed in Santiago de Cuba. He had found on a visit that

although there was no cement available for repairs and construction in the city, the nearby factory had slowed down its production because it no more storage space. The workers at the beer factory told him how, with relatively small investments, they could raise production by one-half. He found that there were little or no recreation centers for the population and that some of the former recreation sites had been taken over as offices by State organs.

He spoke, in this speech, of involving the people in decision making in order to insure against arbitrary or incorrect decisions. He told the million people assembled in Jose Marti Plaza of the Revolution that as a basic revolutionary principle, "faith in the people will never be lacking". Mass organizations should be involved in all decisions that ^{aff}collect the collectivity. He also proposed that trade union organizations should be strengthened and given a bigger voice in factory management. He asked: "Why should the director be the absolute master? Why not begin introducing the collectivity of workers into the administration of the factory?"

Two weeks after Castro's July 25th speech a meeting was held in the Oriente Theatre of Santiago de Cuba. In attendance were the representatives of the mass organizations of the city, the leaders of the Party, the industrial enterprises and the municipal administration. An aggressive plan for the repair of housing was discussed and approved. Cement would be acquired from the factory about which Castro had spoken. The output of bricks and tiles in the local factory would be increased. Local leaders were told that they would have to return recreation sites that they ~~might have~~ taken over for other uses. A plan for recreation, cultural ~~maxim~~ activities was

also discussed.

It was agreed that the priorities for repair would be decided by each neighborhood Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. One citizen took the microphone and warned that these problems should be solved "without favoritism".

Perhaps most important was the decision that popular assemblies of the same kind would be held periodically and that the institutions that have taken on responsibilities will have to respond before the public.

A new stage of the Revolution has been opened, said Castro recently. Like the previous stages, it will be the revolutionary initiative and dynamic of the Cuban people that will assure progress.