**Castro’s Consolidation of power 1959 - 1975**



Although the Rebel Army was successful in removing Batista on January 1 1959, Castro’s power was not yet absolute. He came to power by winning the support of the peasants in the Sierras and promising to bring an end to Batista’s corruption.  In order to consolidate power, Castro needed to meet his promises with action while removing any opposition that existed within the new regime. His actions moved his position from a member of the provisional government to the undisputed leader of Cuba.

Fidel Castro came to power certain that Cuba needed not only a new government but also a new order. This new order had to be based on Cuba’s economic independence. The influence of the United States on Cuban affairs had brought, in Castro’s view, many of the economic and social problems affecting the nation. It was not enough  
to have put an end to Batista’s corrupt dictatorship. Just as the Cubans wanted their political rights back, they also wanted better living conditions. Redistribution of land, improved working conditions, and better wages were only a few of the demands people expected Castro and his men to address. Living standards needed to be raised; health and education made accessible to all. The question was how to meet these demands in the shortest period of time.

*His success is attributable to his ability to portray himself to the majority of Cubans as the life force of the revolution, to his creation of a ruling apparatus of total power and an effective propaganda machine, and to his cautious and systematic approach to radicalizing his government while encouraging the mass emigration of his opponents.*

**Legal Methods: Consolidation of power – Political Consolidation**

In order to consolidate the revolution, Castro made use of several methods between1959 and 1962. First, he removed the people associated with Batista’s regime. Next, he consolidated the position of the 26th of July Movement within the provisional government. Third, he launched reforms to show that the revolution lived up to its promises, and to gain support. Finally, he exploited the idea that Cuba was threatened by the United States and appealed to the people’s sense of nationalism.  
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**Removal of Batista Regime**

Citizens who had served in the Batista government and armed forces were imprisoned; their properties confiscated as they were brought to trial. They were either executed or given long prison sentences. The trials took place with little time to assess the real participation in the Batista regime of each of the people involved, and they did not conform to the standards of justice. As such, they were criticized not only in Cuba but also in the United States for not offering human rights guarantees to the prisoners. Those who believed justice had not been done were told that the revolution was endangered by these people and that ‘immediate justice’ was more necessary than a fair trial.

Between January and February 1959, former Batista officials were removed from office and as many as 500 were executed. The executions rallied public support behind Castro against the former Batista regime. Castro appeared a saviour for he was exacting justice for the violated rights of the Cuban people.

When the U.S. press called the executions a "blood bath," Fidel Castro rallied Cubans to legitimize his policies. He justified the executions by claiming the revolution was endangered by these people, and the Cubans stood behind Castro in support. They shouted paredón, "to the wall," meaning death by firing squad.

Castro also persecuted members from the left. Huber Matos was a prominent leader from the 26th of July Movement, and he declared his resignation from the party after denouncing the increasing influence of communist ideas.

Matos was accused of treason and sentenced to 20 years of prison, because his resignation would have been an embarrassment to Castro’s regime. Castro was prepared to eliminate key members of the party for the sake of reinforcing his own power.

*Summary: Removed the people associated with Batista's regime*

* + *Citizens served in the Batista governments were imprisoned*
  + *As were the armed forces*
  + *Properties confiscated as they went to trial*
  + *Executed or given long sentences*
  + *Didn't conform to standards of justice*
  + *Criticised in Cuba but also in the US for not offering human rights*
  + *Justified by saying that these people saying they endangered the revolution*

**Establishment of a new government**

The provisional government established in January 1959 was formed by a significant number of liberals. They hoped to moderate the left-wing elements, which included the rebels of the 26th of July Movement as well as members of the PSP. The government was led by moderates Manuel Urrutia as president, and José Miró Cardona as his prime minister. Castro set up an office outside the presidential palace, at the Havana Hilton hotel, as commander of Cuban armed forces.

In spite of the provisional government representing many political sectors, real authority was in the hands of Fidel Castro from the very start. He was seen everywhere and heard by everyone. His almost-daily speeches appealed to people’s hopes for a new Cuba, based on the grand ideas of the leaders of the independence and on the ideals of social justice, economic security, and political freedom. He approached people in a way that Cuba had never experienced before, going out into the streets and travelling across the country to meet them face to face. It was not uncommon to see Castro spending an afternoon in a rural village discussing who should repair tractors or fixing refrigerators for the people.

Six weeks after the provisional government took over, Prime Minister Cardona unexpectedly resigned. Fidel Castro stepped in as prime minister. Next, in July 1959, President Urrutia resigned because he was opposed to the increasing influence of communists in the government, as well as to Castro’s refusal to hold elections. He was replaced by Osvaldo Dorticós, who remained president until the 1976 constitution was passed.

Castro’s appointment as prime minister enabled the revolution to move quickly, implementing reforms that led to the transformation of the country into a communist state by the end of 1961. He was supported in this move to the left by the members of the PSP.

Castro and his supporters introduced dramatic changes in the organization of the political parties in Cuba. In 1961, various revolutionary organizations that had acted against Batista were unified under the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI), which aimed to provide the government with a political party of its own. The ORI was formed by the 26th of July Movement (led by Castro), the PSP, and the Revolutionary Directorate (*Directorio Revolucionario*), a revolutionary student organization. The following year, ORI became the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba (*Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba* ) under Castro’s leadership.

In 1965, the party was renamed Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Cubano*, PCC). The PCC remains the only officially authorized political party in Cuba and has ruled since 1965, as other existing political parties in Cuba cannot participate in elections. The PCC began to publish its own newspaper, *Granma*, and developed its youth branch (Young Communist League) and children’s organization (the José Martí Pioneers).

The growing influence of the PCC and of communist ideas in the government was looked at with some suspicion, even within Castro’s inner circle. While men like Raúl Castro and Che Guevara welcomed the revolution’s turn to the left, not everyone supported this shift. One of the people who opposed the turn to the left was Huber Matos, a leader of the 26th of July Movement. He decided to resign as Military Chief of Camagüey – where he enjoyed immense popularity – because he opposed the increasing influence of communist ideas in the revolution and also objected to Castro’s refusal to set a date for elections in Cuba. The resignation of someone who had played a leading role in the revolution would have been a great embarrassment for Castro. Also, there was fear that Matos’ attitude could encourage more dissidence within the movement. After failing to persuade Matos not to resign, Castro ordered Camilo Cienfuegos to travel to Camagüey, to inform Matos that he was under arrest and would be tried for conspiracy and treason against the revolution.

Shortly after his visit to Camagüey, Cienfuegos’ plane disappeared in an accident. The bodies of the passengers and the remains of the aircraft were never found. There are several theories that propose that Castro had Cienfuegos eliminated. One claims that Cienfuegos had also expressed his concerns about the communist nature of the reforms. Another theory claims that what disturbed Castro above all was Cienfuegos’ popularity. The Cuban government has always explained these events as an accident. Matos was accused of treason and sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment. He was released after he fulfilled his sentence and left Cuba in 1979.

***Political Consolidation of power and the military.***

8 man politburo – 8 men including Fidel and Raul Castro and four army majors.

**Control of the Army**

During the first decade Castro’s position was firmly anchored by the military and security forces through a number of senior officers who were veterans of the 26th July movement. Senior officers comprised about two thirds of the central committee of the Communist Party. Military men made up at least one fifth of the party membership. In January 1968 the first of the politburo delegates was appointed as a permanent inspector and supervisor of the Matanzas Province party bureau. By early November at least six other majors were appointed to similar posts to represent Castro and the politburo in other provinces, regions and in industry. Thus the Communist Party – once widely representative came under the exclusive control of Castro and a personal entourage of army majors.

These same men dominated almost all other public institutions and mass organisations through the party. In 1968 the military were responsible for mobilizing tens of thousands of civilians for the sugar harvest. They also assumed control of civilian aviation and began the reorganization of pre-university education.

The increasingly martial environment was encouraged by the Cuban public information media so that Castro and his 26th July colleagues gained a cult of ‘guerrilla heroes’.

The military became the supreme institutional force as the officer corps was the only organized element that Castro trusted. The officer corps was made up of around 200 majors and an unknown number of captains and junior officers. Most were commissioned after Castro came to power and were subjected to extensive political indoctrination and military discipline and were loyal to the regime. No Cuban military officer on active duty defected to the US in the first decade. Few officers were politically ambitious and field commanders were regularly rotated and Raul Castro conducted frequent field tours. Few were known for or exposed to communist ideology before 1959 and loyalty was to Castro personally.

***Foreign Policy: International Relations***

**Relations with the USA**

In seeking to consolidate his power after the revolution, Castro knew that relations with the USA were the biggest problem. Anticipating that there might be a breakdown, he had already begun moving to the Left at the time he took power. That was why he drew closer to the Cuban Communist Party, offering them minor posts in government. There was also a practical reason. The 26 July Movement which he had led to victory lacked the trained officials necessary for running the government in the new Cuba. The flight of the majority of the managers and officials who had worked for the Batista regime left large administrative gaps. To help fill these, Castro turned to the communist **cadres** from whose ranks officials could be drawn.

**Cuban–US problems**

Had it been only a matter of politics, some form of accommodation might have been possible between Castro and the USA. Initially, his revolutionary government had American backing. At the time of his toppling of the Batista regime in 1959, Castro described himself as a ‘humanist’ rather than a Communist, a category **Washington** found acceptable. For a time, indeed, he was something of a hero figure to the US public. The admiration did not last long, however. As a means of uniting the Cuban people, Castro, influenced by Che Guevara, chose to adopt a strong anti-Americanism, asserting that the poverty of Cuba was a direct result of the USA’s imperialism. This became the justification for the expulsion or takeover of a large number of US business concerns. By the end of 1960, the refineries and assets of the following oil companies in Cuba had been seized:

* ● Royal Dutch Shell ● Standard Oil  
  ● Texaco.

Along with this went the takeover of these major foreign companies:

* ● Coca-Cola
* ● Moa Bay Nickel Company
* ● Roebuck  
  ● Sears.

The first response of the USA was to apply diplomatic and financial pressure. When this did not budge Castro, Washington withdrew its diplomatic recognition of the new Cuba. Fearing that they were now dealing with a communist island only 90 miles (145 km) off the Florida state coast, many high-ranking Washington officials turned their thoughts towards armed intervention in Cuba. They were disturbed by the realization that Castro’s revolution had become a considerable **Cold War** coup for the USSR. Following the expulsion of US companies from Cuba, the Soviet Union had been quick to sign a **commercial agreement** and to offer diplomatic and economic assistance. The USSR hoped, and the United States feared, that the establishment of a Soviet-backed Marxist state in Cuba would be the prelude to the rapid spread of Soviet-style communism throughout central and Latin America. A US Congressman declared that ‘for the first time since 1917 free America has the toad of Communism squatting on her very doorstep’.

**The Bay of Pigs, 1961**

Early in 1960, Eisenhower authorized a covert CIA programme for using Guatemala as a training base for **Cuban *émigrés*** in preparation for a future attack on Castro’s Cuba. The hope was that this would provoke a popular rising that would topple the regime. A secret mission statement defined the CIA’s aims.

The attack was launched in April 1961 soon after Kennedy, the incoming president, who had earlier been a Castro admirer, had given it his approval. It proved a fiasco. The invaders failed to receive the support they had expected from either the local Cubans or, more critically, the USA, and were killed or captured as soon as they landed. Forewarned of the attack, Castro’s forces were waiting for them. It was obviously a military disaster for the USA, but an even greater diplomatic and political one. The Soviet Union could barely contain its joy and the young President Kennedy his embarrassment.

A victory parade was held in Havana. *Life,* a popular US magazine, described how ‘Havana gleefully noted the wealth of the captured invaders: 100 plantation owners, 67 landlords of apartment houses, 35 factory owners, 112 businessmen, 179 lived off unearned income, and 194 ex-soldiers of Batista.’ In a grand gesture of defiance to the USA, Castro announced to the cheering crowds at the parade that Cuba would now become a fully communist state. What he meant by this soon became apparent when elections were declared to be no longer necessary now that Cuba was effectively a one-party state.

**Relations with the USSR**

Castro’s stand against one of the world’s superpowers was hugely popular in Cuba but it was fraught with risk. The hard reality was that his adoption of communism had further compromised Cuba’s independence and ability to compete commercially. It had already mortgaged its sugar crop to the USSR. Clearly, the USA would no longer be the main purchaser of Cuba’s other goods. The only alternative was to sell to the Soviet Union, the only buyer comparable to the USA. The result was that, far from being free to do as it wished, Cuba now became wholly reliant on the other superpower, the USSR.

The Soviet Union was swift to build on the moves it had already made. Within a month of Castro’s declaration of Cuba as a communist state, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, formally promised to defend Cuba against any future aggression by the USA, accompanying his promise with the pronouncement that ‘the **Monroe Doctrine** is dead’. Supplies of Soviet arms to Cuba were on their way, in addition to the Soviet Union’s advancing of millions of dollars worth of credit and equipment to the island.

**The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962**

Emboldened by Kennedy’s embarrassment over Cuba, Khrushchev’s USSR took its most provocative step so far in the Cold War. During the 19 months following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Soviet Union’s increasing arms provision to Cuba culminated in the installation on the island of Soviet nuclear missiles with a capability of striking every major state in the USA. Che Guevara led the Cuban negotiations over their positioning. In October 1962, US reconnaissance aircraft brought back photographic evidence of the missiles and their silos in an advanced stage of construction.

The Soviet explanation was that the devices were there to defend Cuba against further foreign intervention but, since this claim followed a previous denial that the USSR had installed any missiles at all in Cuba, it served only to increase US fears. Kennedy announced that a naval blockade of Cuba would operate until the missiles were dismantled and removed. He added that, if any attempt was made to use them against the United States, he would order retaliation in kind. Kennedy backed his ultimatum by putting the United States Air Force (USAF) and the **Polaris** submarine fleet on war alert.

When Khrushchev likened the proximity of Soviet missiles in Cuba to that of US ones in Turkey, Kennedy replied that the US commitment to European defence, which the Turkish bases represented, was in no sense comparable to the Cuban missiles whose only conceivable purpose was to threaten the United States.

The critical decision was Khrushchev’s. Would he be prepared to continue at the risk of full-scale nuclear confrontation? The answer came on 28 October, the day when the course of the Soviet vessels would bring them within the exclusion zone imposed by the US navy. From the **Kremlin** came the order to the Soviet ships not to enter the zone. In the following days, a number of contacts were made by letter and telephone between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Subsequently, the Soviet leader let it be known that the Soviet missiles would be removed from Cuba. For its part, the USA undertook to reduce its bases and missiles in Turkey.

**The outcome of the crisis**

Soon after the crisis had passed, Guevara asserted that had the Cuban leaders been in control of the missiles, they would have used them against the USA. This may have been bravado after the event but it was clear that Castro and Guevara felt betrayed by the Soviet withdrawal. There was no hiding the reality that Castro had been merely an onlooker in the crisis. The drama had been played out between Kennedy and Khrushchev. In an attempt to preserve his status, Castro sought to claim a moral victory. He expressed great pride in the enthusiastic mass response of the Cuban people to his call for them to prepare to defend their island against the expected US invasion. He made adroit use of the missile metaphor to claim a form of parity for Cuba with the superpowers.

**Role of Ideology**

* Not clear in 1959 whether Cuba would adopt a Communist policy
* Liberals in the government
* Castro hadn't committed to an ideology by then
* A fixed set of principles would have restricted the methods at his disposal

**Was Ideology important in the rise and establishment of Castro’s rule?**

The main source of inspiration for Castro’s ideology was the more radical version of Cuban nationalism stretching back to 1868.

Castro’s political ideas seem to be less radical than his two closest allies – Raul and Che (both could be regarded as unorthodox communists). It could be possible that a version of ‘socialism in one country’ was developing through discussions in the Sierra but this was not reflected in the manifestos.

Castro was also inspired by various Latin American anti-imperials movements of the 1930’s and 40’s. Castro’s movement was similar to these national liberation movements which aimed to mobilise the masses against powerful traditional elites and attempted to escape from the controlling influence of US economic interests.

- 1) Castro’s love for Cuba. Fidel Castro can be considered an extreme nationalist. Once in power, this helped him motivate the population of Cuba against the US. By referring to the quality of past treatment of Cubans by the US, he was able to convince the majority of the population to remain as far away from the US as they could. The majority of Castro’s basis for the revolution was created based of his nationalism and support for those who could not support themselves.

- 2) Castro’s foreign policy. Castro’s foreign policy consisted of support from multiple different support groups throughout other Latin American countries. (Bolivia, Venezuela, Nicaragua) In addition, Castro obtained support from the USSR, who shipped goods and materials to Cuba to help the country out. Castro’s main foreign goal however, was to promote the freedom of smaller countries from their much more powerful and wealthier controllers. In addition, since the United states attempted to cripple the Cuban government through a trade barricade, many other countries that were against the US, began to support Castro’s regime.

- 3) “New mans theory”- this theory was an idea that Castro and Che Guevara created, that regulated work and employment throughout Cuba. It consisted of the idea that all Cubans should no longer work for the benefit of themselves, but rather for the good of everyone in society. This increased benefits for Cubans, such as education. From this, Castro aimed to improve the entire society as a whole, rather than just certain individuals.

Fidel’s first and main belief was that he himself was not actually interested in power. Castro claimed that he became the leader of Cuba, not because of the position of power, but rather so he could help improve the life of the lower-class population as well as change the government for the improvement of the people. Right after Castro’s victory over Cuba, people were celebrating because the revolution was over. Castro wanted to improve the country as a whole, rather than just improve himself, and take power. This is one reason that he was able to gain such a large support group.

2) Castro wanted to implement his socialist views throughout Cuba. This began when Castro singed the First Agrarian reform in to law, which put a cap upon the amount of land a certain person was allowed to own. The implementation of this reform, appealed to the peasant community, because they began to receive portions of land from wealthy owners, ultimately building up Castro’s support group. Furthermore, Castro declared Cuba a socialist state in 1961, which was a step towards communism, even though Castro himself was not considered to be completely communist.

Below is an interview with Castro that shows his opinion on communism.

Reporter: Comandante, what is the character of the Cuban revolution?

Castro: You newspapermen are crazy for definitions and neat schemes… You’re impossibly dogmatic. We are not dogmatic… At any rate, you wish to write that this is a socialist revolution, right? And write it, then… Yes, not only did we destroy a tyrannical system. We also destroyed the philoimperialistic bourgeois state apparatus, the bureaucracy, the police, and a mercenary army. We abolished privileges, annihilated the great landowners, threw out foreign monopolies for good, nationalized almost every industry, and collectivized the land. We are fighting now to liquidate once and for all the exploitation of man over man, and to build a completely new society, with a new class contents. The Americans (Cubans say just that, los americanos, to mean the United States) the Americans and the priests say that this is communism. We know very well that it is not. At any rates, the word does not frighten us. They can say whatever they wish. There is a song, which is popular among our peasants, that goes more or less like this: “Bird of ill omen — of treason and cowardice — that are throwing at my joy — the word: communism! — I know nothing about these ‘isms’ — Yet, if such a great welfare conquest — which can be seen by my own eyes — is communism, then — you can even call me a communist!

Reporter: Comandante, what do you think about the Popular Socialist Party, which is the party of Castro communists?

Castro: It is the only Cuban party, which has consistently called for a radical change of social structures and relations. It is true that at the beginning the communists distrusted me and us rebels. Their distrust was justified, their position was absolutely correct, both ideologically and politically. They were right in being distrustful because we of the Sierra who were conducting the guerilla were still full of petit bourgeois prejudices and defects, in spite of our Marxist readings. Our ideas were not clear, although we wished to destroy tyranny and privileges with all out strength. Then, we met with each other, we understood one another, and started to work together. The communists have shed much blood and heroism for the Cuban cause. At present, we continue to work together in a loyal and brotherly way.

**Was he a communist?**

Before 1958 – PSP Communist Party did not support Castro

Castro adapted aspects of communist ideology after 1960 but Richard Gott state sthat nationalism was more important in his ideology than socialism with Marti more influential than Marxist ideology.

Two formal manifestos of the 26 July Movement issued by Castro from Mexico showed no signs of communism or ‘Marxist-Leninism’ and lacked any systematic ideas or ideology. He wanted a socialist revolution for all Cubans but he angrily rejected claims that he was inspired by Communism.

Stephen Balfour argues that Castro was not a communist before 1959. That he saw socialism as providing a structure within which to achieve the radical nationalist aims set out in his manifesto.

**Popular Support – Delivering on Promises**

***Popular support***

Castro was able to maintain the support of the majority of the population of Cuba. He was able to do this through a cult of personality and charisma and because of the effectiveness of the propaganda machine that he controlled.

July 26 1959 was the anniversary of the Moncada attack. Tens of thousands of peasants are brought to the city, welcomed and housed by middle and upper class families.

Class division seemed to disappear during this demonstration of over one million Cubans and the country came together as one unit under Castro.

**Economic policy – Inherited Problems**

The economic policies that Castro adopted were an integral part of his attempt to consolidate his authority. He had inherited a series of economic problems that were not of his making.

Economic problems

* Cuba’s vital sugar industry had suffered significant shrinkage on the world market.
* The sugar refiners had failed to modernize their industry by mechanization and adequate investment. The result was that in 1959 the island was producing only 10 per cent of the world’s sugar, compared with 25 per cent twenty years earlier.
* In that same period, US investment in Cuba’s sugar production fell from 60 per cent to 35 per cent.
* The decision of most of the industrial managers to leave the island when Batista was overthrown deprived Cuba of crucial expertise and so undermined Castro’s plan for reinvigorating the economy.

*We will not forget our peasants in the Sierra Maestra and those in the interior of the country... I will never forget those country people and as soon as I have a free moment we will see about building the first school city with seats for 20,000 children. We will do it with the help of the people and the rebels will work with them there. We will ask each citizen for a bag of cement and a trowel. I know we will have the help of our industry and of business and we will not forget any of the sectors of our population.*

*There will be freedom for all men because we have achieved freedom for all men. We shall never feel offended; we shall always defend ourselves and we shall follow a single precept, that of respect for the rights and feelings of others.*

***From a speech by Fidel Castro in Santiago de Cuba, 3 January 1959***

**Castro’s economic reforms**

To tackle these problems, Castro adopted the following measures:

* Large landowners were deprived of their land and an Institute of Agrarian Reform was created with the main purpose of breaking up the ***latifundias*** and ‘returning the land to the people’.
* The sugar industry, Cuba’s major source of revenue, was nationalized.
* Government subsidies were introduced in order to lower the rents and rates paid by the poor.
* State investment was directed into Cuba’s infrastructure to improve communications and public services, including communal housing in urban areas.
* Plans to redistribute income and raise workers’ wages were introduced.
* To save on expenditure, cuts were made in the imports of food and consumer goods.
* Rationing was introduced to lessen food shortages

Castro began nationalizing industry, beginning with the telephone companies on March 3 1959. He lowered telephone rates. Castro was nationalizing industry to stabilize the economy of Cuba. He wanted conditions to improve from Batista’s regime and began to work with what he had for the betterment of all Cubans. By providing social benefits such as lowered telephone rates, he gained the support of the people.

Castro passed the Agrarian Reform Act on May 1959. It gave 200 000 peasants titles to their own land. Agrarian reform extended to the majority of the population, which allowed for the effective display of Castro’s loyalty to Cuba above all else.  He began by seizing his mother’s land, which reinforced to Cubans that he valued the collective over the individual.

Castro offered every sector of society what they needed to improve their living standards: work for the unemployed, land for rural workers, improved working conditions for the urban workers. The middle class were promised they would be able to become professionals; women that they would be able to work in equal conditions to men. Castro concentrated on his role as a man of action, designing policies to bring about these changes.

The most significant of the measures in this period was the Agrarian Reform Act, which aimed at making the distribution of land more equitable, agriculture more efficient, and Cuba less dependent on sugar. The act, which had been promised by the rebels in the Sierra Maestra days, restricted the land that could be owned; anyone owning above the established limit had their extra part **expropriated** and received **bonds** as compensation. Expropriated land was to be organized in **cooperatives**.  
The act also nationalized the land in foreign hands and ended both Cuban and foreign ownership of large estates, while still allowing private medium- and small-sized farms. These would be the targets of the second (1963) and third (1968) Agrarian Reform laws.

The act was opposed by property owners affected by the reform, and was widely criticized in the Cuban press. It also raised alarm in the United States, as the companies affected saw it as a confiscatory measure and refused to settle for the compensation in Cuban bonds that was offered. Washington began to consider cutting the sugar quota in retaliation.

Other reforms included an increase in wages and the reduction of rents. These created great enthusiasm amongst the lower classes but, again, antagonized the middle and upper classes. Foreign-owned companies began to face waves of strikes as workers took advantage of a more favourable political situation to demand increases in wages and improved working conditions. They found support in the new government, which intervened in many of the conflicts, often in favour of the workers. Some foreign companies were threatened with expropriation, accused of representing countries that had provided Batista with weapons.

Import taxes were imposed on ‘luxury goods’ with several aims. Making these goods more expensive aimed at reducing their imports so that Cubans spent less money  
on them. But also, with the money raised with these taxes, the government hoped to invest in industrialization and the diversification of the economy (i.e. break with the sugar monoculture). This again affected the United States, which saw its sales to Cuba decrease by as much as 35 per cent.

All large farms were nationalized and converted to state farms and cooperatives. In October 1963 the second Agrarian Reform increased public ownership to about 70% of land. Privately owned land of more than 65 hectares were nationalized. 30% of land was still owned privately by small landholders. They were kept under close state control and were forced to sell their produce to the government. The land was not able to be sold or inherited so the government would take control of the land in the end.

Redistributive economic policies– urban rents sharply cut and real wages rise. Utility rates were sharply cut.

Property held by Batista supporters expropriated, creating a state sector in the economy.

October 13: Cuban owned firms, such as sugar mills, banks, large wholesale and retail enterprises are socialized.

October 16: Urban Reform Act socialized all commercially owned real estate.

First Agrarian Reform Act: created the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA) , and set a limit to landholdings at 1,000 acres [more than 402 hectares], with government expropriation of the remaining land. Large and medium estates were taken over, which were later converted into state farms on the Soviet model, with the peasants receiving a salary and a small share of profits.

INRA was to organize the land reform, and eventually came to control most rural programs, including health, credit, housing, and education.

All entrepreneurs were assumed to be anti-revolutionary, and steps are taken to put loyal revolutionaries in charge, even if they were completely incompetent.   
“Such decisions were justified on the grounds of national security and also because direct ownership and control over the means of production were deemed necessary for economic planning. Economic centralization was viewed as a rational step to generate economic growth. The revolutionary leaders were not compelled to socialize the economy: they acted autonomously and, in their view, prudently to implement an ideological vision of society of the society they wished to build. Power had to be concentrated in the hands of the few to achieve the aspiration of the many.”

**Diversification**

Castro’s original plan had been to diversify the Cuban economy so that it would no longer be wholly dependent on sugar. But by the mid-1960s, he realized that this was unworkable. The attempt to develop different crops that could be marketed as profitably as sugar had proved a failure. Furthermore, the plan to develop industrial programmes as alternatives to sugar production had not been successful. This was partly a result of the flight of so many managers from Cuba immediately after the revolution; the skilled personnel required for successful diversification were simply not available.

A further reason was the decision Castro had made soon after coming to power to break economic ties with the USA. The move had left Cuba heavily reliant on the Soviet Union for economic survival, as exemplified in the Soviet purchase of the island’s annual sugar crop. Cuba did not possess the economic freedom to diversify. The consequence was that, for much of Castro’s era, Cuba became a sugar-based, industrially inefficient economy with the only financial backing coming from the Soviet Union.

Having accepted that the attempt to diversify had been ineffective, Castro tried to go back to sugar as the traditional **staple**. But his earlier actions had created their own problems. Much of the sugar cane had been destroyed or ploughed up in preparing the soil for the new crops, such as cotton or soya bean. In some cases it took up to four years to replant effectively and even then the yields did not match the good years of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Adding to the difficulties was the dilapidated state of the mills and refineries which had been allowed to run down. Nature also played a part, with unusually bad weather contributing to disappointing sugar harvests. The 1960s saw an 8 per cent drop in sugar production across the decade.

**The impact of the reforms, 1959–62**

The reforms announced between 1959 and 1962 had several results. First, they allowed Castro and the PSP to become more popular among many sectors of society and to consolidate their position in the government. Many Cubans therefore became less concerned about when Castro would call for elections and restore the constitution. They seemed to accept the idea that it was first necessary to dismantle the old political, social, and economic systems.

Yet there was a certain level of resistance to the changes, as small groups opposed  
the pace of the revolution and took up arms in some parts of the country. Local opposition was controlled by the government and did not lead to major crises, particularly because at this stage Castro still allowed those against the revolution to leave the country. Between January 1959 and October 1962, approximately 250,000 people left Cuba, including former *batistianos*, middle-class citizens who feared the radicalization of the revolution, and members of religious congregations who disliked the communist nature of the reforms.

Castro was less successful in dealing with opposition from the United States. Relations between Havana and Washington deteriorated dramatically between 1959 and 1962. Two major international incidents involving Cuba developed in these years, the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).

**10 Million Harvest 1970**

The poor agricultural performance did not prevent Castro from launching a scheme intended to sustain the revolutionary momentum that had propelled the 26 July Movement to power. The drive towards his brand of Cuban communism was intensified. Further agrarian reforms resulted in two-thirds of the land coming under government control in the form of state farms. This move towards greater centralization was similar to the **collectivization** programme in Stalin’s Russia and Mao’s.

Castro proposed making the 1970 sugar harvest, expected to be abundant, the centre of a great popular rallying. He asked the Cuban people to look beyond selfish material considerations and see the new socialism as a moral movement, where individual advance was meaningful only if it occurred as part of the communal whole. Labelled the ‘10 million ton harvest’ before it had actually been gathered, the 1970 harvest was presented as a symbol of what was achievable through collective endeavour.

In the event,‘10 million ton harvest’ was a major disappointment, not simply because it fell short of the projected figure by some 2 million tons, but also because the desperate means used to try to make the yield meet its target damaged the soil and the cane, severely reducing the prospects for future harvests:

* The underlying problem was that the migration of land workers to the factories that had occurred under the government’s prompting in the 1960s had removed skilled cane cutters from the sugar plantations.
* Those brought in to gather the harvest lacked the knowledge and technique to perform the task adequately.
* In some areas, corrupt officials distorted the figures in order to suggest that they had achieved better results.

The 1970 harvest came to symbolize the new Cuba, but not in the way Castro had intended. It revealed the economic dislocation and continuing corruption in administration that the revolution was supposed to have eradicated.

The harvest failure was part of a larger problem. If planning was to work, there had to be expert planners, but these were in short supply. There was abundant enthusiasm among the revolutionaries who now ran things, but enthusiasm was not enough. It was not a substitute for managerial skill. The consequence was poor decision-making which stifled rather than encouraged expansion.

“Castro’s decision to reach the arbitrary and entirely unrealistic goal of harvesting 10 million tons . . . of sugar in 1970 revealed the prime minister’s poor knowledge of economic affairs, his penchant for grandiose campaigns, his view that nature would conform to he will of one man, and his belief that enormous sacrifices are justifiable on behalf of necessary goals.” (Del Aguila 94)

The largest previous harvest had been in 1952, 7.2 million tons.

“Castro stated that ‘9,999,999 tons’ would ‘constitute a moral  defeat.’ The regime’s prestige, its credibility of its leaders, the  pride of the nation, and the rosy expectations of the future–if not the very vindication of the development strategy followed in the late 1960's–were at stake.” (Del Aguila 95)

***Control of society – establishment of mass organizations***

***Delivering Promises – social reform***

Prostitution, gambling, the lottery and cockfighting were banned

A workers’ organization, the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) is  established.

“Given the fusion between the state, the Party, and theoretically the proletariat, workers’ organizations in Marxist societies cannot assume adversarial or independent economic and political roles.” (Del Aguila 177)

The goals of the CTC are “(1) support of the government (2) participation in vigilance and defense activities, (3) cooperation in order to improve managerial efficiency, (4) maintenance of labor discipline, and (5) raising workers’ political consciousness.” (Del Aguila 178)

A Federation of Cuban Women, (FMC) led by Vilma Espín, Raul Castro’s wife, was formed.

 “ ‘The FMC has been characterized as a mass organization directed from above, with women’s goals pursued only when they coincide with those of the government and coming always after national goals and priorities have been set by the regime.” (Del Aguila 176)

By 1986, 3,100,000 women had joined, or 80% of all women.

37% of the active labor force are women

55% of the technical labor force are women

14% of party members are women (Del Aguila 176-7)

Half a million Cuban women entered the work force. (Suchlicki 140)

“Relations between husband and wife have been undermined and the  family has largely lost control of the children. Large numbers of children attend free boarding schools and see their parents for only short periods of time during the year. There is, therefore, not only frequent separation of husband and wife due to the work demands of the revolution, but also separation of parent from children. The regime has systematically encouraged these developments, perhaps aware that the only way to  develop Cuba’s new socialist man is through the destruction of the culture-transmitting institutions, such as the family and the church.” (Suchlicki 140) (emphasis added)

“That Afro-Cubans made up a disproportionate share of the uneducated, unskilled, and unemployed meant that they were among the principal and immediate beneficiaries of the early distributive policies of the revolution. Moreover, in March 1959, the revolutionary government abolished legal discrimination.” ((Perez 321)

The youth: young people in Cuba were granted special privileges and endowments. All education was offered free of charge. Tuition charges were abolished and textbooks, when available were offered free by the government. About 300,000 scholarship students were provided free room and board, clothing, medical care and a monthly allowance. Many of them lived in Havana mansions once occupied by the rich. In the first decade the government doubled the number of schools and students. A substantial number of the increases occurred in rural areas where the population had been isolated and largely illiterate. Students were spared the hardship of rationing and food shortages. As wards of the state they did not have to wait in queues for food – thus favoured they remained overwhelmingly supportive of Castro.

The peasants and some urban workers also became favoured groups. All medical services were offered free and expanded beyond what had been previously available. Also, extensive adult education programs and literacy drives reached more than half a million adults by 1967. Residents in rural areas probably benefitted most from these initiatives.

Personal income increased according to Cuban figures and its distribution shifted to the advantage of the poorer classes. The supply of goods and services available for consumption remained relatively stable and personal income – especially among peasants and urban workers grew. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers received pay rises and other benefits which increased their purchasing power. In addition, unemployment and underemployment were reduced as agricultural workers migrated to better paying jobs in industry and construction.

***Fear and Terror:***

*Isolation and removal of opposition*

The combination of failed economic policies, increasing authoritarianism and a growing sense of disappointment with the way the revolution was working in practice led to the growth of opposition. Those who had regarded Castro’s 26 July Movement as a movement for liberation now began to have doubts.

The worldwide adulation among liberals for the Cuban leaders served to make it additionally troubling to the idealists in Cuba when they realized that the admiration felt by outsiders for Castro’s revolution was based on a misunderstanding of the actual situation. Unfulfilled hopes were, therefore, an important element in the formation of opposition. The same idealism that had motivated support for Castro now aroused opposition to him.

**Disaffected groups**

The disaffection was strongest among:

* landowners who had been forced off their land
* industrialists who had had their factories taken over by the state
* peasants who felt aggrieved at having been forced into collectivization
* pro-Americans who had been forced to break their commercial and financial links with the USA
* those badly affected by the failure of Castro’s economic diversity programme
* those who were offended by the ineffectiveness with which Castro’s government operated
* those who considered that the political constraints and repression imposed by the regime were unjustified by any of the internal or external threats supposedly facing Cuba
* writers and artists whose works were subjected to government censorship
* editors and journalists who objected to the curtailment of their press freedoms
* academics who resented the government’s encroachment on university freedoms
* the trade unions, which had lost their independence
* professional bodies and associations, such as those representing businessmen, solicitors and teachers, who were angered at their being brought under state control
* lawyers who chafed at the government’s asserting the right to appoint judges, a move that amounted to state control of the judiciary; their objections were voiced by Manuel Urrutia, a judge who had previously opposed the Batista regime and who, despite his re-appointment to the bench by Castro, chose to resign in protest at the new regime’s suspension of elections
* those who were dismayed by the way Cuba’s revolutionary government became centred in the person of Fidel Castro himself; such personalizing of authority undermined the notion of the 1959 revolution as a movement of the people
* those among Castro’s former supporters who were disturbed by his insistence on fighting wars abroad on behalf of liberation movements in such far-off countries as Angola, Zaire (later renamed the Congo) and Ethiopia, as well as closer to home in Latin America; they found his pre-occupation with anti-imperialist campaigns merely drew attention to his failure at home to extend to his own people the rights that Cuban soldiers were fighting and dying for elsewhere
* those who had fled the island because they knew their days of privileged living were over or because they simply felt they could not live in the repressive society Castro was creating
* those in the cultural scene who resented the regime’s restrictions on artistic freedom. Often expressed in protest songs, a main target of their complaint was the bureaucracy that had grown up under Castro, interposing itself between him and the people. A popular representative of this view was the folk singer Silvio Rodriguez who bitterly berated the bureaucrats, describing them as ‘bosses who said one thing and did another ... establishment cowards who were ruining the revolution’.

***Émigrés***

By 1968, 350,000 Cubans, nearly 5 per cent of the population, had left the island. Most went to the United States where many of them formed cells planning to return to reclaim Cuba by force should the opportunity arise. It was the existence of such *émigrés* abroad and their contacts with disaffected groups remaining in Cuba that gave Castro his justification for imposing surveillance and controls on the people.

Although the opposition groups looked to be a large and formidable array, they were never as serious a threat as appearance suggested. It was only the US-backed émigrés who represented real resistance, and when they did openly challenge Castro, as at the Bay of Pigs, they were decisively beaten.

**Opposition weaknesses**

* Opposition was never a united, organized body and the disaffected groups were unable to concert their efforts, even had they ever seriously planned to challenge Castro.
* Castro’s status as the embodiment of Cuban aspirations meant that opposition to him seemed unpatriotic and so rarely gathered popular support.
* The firmness with which Castro dealt with challenges rendered it a hazardous venture to try to oppose him.
* Cuba’s close-knit society made it easy to monitor opposition movements through eavesdropping and surveillance. The **DGI**, an organization which operated under Fidel Castro’s direct control, was a highly effective means of detecting his enemies in Cuba and outside.

**Assassination attempts**

Castro was a leader who excited either intense affection for the way he attempted to elevate the poor and the dispossessed, or profound dislike for the way he was prepared to destroy rights and liberties. One of Castro’s long-term bodyguards, Fabian Escalante, claimed to have counted 638 assassination attempts on the man he was guarding. Allowing for the likely exaggeration, since so many failures would reflect well on Escalante, the number suggests the danger Castro was constantly in and the degree of hatred towards him. He once joked that, if surviving assassination attempts were an Olympic event, he would be a multi-gold-medal winner. Unsurprisingly, the CIA was thought to have been behind most of the attempts.

**Castro’s treatment of opposition**

Initially Castro had made little effort to stop people leaving; if they did not want Cuba, he said, Cuba did not want them. He had deliberately encouraged criminals, the insane and anti-social types to go. (US refugee agencies in Florida complained of Castro’s dumping his unwanted population on the USA.) Subsequently, however, Castro grew concerned that Cuba was losing too many of the skilled personnel it needed. Regulations were introduced forbidding Cubans to leave without acceptable reason. The restriction added to the feeling that Cuba was a closed, authoritarian society.

Occasionally, however, in order to reduce political tension, Castro would allow large numbers of Cubans to leave. One such moment occurred in 1980 when 10,000 people, reacting against food rationing, besieged Cuba’s Peruvian embassy appealing for asylum. But Castro always accompanied such occasions with vast propaganda displays of support for himself and the regime. His intention was to show that the overwhelming mass of the population backed the revolution, contrasting with the relatively tiny number of selfish individuals who refused to stay and continue the struggle to achieve Cuba’s destiny.‘Let them depart in shame’ was his dismissive reference.

“Castro has never shown any concern over the use of coercion and deceit. He justifies these techniques as necessary and correct under Marxist- Leninist doctrine to protect the revolution against foreign and domestic enemies and to expand its influence abroad. . . . . He believes that the preservation of his revolution requires massive doses of coercion and the use, for a long time, of techniques of centralized administration and repression to crush any resistance.” (Suchlicki 166)

Castro told a US journalist in 1965 that there were 20,000 political prisoners in Cuba. In the 1970s, French photographer Pierre  Golendorf estimated the number at 20,000, but said older prisoners  thought it was 80,000 to 200,000. (Del Aguila 202)   
Fidel Castro’s rule was and remains charismatic in the sense that it depended on the conviction that he did not depend on election by his followers but had been ‘elected’ by a supernatural authority or some ‘historical force.’ He also depended on the citizenry’s sharing that conviction. . . . ‘History will absolve me.’ History-as-god elects the revolutionary leader to act with and for his followers.” (Dominguez 124)   
“Subjective will was the fundamental resource for revolutionary leaders to overcome objective obstacles in war, politics, or economics. A vanguard, and elite, must lead the people and awaken them to their historical responsibilities. Moreover, only the maximum possible effort toward the optimal goal was worth pursuing. . . . An activist determined vanguard would reach for the future –and conquer it.” Dominguez 125)   
“This style of leadership bred intolerance toward critics, dissenters, or even those who were just somewhat unconventional. This style of rule rejected out of hand the hypothesis that the great leader’s policies might be in error – until disaster struck.” (Dominguez 125)   
The Revolution also legitimizes itself on the basis of performance, particularly in redistribution of benefit in health care and education. Nationalism is also a powerful legitimizing tool.   
In 1967, Castro ‘discovered’ a “micro faction” within the PCC.  It was led by Anibal Escalante, and were mostly former PSP  members who thought Cuban policies were wrong.  They were imprisoned for their opinions.

“Since their diagnosis of mistaken Cuban policies would  eventually prove correct, they were punished for having the right ideas at the wrong time.” (Dominguez 131)

This episode strained relations with the USSR, but Cuba was  forced to toe the line by the 1970s, since the regime could not  survive without Soviet aid.

On October 15 1959, Raul Castro was named the Minister of Defence. Up till this point and throughout the movement, Raul carried out much of the violence of the revolution ordered by Castro. Raul dealt with violence so that Castro did not have to. Castro appeared to Cubans as a hero while Raul took the position of the villain.  On September 28 1960, Castro established the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. The CDR was responsible for regulating dissidents, while also carrying out health and education campaigns and fuel revolutionary enthusiasm.

Castro encouraged the mass exodus of his opponents and critics. In the first decade between 500,000 and 700,000 Cubans left the island. Mnay of the legal refugees were from the upper and middle classes and most were middle aged or elderly. As a result of the steady migration of opponents and an increase in population growth those that favoured or benefited from Castro increased proportionally. The median aged steadily declined and in January 1969 and estimated 55% of the population were under 25 and had been open to propaganda. The vast majority who were in school were Castro supporters.

**Treatment of opposition**

[Fidel Castro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_Castro) came to power with the [Cuban Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Revolution) of 1959. By the end of 1960, according to [Paul H. Lewis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_H._Lewis) in *Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America*, all opposition newspaper had been closed down and all radio and television stations were in state control.Lewis states that moderate teachers and professors were purged, about 20,000 [dissidents](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissident) were held and tortured in prisons

During Castro’s rule, thousands of Cubans were incarcerated in abysmal prisons, thousands more were harassed and intimidated, and entire generations were denied basic political freedoms.

The denial of fundamental freedoms throughout Castro’s decades in power was unrelenting, and marked by periods of heightened repression, such as the 2003 crackdown on 75 human rights defenders, journalists, trade unionists, and other critics of the government. Accused of being “mercenaries” of the United States government, the individuals were summarily tried in closed hearings. Many served years in inhumane prisons, where they were subjected to extended solitary confinement and beatings, and denied basic medical care for serious ailments. More than 50 of the remaining prisoners were released after Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother, most on the condition that they accept exile to Spain.

**Changes in Castro’s style of government,**

**1970–76**

No longer able to turn for advice to Che Guevara, who had left Cuba in 1965 and was killed in Bolivia two years later, Castro had hard decisions to make. Conscious of the limited economic gains the revolution had made in its first decade and of the opposition that had developed in reaction to the economic measures, Castro responded by increasing political repression. But he also took major steps to adjust the organization of the government. Admitting that the failed 1970 harvest programme had revealed the limitations of the previous approach, he decided on a policy of depersonalizing the revolution. This did not mean he gave up power; he still retained ultimate authority, but he chose to delegate more while at the same time spreading the base of government. His response to criticism of the growth of bureaucracy was not to cut bureaucracy but to make it function more efficiently.

**The Cuban Constitution, 1975**

To give greater formal authority to the system which had been created since the 1959 revolution, a new constitution was adopted. Its most prominent clauses stated that:

* Fidel Castro, as First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party and President of the Council of Ministers, was head of government
* Cuba was a socialist state, with the Communist Party as the only recognized political group
* local assemblies, drawn from members of the Communist Party, were to provide delegates for the National Assembly, an elected body of 600 members
* the Council of Ministers was to be drawn from the National Assembly.

*Political and administrative changes*

Under the terms of the new constitution, a number of important administrative and political changes were introduced:

* Ministers had greater freedom to act on their own initiative.
* Clearer lines of responsibility were drawn between departments and services.
* The police force was made part of the armed services.
* The 26 July Movement and the Communist Party were merged as one party.
* The legal system was streamlined to make court procedures simpler.
* While not given full independence, the trade unions were entitled to sit on tribunals concerned with workers’ rights and to make recommendations regarding economic planning.

***Rectification***

Castro was sincere in his wish to broaden the base of his authority and to make his personal role in government less obviously dominant. However, it was clear that, whatever the adjustments he allowed, the reins of power remained firmly in his hands. He also knew that the political and administrative alterations would be mere tinkering unless they were accompanied by genuinely productive economic changes. It was to that end that the government under him initiated what became known as ***rectification***, an approach intended to combine revolutionary idealism with hard practical realism. It was meant to apply especially to the economy.

* To enable Cuba to keep pace with modern technology, computers were introduced into factories and offices.
* Incentives were reintroduced into the workplace. Productive workers and managers were to be rewarded with pay increases and bonuses.
* Studies were conducted to make work practices more productive.
* A quota system was introduced, laying down targets to be achieved in designated areas of production.
* Priority in the supplies of materials and labour was to be given to areas and plants where the evidence suggested they would be most productively used.

***Effects of* rectification**

*Rectification* as an economic programme had mixed results:

* Between 1971 and 1976, Cuba’s **GNP** grew each year by 10 per cent, which compared favourably with less than 4 per cent annually in the preceding five years.
* However, in the following half decade, 1976–81, the growth figure fell back to 4 per cent annually.
* Under the drive for efficiency, workers with higher skill levels received bonuses, but the less skilled remained on basic or decreased wages and were obliged to move to other jobs or locations.