



# World Scientific News

WSN 87 (2017) 60-76

EISSN 2392-2192

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## Fidel Castro and the Consolidation of the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1963

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the success story of the Cuban revolution of 1959. It documents the remote and immediate factors that instigated the revolution, particularly, the resentment against the corrupt, repressive and dictatorial rule of Fulgencio Batista; America's neocolonial domination of Cuban economy and politics as well as; the lackluster economic growth of Cuba that benefitted foreigners but impoverished Cuban peasants. The paper further interrogate the factors that aided the success of the revolution and the many reforms introduced by Fidel Castro, the charismatic leader of the revolution, right from the first month of the new government; through which the revolution was consolidated initially, and has remained formidable since the past fifty-eight years, even in the midst of United States antagonism. The study employed the eclectic method of inquiry adopting mix of historical, descriptive and interpretative methods of data collection and analysis. The study relied heavily on secondary data sourced from journal articles, textbooks, newspapers and magazines and other relevant materials including theses, dissertations and government reports. Facts and information obtained were, however, subjected to corroboration and critical analysis to enhance objectivity.

**Keywords:** Cold War, Cuba, Fidel Castro, Reforms, Revolution

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Fidel Castro led one of the most successful and enduring revolutions in our contemporary world in Cuba on 1 January, 1959. It was successfully prosecuted against the

military-oligarchic junta of Fulgencio Batista. The basic aim of this research work is to look at the process of consolidation of the Cuban revolution between 1959 and 1963. The specific goals are to: analyse the enabling factors that precipitated the Fidel Castro's led 1959 revolution; document the reforms introduced by Fidel Castro in the first-five years of the revolution; look at the challenges, both internal and external, that contended with the survival of the revolution and; highlight the various issues that aided the success of the revolution during the period of study.

It needs be recalled that until 1898, Cuba was ruled by Spain since the 16th century. In 1898, after the defeat of Spain by America in the Spanish-American War, the Island was ceded to the United States of America (U.S.). She became an independent republic on 20 May, 1902 (Europa 1987). But then, her military defence was bound to the U. S. A. by the Platt Amendment of 1901 which granted the U.S. Navy a coaling station (base) at Guantanamo Bay (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). It further granted the U.S. the right to intervene and restore peace in Cuba when such request is made by the president.

Apart from political control, Cuba also gradually became 'an economic colony of the U.S.A.' As at 1950, the U. S. alone owned about half of the total \$ 1 billion foreign investment in Cuba. Multinational corporations have almost seized control and initiative of the Cuban economy. Unfortunately, the masses did not benefit from the massive economic growth propelled by increasing rate of foreign investment. Only a few citizens of Cuba and some foreign companies reaped the fruit of industrialization. The need to correct this abnormality and redistribute wealth largely propelled the 1959 revolution.

To compound the already battered situation, General Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar who had earlier ruled from 1933 to 1944 staged a comeback in March 1952, when, in a bloodless coup, he toppled the democratic government of President Carlos Prío Socarras (Slee, 2008: 8-9). He set up a dictatorial government that was pro-America. His government soon became harshly repressive, corrupt and unpopular.

## **2. A SHORT POLITICAL HISTORY OF CUBA**

Cuba was reportedly discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013). Soon after that, it became a Spanish colony used largely as a rest stop for Spanish ships travelling between Spain and the other Spanish colonies (Rogers, 1974: 7).

The first revolt against Spanish rule lasted from 1868 to 1878. It was motivated by the desire for self-government combined with hopes for an end to slavery. By 1878, the Spanish colonial power agreed to free the slaves, but declined from granting the colonists' self-government. The colonists' had to wait till 1895 before they could garner enough confidence and military strength to organize another revolt led by Jose Martí, a Cuban nationalist intellectual that had lived in exile in the U.S. (Rogers, 1974: 2). The clamour then was to create an independent republic of Cuba (Frank, 1965: 1102). Though, he died while leading a group of guerrillas against the Spanish, he became a national hero whose ideas formed the basis for the Cuban nationalism in the years to come (Ruiz, 1968:20 cited in Rogers, 1974: 2).

By 1898, after a bloody struggle with the Spanish soldiers, the Cuban rebels had come close to victory. It was at this point that the American government decided to intervene actively by sending troops to Cuba to defeat the Spanish (Wolf, 1969: 254 cited in Rogers, 1974: 2; Frank, 1965: 1102). Once the war was over, the Americans almost replaced the

Spanish as the villains for Cuban nationalists, though they agreed to the founding of the Cuban republic, and eventually withdrew their troops. The Platt Amendment of 1901, which allowed for further American intervention in Cuban domestic affairs, at its pleasure, was incorporated into the new constitution (Frank, 1965: 1102). Its presence reinforced the anti-American feelings of the nationalists, especially when it was used to bring U.S. troops back to Cuba several times between 1902 and 1920 (Ruiz, 1968: 24, 33). But even after the Platt Amendment was abrogated in 1934, the possibility of American interference was always a consideration (Rogers, 1974: 3).

### **3. THE INVOLVEMENT FIDEL CASTRO IN CUBAN POLITICS BEFORE 1959**

Fidel Castro Ruz was born on 13 August, 1926 at Biran, Oriente province of Cuba (Prevost, 2007: 19). He was educated at Jesuit institutions, Colegio La Salle and Colegio Dolopes in Santiago and finally Colegio Belen in Havana (Prevost, 2007: 19). He later proceeded to the University of Havana where he bagged a degree in law in 1950 (Slee, 2008: 11). Upon his graduation, he joined the services of a small law firm that defended the poor and people with political difficulties (Prevost, 2007: 19; Nosotros, 2003).

Castro's active involvement in Cuban politics started in 1950 when he joined the Cuban Peoples Party (also known as the Ortodoxo Party) which was in opposition to Fulgencio Batista's ruling Authentic Party (Prevost, 2007: 19; Slee, 2008: 11). Castro was chosen to be a parliamentary candidate of the Ortodoxo Party in elections planned for May 1952 but the elections were cancelled after Batista's coup of 10 March, 1952 (Frank, 1965: 1102) It is instructive to note that Castro instituted a legal battle to challenge the Batista's coup as a violation of the Cuban Constitution of 1940. The failure of this legal act to bring a redress invariably invigorated Castro's revolutionary instinct that quickly began preparations for an armed uprising. Slee (2008: 14) reports that for this purpose, "he (Fidel Castro) recruited 1200 young people, mainly drawn from the Ortodoxo youth, and gave them some very elementary military training". On 26 July, 1953, Castro led a revolt of radical opposition group against Batista's government at the Moncada barracks in Santiago (Pedraza, 2009: 2; Rogers, 1974: 9). The attack was intended to spark a general insurrection throughout the island.

The revolt failed. Consequently, a real number of the attackers died. Fidel Castro, his brother, Raul Castro and many of his followers were captured, tried and jailed (Asprey, 1975: 695-698). Nosotros (2003) reports that Castro deployed his years in jail to study political philosophy, history and literature which strengthened his revolutionary philosophy. During his trial, Fidel Castro delivered his four hours famous speech titled: "History Will Absolve Me". The speech, which represented nothing more than an impassioned critique of the Batista regime, called for greater political and social liberties. The speech eventually became the rallying cry of the July 26th Movement, and since 1959; July 26 has been celebrated as Cuba's most important national holiday and the occasion of a major speech by Fidel Castro (Prevost, 2007: 20).

But for reasons best known to Batista, Castro and his cohorts were released and granted State pardon on 15 May 1955 (Slee, 2008: 14; Rogers, 1974: 9). On 7 July, 1955, Castro left Cuba and went to Mexico on self-exile where he formed a revolutionary movement christened "The 26th of July Movement" for the overthrow of Batista (Greenblatt, nd: 650). At Mexico, he and his followers carried out military training in preparation for a return to Cuba to

overthrow the dictatorial government of Batista. While in Mexico, Argentinean doctor Ernesto “Che” Guevara, joined the movement to give more bite to the revolutionary force (Slee, 2008: 14).

On 2 December, 1956, they set sailed for Cuba on the second attempt at revolution. It, however, turned out to be a failure. Sixty-eight of the eighty-two members of the revolutionaries died. The remnant of the troop fled into the remote Sierra Maestra mountains to continue their struggle (Prevost, 2007: 20; Pedraza, 2009: 2). Thereafter, Fidel Castro and his group engaged guerrilla warfare against local army outposts. Most attacks were successful and the needed weaponry was stolen from the army. Batista’s regime collapsed after a prolonged struggle in 1959. Commanding an overwhelming support from the students and peasants, Castro and his forces (*thefidelistas*) occupied Havana on 1 January, 1959 (Frank, 1965: 1105). Batista fled the country immediately (Lewis-Beck, 1979: 1134; Karol 1970, 572). A revolution whose major aims were to destroy all privileges, remove exploitation and create a just society had taken place. A new government emerged with Fidel Castro as its Prime Minister (Slee, 2008: 14).

#### **4. CAUSES OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION OF 1959**

Fisher’s (2011) submission that “revolutions are explosion of frustration and rage that build over time, sometimes over decades” rightly captures the reality of the remote and immediate factors that culminated in the 1 January, 1959 revolution in Cuba, some dating to as far back as 1898. The first, which is political, was the autocratic rule of Batista. The long and brutal dictatorship of General Fulgencio Batista (1933–44 and 1952–58), which had been intolerant of opposition had become intolerable to the masses of Cuba. His highly personalist and oligarchic style of administration drove many people in opposition to his government. However, the immediate cause that instigated the 1959 revolution was the truncation of democratic political process by Batista in 1952. Pedraza (2009:2) submits that Cubans who fought for the revolution were against Batista’s dictatorship and wanted to restore the republic, namely, the constitutional elections that General Fulgencio Batista’s 1952 *coup* had broken. But more importantly, Fidel Castro was nominated as the Orthodox Party candidate for Congress election of 1952. However, the elections were cancelled by Batista. Castro’s challenge of the legality of Batista’s coup also failed in court. Castro responded by forming a revolutionary group (Prevost, 2007: 19). The Cuban Revolution may thus be said to have undoubtedly grew out of the dictatorial repression of Batista.

The second factor advanced for the revolt was the lackluster economic growth witnessed by Cuba during Batista's reign and the wish to shake-off American grip over the Cuban economy. Lotta (2006) and Prevost (2007: 24-25) report that by the 1950s, the United States had an estimated \$1 billion investment in Cuba. The U.S. companies controlled 80 percent of Cuban utilities, 90 percent of Cuban mines, close to 100 percent of the country’s oil refineries and 90 percent of its cattle ranches. But most importantly, U.S. companies controlled 40 percent of the sugar crop and 55 percent of the sugar mill capacity; and were the major buyer of Cuban sugar. In return for preferential entry of its sugar into U.S. markets, Cuba was further required to open its market to U.S. manufactured goods. This had a negative effect on the growth of local firms in Cuba. Given such an intimidating statistics of American role in the Cuban economy, it is apt to agree with Lotta (2006) and Prevost (2007: 24-25) that

Cuba had gradually turned to an economic colony of the United States as the latter was taken initiative for Cuba's economic development. Cuban radicals as well as the poor masses were fed up with resentment to this high dependence on the U. S. This served as the backdrop for the Cuban revolution of 1959 (Lotta, 2006). The essence of the revolution here was to shake off American grip on Cuban economy and promote an economic indigenisation policy in the country.

The rampant scourge of corruption was another feature of the Cuban political economy (Prevost, 2007: 19). Right from 1909 under the administration of José Miguel Gómez (1909-1913) and through the governments of Mario García Menocal (1913-21), Alfredo Zayas (1921-25), Gerardo Machado y Morales (1925-33), Fulgencio Batista (1933-44 and 1952-58), Ramón Grau San Martín (1944-48), and Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948-52); Cuba may be said to have lived under the curse of corrupt leadership (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). Public funds meant for State administration were siphoned into private purses of the leaders and their cronies. The net effect was that the Cuban economy was starved of funds for development, just as the nation experienced infrastructural negligence and decay (Slee, 2008:6; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). The need to wipe out corruption, therefore, became one of the corner stones of the Cuban revolution in 1959. In other words, the Cuban Revolution, which began in the early 1950's, was regarded as an overthrow of a very corrupt government. It was trying to improve the conditions of the Cuban people by eliminating the monster of corruption which had been a clog in the way of socio-economic development.

The twin problems of rampant unemployment and abject poverty among the peasants may also be held responsible for the outbreak of, and massive support for, revolution in Cuba in 1959. It is true that the Cuban economy showed signs of growth and wealth on the eve of the revolution, especially given a high GDP recorded by the economy as well as the physical presence of huge industries spread across the country between 1940 and 1952; yet it was clear that the predominantly peasant population was probably not benefitting much from this economic growth. Hence, although Batista and his friends in the corridors of power were worth millions of dollars, the average Cuban lived in poverty and ill-health. In Cuba, 600,000 out of 3,000,000 Cubans were unemployed. Apart from this, over half of the population lived in huts, shacks and slums, without the slightest sanitary facilities. In short, the thriving economy only enriched a few Cubans while most people experienced abject poverty. Consequently, they were desperate to see an improvement in their lifestyle. This probably explains why the people supported Castro and his revolutionary group wholeheartedly.

## **5. REFORMS INITIATED BY FIDEL CASTRO**

When Fidel Castro and his revolutionary group took control of the Cuban government in 1959, it was just a matter of time for Cubans to witness spectacular changes and transformations in the nation's social, economic and political destinies. Some of the formidable reforms implemented by Castro are examined below.

### **a. Economic Reforms**

The first major economic reform initiated by Fidel Castro was to nationalise all foreign investments in Cuba, particularly of the US, without compensation (Boline, 2015). As a result of the socialist tendencies exhibited by the new revolutionary government, US owned

refineries in Cuba refused to process Soviet crude oil. (Slee, 2008: 27). The Cuban government responded by taking over the refineries. Slee (2008: 27) and Prevost (2007: 24) agree that confrontation over the oil refineries resulted in the first nationalizations in July 1960, and they were followed quickly by the seizure of U.S.-owned sugar plantations in August, foreign banks in September, and more businesses in October (Prevost, 2007: 24). Eventually, all United States' business interests were expropriated in October 1960 (Rogers, 1974: 11). This particular step was no doubt an exhibition of Castro's determination to oust U.S. 'dollar imperialism' in Cuba (Brown and Mooney, 1976: 79; Perry, 1980:711; Roehn, 1965: 58). Brown and Mooney (1976: 80) report further that by then, "the only foreign investments of importance in Cuba were those of the U.S.". American participation in the telephone and electric services, the public service railways and sugar production were estimated to be about 90%, 50% and 40% respectively. Cuba indeed ranked third in Latin America in the value of U. S. direct investments (ibid).

As expected, Castro's nationalisation policy provoked U.S. reaction. She retaliated initially by cutting off Cuban sugar imports into the US and in January 1961, the Eisenhower's administration instituted an embargo on most exports to Cuba (Rogers, 1974: 11). In response, Cuba and the Soviet Union signed a trade agreement in February 1960 in which the Soviet Union agreed to buy sugar and other items from Cuba and to supply Cuba with crude oil (Garvin, 2016). In furtherance of US opposition to the Cuban revolution, the US Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act on 1 August, 1962, including an amendment barring aid to "any country which furnishes assistance to the present government of Cuba." This provision was further amended in 1963 to withhold foreign aid from countries that allow ships under their flag to carry goods to or from Cuba (Krinsky and Golove 1993, 112–13). Furthermore, in February 1963, the US government enacted a law which prohibited shipments of cargoes paid for by the US government on foreign-flag ships that have called on a Cuban port. Maritime unions were also encouraged to boycott ships named on US government blacklist because of their trade with Cuba (Krinsky and Golove 1993: 112–13 cited in Hufbauer et al., 2011: 2). On the advice of US State Department, US oil firms in Cuba stopped refining oil purchased from USSR. Sooner, Castro, feeling unperturbed, began a process of rapid industrialization. The plan soon gave way to more realistic concerns as there was increased sugar, agricultural and mineral production courtesy of aids from the USSR.

Castro also introduced a good number of pro-poor policies to give the masses a new lease of life. For instance, the Agricultural Reform Act was earlier signed into law in May 1959. The Act limited the size of most farm holdings to fewer than 1,000 acres. As against the initial 3000 acres. The new law ensured that land was distributed to thousands of hitherto landless rural workers. Government went ahead to improve conditions on the farms. Similarly, Government passed the Rent Reduction Act in 1959 which resulted in the transfer of about 15 percent of the national income from property owners to wage workers and peasants (Prevost, 2007: 25). These two regulations indeed represented a bold attempt by Fidel Castro to redistribute wealth in Cuba. This went a long way to stimulate masses' support for the revolution across the nooks and crannies of the country.

## **b. Social Reforms**

A number of social reforms were initiated by Fidel Castro in the educational, health, housing and social security sectors of Cuban life.

## **bi. Education sector**

The first in the series was the introduction of free and adult literacy programme to combat the problem of widespread illiteracy. Without mincing words, Fidel Castro's declaration that "there can be no revolution without education because a revolution means profound changes in the life of a country" underscores the basic philosophy of Cuban educational reform after the revolution (Castro, 1961 cited in Steinborn, 2014: 13).

Steinborn (2014); Carnoy (1990) and Schwab (1999) have indeed identified some of the basic aims of Castro's education reforms in the immediate post-revolutionary era to include, but not limited to: education as a lever and leveler especially for the down-trodden masses; education as a tool for constructing a national culture as a means of arming the masses against U.S. influence; education as a tool for enhancing Cuba's global legitimacy as an autonomous nation and for influencing domestic change regarding the transition from U.S.-controlled capitalism to socialism following the revolution and; education for social transformation.

## **6. COMPONENTS OF CASTRO'S EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

One of the major provisions of Cuba's educational reform was equal access to education for all citizens irrespective of race, class or gender. Indeed, education became free and available to all (Slee, 2008: 30). All citizens were given full access to schools.. Adults and children in urban and rural settings – people from all walks of life, many of whom previously faced restrictions in their ability to access high quality schools and who hitherto could not advance beyond grammar school – were welcomed into this system. This system domestically marked Cuba as wholeheartedly different from pre-revolutionary times, when schools were privatized and hierarchical, privileging the upper classes and restricting proletarian education. Cuba thus pushed constantly towards complete equality, equity, and accessibility. This system made Cuban education competitive on an international scale, since it provided a strong education to all students in all parts of Cuba, even the remote mountains and sugarcane fields (Steinborn, 2014: 15-16).

The second provision of the education reform was making the teaching profession more lucrative as Castro referred to the teachers as "the great army of education in our country" (cited in Steinborn, 2014: 13). Teaching was considered foundational to the entire revolutionary transformation of Cuban culture, which Castro rooted explicitly in education. Hence, Castro invigorated the teaching profession in order to draw more people into the teaching force. Government prioritized teacher education and embarked on training thousands of additional teachers (Slee, 2008: 30; Prevost, 2007: 21). Cuba education also emphasized specialisation by discipline which increased the functionality of teachers (Steinborn, 2014: 17). Great incentives were provided for teachers as they "paralleled military generals in the way that they functioned in the cultural battle of communism against imperialism, because they directed the knowledge and resultant behaviors of the Cuban people" (Steinborn, 2014: 17).

Thirdly, Castro universalised schooling across the length and breadth of Cuba. This ideal of began during the hey days of the Cuban Revolution as guerilla fighters taught peasants in liberated zones (Steinborn, 2014: 18). It became heightened when he converted the Batista regime's bases into schools following the 1959 victory. Early revolutionary education then took place in *bohios* (peasant huts). This system was effectively managed to

disperse knowledge to underprivileged Cubans in underdeveloped areas (Steinborn, 2014: 18).

Through the 1961 Literacy Campaign programme, Castro succeeded in mobilizing revolutionary troops to provide the illiterate population with reading and writing skills so that the revolution could take root in the minds of all Cubans (Steinborn, 2014: 18). As Carnoy (1990: 174-175) noted in his pedagogical analysis of Cuban education following the revolution, universalising participation greatly assisted Cuba to actualize its socialist goals. It is essential to add that private schools were abolished in Cuba in 1961. Before then, only the rich whites attended the well-equipped private schools while the blacks and some poor whites attended the under-financed public schools. After the abolition of private schools, the bulk of Cuban students started attending fully integrated schools where blacks and whites received equal treatment.

Another unique feature of Cuban educational reform was the invention of workplace schools and rural schools which furthered the trend of universalising the location of education so that it would pervade Cuban social spaces. As a complementary project, the government also embarked on rigorous construction of new schools (Slee, 2008: 30; Prevost, 2007: 21). Explaining the rationale for this, Castro said: “in the future, practically every plant, agricultural zone, hospital, and school will become a university” (Read, 1975: 217). Plantation mansions – referred to as fortresses by Castro, used to keep commoners away from wealthy estate owners before the revolution –which dotted the rural areas of Cuba, were converted to schools for rural workers and their children. This extraordinary emphasis on education, according to Schwab (1999: 159), “has given Cuba a literacy rate above 96 percent, by far the highest in Latin America”. In his estimate, the rate of illiteracy in Cuba reduced drastically from 23.6 percent to 3.9 percent in less than one year of the reform.

## **bi. Housing Reform**

In an attempt to enhance the human dignity of average Cubans, Castro also introduced reform in the housing sector witnessing the launching of low - cost housing schemes. It instituted an immediate 50 percent reduction in rent and eventually government granted the former tenants ownership of the houses. Thus, the most visible impact of the programme according to Dzidzienyo and Casal (1979) was that more blacks as a percentage of the population own their homes in Cuba than in any country in the world.

Through the 1960 Urban-Reform law, government eliminated multiple ownership of land and gave renters a chance to buy their homes at low-cost. Government also took a bold step to curtail speculation by requiring private owners to sell sites at low uniform prices to anyone willing to start construction. The State assumed responsibility for providing housing for all. Cuban law prohibits homeowners from selling their homes privately or buying properties because Castro believed land speculation violates socialist principles (Kapur & Smith, 2002: 5). The Urban Reform Law further converted half of urban tenants into homeowners, and many tenants were given long-term rent-free leases. Some others were also granted leases on all units built or distributed by the government after 1961 at no more than 10% of household income. Ownership of the units was conferred after 5-20 years of payment (Kapur & Smith, 2002: 5). This policy promoted a better life and good comfort for the relatively economically weak and poor Cuban citizens. Most former owners were eventually fully compensated for their losses, but landlords of slum tenement buildings received nothing from the government (Kapur& Smith, 2002: 5).

Meanwhile, the housing bill prohibited private renting and subletting, and it was illegal for households to own more than one primary residence and one vacation home (Hamberg, 1990: 235-250; Kapur & Smith, 2002: 5).

In addition, the government initiated an extensive programme of construction of new houses in the rural areas where owner-occupants made loans and technical assistance available for private construction. The programme raised the housing conditions of many. Government also redistributed elegant homes left by wealthy Cubans who fled the country among poorer residents.

### **bii. Health Sector Reform**

Reform in the health sector after the revolution was multi-dimensional. In the first instance, government extended health care to the entire population for the first time with by constructing rural clinics and hospitals across the country (Prevost, 2007: 21). Prior to the revolution, only the affluent members of the society had access to adequate medical treatment. But under the new health reform, health care became free and available to all.

The basic aim of the new health policy was to improve the health care delivery system of Cuba so that the masses might have direct and easy access to health facilities and thus enhance long life of citizens. Deliberate attempts were, therefore, made by government to set up new health centers while the existing ones were refurbished. Government also made huge investments in training health staff in the country (Slee, 2008: 30).

The reform yielded positive results. For instance, Hague and Harrop (1987: 305) reported that by 1971, 90% of Cuban population lived within 'an hour' of a health care facility while in the same period, about 30% of Cuban University students were studying medicine on full scholarship. As a result, the health system of the Cuban population has been positively transformed since the 1959 revolution.

Other social reforms introduced by Castro included: elimination of all discrimination on the basis of race or sex, ameliorating extreme social inequality and enforcing honesty and probity in public service through the confiscation of assets gained by fraud (Slee, 2008: 28). The reason for this was to cut the incidence of corruption that had eaten deep into the fabrics of the society under Batista (Perry, 1980: 711; Lotta, 2006). Some productive assets were also placed in the hands of the State by confiscating assets gained by fraud.

### **c. Military reform**

Castro undertook a major restructuring of the military and police in Cuba. This involved the replacement of professional army and police with a voluntary national militia "whose initial cadres were drawn from the Rebel Army and the urban underground." (Slee, 2008: 25). But apart from that, there was involvement of ordinary people in the new militia force (Sanchez, 2005: 7). Anderson (1997) adds that some members of the old army and police who were sympathetic to the revolution and who had been anti-Batista fighters were equally allowed to join the new army and police. The rationale for this policy was to cut drastically the huge government expenditure on military formations and supplies. This was no doubt a reaction to the excessive expenditure on security agencies in Cuba since 1952. It should be recalled that when Batista came to power through a coup d'état in 1952, he increased the pay of the military and the size of police force in trying to reduce crime in the country (Hill, 2010: 2). This had taken its toll on the resources of the country. But beside that, it was also intended

by government to de-politicise the armed forces to reduce the incidence of military incursion into politics that was a common phenomenon in Latin America

#### **d. Political Reform**

Perhaps the most consequential of all the reforms initiated by Castro was the turning of Cuba into Latin American hemisphere's first communist state in December 1961 (Nosotro, 2003). Shortly after the revolution, Castro visited Washington in 1959 and left without requesting significant U.S. aid. Then, U.S. officials had expected to control Cuba through the normal give-and-take of foreign aid. However, by April 1959, the Cuban leadership had already decided on a series of radical changes in Cuba and was not seeking approval in Washington. Official Cuban-USSR relations was, however, laid in December 1959 when a USSR journalist was admitted to Havana. This was followed by an official State-visit to Cuba in February 1960 by the USSR First Deputy Premier, Anastasias Mikoyan. A Soviet-Cuban trade agreement was signed on the occasion when the latter agreed to accept Cuban sugar and give aid after the American boycott of Cuban trade (Brown and Mooney, 1976: 80). Soon after, Che Guevara went to Eastern Europe and lined up \$100 million in credits for industrialization in Cuba. Relations with the Soviet Union actually offered a balance and an alternative to American dominant power in Cuban affairs.

Subsequently, Cuba openly welcomed Soviet military and economic aids just as Castro admitted he was a Marxist. It would be recalled that the United States under President Eisenhower had cut off diplomatic relations with Cuba. In December 1961, Castro had declared: "I am a Marxist - Leninist". Castro then formed a political and economic bond with the U.S.S.R. and, on 16 April, 1961, announced that Cuba was a socialist state (Nosotro, 2003). The two nations established formal diplomatic relations in May 1960 (Prevost, 2007: 23). He later proclaimed communist programmes for the future development of Cuba. In 1962, Cuba became a one - party communist state. The Partido Unido de la Revolucion Cubano (Cuban Communist Party) PCC became the sole legal party. And in July 1962, Raul Castro and Che Guevara travelled to Moscow to increase economic links and arrange defence aid in case of further U. S. intervention in Cuba (Ibid).

## **7. FACTORS THAT AIDED THE SUCCESS OF THE REVOLUTION**

A number of factors worked in favour of the Cuban revolution that ensured its success and consolidation. Some of these are discussed briefly below.

### **(a) A strong and well-developed economy**

It has been asserted that Cuba, by mid - 20th century, was among Latin America's most highly developed economies judging by socio-economic indicators. For instance, the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013) reports that Cuba had an annual per capital income of \$353 in 1958, which was certainly among the highest in the region. Indeed, Frank (1961:1101) reports that per capita income in Cuba was higher than almost anywhere else in Latin America on the eve of the Cuban revolution. Poverty was not as rife as in other Latin American states. She had comparatively fewer land-poor peasants. This largely explains why Cuba's economy was rated very strong indeed. The basic challenge with the Cuban economy then was the

lopsidedness of wealth distribution. Because of the uneven development and stagnation of Cuba's economy, many of Cubans lived at subsistence levels, particularly in the countryside. Much of the national income went either out of the country or to the urban middle classes. The rural population, made up of agricultural workers, tenants, and small farmers, bore the brunt of the seasonal fluctuations of the economy (Rogers, 1974: 31-32). Cuban economy under Batista presented a picture of contradiction: a rich country but with too many poor people. Incidentally, however, it was this Cuban abundance of wealth that enabled Castro to take wealth from the rich few and distributed to the poor masses.

### **(b) Weak Institutions**

Fidel Castro was very lucky with his revolution because of lack of a strong governmental institution that could have confronted the principles of the revolution. The rich Creoles and the Catholic Church did not have any firm roots in Cuba. Similarly the Cuban Constitution of 1942 was relatively new in implementation and practice. Even the army was not united on the revolution. Castro therefore met with little or no institutionalized opposition within Cuba itself.

None of the established institutions of Cuba was able to play an independent role in the politics of the 1950's. Labour was politically quiescent because of deals with the government. The army was strictly under Batista's control, and was riddled with corruption just as the bureaucracy. The Church did not exercise much control over Cubans, in spite of the Spanish background of many of them. The Afro-Cuban community had many small sects which undermined the strength of the Roman Catholic Church. And though the University was the breeding ground for many activists, including Castro himself, it was not formally involved in politics. The political parties too were not united within themselves and largely discredited with the public. Without any doubt, there was no basis for organizing resistance within this institutional framework (Thomas, 1971: 737, cited in Rogers, 1974: 8).

### **(c) Increased Soviet Aids**

When the United States of America under Eisenhower cut Cuban trade with the U.S. by about 95% in 1960, she meant to disrupt the Cuban economy, put it in disarray and finally experience a total collapse; leading to socioeconomic hardship for the masses and in turn produce a general uprising against Castro's government; thereby forcing Cuba on its knees soliciting for U.S. help. This feeling was against the backdrop of the fact that the U.S. was undoubtedly the principal trading partner and source of loans, grants and private investments for almost all Latin American countries and their leaders had always considered the U.S. favour worth having. And true to prediction, there was serious decline in Cuban productivity initially but this was offset by Soviet subsidies. Indeed, as Cuba's economy approached collapse, Castro turned more and more to Russia for aid. He was lucky indeed. According to Garving (2016), "Moscow poured tens of billions of dollars in direct aid into the island and countless more through a tangled web of subsidized commercial transactions. For instance, not only could Castro buy below-cost Soviet oil and resell it at a profit to other Latin American countries, but Moscow bought Cuban sugar at premium prices".

By implication, the vacuum created by the withdrawal of U.S. aids was adequately filled by the U.S.S.R. which continued to give technical, military, technological and financial supports to the Cuban government. Eisenhower may, therefore, be said to have only

succeeded in drifting Cuba to the communist bloc especially in the cold war era. It was the greatest policy somersault made by the US government then. The increased Soviet aid to Cuba was all Castro needed to keep her various reforms on course. Sustainability became a matter of forgone conclusion. Ever since then, the US lost Cuba to the communist bloc.

**(d) U. S. Reaction was belated**

Another reason that also guaranteed the success of the Cuban revolution was that U.S. reaction to it was belated, slow and uncertain. There is no gainsaying the fact that the U.S. was not reconciled to its loss of economic and political grip on Cuba. Not surprising therefore, the U.S. wanted to regain its lost holdings and profits. However, of even greater concern to the US was the ripple effect the Cuban success would have on other countries in Latin America. It was largely due to these strategic reasons that the U.S. moved in the early 1960s to crush Cuba and stamp out revolutionary movements throughout the Latin American region (Lotta, 2006).

But though the U.S. policy was to oppose all communist revolutions across the world for security and strategic reasons, her reaction to quell the Cuban revolution was neither well-coordinated nor properly executed. In trying to topple Castro's regime, the U.S. actively supported and trained exiled anti - Castro forces. Through the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A), the Cuban rebels were given logistics support. The US government budgeted a whopping sum of \$4,400,000 for the ill-fated mission. On 17 April, 1961, the United States' CIA sponsored an armed incursion into Cuba to incite Cubans to overthrow the government. About 1500-2000 Cuban exiles, armed with U.S. weapons, landed at the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) on the south coast of Cuba. Hoping to find support from the local population, they intended to cross the island to Havana.

During the invasion, Castro's forces, with the support of the peasants, dispelled the rebel forces. It was a disaster for the U.S. and the rebels (Amstutz, 1995: 178-79; Brown and Mooney, 1976: 80; Roehn, 1965: 589; Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2008). The trade boycott declared on Cuba's products by the Organisation of American States (O.A.S.) in 1962 was not effective either just as most of the O.A.S. states gradually resumed political and economic relations with Cuba. The point here is that the USA suffered from the challenge of procrastination and failed to decide on time what her reaction to Castro's intransigence was. The transition from imposition of trade embargo to military invasion of Cuba in 1961 ended in disaster for the US. The three years spanning 1959 to 1961 were enough for the Cuban revolution to take a firm root among the masses. Castro's welfare policy initiatives had already endeared him to the masses. They were already enjoying the dividends of the revolution before the US invasion and incitement of April 1961. Had it being that the invasion came earlier, probably the people's reaction might have been different.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was the second in the series of major confrontations between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) between 1959 and 1962 in which Cuba was deeply involved. The genesis of the crisis was Fidel Castro's willingness to allow the USSR to build missiles' launching sites in Cuba. The incident undoubtedly provoked a harrowing diplomatic faceoff between the USA and USSR in October, 1962. The event may be regarded as the world's closest approach to nuclear war. It began when the United States discovered that Cuba had secretly installed Soviet missiles able to carry nuclear weapons. The missiles were capable of hitting targets across most of the United States.

The United States under President J.F. Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba immediately, ordered an increase in U.S. surveillance of Cuba and its military buildup and demanded that the USSR remove the missiles immediately. Kennedy threatened that the US would view “any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union” (Thompson, 1962) However, within two weeks of heated negotiation between the two countries, the confrontation was defused and the launching pads were dismantled. Incidentally, however, the U.S. stance only solidified Castro's popular support and further pushed him toward the Soviet Union.

**(e) Castro's Charismatic Leadership:**

Fidel Castro has been described as a ruthless but dynamic leader with great charisma. While Schwab (1999:162) refers to him as perhaps “the charismatic leader of our time”; Frank (1961: 1101) submits that without invoking the charisma of Fidel Castro, an exhaustive causative explanation of the success of Cuban Revolution was possible. He was a man of extraordinary quality of personality that generated excitement and attracted admirers and followers. Most Cubans saw him as the national revolution personified. He indeed gave them a sense of pride considering his enviable achievements. For being scrupulously honest, Fidel Castro was as a patriotic leader by the masses (Perry, 1980:711).

Through his reforms, he was able to meet the needs of the peasants. He further incorporated them into politics to subdue any resistance to the government's development plans by traditional ruling elites (Brown and Mooney, 1976: 80).

Matthews (1971: 295, 398) may thus have been right when he asserted that the Cuban revolution was really "Fidel Castro's Revolution", claiming further that the revolution would never have occurred without the "powerful and extra-ordinary personality of Castro himself". One cannot but agree with this assertion given the boldness and aggression of Castro about the essence of the revolution. Once in power, Castro had great freedom to act because of his great popularity. He chose to take a radical socialist place because of a series of factors, including the wish to assert Cuban sovereignty by confronting the United States, the activist political background, and the momentum created by early measures of the revolutionary regime (Rogers, 1974: iii).

**(f) Loyal Compatriots**

It has been argued that the Cuban revolution was successful largely due to the calibre of Castro's revolutionary group. Castro was surrounded by a group of loyal and dedicated compatriots and lieutenants who were faithful to the core with tough minds. They were a people who also possessed great abilities and intelligence. Without their able support, Castro might have been a failure. To this end, people like Ernesto Che Guevara, Raul Castro {Fidel's younger brother}, Celia Sanchez, Osvaldo Dorticos, Haydee Santamaria, Almando Hart, Frank Pais, Camilo Cienfuegos, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Juan Almeida, among others, should have their names engraved in gold for their selfless sacrifice and commitment to the well-being of the Cuban nation – state (Prevost, 2007). From 1953 to 1958, all these associates of Fidel Castro conducted guerrilla operations against Batista's government and the military, which resulted in an eventual overthrow of the regime and Castro's rise to power (Hill, 2010: 2).

**(g) Popular Support from the Masses**

Between 1960 and 1961, Castro had successfully indoctrinated Cubans into defending the revolution. Throughout his 1960s speeches, Castro emphasized that the promotion and adoption of the revolutionary culture would effectively defend revolutionized Cuba from outside subversion and from engaging in armed conflict (Steinborn, 2014: 27). According to Castro, the process of defensively arming Cubans with that culture would occur through education, and sought to transform everyone into a revolutionary and to grow the revolutionary vanguard and party. Castro explicitly outlined the specific abilities of such revolutionaries in 1962:

What the Revolution is interested in is having in every place of work prepared workers... with high political education... capable of orienting their comrades... capable of explaining socialism, or arguing with defeatists, of arguing with the ignorant, of taking issue with the arguments of enemies; of explaining the reasons for every difficulty; and of explaining the past, the present, and the future... the more revolutionary militants with a high level of political education... the more force and solidity the Revolution will have (Fagen, 1969: 36).

In essence, mass participation was both inherent and necessary to the success of the revolution, and education defended the revolution by promoting the much desired mass participation.

Castro also took many measures to win popularity and large followings among poor peasants, urban workers, youths, and idealists. Indeed, their loyalty was unwavering. For instance, unemployment rate reduced drastically from 29.6 percent in 1959 to 20.9 percent in 1961. Similarly, government increased worker's salary by 20 percent between 1959 and 1961. Peasant farmers were exempted from rent payment. They had easy access to cheap credit facilities. Government also provided modern farm implements to farmers. All these policy initiatives brought succour to the poor masses. These went a long way at deepening the support of the masses for the revolution. The people, therefore, had no hesitation in throwing their weight behind the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro.

**8. CONCLUSIONS**

Fidel Castro who successfully led the 1959 revolution in Cuba against Fulgencio Batista, acted first as the Head of the Cuban Armed Forces and later the Prime Minister of Cuba, between 1 January 1959 and 23 February, 2008. He died a fulfilled man on 25 November, 2016 at age 90 (Garvin, 2016; DePalma, 2016). During his tenure, Castro took very bold steps to push through radically changing reforms that gave the poor masses a new hope for living in the first five years of his administration. Such included redistribution of wealth among the poor; education for all, both as a leveler and lever, thereby reducing the high level of illiteracy; free and quality health care for all which not only enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of labour, but also increased life expectancy of Cuban nationals; and a firm foreign policy based on ideology which not only turned Cuba to a communist State, but which was also sustained to give Cuba an accolade among the comity of nations in the world.

It is instructive to note that as Castro helped the mass proportion of the Cuban population to meet a higher and better standard of living through his many economic and social reforms, he equally helped himself to enhance the legitimacy of his government. His compassionate heart, codified through his welfare programme, gave many down-trodden peasants a new lease of life. He quickly turned himself to a messiah for the hopeless Cubans. Henceforth, Castro had great freedom to act because of his great popularity. That was all he needed to consolidate the success of the 1 January, 1959 revolution that not only rescued Cuban economy from the pawns of the United States of America, but also affirmed the true political sovereignty of Cuba.

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( Received 05 September 2017; accepted 22 September 2017 )