

Sol Arguedas

# WILL CHANGES IN EASTERN EUROPE REACH CUBA?

Since changes have begun to occur in Eastern Europe, politicians, philosophers and sociologists all over Latin America -and the rest of the world- are wondering about the meaning of such changes and the repercussions they could bring to countries and movements that sympathize with socialism. An understanding of the motives which led the Soviet Union and other countries to change their way of living requires profound analysis. Sol Arguedas argues that these changes have their origin in the very human search for freedom, and examines the effects these changes in socialism will have for Cuba and for the Latin American region.

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"There is true aristocracy in taking the part of the weak, disinherited and exploited."

That we are contemporaries of Fidel Castro exalts all Latin Americans; all who have participated — in one way or another — in his ideals and deeds. Because being his contemporaries is not simply chronological, it is a matter of moral and rational coincidences as the children of a perennially violated and offended America.

Will Fidel Castro see his dream of offering the continent a socialist hope crumble, as Simón Bolívar saw his dream of forming a single, great Latin American nation destroyed?

Will the U.S. see its dream of absolute dominance of the whole hemisphere, as established in its "manifest destiny", fulfilled?

Since the conditions do exist for both possibilities to become reality, it is time to reflect on them in order to better understand our present and propose our future.

Undertaking the discussion of the survival of socialism, or speculating about the forms it will take in the future, would seem premature. Feelings are too heated (and political passions and opinions are exaggerated to the point of caricature among the directly affected parties) by

the collapse of the "socialist block" to permit definitive conclusions to be drawn about the future of socialism. It would appear prudent to wait for the answers which those societies known up until now as "socialist", offer in response to the requirements of the decisive technological change which marks the beginning of the twenty first century.

We should also wait — if we do not help formulate it — for the theoretical work which socialist thinkers and ideologues have undertaken after the dramatic changes which social systems are undergoing currently in both the socialist and the capitalist worlds.

But in spite of advisable prudence and caution in this matter it is impossible to resist the temptation of making

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**The drama which is unfolding in Eastern Europe and the USSR is very close to home for Latin Americans because of the situation now faced by the Cuban Revolution**

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some comments and reflections about the international political context.

The drama which is unfolding in the countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR is very close to home for Latin Americans because of the situation the Cuban Revolution has to face. But because of our proximity with our northern neighbor, the United States, the transformations underway in the international capitalist system are also close to home.

Communists spent years predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism; for the capitalists a few weeks have sufficed for the most hurried, a few months for the slowest, to assume socialism is a thing of the past. If this were true, the hope of the overwhelming majority of human beings who want, here on earth, the justice that religions promise in the afterlife, would have been destroyed without mercy.

### The Church Joins In

This hope is indestructible. The Church which surprises us with the call —*urbe et orbi*— that John Paul II has made for a "new evangelism" knows this. The Catholic Church is eager to try to fill the space left in the hope of the poor by the supposed failure of the socialist system.

Approximately at the same time, the Church lashes out at Protestant churches and at rebellious Catholics who espouse liberation theology, which have been gaining ground in Latin America. Latin America continues to constitute, in spite of Poland, the future (in terms of physical and demographic survival) of the Roman Catholic Church.

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The Catholic Church, inspired by the political genius of Karol Wojtyla, has used this opportunity to jointly punish enemies which fight from within and from without: Marxists, rebellious Catholics and Protestants (Wojtyla also insinuated a future fight against "savage" capitalism).

The Church will have lost before it begins, in the medium and long term, the fight against what "Marxism" has represented up until now, if it does not decide to reconcile itself with socialism. The generalized action of the mass media works against it, against the resignation to their fate that the traditional Church asks of the poor.

Through the "demonstration effect", the mass media displays to the poor, to a degree never before achieved, the opulence of the good life which the rich live here on earth. Of course, the poor will continue to ask themselves evermore urgently: "And why not us?"

With its millenarian perspective the Church should consider — perhaps it is doing so — the probability of a socialism with God, which may be conceived in the Polish laboratory. (This, although not precisely a scientific



José Martí, from the cover of *Cuba International* magazine. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

hypothesis, could be a reasonable and fertile speculation, if the brilliant political leader John Paul II does not let the irrational hate of Karol Wojtyla towards the "Soviet" socialism that the Polish people suffered, get the upper hand internally.)

It is time to define what has died and what has survived in the historical form that the idea of socialism took: what we have known under the name of "existent socialism", or just plain "socialism" for most people.

### Clear Concepts

It is important to differentiate those societies in which socialism was not imposed by the Red Army but was the result of an authentic and profound social revolution (although later — through ideology — an authoritarian, dogmatic regime was imposed). This is an urgent task for independent social scientists or those who are above the mutual recriminations which are made by both groups in swampy ideological terrain.

From this point on in this essay I will worry less about the events in the so-called "popular democracies" in Central Europe and focus more on what is happening in the USSR and our Cuba.

It would not be exaggerated to reintiate an analysis of the fact that the first historical attempt to put socialist theory into practice took place in poor and backward (or underdeveloped) societies — as a great mutation in their evolutionary process — and not as a solution to intense conflicts within an advanced capitalist society, as the previous revolutionary ideologues had predicted.

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### By definition, socialism follows -or should follow- capitalism in resolving contradictions in a context of advanced economic and social development

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## FEATURES

This first historical aberration, whose initial successes could be explained in irrational terms similar to those which explain the religious emotions of the masses (but not individuals), must be analyzed again in the light of the collapse of the system defined as "existent socialism". It must also be analyzed taking into account that, by definition, socialism follows – or should follow – capitalism, to resolve the fundamental contradictions within capitalism in a context of advanced economic and social development (and prolonged democratic experience, I would add). The decisive technological transformation of our times forces the revision of Marxist concepts in this respect. And if any, or even all, of the Marxist dogmas were to fall under their own weight, the same would not be true for the Marxist methods of investigation of social and historical phenomena, for the study of which Marxism will continue to be irreplaceable.

That socialism was not implanted as classic Marxists had predicted was a dirty trick history played on these countries. The question, "Why did this first socialist experience began as it did?" has kept many thinkers awake; but the fact that it ended as it did will keep many more up at night.

It does not seem to be a mistake of "existent socialism" that economic centralization was used to finance the triumphant revolution; there was no other way. In the absence of a viable alternative, a centralized political economy accomplished the socialist equivalent of what has been called "original accumulation" in the capitalist system. That is, the basic social wealth necessary to implant the system was created (just as occurred in the capitalist system).<sup>1</sup>

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### When did economic growth and social development come to a halt during the socialist experiment?

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That it was not a mistake is evidenced by the fact that the first stages of incipient socialism were characterized by economic growth and, more importantly, because this is the heart of socialism, by significant social development, the latter being the result of social distribution of the economic surplus of goods and services.

When did economic growth and social development come to a halt during the socialist experiment?

First we will undertake a tentative justification of the appearance of a centralized economy. When a society tries to set into motion a project of economic growth and social development, if it is poor and backward as up until now revolutionary societies have usually been, it is obliged to centralize all the economic, financial, technological and above all human resources so that all of them – which are few and poorly administered – can be used efficiently to reach the goal of development. Be it tractors or engineers, investment capital or planning economists, they must be used rationally in space and time.<sup>2</sup> (Centralization is not unique to socialism; Mexico,

for example, underwent centralization following the consolidation of its 1910 revolutionary process.)

### Decentralization

In these circumstances the economies grew, efficiently assisted by an initial revolutionary mystique which motivated and mobilized large social contingents. The economies grew as does a normal foot, which sooner or later feels that the shoe does not fit. This is the moment to decentralize the economy: when a centralized system stops fulfilling its protective role for the economy (like the shoe for the foot) and, on the contrary, acts as a brake to growth and development. It goes without saying that, from this point on, a centralized economy loses viability and, therefore, social support. It can only sustain itself by hardening its accompanying political centralization into a staunch dictatorship, with all kinds of perverse side effects for the development of socialism. This was nothing less than the foundation of stalinism.

A socialist economy should be decentralized when the quantitative growth phenomenon (favored in the beginning by central planning) gives way to the qualitative phenomenon of "self-management" or relative inde-

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1 The cruelty with which this "original accumulation" took place is common to both systems; it is just that the brutality of stalinism is better known because it was practically contemporary, while the knowledge of the inhuman exploitation of labor, in the beginnings of "savage" capitalism, is buried in history books.

2 Although this should not be taken as a justification of Stalin, there is doubt about whether Lenin's NEP (New Economic Policy), which encouraged private initiative under state control, would have had success in the lower levels of the Soviet economy. It may be noted in this respect that if Yugoslavia did not obtain the hoped-for success with its self-managed economy it was because it was implanted prematurely in terms of its economic – principally – and political aspects.



Engraving by María Luisa Martín. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

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**A moment comes when a centralized economy stops fulfilling its protective role, and begins to act as a brake to growth and development**

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pendence – in respect to the centralizing nucleus – of economic units which have sufficient resources of all types in order to function more or less autonomously. It would not function without a political decentralization which gives way to democracy.

In both cases, in a socialist or a capitalist economy, decentralization should occur as a necessary transfer of economic management from the State to civil society. But in practice this transfer encounters enormous difficulties – the problems of *perestroika* – in socialist societies. Under the capitalist system the concept of "civil society" suffers misinterpretation, since civil society is understood as restricted exclusively to the oligarchy in power, such as occurs in Mexico.

Before continuing with comments about the difficulties of decentralization in the socialist world, I must point out a matter of great importance. It is in this imperative need to transfer to civil society as a whole, the economic management of the State (be it a Marxist-Leninist State or a Keynesian welfare State) – a need which surfaces because the economy "matures", in part influenced by the current scientific and technological revolution – that we must look for the immediate motivation of the sweeping movement in favor of democracy that has shaken the world. A political economy which frees the formidable latent energy of civil society, which feeds on the creative capacity of an ever-growing number of individuals is, without a doubt, the perfect democracy. But... in capitalist society who will receive the most part of the benefits which such an effort will yield? Here words do not suffice; statistics are necessary to show the income distribution in our capitalist societies, both developed and underdeveloped, but above all in the latter.

On the other hand, we can infer the direction in which *perestroika* or the restructuring of the USSR points: towards voluntary, efficient involvement of civil society in all aspects of production, while at the same time, procedures for equal distribution of goods and services are adjusted. It is evident that this is very different from the Soviet Union's supposed "return to capitalism" which those interested in confusing public opinion (or who are themselves confused) declare with great fanfare. It is time, therefore, to question the predominant attitude in conservative circles, whose members simplistically celebrate that they have "won" the cold war, that socialism has "died" and their democratic model has "triumphed". They use these apparent triumphs to explain in a superficial and frivolous manner (as if it were a fight between thugs), the profound historical transformation of the economic organization and political and philosophical conceptions of modern societies.



Engraving by Moshe Gat. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

### **A Dubious Urgency**

What we should not accept is that the urgent need for democracy which exists today, be trivialized to the degree of accepting as the full satisfaction of this need, the deteriorated and corrupt democratic formula which the United States is trying to impose by force on the weak countries under its fist. On the contrary, in the immediate future profound innovations will come to light which will contribute to new and original democratic formulas. By imposing its own "democratic" capitalist formula in its sphere of influence, the United States is doing exactly what the USSR did when it forced those countries (and the Communist Parties of the world) under its hegemony to accept the Soviet socialist "democratic" formula.

Besides the role of what we have termed "maturity" (although it is relative) of what have up until now been centralized economies in producing a pressing need for decentralization, there is another even more important element that explains the deep need for democracy. Specifically, the appearance of a new type of salaried worker and a new labor relationship in post-industrial societies, a product of the modernization required by the scientific-technological revolution.

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This is a worker who, because of the growing automatization of productive processes, has a stronger subjective tie to his or her work through intelligence, and less through his or her muscular force (as opposed to a traditional worker). This new type of worker cannot be satisfied with salary alone, be it direct (money) or indirect (social services). This type of worker demands "participation" in decisions about production. In a word, he or she demands responsibility – rights and duties – in the management of the economy of the firm and the nation.

Induction allows me to conclude, in theoretical terms, that humanity, having first achieved political democracy (or at least consciousness of it) with the triumph of liberal concepts, then social democracy (or consciousness of it) with the consolidation of the welfare State, today clearly has to fight to obtain economic democracy, in practical terms. This is independent of whether societies adopt the capitalist or socialist label since this long, difficult, arduous path towards integral democracy is made above and beyond ideologies and temporal or spatial events: it constitutes the central current of the historical process.

The capitalist system – as it currently exists – could not tolerate full economic democracy without shaking the very foundation of the system. But now we also know that the classical revolutionary path does not lead to this type of democracy either.

Reaching integral democracy is one of the dearest desires of human beings, for if expression requires freedom, truly human communication requires democracy. Therefore freedom and democracy are inseparable, as are human expression and communication.



Fidel and Camilo. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

Therefore it is not inconceivable that socialism and capitalism could suffer future defeats and failures in their respective efforts in search of freedom and democracy, before reaching both integral freedom and integral democracy for an individual who only exists as an absolutely social being.

The decisive scientific-technological revolution underway today, and the important events that are occurring in both socialist and capitalist societies, lead us to expect true changes in these societies, guided by the determinant principles of the human condition. Nevertheless, as has occurred until now, no society is safe from deformation and deviations, such as fascism and stalinism. If we recognize this danger, we also accept that politics are inherent to all human activities, be they transcendental or simple, daily tasks.

**Technology and Social Change**

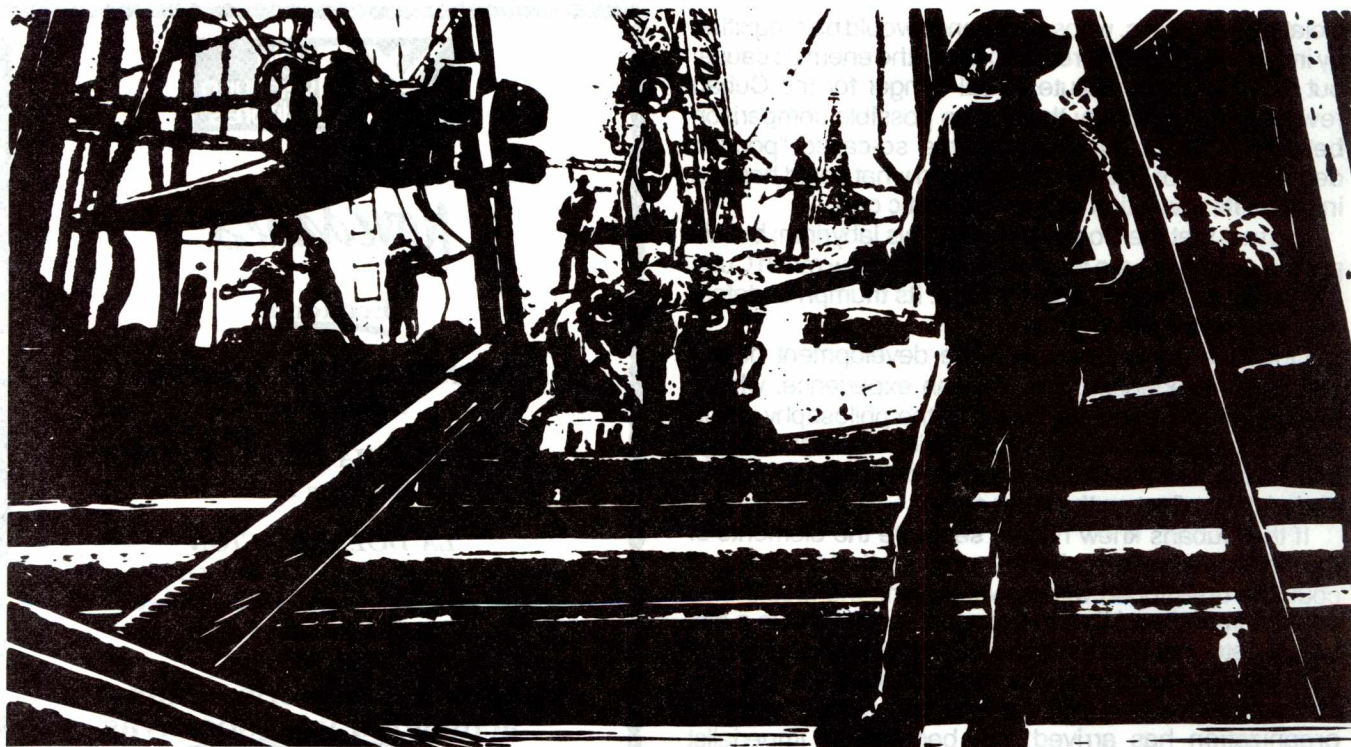
I asked myself previously in this essay about when economic growth and social development stopped in the socialist economies. To affirm that this happened at a moment of qualitative change during which the centralized economy was no longer stimulating and was converted into a braking mechanism, is not very enlightening because this moment cannot be pinned down either. A hypothesis could be proposed relating this moment with the opening to technological change in the West, but this last event cannot be dated with accuracy either. Surely there will be someone in the western world who thinks that the invention of the transistor dates the beginning of the technological revolution of our time; and just as surely someone will reject this idea. In any case, the rapid technological innovations taking place in the West were what made evident – internally and externally – the stagnation and growing deterioration of the socialists' economy.

This evokes speculation about what would have happened if the necessary transformation had been carried out by Krushchev instead of being postponed until Gorbachev's time. Perhaps things would not have been as difficult and complicated as they are for the USSR today. I mean to say that, without specifying when all this began, we can affirm that for reasons intrinsic to its historical evolution – without a doubt because of the lack of political freedom – the Soviet economy was bogged down for a long time (Krushchev, Breshnev, Chernenko, Andropov and, at last, Gorbachev!) and now it is paying the consequences of the time lost.

**A Search for Freedom**

As opposed to the obstacles which the USSR has found in its efforts towards economic restructuring or *perestroika*, the policy of informational transparency or *glasnost* spread like wildfire. This is very understandable because something which is indestructible in human beings is their desire for freedom.

Freedom constitutes part of the essence of humanity, since the need to free oneself from the womb of nature, to separate oneself from a purely animal condition, was essential to the human condition of pre-human man. Humanity's questions and answers in relation to nature were evermore numerous and complex because their



Yankee Exploitation. Engraving by Leopoldo Méndez. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

brain, hands and emotion evolved. Evolution towards full humanity has not ended, but today the predominant character of evolution is social and the biological factor is recessive. Human beings today evolve more within society and less in nature.

In order to evolve, socially human beings use the tools of expression and communication, which if they are looking for integral freedom (or full humanity) should obviously be used in the context of freedom. This is the source of the force which has accompanied the eternal struggle to establish, conserve or recuperate extensive expression and communication in their full human width and breadth.

If freedom is the goal, and the motor which pushes man towards a fully human condition, if the search for it gives meaning and direction to life, how can the identification of human freedom with the removal of obstacles to the "free play of the market forces" not seem ridiculous as well as stingy? Especially a capitalist market which is the very source of all economic and social inequality.

But this constitutes, as we have experienced, the "freeing" formula, the type of "freedom" which the United States imposes on the world with an excess of force made possible by its economic and financial power. Its supposed defense of different manifestations of freedom of expression and communication is refined hypocrisy. (Paying a mercenary army to crush a triumphant popular revolution, in the name of "democratic plurality", and then filling the pockets of opposition parties with dollars to buy votes and consciences, is simply disgusting.)

On the other hand, in the socialist world freedoms were abused (they were scorned as bourgeois) in spite of those socialists who were conscious of philosophical principles pertaining to the true freedom of human beings. Unfortunately the fact that freedoms are useful instruments for reaching freedom as an abstract concept was ignored.

The tasks which *glasnost* and *perestroika* are performing in the USSR today aim to rescue specific freedoms

won and accumulated by civilized humanity. This is part of the rectification and the material and spiritual restructuring within existent socialism, the Soviet interpretation of the universal concept of "socialism".

### What About Cuba?

Cuba is a besieged country. It has been for thirty years, since its people and their leaders decided to become independent from the United States. The Cuban revolution was, in the beginning, a revolution seeking independence; it did not intend to implant socialism. What is deeply buried within the Cuban people is the pride of having reached their independence; socialism is the objective presence, the evidence that they are independent. This is why the Cubans are such a difficult enemy for the United States: they are ready to face anything in order to keep out of that nation's grasp. In this their nationhood is at stake.

What is happening to the United States with Cuba could be what happened to Hitler with Russia. It was not the "Soviet Union" which turned out to be invincible for the Nazi hordes, but the ancestral, profound, sweet Mother Russia which uncovered the internal strength which supported her children so that they could survive and live in freedom.

Independence and socialism are so intimately linked in the hearts of many Cubans that they would be unable to separate them. But on the island—we must not forget this—there is also disillusionment, boredom and desperation because of the immobility of the political system and the precariousness of the economy.

Nevertheless, only those who do not know the Cubans, or born since the socialist revolution, could think, believe or hope that the latent discontent could betray the self-defense which they have been engaged in for more than thirty years. (This does not rule out the possibility of

## FEATURES

isolated individuals, whose existence would be magnified by imperialist publicity, ready to serve the enemy's cause; but they do not constitute a real danger for the Cuban revolution). This is why there is no possible comparison between what is happening in the so-called "popular democracies" of Eastern Europe and what could happen in Cuba. Its revolution was an authentic one.

It is true that the Commander is in his labyrinth; but his people are too, as are all of us who know how much Cuba means for the rest of Latin America. Its triumph or defeat will mark us for a long time.

Our America is faced with the development of two definitive experiences: the Mexican experience, whose leaders appear to act according to the philosophy which says, "it is better to be servants in a rich house than kings in a shack", and the Cuban experience which has not yet ended. We reflect on the latter case.

If the Cubans knew how to separate the elements of the "independence-socialism" unit, so that the second could be questioned without weakening the first; if they could comprehend that the concept "socialism" is a historical category and therefore susceptible to changes; if they would accept that the moment to make decisive socioeconomic and political changes in their socialist organization has arrived, not because of imperialist threats from their neighbor, but because of pressures from the scientific-technological revolution that affects the world through incredible transformations; if they coincided in the need to search for new definitions for new social phenomena in this accelerated march towards a new civilization...if the Cubans achieved all this, the Commander would come out of his labyrinth, and with him, all of us who are searching for a way out. ■