

LAWRENCE D. PRATT

Is there No Enemy to the Left?

The Losers, by Paul D. Bethel, Arlington House (New Rochelle, N. Y.), 1969. 615 pp. \$10.00

Fidel Castro, by Herbert L. Matthews, Simon & Schuster, 1969. 382 pp. \$6.95

HERE is Herbert Matthews' (a *New York Times* editor until 1967) answer to the titled question: "For the sophisticated minority in the United States and for just about everyone in other Western nations, Communism is simply another and different political, economic and social system," (M.p. 194). Matthews argues that in Cuba — and by extension, potentially in most of Latin America — the emergence of Communism was the pragmatically determined course once a decision was made to bring about a radical social revolution. As one of the sophisticated minority in the U. S., Matthews sees little serious effort on the part of Fidel Castro to subvert the governments of the rest of the hemisphere.

The only proof Matthews offers for his argument, that Communism in Cuba is merely a marriage of convenience from which Fidel could divorce himself, is private conversations with Fidel and his leading followers. For him to continue trusting Fidel & Co. after they so thoroughly bamboozled him in the Sierra Maestra — they completely misled him about the relative strengths of their own and Batista's forces — is remarkable.

BETHEL'S book provides a striking contrast to Matthews'. Bethel, the Press Attaché under the last three U. S. ambassadors to Cuba, meticulously examines not only the liberal sources considered by Mat-

thews, but also a wide range of opinion and documentation (including his own firsthand experiences) as well as refugee testimony — something which is entirely missing in Matthews' *Fidel Castro*.

Matthews' methodology leads him to make some preposterous statements. While admitting that the revolutionary regime's executions of Batista supporters were not



Paul Bethel

"meticulously examines . . . a wide range of opinion and documentation"

legal in every case, Matthews insists that they were always just and were "never preceded by torture as in the Batista regime," (M.p. 125). This is completely inaccurate. What is 'just' about Castro personally intervening in the acquittal by a revolutionary tribunal of forty-three pilots and demanding over television that a new commission convict them (which it did)? As for torture, it has been as ghoulish as anything Hitler could conceive. For example, preceding the continuous executions in

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Havana's dreaded La Cabaña fortress, a quart and a half of blood is drawn from the condemned the evening before their execution. Of course, for those with a weak heart, that is their execution (B.pp. 382-3).

Similarly, Matthews asserts that on the whole, Cubans are eating better, whereas Bethel refers to refugee accounts of strict rationing, and often the complete unavailability of such staples as sugar (Cuba's main product), coffee, milk, and meat — except for the privileged members of Cuba's "new class."

PUBLIC health is now a facility offered to all of the public according to Matthews. For example, he claims that the "former children's scourge of gastroenteritis is now close to being completely eradicated." His source? "The Cubans claim . . ." (M.p. 267). On the other hand, testimony is available to the contrary from both refugees and official Cuban sources. Bethel refers to the admission by the Vice Minister of Public Health in 1963 that gastroenteritis was still the major Cuban health problem, and to the President of the National Institute of Water Resources who in 1965 complained this was still so because the regime had not devoted a sufficient amount of its resources to insuring an adequate distribution of good water (B.pp. 409-410).

Since people get machine-gunned in their boats and rafts when trying to leave Cuba, it is nearly beyond comprehension how Matthews can claim that Castro has enjoyed "widespread popular support even when things were at their worst," (M.p. 151). What does "widespread popular support" mean when a country of almost 7,000,000 has 100,000 political prisoners, at least 600,000 refugees, and 300,000 men in uniform (ten times the number of Batista's forces) — forces which no one imagines are intended for use outside of Cuba? Furthermore, how many uprisings must be suppressed by tanks and by random public executions designed to cow rebellious subjects back into line before "widespread" becomes a cruel joke? The reader will find a sufficient recounting of such calculated terrorism and brutality in *The Losers* to suspect that at the very least, and most charitably, Herbert Matthews is a very unreliable reporter.

Yet this is the man to whom Earl Smith was sent for a briefing before he left for

Cuba in 1957 to take up his duties as our ambassador in Havana. Matthews and his views had much more weight in Washington than did Smith, and Matthews has quite obviously not changed his opinions in any important way during the past twelve years. (His first book on Cuba, *The Cuban Story* published in 1961, makes *Fidel Castro* look almost like a rewrite.)

Several times, Matthews claims that now, after a great deal of reading and experience, Fidel Castro is an agricultural expert. But what a price Cuba has paid for this putative expertise! The U. S. had been paying 5.11 cents per pound for Cuban sugar in 1959 — the world price was 2.9 cents per pound. The generous Soviets paid 2.78 cents per pound. Yet Matthews can agree with Che Guevara that the U. S. - Cuban terms amounted to slavery (M.p. 162). One occasionally gets the feeling when reading Matthews that perhaps a Lewis Carroll is trying his hand at a politicized version of *Alice in Wonderland*, with the narrators as the Queen of Hearts.

ONE of the uses to which Castro has had to put his conscripted army (in 1958 he was promising to free Cubans from the thralldom of the draft) has been to force recalcitrant peasants to go along with the collectivization of agriculture. Although Castro publicly blamed the burning of the cane fields in 1963 on CIA sponsored bombings, he obviously did not believe this himself, for he subsequently brought large numbers of informers from the cities to guard the cane fields against the peasants. When the guards demonstrated their disloyalty, the militia had to be called in.

Much ballyhoo has been put out regarding the volunteer labor which assists in the sugar harvest. Matthews claims that this labor, while not actually spontaneous, is nevertheless voluntary, and that the remarkable Cuban nature has the knack of turning such outings into a fiesta (M.pp. 251-2). He fails to tell the reader what the lack of spontaneity really means: many "volunteer" cane cutters are taken off the streets at random, and from the jails. The rest of the "volunteers" (outside of the small group comprising the Cuban "new class") understand quite clearly that if they value their ration cards, they will return to their regular jobs with a stamp certifying their "voluntary" labor.

If Castro is an agricultural expert, then a



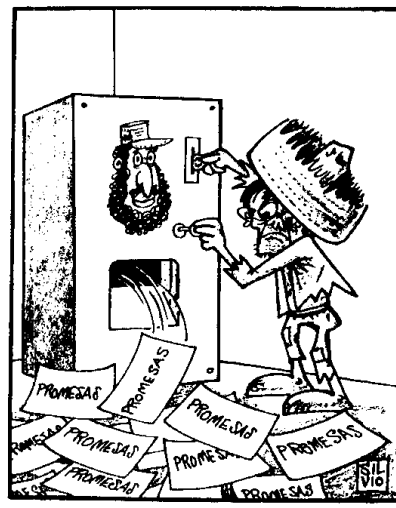
The production trick didn't work.



Tell your mother they came after me for "voluntary labor."



X-ray of the valise of a Cuban Communist "diplomat"



The Cuban people and the Machine of Promises

translation is required: Castro is an expert at forcing people to do whatever he tells them. Moreover, they have to be happy about it. "What joy I would have in revolutionizing this country from top to bottom! I am convinced that every inhabitant can be made happy," he wrote in a letter in 1954. Rousseau could not have improved on this rewording of his famous desire to force people to be free. Does this reflect the Fidel Castro who, Matthews is sure, has shown deep feelings for the masses, or the Fidel Castro who is aware of the Matthews' dictum that "Revolutions break lots of hearts that don't deserve to be broken," (M.pp. 354, 144)?

The twice-daily plane loaded with refugees, plus the desperate attempts that are made to elude Castro's coast guard cutters, are proof enough that substantial numbers of Cubans have stubbornly refused to be

one percent were either blue or white collar workers. And, as some of the hijackers have found out, Cuba is not a paradise for negroes either.

IN the Caribbean, as in Cuba, argues Matthews, *social imbalance*, not subversion is the real enemy. In any case, he estimates, Castro only devotes about five percent of his time and resources to foreign adventures. This might be a correct figure, at least for resources — if we do not count the contribution made by the Soviet Union. Actually, Bethel says, Castro taught the Kremlin an important lesson in tactics: "that a local leader of a national-revolutionary movement may be more capable of achieving victory than the official Party appendages abroad," (B.p.21). This is the conclusion he draws from the position taken in 1966 by the Soviet delegation to the Tri-continental Conference whose avowed aim was to spread the war of national liberation concept from Vietnam to Latin America. A Tass announcement had already set the theme several months before, reporting on a communique instructing the Communist parties of the Western Hemisphere to support Fidel Castro in his efforts to overthrow other Latin American governments (B.p. 422).

The Soviets have not been slow to take advantage of what has been called the largest, and the only unsinkable, aircraft carrier in the world. In 1962, the Soviets became rather greedy (Bethel speculates that Kennedy's weakness at Vienna in 1961 tempted Khrushchev) and made a dramatic move to shift the strategic balance of power between the U. S. and the U.S.S.R. But the missile crisis did not end Soviet interest in or utilization of their magnificent base, for they have, according to Bethel, an estimated 40,000 troops in Cuba — although often clad in Cuban uniforms, such as the ones who had to be substituted for unreliable Cuban militia in putting down a bloody uprising in Matanzas Province in 1963. The U.S.S.R. has continued to supply large amounts of arms and vessels to Castro, while (according to authoritative refugee accounts) maintaining long range missiles in concealed subterranean sites. And they have obviously not prevented Castro's sponsorship of several incipient wars of national liberation (Ché Guevara's fiasco in Bolivia being merely the most well-known effort), implemented by guerrillas trained in Cuba



Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara

"What joy I would have in revolutionizing this country."

made happy by Castro. Matthews resorts to a bit of Marxian class analysis to explain away this strange shortcoming on the part of so many Cubans. He claims that virtually all of the refugees are middle class, as are those waiting to go on the scheduled flights. Matthews is simply not correct, for according to a 1960 International Refugee Commission study of the social composition of the Cuban refugees, sixty-

and often transported in converted Soviet fishing ships.

Closer to home, Phillip Abbott Luce, J. Edgar Hoover and occasional newspaper headlines have pointed out the connections between the Castro regime and militants (both black and white) in this country. The aid takes the form of instruction during trips to Cuba as well as material support which is supplied directly to the militants from the Cuban U.N. consulate in New York City.

THERE is an enemy in Latin America, and it is not hunger nearly so much as

the machinations of foreign powers seeking to impose their system on the world. Whether or not those rulers really believe they would be filled with joy making us happy, the dynamics of their systems are inexorable. Whether under Hitler or under Castro, one must be enthusiastically for the regime. If not, one is by definition a counter-revolutionary and a traitor, deprived of any vestigial rights which may or may not be given lip service by the regime. Such a government is *ipso facto* morally repugnant, but it becomes dangerous to its neighbors when it fails to make any distinction between foreign nations and its own subjects.

There is indeed, an enemy to the Left.



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