



# **THERE IS POWER IN A UNION: REVOLUTIONARY TRADE UNIONISM HISTORY AND PRAXIS**

Readings for Class One: The Working class & Revolution

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# The Manifesto of the Communist Party

By KARL MARX and FREDERICK ENGELS

## Chapter I. Bourgeois and Proletarians

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacturer no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry; the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the medieval commune: here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany); there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy (as in France); afterwards, in the period of manufacturing proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, cornerstone of the great monarchies in general, the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political

illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages, which reactionaries so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant

lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground — what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

We see then: the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in

the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted in it, and the economic and political sway of the bourgeois class.

A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeois and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises, a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity — the epidemic of over-production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons — the modern working class — the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed — a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc.

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.

The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the

pawnbroker, etc.

The lower strata of the middle class — the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants — all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.

The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operative of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages.

At this stage, the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeois. Thus, the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.

But with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The increasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they

found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there, the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarian, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus, the ten-hours' bill in England was carried.

Altogether collisions between the classes of the old society further, in many ways, the course of development of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all time with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles, it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

Further, as we have already seen, entire sections of the ruling class are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence. These also supply the proletariat with fresh elements of enlightenment and progress.

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the progress of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois



ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance, they are revolutionary, they are only so in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat.

The “dangerous class”, [lumpenproletariat] the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.

In the condition of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industry labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.

In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.

Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. The serf, in the period of serfdom, raised himself to membership in the commune, just as the petty bourgeois, under the yoke of the feudal absolutism, managed to develop into a bourgeois. The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the process of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.

The essential conditions for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

# Marxist-Leninist Perspectives on Black Liberation and Socialism

By FRANK CHAPMAN

## Civil War, Class Struggle, and the Fight for Socialism

Class is economically determined by objective social relations between those who own and control the means of production and those who do not. But as we have seen from the class analysis offered above, the workers in the United States were divided into slave and free and that the class struggle was deeply affected by this division. So objectively speaking, how did the Civil War impact the working class, and Black slaves and white workers in particular?

On the eve of the Civil War, in 1860, the sentiments of most white workers were summed up in the following statement:

We are weary of the question of slavery; it is a matter which does not concern us; and we wish only to attend to our own business, and leave the South to attend to their own affairs without any interference from the North. The Workingmen of the United States have other duties.

The principal working-class organizations that were white were not abolitionists. Their position was "let slavery be." Shortly after Lincoln was elected president, 26 trades with national organizations met in convention and not one of them mentioned slavery or abolition. The only exception was the German-American Marxists, led by Joseph Weydemeyer, who protested "most emphatically against both black and white slavery..." The Communist Club of New York did not hesitate to expel any member who "manifested the slightest sympathy" for the Southern Slaveholders' Rebellion.

William Z. Foster sums up the contributions of Joseph Weydemeyer, founder of the first Communist Club in America:

In all his activities Weydemeyer contended for the position that the fight against slavery was central in the work of Marxists in that period. He strove to involve the trade unions in the great struggle. He showed that without a solution of the slavery question no basic working-class problem could be solved. He linked the workers' immediate demands with the fundamental issue of Negro emancipation. In this fight the American Workers' League, under Marxist influence, played an important role in winning the workers and organized labor for the abolition struggle. Thus, in 1854, after the passage of the infamous Kansas-Nebraska Act, the League held a big mass meeting which declared

that the German-American workers of New York "have, do now, and shall continue to protest most emphatically against both white and black slavery and brand as a traitor against the people and their welfare everyone who shall lend it his support."

When the Civil War started in 1861 the white workers supported the Union; however, their support was in no way an expression of unconditional solidarity for the battle against slavery. Economic fears of Black worker competition soon gave rise to racial antagonisms. Even though President Lincoln declared that the war was not about slavery, he and the Republican Party was still nonetheless denounced as "...the party of fanaticism or crime, whichever it may be called, that seeks to turn the slaves of the Southern States loose to overrun the North and enter into competition with the white laboring masses, thus degrading and insulting to our race and meriting our emphatic and unqualified condemnation."

This policy of opposition to the presence of Black workers in the labor market led to race riots and strikes against employers who hired Black workers. After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, the New York Herald and other pro-South Northern newspapers issued "flaming editorials" predicting that there would be an influx of freed slaves into the factories and shops, replacing white workers. Nevertheless, and despite all this reactionary fanning of the flames by pro-slavery forces, objective social and economic conditions (e.g. labor shortages caused by the war and the subsequent rise in prices) gave rise to a rapid spread toward unionization between 1861 and 1865. The emergence of citywide trade assemblies in all the important industries led to large scale development of national trade unions.

Twenty-one new national trade unions were formed during the decade of 1860-1870. If we couple this with the fact that more workers were in the Union Army (perhaps 50% of all Northern workers) than any other class; then objectively speaking, the white working class, driven to participate in the war by economic conditions and political coercion (like conscription and draft) made a tremendous contribution to the ending of slavery. As Marx pointed out before the Civil War happened: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." Some 750,000 white men left Northern industries to enlist in the Union Army. Regardless of prevailing racist attitudes among white workers, the fact is they objectively made an immense contribution to defeating the Slaveholders' Rebellion.

White workers instinctively as a class knew what Marx meant when he said the Slaveholders' Rebellion was a holy crusade of private property against labor, but they did not have the consciousness as a class to fight racism and racist policies in their own unions. Thus, from the

very beginning we see that class struggle unionism and the fight for African American equality must go hand in glove.

That is why it is clear that the decisive component in the war against slavery was the slaves themselves.

Leading up to the Civil War, the slaves and their white allies were engaged in a war of their own against slavery. There were slave uprisings and then came Nat Turner's Rebellion, which sent shock waves throughout the nation. There was five-foot-tall Harriet Tubman, who became an experienced guerilla fighter in leading the Underground Railroad. She was intending on being with John Brown but was stopped by sickness. Slave rebellions happened far more often than the masters cared to admit. And slave resistance to their masters took a variety of forms in the master's house and in the fields, as we learn from the narratives of the slaves themselves.

But with the outbreak of war after the shots fired on Fort Sumter, slaves found themselves in a most peculiar situation. Frederick Douglass best described it when he said that the Civil War was begun,

in the interest of slavery on both sides. The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union and the North was fighting to keep it in the Union, the South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution and the North fighting for the old guarantees; both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro.

So, what was the slave? Clearly the economic backbone of the South, and therefore crucial to the outcome of the Civil War. At every turn of events the slave holders were telling their slaves of the cruelty that awaited them if they should dare to run away to Yankee military camps. There were endless tales of how Yankee soldiers took runaway slaves and worked them hard with little food and rest and no pay.

But the test, the moment of truth, came when the Union Army invaded slave territory. From that moment on the slaves ran over to the side of the Union. They cared nothing about the attitude of the generals or rank-and-file soldiers. No argument or calculated insults could stop the masses of fugitive slaves from becoming camp followers of the Yankee soldiers. Du Bois said it was like thrusting a walking stick into an anthill.

Now the South was faced with a labor strike of slaves. The rebellion against the Confederacy had begun on the slave plantations and the slaves were not passing up their chance for insurrection. They were not waiting on a decree or declaration of government to announce their freedom. Every time the Union army moved the fugitive slaves moved with it, for they flatly refused to act like the war was a dress parade. And when the war finally became

a real war, slaves were either received or captured and used as much needed workers and servants.

One can call these runaway slaves "fugitives" or "contraband," but the fact remains they were by their own actions refusing to be slaves. This is only as it should be and can be, for those who want freedom will take it as soon as circumstances and opportunity present themselves.

Of course, what we are describing is the beginning of the turning point in the Civil War initiated by the arrival of these hordes of former slaves, who were more often than not followed by landless, homeless white peasant families. Yet of greatest historical importance is the fact that out of this growing mass of striking slave-workers and insurgents came 186,000 Black Union troops who took to the battle fields to confront their former oppressors and suffered 35% more casualties than any other group.

When the war ended, the working class wanted more of the benefits of its labor, at a time when unemployment was rising along with large-scale immigration and post-war depression. These conditions gave rise to workers' demands for an eight-hour day with no decrease in pay "and a more equal participation in the privileges and blessings of those free institutions defended by their manhood on many a bloody field of battle." Fully aware of the oncoming crisis to be faced by the U.S. working class in the wake of the Civil War, Karl Marx, writing on behalf of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, in congratulating the workers for the "end of slavery," advised regarding future actions:

An injustice to a section of your people has produced such direful results, let that cease. Let your citizens of today be declared free and equal, without reserve.

If you fail to give them citizens' rights while you demand citizens' duties, there will yet remain a struggle for the future which may again stain your country with your peoples' blood.

The eyes of Europe and of the world are fixed upon your efforts at reconstruction and enemies are ever ready to sound the knell of the downfall of republican institutions when the slightest chance is given.

We warn you then, as brothers in the common cause, to remove every shackle from freedom's limb, and your victory will be complete.

Of course, these warnings were not heeded.

Given the hindsight of history we know that U.S. workers and the then-existing socialist movement did not heed



these words of wisdom from Karl Marx and the First International.

What this means is that during the most revolutionary period of our history—when 300,000 slaveholders led a holy crusade against labor and rose up to create a slave republic—that organized labor, due to racism and its focus on narrow economic issues, could not unite with Black workers to consolidate the revolutionary gains of the Civil War. As revolutionaries we do not simply lament the past failures of our predecessors, we learn from them and use these lessons to enrich the revolutionary consciousness of the present generation.

### **The Last Will and Testament of the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution of 1867-1877**

First let us assess the political situation on the eve of the Civil War in order to fully appreciate the revolutionary character of the war. Although the industrial capitalist class of the North was rapidly becoming a powerful force in the political life of the nation, they were not the dominant force. The slaveholders were the dominant force in government. Let us make the comparison.

Look at the economic power and supremacy of the Northern industrial and merchant capitalists. In 1861 the North had 71% of the population, 72% of the railroad mileage, 92% of iron and steel production, 75% of the wealth, 68% of the value of exports, 85% of the factories, 16% of the large farms. The South lagged behind in every economic category save for large-scale farming (plantations worked by slaves). In the North, the soil and climate favored smaller farmsteads rather than large plantations. Industry was rapidly expanding, fueled by more abundant natural resources than in the South, and many large cities were established (New York was the largest city with more than 800,000 inhabitants). By 1860, one quarter of all Northerners lived in urban areas. Between 1800 and 1860, the percentage of laborers working in agricultural pursuits dropped drastically, from 70% to only 40%. Slavery was gone economically and legally, replaced in the cities and factories by immigrant labor from Europe. In fact, an overwhelming majority of immigrants, seven out of every eight, settled in the North. Transportation was more developed and easier in the North, which boasted more than two-thirds of the railroad tracks in the country. The economy was booming and periodically busting.

Right before the Civil War broke out, both houses of Congress were controlled by the slaveholders' party (i.e., the Democratic Party); the president and his cabinet were in full sympathy of the South, and seven out of nine Supreme Court justices were either slaveholders or vigorous sympathizers. All the committees of Congress were controlled by the slaveholders. Politically speaking, the economically backward slaveholding South held the

burgeoning industrial capitalists of the North in bondage. Through the infamous U.S. Supreme Court Dred Scott decision and the Fugitive Slave Act, the slaveholders were clearly embarked upon a program of expanding slavery and turning the United States into a republic dominated by slaveholders.

Nonetheless, the defeat of the Southern slaveholders and the emancipation of the slaves, given the relationship of class forces outlined above, were inevitable. The forcible, violent overthrow of the planter class and the institution of slavery created a new revolutionary situation that raised questions about how the slaveowners would be deposed and their landed estates divided up among the freed slaves and poor white farmers. Thus, the path of radical reconstruction seemed quite clear: for the Northern industrial capitalist class to maintain domination it would have to take all political power from the former slaveholding landed aristocracy and empower the former slaves and poor white farmers to reconstruct the governments of the South along the lines of bourgeois democracy.

Also, added to this revolutionary situation was the fact that some 200,000 former slaves had been recruited into the Union Army. In this intense moment of history, the previous slave uprisings of Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Shields Green and John Brown had morphed through the Civil War into a potential slave revolution with thousands of Nat Turners. In Charleston, South Carolina, the same scene of Vesey's defeat became the scene of his victory when Black soldiers marched through that place with "Liberty" inscribed on their banners, searching every house, burning slave pens and auction blocks, seizing firearms and abandoned property. Yesterday's slaves, now landless peasants armed with guns, menacing to their former masters, occupying the master's big house, tearing down the master's churches and using the lumber to build cabins, marching, singing and dancing in the streets in a moment of revolutionary ecstasy. There could be no doubt for all who cared to look that the most revolutionary ally in the democratic transformation of the South would be the freed slaves.

To sum matters up. The first phase of the revolution went down like this: 300,000 slaveholders were expropriated of having property in people and the buying and selling of human beings was abolished forever. It was estimated that Southern states had \$3 billion invested in slaves by 1860. The revolutionary measure of expropriating the planter class in the South was carried out first of all by arming the slaves, because this enabled the Union to violently crush the Slaveholders Rebellion. Not only were the planters being dispossessed, but their huge estates were subject to being divided up among the former slaves as a matter of the spoils of war. And of course, the former slaves often seized land by their own initiative; as they did in South Carolina, Mississippi and a number of other places.

Such was the general economic character of the revolution. The political character consisted of granting the franchise (the right to vote) or universal suffrage to freed Black men, which Du Bois described as the “greatest step toward democracy...ever taken in the modern world.” But no one has stated it more sharply and succinctly as the freed slaves themselves. At the January 1866 Freedmen’s Convention in Georgia, the former slaves declared that they would not “remain dormant and disinterested, while you are making laws to govern us under such different relations as obtained in our State before we were freed.” They further stated that new laws were needed which “should either recognize our rights as a people, or else the State should not exact from us the tribute of a people, for taxation without representation is contrary to the fundamental principles which govern republican countries.” This statement captures the impatience and revolutionary fervor as well as a developing national consciousness of Black people during this period. They were keenly aware of the challenges confronting them and they were capable and ready to enter upon the stage of revolution with their banners raised high and their demands clearly formulated.

Because union troops particularly Black regiments, and the Union Leagues, a mainly Black political organization, emerged as key forces backing reconstruction and remained poised to quash counter-revolution for almost a decade, Black people as a people had democratic community control in the Black Belt (Black majority) counties over how the law was enforced and who enforced it.

One must also remember the Enforcement Act of 1871, otherwise known as the Klan Act. This act made the KKK, and other groups that interfered with civil or political rights, illegal. Certain crimes, such as conspiracies to prevent people from voting, were now punishable by federal law. Under the Klan Act federal troops and marshals were used, rather than state militias, to enforce the law. Klansmen were prosecuted in federal court, where juries were often predominantly Black. Hundreds of Klan members were fined or imprisoned, and habeas corpus was suspended in nine counties in South Carolina. These efforts were so successful that the Klan was destroyed in South Carolina and decimated throughout the rest of the former Confederacy, where it had already been in decline for several years. The Klan was not to exist legally again until its re-creation in 1915.

The executive action taken by President Grant’s federal troops, which significantly included Black troops, quashed the Klan, thus preventing it from violently denying the former slaves’ right to vote. Once they were able to vote, Black people proceeded to elect their own marshals and/or sheriffs in those jurisdictions where they constituted the majority. As federal troops, marshals, sheriffs and jurors, Black people policed themselves and served and

protected themselves from the racist, organized terrorism of the Klan. To be sure there has not been any systematic study of policing during this period, but there is a book called *In My Father’s House There Are Many Mansions* by Orville Vernon Burton that talks about how former slaves became sheriffs and marshals before the end of Reconstruction. For the most part sheriffs and marshals were elected but in some instances were appointed by federal army officers.

There are some references on this issue in *Black Reconstruction* (1935) by W.E.B. Du Bois, particularly in the chapter on “The Proletariat in South Carolina.” Du Bois originally called this chapter “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat in South Carolina.” Why? Because he viewed slaves as super-exploited workers and slaveholders as agrarian capitalists producing for a capitalist market. To be sure, Black people were slaves, not proletarians. During Reconstruction they worked for the most part as landless peasants. Consequently, Du Bois was making a detailed study of the empowerment of the Black people in the South, who were overwhelmingly landless peasants. To the extent that there was a dictatorship, it was the half-hearted dictatorship of the industrial capitalists of the North. At best, they ruthlessly used the freed slaves and poor white peasants as political battering rams against the deposed planter class.

In 1877, federal troops were ordered out of the South by President Rutherford B. Hayes. Black regiments and the Union Leagues were disbanded, leaving Black people defenseless. Counter-revolution ensued, and the rest is history.

# A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory

By STEVE CUSHION

## FOREWORD

*The war constitutes an encouraging example of what can be achieved by the tenacity and revolutionary will of the people. The revolutionary armed combatants, in the final phase of the struggle, scarcely numbered three thousand men.... Our workers and peasants, integrated into the Rebel Army, with the support of the middle class, pulverized the tyrannous regime, destroyed the armed apparatus of oppression, and achieved the full independence of the country. The working class, with its revolutionary general strike in the final battle, contributed decisively to the triumph [of the Revolution]. This brilliant feat of our Revolution in the military terrain is little known outside the country. It has been published in anecdotal and sporadic form, but a documented and systematic history of it remains to be written.*  
— FIDEL CASTRO

Fidel Castro's retrospective analysis of the insurrectionary phase of the Cuban Revolution, delivered at the first Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1975, recognizes the contribution of the working class to the revolutionary struggle, but confines this contribution to two areas: active service in the rebel army and the general strike of January 1, 1959. Whereas the latter receives minimal attention in historical accounts of the Revolution, the deeds of the small band of revolutionary guerrillas continue to exert a powerful hold on popular and scholarly depictions of its eventual triumph. Despite the rhetorical invocations of the *pueblo* (the people) by the revolutionary leadership, and despite the official embrace of Marxist-Leninist ideology from 1961, there remains surprisingly little documented and systematic analysis of the contribution of Cuban workers to the eventual overthrow of the detested Batista regime. Yet, as this engaging and meticulously researched book amply demonstrates, a militant and well-organized labor movement, often operating independently of union leaders, played a pivotal role in the victory of the Cuban insurrection, not only through the final coup de grâce of the 1959 general strike, but in myriad actions that served to defend workers' interests, resist state repression, and materially support the armed struggle. Thus there was a third arm to the revolutionary forces, a labor movement, which has been consistently ignored by both general and labor historians of Cuba alike.

Scholarly neglect of the role of organized labor in the

Cuban Revolution can be partly explained by the nature of the official trade union organization, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), under the leadership of Eusebio Mujal. As this book vividly describes, the CTC leadership, working hand in glove with the Batista regime, was responsible for gross abuses including interference in union elections, removal from office of elected officials, expulsions of troublesome officials from the unions, and discrediting individual leaders by false or exaggerated accusations of Communism. By 1957, in the wake of further anti-communist purges carried out with the full backing of state security forces, the CTC was openly operating as Mujal's personal fiefdom. However, in conflating organized labor with the corrupt bureaucracy of the CTC, scholars have overlooked or underestimated the activities of ordinary workers and the critical role they played in resisting not only the corrupt trade union leadership but also the iniquities of the Batista regime. Steve Cushion's work calls for a broader definition of organized labor, looking beyond the formal structures of the trade union federation to include the multiplicity of unofficial, informal structures through which ordinary workers defend their interests. This includes the activities of shop stewards, independently minded union officials, strike committees, regional committees, mass meetings, and unofficial, as well as clandestine, networks of militants, all of which make up the wider labor movement and interact together to produce the dynamic of industrial action.

What emerges in this book is a lively and variegated picture of working-class activism that sheds new light on the struggles of workers, ranging from those employed in the more traditionally proletarian sectors of sugar, transport, textiles, and utilities to those in shops, department stores, and white-collar professions in offices and banks. Drawing on a wealth of untapped sources including material from local and provincial archives, interviews with veterans of the labor and revolutionary movements, clandestine publications, leaflets, pamphlets, and other political ephemera encompassing previously unused collections from activists' personal archives, the book offers a rich and detailed account of labor activism in 1950s Cuba. This activism, often undertaken at considerable risk to its protagonists, took multiple forms, from slowdowns, walkouts, and solidarity strikes to mass meetings and street demonstrations, to sabotage and the formation of clandestine cells that would form the basis of the workers' section (*sección obrera*) of the guerrilla movement. Thus, for example, we see railway workers in Guantánamo developing the tactics of *movimiento obrero beligerante* (trade unionism on a war footing), which combined mass action with acts of sabotage, an approach that led telephone workers to cut phone lines, sugar workers to burn fields, and railway workers to derail strikebreaking trains during strikes. Further west, in Matanzas, we see a textile workers' strike leading to the complete shutdown of the city, with female workers in the Woolworth's store playing a central role in enforcing

the ciudad-muerta (city-wide general strike) in defiance of state security forces who attempted to force them to reopen the store. And in Oriente Province, we see mass demonstrations and a general strike initiated in response to the murder of Frank País, one of the leaders of the Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio (MR-26-7, Revolutionary Movement of July 26), which constituted probably the biggest public demonstration of opposition during the entire Batista dictatorship. As Cushion argues, this strike, so often characterized as spontaneous, suggests the existence of a high level of clandestine organization that was able to react quickly and seize an opportunity without requiring orders to do so.

This attention to local contexts constitutes one of the many contributions of this book. Looking beyond Havana to consider actions right across the island, Cushion highlights the existence of an energetic and independent milieu of local labor activism, acting autonomously from, and indeed in defiance of, the central labor leadership. For example, sugar workers at the Delicias y Chaparra mills in Las Tunas undertook strike action on their own terms after the mujalista union officials melted away at the first sign of trouble. These workers organized themselves in the absence of their official leaders by holding daily mass meetings, despite the presence of Rural Guardsmen on horseback with drawn sabers. In Santiago, members of the local PSP, the communist Partido Socialista Popular (Popular Socialist Party), acted in defiance of direct instructions from the leadership in Havana, calling strikes to support the November 1956 Granma landing by MR-26-7 rebels, an action considered adventurist by the party's national leadership. This attention to local traditions of activism, local networks, and solidarities, and local responses to national events, contributes to a more variegated picture of working-class activism that highlights the differences and tensions between and within the trade union and political leadership and the rank and file, as well as between the capital and the provinces. It also helps to explain the different outcomes across different sectors and regions, for example, contributing to our understanding of why strikes in some sectors succeeded in achieving their goals while others were defeated. Hence Cushion's regionally differentiated analysis of the August 1957 strike suggests that it was more effective in areas where the M-26-7 and the PSP had a history of established collaboration.

Taken together, the workers' struggles provide a compelling account of how organized labor contributed directly and indirectly to help shape the course of revolutionary struggle in 1950s Cuba. As Cushion depicts so vividly here, workers provided valuable material support for the rebel guerrillas in a number of ways, including organizing significant strike action in support of the Granma landing and armed uprising in Santiago. Workers in shops, warehouses, and distribution depots proved valuable by large-scale pilfering of essentials, railway workers were able to move those supplies

under the noses of the police, and bus drivers formed propaganda distribution networks, while telephone operators eavesdropped on police conversations, providing vital intelligence for those more directly engaged in the armed struggle. Others organized clandestine networks involved in acts of sabotage such as derailing an armored train carrying soldiers sent to protect the vital railway system, and helping disaffected soldiers to desert. Such actions depended on a high degree of organization that reached its apotheosis in the revolutionary general strike of January 1, 1959. Overlooked in much of the literature, this strike is reassessed here for its decisive contribution to the triumph of the revolution, securing the capital, heading off a potential army coup, and ensuring the victory of the revolutionary forces. This analysis aligns with Castro's own estimation of the strike's significance. Thus, for Cushion, the final victory of the revolutionary forces should be viewed as the result of a combination of armed guerrilla action and mass support.

Cushion's analysis also casts a fresh eye on working-class politics in the period, assessing the relationship between organized labor and the two main organizations seeking to mobilize the working class: the PSP and the M-26-7. In so doing, he brings a new perspective to both, highlighting for example how local traditions of labor militancy directly contributed to the development of the M-26-7's network of clandestine workplace cells (the secciones obreras), and showing how mistakes made at the leadership level derived partly from their lack of experience of labor organizing, contributing to the failure of the general strike called for April 9, 1958. And though the PSP has often been considered a latecomer to the revolutionary struggle, Cushion underscores the immense contribution made by rank-and-file Communists in sustaining levels of working-class discontent in areas where they had influence, often at considerable risk to their lives. Meticulously tracing the evolution of the relationship between the M-26-7 and the PSP, this book provides a much more nuanced picture of the internal debates within and between these two organizations, the points of commonality and difference in their respective approaches to confronting the Batista regime, and the local specificities informing the mixture of competition and collaboration that characterized relations between the two. Cushion's detailed analysis of joint endeavors such as the Comités de Unidad Obrera and the Frente Obrero Nacional Unido (FONU) suggests that the coming together of the M-26-7 and the PSP started at the working-class base of both organizations. Local grassroots collaboration between PSP and M-26-7 members in the workplace provided a solid base for unity on which to construct the attempted national organization of a workers' united front.

In foregrounding the courageous struggles of Cuban workers and their families in the face of increasing state brutality, this rich and engaging book makes a welcome addition to the literature on the Cuban Revolution.



## CH 6. TWO STRIKES

In the period from the end of 1956 to the beginning of May 1958 two important mass strikes took place in Cuba. The first, starting in Santiago de Cuba at the beginning of August 1957, was a great success; the second, called for April 9, 1958, was an abject failure. An analysis of these events is crucial in gaining an understanding of the developing tactics of the communists and the July 26th Movement. The strikes can be used as a lens through which the issues can be examined. It is also possible to assess the growth of the rebel clandestine labor organization by examining the extent of each strike. Finally, the lessons learned by the rebels from the failure of the April strike resulted in far-reaching organizational and political changes, arguably ensuring the final victory of the revolutionary forces.

As 1957 progressed, the predominant political and social question became the continued existence of the dictatorship. This change in priorities from the economic to the political, combined with the growing realization that small-scale industrial action was becoming impractical in the face of repression, resulted in increased workplace sabotage and clandestine aid to the rebels, while the frequency of local or sector-based strikes decreased through 1957 and early 1958. As part of this process, the MR-26-7 set up a committee, chaired by Nico Torres, to organize the spread of clandestine revolutionary working-class organizations from Guantánamo and Santiago to the rest of the island, and at the same time building a support network for the rebels in the hills. It is, of course, always difficult to trace the activities of successful clandestine movements; police and newspaper accounts only describe the failures. Nevertheless, there is evidence, in addition to leaflets and underground newspapers found in the archives and personal collections, as well as the recollections of participants, which can guide an attempt to reconstruct the previously untold history of the spread of the influence of the revolutionary workers' underground. This leads to a reassessment of the role of clandestine organization in the successful general strike in Oriente Province, which was sparked by the death of Frank País, a popular national leader of the MR-26-7 urban underground, who was murdered by the police in Santiago in August 1957. This strike is commonly characterized as "spontaneous," but a more nuanced explanation is needed that considers the relationship between spontaneity and organization.

Following this strike, both the PSP and MR-26-7 stepped up their propaganda for a general strike to overthrow the regime. However, the leaders of these organizations

drew very different conclusions from the strike, each using the experience to reinforce an entrenched position. Nevertheless, starting in October 1957, the PSP and rebel army leaderships began talking to each other on a relatively formal basis. However, discussions with the PSP had not advanced greatly by the time the MR-26-7 called a general strike on April 9, 1958. This strike, which received almost no working-class support in Havana, cost the lives of many of the movement's best underground activists. The subsequent repression was particularly severe, with Batista's chief of police issuing the instruction: "No wounded. No prisoners."

In the aftermath, both the PSP and the MR-26-7 took stock in May 1958. The changes in the practice that resulted from these internal debates and the lessons drawn by both organizations led to a convergence in the tactics they advocated for the overthrow of the dictatorship. The PSP accepted the need for armed opposition to the dictatorship and the MR-26-7 took a more open approach to working-class organization. This paved the way for practical joint activity and a new phase in the revolutionary process that marked another turning point in the history of the Cuban insurrection.

### A Clandestine Network

Frank País, national leader of the July 26th urban underground, was one of the first among the organization's leadership to see the potential importance of a revolutionary labor movement. He was killed before he could implement his ideas, but the seeds he planted flourished as the networks of militants he encouraged spread from their origins in Guantánamo.

Frank País was arrested in March 1957 as part of the government crackdown following the November 30 assault on Santiago and an attack on the presidential palace by the Directorio Revolucionario on March 13. Along with over a hundred other MR-26-7 defendants, he was released in May, when Judge Manuel Urrutia defied pressure from the government and ruled that they were exercising their constitutional right to rebel in the face of tyranny. Upon his release, País immediately set about reorganizing the MR-26-7 underground movement. As part of this process, he decided that much greater attention was to be paid to recruiting and organizing workers. As a result of the success of the strike in Guantánamo in support of the Granma landing, Nico Torres, now a wanted man, was made coordinator of a committee charged with rolling out the workplace cell structure and spreading the Guantánamo example nationwide. He spent the next year crisscrossing the island with this objective. However, while Frank País was certainly in the forefront of those in the movement who saw the importance of labor support for the revolution, he still had an incomplete understanding of the need to organize workers around their specific class-based interests.



Of the senior figures in the organization with a labor movement background, other than those from Guantánamo, José María de la Aguilera had led only a single strike in a white collar industry, while David Salvador's experience was limited to local activity in the sugar mill at central Stewart near the town of Ciego de Avila in the rural center of the island. Conrado Bécquer was still leading a double life, attempting to maintain a precarious legality, and Julian Alemán was deeply involved in the ongoing troubles of the Matanzas textile industry and did not yet have effective lines of communication with Santiago. From the beginning, the 26th July Movement had a perspective of organizing workers, but their role had been seen principally as providing financial and logistical support for the rebels in the mountains, as well as engaging in sabotage. The success of the Guantánamo strikes in early December 1956 had impressed Frank País enormously with their power and potential, but he seems not to have realized the years of previous work that had been necessary to create the solid foundations that his MR-26-7 compañeros in that city had been able to draw upon.

The PSP was continually urging the importance of "immediate demands" in the process of organizing workers to resist the dictatorship, but the MR-26-7 leadership would not come to realize this until later, after they had suffered a severe setback in April of the following year. Thus, the MR-26-7 propaganda aimed at the working class at this stage of the movement's development was extremely general, concentrating on appeals to patriotism and rejection of corruption and tyranny. There was some mention of the defense of wages and conditions, demands for trade union democracy, and vague promises of social justice, but the lack of familiarity with the working-class political milieu is clearly evident in surviving leaflets and newspapers.

Nevertheless, when Frank País was released from prison, he wrote a report calling for serious attempts to be made to recruit workers saying that the movement had forgotten the importance of the workers, who, if well organized and led, could overthrow the regime. He urged the creation of a disciplined and educated leadership that could lead small-scale general strikes to gain experience, in the way that had already been done in Guantánamo, where he described efforts made to organize the workers as formidable and which had shown in practice what could be done. However, according to the memoirs of Armando Hart, one of the leaders of the MR-26-7 in Santiago, during these early months of 1957, Frank País's main priorities were to support and supply the rebel guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra and to win over the conjunto de instituciones cívicas (civic institutions) to supporting an armed insurrection. This organization, led by the president of the Cuban Medical Association, was a loose association of nearly two hundred professional and religious organizations ranging from the Freemasons to the Catholic Teachers'

League and the Havana Bar Association. It had come to represent the more liberal elements of the Cuban middle class, who were becoming increasingly alienated from the regime as the violence worsened and the economy deteriorated. As part of the process of attracting support from the instituciones cívicas, a meeting of the 26 de Julio leadership in the Sierra Maestra in February 1957 decided to set up the Movimiento de Resistencia Cívica (MRC). This organization, while being firmly controlled by MR-26-7 members, was nominally independent and acted as a bridge between the rebels and the civic institutions. It is clear from the memoirs of participants such as Armando Hart that the MRC received a much higher priority than did building the MR-26-7 *sección obrera*. The Guantánamo militants, having received the blessing of the national leadership, would be given a free hand in building their organization and spreading the ideas of *movimiento obrero beligerante*.

To this end, Frank País asked Níco Torres to write a report describing their organization in Guantánamo. Frank País gave this report to Armando Hart, who in turn sought the advice of friends in the PSP and other Santiago trade unionists with whom he was in contact, such as a Bacardi delivery driver, Ramón Alvarez. This process led to Torres being appointed head of a national committee charged with organizing the movement's work in the labor movement. The committee consisted of Torres, a sugar worker called Asterio Hernández, a telephone engineer, José de la Nuez, and a bank worker, Jorge Gómez. It was in pursuit of this task that Níco Torres began to tour the country in order to generalize the experience from Guantánamo, while Octavio Louit and Ramón Alvarez moved to become provincial workers' organizers for Las Villas and the central region of the island. It is hard to trace the progress of this work because its secret nature precluded the keeping of records and its success required that the activities of the group did not come to the attention of the authorities. Nevertheless, we can piece together the general lines of the organizing drive from later interviews.

For example, we know from the investigations of Delio Orozco, City Historian of Manzanillo, that Torres and Gomez were in the town of Manzanillo in May 1957. Gomez knew another bank worker, Nardi Iglesias, who had already started building four-person cells in his own industry. From this base, the Manzanillo sección obrera grew and formed cells in the unions representing electrical workers, transport, telephones, pharmaceuticals, bakers, shop workers, shoemakers, and coffee roasters. The Manzanillo electrical workers specialized in sabotage, teaching workers in other trades the use of explosives, while the bus drivers of the El Paraíso company brought propaganda material from Santiago. Given the proximity to the rebels in the Sierra, raising money and supplies for the rebels was of considerable importance and the Manzanillo sección obrera sold bonds known as bonos, which served as

propaganda fliers as well as fund-raisers.

Torres and his committee were not the only MR-26-7 activists organizing among the working class. In Matanzas, recruiting out of the disputes in their industry, the textile workers became the backbone of their regional sección obrera. The struggles of the textile workers from 1952 onward, the sacrifice of the Cuban textile industry to the interests of the sugar oligarchy in the 1954 commercial treaty with Japan, and the anti-union attitude of the Hedges family, American owners of two factories, La Rayonera and Textilera de Ariguanabo, all served to increase nationalist sentiment and provided fertile grounds for the MR-26-7 to recruit members. The local offices of the textile workers' union became the organizing center for the 26th July Movement in the province, which also adopted an approach, similar to the Guantánamo militants described above, of combining sabotage and strike action.

There is no surviving record of anyone from Guantánamo visiting Matanzas, and it seems likely that textile workers of the province independently developed similar tactics to meet a similar problem. They were coordinated by Julián Alemán, regional secretary of the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Textiles (FNTT). Julián Alemán was also national vice general secretary of the union, but he had managed to conceal his links with the MR-26-7 and, along with Conrad Bequer and Conrado Rodriguez, was one of only three senior trade union officials to break with Mujal and join the rebels. He was succeeded in his role as coordinator of action in Matanzas by Joaquín Torres, who worked for La Rayona, when he was forced to leave the area to escape the attention of the police after helping to organize a strike at the end of July 1957 following the murder of Frank País in Santiago.

### **“Spontaneous” Strike?**

In the summer of 1957, Frank País, now MR-26-7 National Coordinator of Action, was based in Santiago, where he was working both to promote the movement's clandestine operations and to organize support for the guerrillas in the nearby Sierra Maestra. His murder at the end of July 1957 by a local police chief provoked a general strike in Oriente, which was probably the biggest public demonstration of opposition during the entire Batista dictatorship. The August '57 strike is normally characterized as “spontaneous,” though spontaneity is confused with lack of organization and political direction. This betrays a failure to understand that a far greater level of organization is required to produce a “spontaneous” strike than one formally called by the bureaucracy. Statements by militants involved in the strike paint a more complex picture and lend weight to Daniel Guérin's assertion that spontaneity and organization are always intertwined. As he argues, “There is always someone pushing for spontaneity.” Therefore it is probably fair to say that, though the demonstrations

and strikes at the time of Frank País's murder and funeral were spontaneous in the sense that no organization had planned them in advance, the speed with which the strikes spread suggest a high level of clandestine organization that was able to react quickly and seize an opportunity without requiring orders to do so.

Frank País was caught in a police roundup on July 30. He was identified by a police informer and shot dead on the spot by Colonel José Maria Salas Cañizares. This was part of a reign of terror that the colonel had imposed on the city of Santiago de Cuba in the period following the events of November 30, 1956. Frank País's funeral was the occasion for a massive show of opposition, not just to his murder, but in protest against the general level of brutality being visited on the city. Miguel Angel Yero, an activist in the MR-26-7 sección obrera, describes how he and his comrades went to the funeral with the idea of initiating some action, if at all possible. Seeing a large turnout, combined with the fact that very many Santiagueros shared their anger, they started to shout for a strike. The call was taken up, and the 60,000 people at the funeral marched through the town, calling workers out of their factories, offices, and shops until the town was paralyzed in a strike that lasted five days. Contemporary photographs and accounts of the funeral confirm the prominent part played by women in the demonstrations following the funeral. The July 26th Movement had recently been working to organize the shopworkers in Santiago, and these workers, predominantly women, played an important role in forcing their employers to close the city's commercial enterprises as well as picketing out other groups of workers. Many of these women attempted to present a letter to U.S. ambassador Earl Smith and were attacked by the police using fire hoses. This shocked the newly appointed ambassador whose mission thereby did not start well. The vehemence of the popular reaction startled the police and army, which, after a few skirmishes, retreated to their barracks where they were besieged for the rest of the day.

The strike spread quickly in Oriente, Carta Semanal reporting complete shutdowns of Palma Soriano, Contramaestre, Bayamo, Manzanillo, Guantánamo, Campechuela, and Jiguaní. In Manzanillo, the situation was considerably aggravated when two soldiers opened fire on a group of passersby who were jeering at them and, in the process, killed two little boys, aged five and eight, the Cordové brothers. The strike in Manzanillo lasted several days following this outrage.

An MR-26-7 militant from Guantánamo, Demetrio Monseny Villa, was in Santiago as the strike started and carried news of the events back home. The leadership of the MR-26-7 in Guantánamo had been taken by another ex-Trotskyist, Gustavo Fraga, who worked on the U.S. naval base. A strike committee was formed, and, starting with the railways, the town and surrounding country went on

strike the following morning, August 1. Frank País was well known and respected in the area and the strike was completely solid, the railway, the electrical plant, the aerodrome, the banks and buses, along with most shops and businesses, shutting down. To accompany this industrial action, strikers bombed some bridges and power lines as well as taking part in armed skirmishes with the police and rural guard. Here as well, the brutal behavior of the forces of order helped spread the strike, as the army broke open closed shops and threw their merchandise into the street, thereby giving a propaganda coup to the rebels, who ensured that the soldiers were the only ones engaged in looting.

Fraga, as well as being in overall charge of the 26th July intervention in the strike in Guantánamo, was also running the explosives factory in a garage in the city. On August 4, there was an explosion that killed Fraga and several other members of the movement. The explosion in the bomb factory was a blow to the movement, as they not only lost some important militants, but also a considerable stock of weapons. However, it served to prolong the strike and deepen bitterness against the regime as the first act of the police on arrival at the scene was to shoot dead two neighbors who were not involved with the MR-26-7 but were merely trying to put out the flames and stop the fire spreading to the rest of the neighborhood. Such acts of random brutality against uninvolved bystanders, similar to the killing of the Cordové boys in Manzanillo, are a common feature of the times that did much to increase opposition to the regime. But with Guantánamo the only city remaining on strike by August 9, the national leadership of the MR-26-7 ordered a return to work, fearing the army was planning to make an example of the town.

Octavio Louit, now a clandestine organizer for the 26th July Movement, was in Santiago for consultations with the national leadership when Frank País was killed. He returned to Camagüey to spread the strike, while Torres continued on to Havana to see what could be done in the capital. In Camagüey, there was a positive response from the rail workers, the intercity bus drivers, the banks, and the airport. However, it did not prove possible to produce a similar result in Las Villas, where the army had rounded up as many militants as they could and succeeded in intimidating most of the workforce, with bus and truck drivers being forced to return to work at gunpoint. There were considerably more stoppages in Pinar del Rio Province, most notably the town of Artemisia.

Both sides saw Havana as key to the situation, and the government concentrated its efforts here. The action did not spread to Havana immediately and the Havana strike committee called for the action to start on August 5. There was little response, although there was some action from bus drivers and construction workers, along with stoppages in the Coca-Cola factory and by the tobacco workers employed by the Partagas and H.

Upmann companies. Little or nothing occurred in the suburbs or the rest of Havana Province. The Matanzas textile industry saw some partial strike action and token stoppages, but Julián Alemán's base in La Jarcia was the only factory where the workers walked out completely. Once the strike had failed to get off the ground in Havana, it quickly petered out in the east.

Although it is difficult to trace the organization of a clandestine movement, this strike gives us a snapshot of the development of the workers' underground in the summer of 1957. There was clearly an established organization in most of Oriente Province, given the speed with which the strike spread to other towns, such as Bayamo. The response from Camagüey suggests a well-rooted network there as well. It is probably significant that Octavio Louit, speaking twenty years later, used the expression "núcleos obreros combativos" (combative workers' cells) for the organizations in Ciega de Avila, Jatibonico, Florida, and other parts of the central zone, while talking of "compañeros muy valerosos" (very brave comrades) in Las Villas, thereby implying a real network in the former case, but more isolated individuals in the second. We know that the MR-26-7 sección obrera in Las Villas was based on the sugar workers around Conrado Bécquer. Bécquer was still operating legally at this stage and may not have prioritized building the underground network outside his traditional base. It may also be assumed that the Las Villas sección obrera was not yet organized to reflect the Guantánamo experience with its principles of movimiento obrero beligerante, but was concentrating on support and supply for the guerrillas. Finally, Bécquer had sour relations with the Communist Party, as witnessed by the mutual public recriminations and accusations.

Generally speaking, areas where the August strike was most effective were those where there was established cooperation between the MR-26-7 and the PSP, a point made indirectly by Carta Semanal in its analysis, which was printed in the following weeks. The Communist newspaper blames the failure to convince the majority of the Havana workers to join the strike on government repression and Mujal's "treason," but spends the most time expressing the opinion that these could have been overcome had there been unity in the opposition. Indeed it goes further and, without presenting any evidence, accuses the "bourgeois opposition" of undermining the strike and being more interested in not offending the U.S. ambassador. The MR-26-7 is specifically named as one of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties against whom this accusation is leveled. Though this is obviously unfair as, after all, it was the MR-26-7 who called the strike in Havana for August 5, what is certainly true is that the July 26th organization in Havana did not involve the PSP in the planning of the strike call. There had been some contact between the MR-26-7 and the communists through the Juventud Socialista (JS, Socialist Youth), but Luis Fajado, the PSP contact person, was not present at

the meeting in the church of San Francisco where the decision to launch the strike on the 5th was taken, and it probably took the Communists by surprise. Therefore, in those areas of the capital's labor force, such as the docks, where the MR-26-7 appears to have had little influence in the summer of 1957, by the time word had spread of the strike call, its failure would already have been apparent. The fact that some areas of Communist influence, mainly bus crews and tobacco workers, took part in the action testifies to the PSP's willingness to participate, whereas the disciplinary action taken against two hundred bus drivers for taking part in the strike can only have increased the communists' sense of bitterness. The question of disciplinary reprisals brings us back to the strong support for the strike in Pinar del Rio. In the Minas de Matahambre, attempts were made to arrest some workers after the strike, but the rest of the miners refused to start work until their colleagues were released. The cry of "¡O trabaja todos, o no trabajaremos ninguno!" (Either all of us work or none of us will!) was successful and the detainees were released.

Finally, we must consider the lack of response from Matanzas, despite its militant tradition and strong workers' section of the 26th July Movement among the textile workers. Neither of the detailed surveys of the revolutionary period conducted by Gladys García Pérez and Clara Chávez Alvarez give any indication of strike action in Matanzas in August 1957, but they do not offer any reason for the failure of the region to support the strike. Any explanation must be conjecture, but the previously mentioned lack of contact between the Matanzas militants and their comrades in the east may have meant that, by the time word had spread of the actions in Oriente, the strike had already passed its peak.

The search for explanations for the lack of success in Havana or Matanzas should not result in an underestimation of the speed with which the strike spread in Oriente, Camagüey, and Pinar del Rio, an impressive achievement in the circumstances. A general strike may start more or less spontaneously in a single town, but to spread it across three provinces in a matter of days demonstrates a significant level of organization. Thus the foregoing description of the spread of the strike paints a useful snapshot of the state of oppositional working-class organization in August 1957.

### **April 9, 1958**

The success in Oriente of the strikes in protest of Frank País's murder eclipsed the subsequent failure to spread the action further west. This would encourage the leadership of the MR-26-7 to call a general strike starting on April 9, 1958, which they envisaged as the final blow required to overthrow the dictatorship. However, it was a complete disaster, begging the questions: How can we explain the success of the strike in some areas and the lack of response in others? What is its significance and

what lessons were drawn from it by the opposition?

The leaderships of both the PSP and the MR-26-7 were extremely impressed by the impact of the August 1957 strike, but drew different conclusions, both using the experience to reinforce an entrenched position. The MR-26-7 leadership concluded that one more push was all that was required for victory, without fully realizing the amount of work that still remained to be done in terms of building the networks, particularly in Havana, which was necessary to call a successful nationwide general strike. The PSP, on the other hand, having seen the widespread support of their proposals for a 20 percent wage claim, as well as the strikes against repression, felt that they had cause to believe that their approach, *la lucha de masas*, was bearing fruit. They concluded that the strike had weakened the government and had proved that strike action alone was the sufficient and only way to bring down the government. Moreover, the MR-26-7 had not learned the lesson of the sugar strike, which had shown the importance of the economic struggles in radicalizing workers, and thus ignored the PSP's insistence on the importance of raising "immediate demands." But with both organizations committed to a general strike, albeit with a completely different understanding of the term, there was some basis for the discussions between Fidel Castro and the veteran communist sugar workers' leader, Ursinio Rojas, which took place in the Sierra Maestra in October 1957.

Following this meeting, an attempt was made to form a united workers' front. There were several meetings in Havana, with the CNDDO represented by Carlos Rodríguez Cariaga, Miguel Quintero, and occasionally Ursinio Rojas, while the MR-26-7 was represented by Níco Torres, Octavio Louit, and Conrado Bécquer. However, these meetings failed to reach agreement because, according to Torres, the PSP was opposed to the armed struggle. Nevertheless, these discussions produced a softening of the party's attitude to the guerrillas, which, though it still extolled *la lucha de masas* and condemned urban terrorism, pledged its support to the rebels in the Sierra Maestra in March 1958, with the reservation that armed action must support mass action rather than the other way round. *Carta Semanal* also started to take a much less hostile line when speaking of Conrado Bécquer, having become aware that he was a member of the MR-26-7. Furthermore, the PSP national committee decided, in February, to send one of its members, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, to the Sierra for face-to-face discussions, but before this could be arranged, the 26th July Movement unilaterally called a general strike.

By the spring of 1958, the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra had survived for over a year and had grown into an efficient disciplined fighting force. With the help of the urban underground, they had established control over their area, carried out many successful attacks on government forces, and built up a considerable



measure of support among the local campesinos. Their continued existence helped maintain the atmosphere of crisis and gave hope and inspiration to the regime's opponents, while the army's obvious inability to destroy them militarily undermined Batista's waning credibility. Add to this the fact that, by the beginning of March 1958, a student strike had managed to close much of the country's educational system, and a general strike call appeared to be the logical next step. Faustino Pérez, who was in overall charge of the operation, said in a later interview that the success of the August 1957 strike convinced him that conditions existed for the final uprising that would overthrow the regime and that this led to an unrealistic view of the balance of forces. In a letter to Fidel Castro dated April 2, 1958, Pérez states that "all sectors look favorably on the strike and are ready to support," and a circular to all provincial heads of the sección obrera in early March says nothing about organizing for the strike, but is almost totally concerned with the steps necessary to take over the CTC after the strike had been won. Having previously seen that it was possible to organize a general strike in the east, all sides saw the success or failure of the strike in Havana as key to the situation. However, though the organization of the FON had continued to grow and establish itself outside the capital, it had made only limited inroads in Havana itself. This was in part because anti-communist elements in the Havana MR-26-7 underground were unhappy with Castro's discussions with the PSP and, as a result, refused to organize joint strike committees in the capital with communists for sectarian reasons. It should be stressed that at this point the FON was far from being a unified organization and its practice varied enormously from region to region, depending on the politics and previous experience of its leaders in each locality. In particular, there was an east-west split with the concept of movimiento obrero beligerante being more dominant in the east, whereas in the west the role of the workers was seen as supporting the militias and raising money. This would affect the course of the April strike, because the importance of winning the capital meant that it was to be run from Havana.

Faustino Pérez wrote to Fidel Castro at the beginning of April expressing unhappiness at the manifesto that Castro had issued on March 26. This manifesto said that "the leadership of the FON will coordinate their efforts with the workers' sections of all political and revolutionary organizations," a policy that was not popular with the Havana MR-26-7 leadership. Nevertheless, in some of the industrial suburbs of Havana, San Miguel del Padrón, Guanabacoa, Regla, Bejucal, San Jose de las Lajas, and Luyanó, joint committees had been established, but this was without the consent, perhaps without even the knowledge, of the Havana leadership of the 26th July Movement.

The MR-26-7, prior to April 1958, had an essentially military view of the general strike, and workers were

expected to place the "national interest" above their perceived class interests. This caused the MR-26-7 to give responsibility for the strike organization to the Movimiento de Resistencia Cívica in Havana, an organization that had neither the experience nor the networks capable of fulfilling their role. The national strike committee, which consisted of Faustino Pérez, Marcelo Salado, Manolo Rey, David Salvador, and Marcelo Fernández, had little experience or understanding of labor militancy. Their conception of a general strike relied much more heavily on sabotage and the armed action of militia fighters than on the conscious self-activity of rank-and-file workers, more of an armed popular insurrection than a traditional workers' strike. This was not the opinion of everyone in the MR-26-7 sección obrera, as the bank worker José María de la Aguilera made clear in an interview with an Argentine journalist later in 1958.

However, in the spring of that year, such voices as Aguilera's were in a minority in Havana. From the end of 1957, with Níco Torres incapacitated by illness, the FON itself had been under the leadership of David Salvador, a sugar worker from Ciego de Avila. He was an ex-communist and a founding member of the 26th July Movement. Despite his occupational background, his involvement had been mainly in the general political arena and his experience of the working-class movement was limited. This inexperience prevented his appreciating the inadequacy of the organization in Havana, while the hangover from his previous relationship with the PSP meant that he had little inclination to work with them.

Reading the Communist Party's literature of the time, it is obvious that they thought the strike would start on May Day. Communists in the industrial suburbs of Havana started agitating for a general strike from the beginning of March. For example, on March 14 the Juventud Socialista in San Miguel del Padrón organized a march through the area, shouting "¡Huelga General!" (General Strike!) and "¡Abajo Batista!" (Down with Batista!), in which they managed to involve some of the youth section of the July 26th Movement. This agitation in support of a general strike was combined with a series of open letters and appeals calling for the unity of the FON with the CNDDO. Nevertheless, the secrecy about the start of the strike obviously irritated the PSP, which accused the MR-26-7 of sectarianism on several occasions, even while calling for unity.

Despite the insistence of many local FON organizers that they needed seventy-two-hours' notice to activate their networks, the strike organizers decided to keep the date of the proposed action secret, only telling MR-26-7 militants in Havana on the morning of April 9 itself. If the date was secret, the fact that a strike was planned was not, Fidel Castro having announced a forthcoming revolutionary general strike when he made his declaration of "total war" on March 12. So forewarned, the government had suspended the constitution and



placed the army and police on a war footing. The CTC bureaucracy had stepped up its anti-Castro propaganda, accusing the MR-26-7 of stabbing the working class in the back, while issuing threats that any workers supporting the strike would be dismissed and that the unions would not support them. To this end, the CTC bureaucracy drew up lists of suspected militants for the police and the employers.

Thus, while the authorities were prepared, most workers were taken completely by surprise when the strike call came at 11 a.m. on April 9 and were thereby denied that feeling of ownership that is so essential to the success of a strike. The police and army, supported by a pro-government militia, the Tigers, rampaged through the streets of Havana, discharging their weapons at random. The poorly armed MR-26-7 militia was unable to wrest control—indeed, most members were not even in a position to defend themselves. In these circumstances, most workers found it impossible to leave their workplaces, and the strike failed.

In the Archivo Nacional in Havana, there is a typewritten account of the April 9 strike, written by Roger Venegas Calabuch, coordinator of the MR-26-7 grouping in the port of Havana. He paints a graphic image of chaotic organization; the first he hears of the strike is at half past ten on the morning of April 9, when he is ordered by the clandestine MR-26-7 leadership in Havana to “strike the port of Havana.” He was astonished and replied that it was impossible to pull out 10,000 workers in thirty minutes. He says they had no weapons, while armed police were everywhere. Meanwhile, the leaflets arguing for the strike did not arrive until two o’clock in the afternoon. In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the strike failed. The government television station was able to dismiss the affair as “isolated groups of criminal elements under the leadership of the communist party,” despite the fact that, on the morning of April 9, PSP members had been as much at a loss as everyone else.

The CNDDO kept a tactful silence on the disaster, but Carta Semanal was vitriolic, attacking the MR-26-7 for sectarianism and for sterile commando raids producing the unnecessary deaths of brave young people. Nevertheless, the paper admitted that the limited but courageous response showed that the workers saw the necessity of a general strike. Carta Semanal also noted the relative greater success in the eastern provinces and condemned divisions in the opposition; the subtext here is that in the east there was a greater tradition of united working-class action involving communist workers. Outside the capital, the response to the strike call was mixed but far from insignificant, as Table 6.1 indicates.

Many workers in Havana had been able to protect their living standards and staffing levels because of the nature of the predominant industries. I discussed previously

**TABLE 6.1: Strike Activity outside Havana**

Guanabacoa	MR-26-7 militia succeeds in sealing off access roads, disarming the police, and seizing control of the town but have to disappear when it becomes clear that they were alone.
Matanzas Province	Many agricultural workers stop work in rural areas.
La Rayonera	Work stops in the textile factory following sabotage of the water supply.
Matanzas and Cardenas	Workers who walk out in response to a strike call broadcast over the radio quickly return to work as news arrives from Havana.
Las Villas Province	Junta Patriótica de las Villas, which involves all sections of the militant opposition, formed earlier in the month.
Sagua la Grande	Town seized by the local rebel militia and only retaken following fierce fighting with the loss of 14 militiamen. Aircraft used to bomb militia positions with much civilian loss of life.
Santa Clara	Complete stoppage of the railway and intercity buses, along with a partial stoppage of commercial activity and some strike activity among carpenters and tobacco workers. Some fighting in the streets.
Cabaiguán	Strikes by bank, tobacco, and telephone workers.
Sancti Spiritus	Electrical and telephone workers as well as central Vega.
Yaguajay	Complete work stoppage.
Camagüey City	Strike starts on the afternoon of the 9th and continues through the 10th. Railways (train crew, workshops, track maintenance, and offices); local buses; banks; telephones; electrical plant; shops; restaurants and hotels; taxis; radio stations; Guarina and Pijuán factories; Catedral meat-processing plant.  Bus drivers abandon buses to block roads but are forced back to work at gunpoint. Police smash windows of closed shops.
El Cobre	Guerrillas take and hold the town of El Cobre on the outskirts of Santiago.
Other Guerrilla actions	Guerrillas advance to the outskirts of Manzanillo, Yara, Santa Rita, and Baracoa.
Santiago	Santiago militias attack Cuartel de Boniato, Miguel Yero and Alvaro Alvarez call strike at 10.45 a.m. Solid for 3 days, 11 dead.  Electrical workers take vital machine parts home to prevent strikebreakers from working.
Manzanillo	Failure of communication meant that the strike did not start until the 11th and was called off later that day following news from Havana and Santiago. However, it was solid for its short duration.
Guantánamo	Begins on railways, by 10th <i>ciudad muerta</i> . No press until the 15th. Port of Boquerón closed. Guerrillas attack various army and police barracks including central Jamaica on 12th and central Soledad on the 13th. Army forced to remain in barracks. Return to work after 5 days. <sup>58</sup>

Table compiled by the author from the following sources: “El 9 de Abril de 1958,” *Bohemia* (19th April 1959) p.112; Chávez Alvarez, *Matanzas de rojo y negro* (2007), pp.163–167; *Carta Semanal* (2nd, 9th, 11th, 12th, 16th, 23rd April 1958); Cabrera, *Sagua la Grande escribió su nombre en la historia* (1959), pp.36–38, 122–3; Monserrat Iser, *Luchas obreras en Manzanillo* (2009), no page; Orozco, *Manzanillo: El Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio y el apoyo a la Sierra* (1989), pp.77–78; Rodríguez Ramírez & Ramos Cabrales, *El Movimiento Revolucionario en Manzanillo de 1950 a 1959* (1988), pp.76–78; Mendoza Bú, *El movimiento 26 de julio en el sector ferroviario en Santiago de Cuba* (1988) p.57; Andrews, Tomás, *La huelga de 9 de abril en Guantánamo* (1982), pp.15–34; Rodríguez López & Martínez Rodríguez, *La huelga de 9 de abril de 1958 en la ciudad de Camagüey* (1984), no page; Coya, *El movimiento obrero en Santiago de Cuba 1952–1958* (1982), p.103.

the port and tobacco industries, where the workers had avoided defeat. Another important sector in Havana was the tourist industry, to which the construction industry was closely linked, as the major building work in the capital was for new hotels. The tourist industry was still booming despite the growing crisis, and the U.S. Mafia made use of its participation in tourism to launder money from its illegal activities at home. This meant that the economic crisis resulting from the fluctuations in the price of sugar did not affect the tourist industry in the same way, thereby reducing the imperative on their employers to raise productivity by reducing living standards. All of which meant that there were fewer reasons for some workers in Havana to support a revolutionary solution at this stage.

Guantánamo was again the last town to return to work; the order to resume working was given because the army was now free to concentrate as much force as would be required to make an example of the town. The strike here lasted as long as it did because the newly arrived rebel force in the Sierra Cristal, the *segundo frente* (second front) commanded by Raúl Castro, was able to engage the forces of repression and thereby provide cover for the strikers. While the guerrillas elsewhere were able to harass government forces, such as in El Cobre, this was as yet the only area in which rebel forces were sufficiently strong to neutralize the army locally, aided by the isolation of the region from the centers of power. The comparative success of the strike in the Guantánamo region would give those who advocated movimiento obrero beligerante the credibility they needed to spread their approach to the rest of the island.

### **Picking Up the Pieces**

The failure of the strike in Havana provoked an intense debate within the anti-Batista movement, and two documents reflect this debate. The first is a letter to Fidel Castro, copied to the MR-26-7 national directorate and to the leadership of the FON, signed by various Havana workers' organizers and militia captains. It is written in a critical tone and complains that the strike has played into the enemy's hands. It goes on to say that the July 26th Movement had insufficient penetration in the working class to call a general strike and had relied on armed action rather than the conscious will of the workers. However, this strategy was doomed because there were insufficient arms. Other problems outlined are that there was insufficient preparation, that important sectors such as the retail workers did not receive the strike call until too late, that there was a lack of communication between the leadership and local coordinators who had to organize the strike at base level, and that there was a failure to coordinate with other organizations. The letter concludes that the organization had lost touch with reality and had started to believe its own propaganda about the balance of forces. Another letter, this one signed by the provincial leadership in Las Villas, made similar points, but in a much more measured tone, accepting that the failure was the fault of the whole organization, not any particular leader. This difference may be explained by the fact that the strike in Las Villas had been considerably more successful than the previous attempt in August 1957 and the authors had something to be proud of in a local context. It is worthy of note that the Las Villas letter starts by saying that the analysis it contains is the result of extensive consultation within the regional organization. It is safe to assume that there would have been considerable debate within the MR-26-7, and that when the national leadership met at the beginning of May they would have been aware of the tenor of that debate.

The process of picking up the pieces therefore began with

a meeting on May 3, 1958, at Los Altos de Mompié in the Sierra Maestra. From the point of view of working-class involvement in the insurrection, two important decisions were taken. One was to give future priority to the guerrilla struggle, and the other was to reorganize the FON. As part of this latter process, Níco Torres, now recovered from his illness, was restored to the leadership of the FON, and David Salvador was given other responsibilities. Torres had been out of action for the early part of 1958, following an operation for a stomach ulcer and had only returned to activity when the plans for the April strike were well advanced. The relatively greater success of the strike in areas that he had influenced and the particular success in his hometown of Guantánamo must have given him the necessary credibility to reorganize the FON, and he set about extending his network and methodology from Oriente toward the capital.

The FON showed an immediate change of style with the issue of a manifesto in May 1958 that took responsibility for the fiasco. Nevertheless, it maintained that a general strike was the most efficient way to defend and extend workers' rights, as well as "curbing the sinister despotism that is strangling our republic." The manifesto attacked Mujal and the government in a detailed manner, highlighting the widely unpopular, corrupt practice of compulsory check off of union dues. It finished with a list of demands that mixed the economic and political in a way clearly designed to link the need for revolutionary change with workers' immediate concerns. An example of the new approach can be seen in a surviving FON leaflet calling for a railway strike in Las Villas in protest at the late payment of wages, which relates directly to a matter of immediate concern and contrasts to the general exhortations contained in the FON leaflet calling the April 9 strike. This shows an increasing acceptance of the PSP's view of the importance of immediate demands and would have lent credibility to the other theme of the reorganized FON, the call to unity. This reflected the realignment toward the communists that was emerging with the discussions between Fidel Castro and the PSP delegate, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez.

In a much quoted article written in 1964, Che Guevara speaks of Níco Torres being given instructions to work with the PSP in the labor movement and of his reluctant but disciplined agreement to do so. It is likely, however, that his reluctant attitude was shared by others in the leadership, who might have been convinced of the need to work with the PSP but who were not happy with the prospect. The strained relationship between the PSP and the rest of the anti-government opposition demonstrates, in part, the divisive effect of Cold War anti-communist propaganda. The liberal opposition, often rather contemptuously referred to as "los partidos burgueses" (bourgeois parties) in PSP literature, did not wish to antagonize the United States by being seen to associate with the communists. Thus, for example, in November 1955 the fact that the PSP had organized a

large turnout to support an opposition demonstration was condemned as “Communist sabotage” in the opposition press. The PSP wrote endless open letters to the “bourgeois opposition” proposing a united front, although nearly always in terms that invited rejection, but they rarely if ever received a reply. Of course, the PSP’s uncritical support of the USSR, in particular its support of the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, played into the hands of its enemies. These attitudes affected the relationship between the PSP and the July 26th Movement. Thus the bad start to relations as a result of the condemnation of the Moncada attack continued, and by the middle of 1958 a significant anti-communist faction had grown in the MR-26-7, particularly in Havana.

But it is important to differentiate between right-wing anti-communism that is opposed to the potential threat that communists pose to property relations, which is more common among the petit-bourgeoisie and the professions with property to lose, and the left-wing anti-communism that saw the PSP as too moderate and overly prepared to make compromises, which is more common among working-class militants. Torres, as a sometime Trotskyist, fell into the latter camp.

The decision to work with the PSP had to be implemented in the aftermath of the failure of the April strike, about which, as outlined above, the PSP had been given no details and had not been involved in the planning process. The PSP leadership clearly felt considerable irritation at their exclusion from the strike, but this potential animosity seems to have been overcome by the decision of the July 26th Movement to begin serious negotiations. The PSP had been calling for unity for a long time and the approach from the rebels gave them reason to believe that their criticisms had been at least partially accepted. Moreover, the negotiations were given urgency by the ever-increasing wave of state-sponsored terror, which was widely reported in the party’s press. The disappearance and subsequent murder of two of the most prominent and well-known communist leaders, Paquito Rosales, ex-mayor of Manzanillo, and José María Pérez, a bus workers’ leader who had also been a congressional representative, appears to have shocked the rest of the PSP leadership. Blas Roca, PSP general secretary, tells us that this terror started to convince the party leadership that there was no possibility of a legal solution to the crisis and that there was a need for armed protection before workers would take further action.

### **Convergence**

The August 1957 strike occurred because of a convergence of the deeply felt anger of a mass of the population in eastern Cuba and a clandestine organization capable of capitalizing on the situation and spreading the action. The failure of the April 9 strike demonstrates that the “directing will of the center” is insufficient without mass involvement.

If chaotic organization and divisions within the opposition are a contributing factor in the failure of the April 1958 strike, they are not a sufficient explanation in themselves. The inability of the rebels to win a military confrontation with the government’s armed forces in Havana must be seen as being decisive. Of course, any government’s power is always concentrated in the capital, and this advantage was enhanced in this case by the fact that the influence of the trade union bureaucracy, upon which Batista depended so heavily, was also strongest in Havana.

Despite the failure of the August and April strikes to reach Havana, they were nevertheless impressive displays of opposition. Their ability to generate such widespread action, combined with the survival and growth of the rebel army in the mountains, made it clear that the MR-26-7 was now, irrespective of the defeated strike, the center of opposition to Batista and that other political organizations would have to orientate toward them. The PSP therefore had an interest in coming to an understanding with the MR-26-7 despite their annoyance at being excluded before the strike. With hindsight, it was probably politically fortunate for the PSP to have been so excluded, as it is unlikely that their involvement in the planning of the strike could have affected the outcome greatly, and their exclusion left them with the moral high ground.

The failure of the strike also convinced a significant group within the July 26th Movement that there would be advantages in working with the PSP, which still had sufficient roots in the labor movement to be of assistance. An analysis of the detail of both strikes certainly indicates that they were most successful in areas where militants of the two organizations worked together. The new leadership of the FON, though having no liking for the leadership of the PSP, was prepared to take a pragmatic approach and would begin serious negotiations over the summer of 1958. As can be seen from examining agitational material, there was much common ground between the egalitarian nationalist politics of the MR-26-7 and the communist notion of an “*amplia coalición democrática*” (broad democratic alliance), with both requiring a cross-class alliance fighting for democracy and national independence. The differences between the two organizations were at the tactical rather than the strategic level, and circumstances were pushing both organizations to adopting a more accommodating attitude. Thus the failure of the strike on April 9 caused both the MR-26-7 and the PSP to change their approach and we see the start of a process of tactical convergence between the PSP and the MR-26-7, although the organizational convergence would be slower.

In this context, the other main decision taken by the MR-26-7 at Altos de Mompié, to give priority to the guerrilla struggle, though at first appearing like a turn away from the tactic of a general strike, in fact produced the conditions that would make such a strike possible.