

DIA DEL GUERRILLERO HEROICO 8 DE OCTUBRE  
JOURNEE DU GUERRILLERO HEROIQUE 8 OCTOBRE  
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يوم الثوار الياصل



"The young Trotskyists, Maoists, and Black Panthers also shared the wider zeitgeist of the New Left, the romantic admiration for Che Guevara and the guerrilla insurgent..."

## NEW LEFT, OLD LEFT

What was the "New Left"—and what the "Old Left"? Unlike Whigs and Tories, Democrats and Republicans (or Jonathan Swift's High Heels and Low Heels), the answer is not to be found in a formal allegiance. The distinction between the New and Old Lefts was one of outlook, temperament, and style. Generation also played a part—the idealistic exuberance of youth, the crusty caution of middle age—but many individuals were able to cross that frontier.

The Old Left was by no means an alliance of sympathetic parties. Democratic Socialists and Communists with common memories of the 1930s and the Cold War were habitually locked in mutual enmity; the hostility between Stalinists and Trotskyists was legendary. Within the New Left, too, there were dramatic divergences. A gentle "flower-power" girl appealing to soldiers to "make love not war" bore little affinity to a hardened Weatherman engaged in militaristic confrontations with the police or in planting bombs.

Where, then, resided the frontiers between the Old and New Lefts? The Old Left, whether revolutionary or reformist, accepted the necessity of political parties, each competing with the others for control of the State. Adversarial politics inevitably involved leadership, hierarchy, discipline. The most fundamental characteristic of the New Left was its libertarian distrust of state power, parties, competition, leadership, bureaucracies, and, finally, representative government.

The New Left demanded "participatory democracy," not only in the universities (where its influence was most conspicuous), but in the wider society as well. This vision, part anarchist, part Rousseauesque, was generally derided by the Old Left as both aggravatingly utopian and a free ride for charismatic orators seeking power without responsibility.

The Old Left accepted that the modern State, with its corporate economy, inescapably concentrates power at the center. Not only the

Bolsheviks but the Western European Communists and Socialists amalgamated expropriated capitalist enterprises into *nationalized* industries administered by governments through large bureaucracies. The New Left rejected political and economic concentrations of power in favor of a decentralized society with power vested at a local level among producers, community associations, and student unions. A key phrase during the French events of May and June 1968 was *auto-gestion*, or self-management. It was a "cellular" movement, whereas the Old Left stressed the primacy of the whole over the parts.

The Old Left issued plans, programs, and manifestos. Each of its parties offered codified remedies (of which the most important was "vote for us"); the New Left laid more emphasis on spontaneity, on discovering solutions through direct experience and action—the parents of perception.

The Old Left, whether Leninist or Social Democratic, tended to view society in terms of class conflict (though the reformist wing of social democracy and the American labor unions were already converted to redistribution of wealth within a new social consensus). The European New Left displayed a high level of class consciousness, but the movement as a whole was more passionately concerned about racial discrimination and the exploitation of the Third World—about which white working-class attitudes varied from indifference to conservatism. The New Left remained a middle-class movement that made no headway within the trade unions, the backbone of the old Communist, Socialist, and Labour parties.

Jürgen Habermas noted that student protesters were almost exclusively bourgeois youth, representing neither the working class, nor the blacks, nor the underdeveloped countries, yet eager to act on their behalf. They set no store by bourgeois rights and constitutions. As for the achievements of the past, the radical students dismissed them as models of integration, which had absorbed only too effectively all oppositional forces. "So we are confronted here with the first bourgeois revolt against the principles of a bourgeois society that is almost successfully functioning according to its own standards."

The young radicals regarded the Third World not only with concern, but also with sentimental reverence. When Gregory Calvert, national secretary of SDS, addressed its Princeton Conference in February 1967, he began with a story about Guatemalan guerrillas who, on entering a village, did not teach Mao, or anti-imperialism, or dialectical materialism, but rather brought all the people together. After each guerrilla fighter had testified about his own life and longings, the villagers were encouraged to do the same and to discover their common humanity. (Here Calvert quoted Sartre.) Thus Third World

liberation movements were pictured as mirrors of the humane, nondogmatic, existential New Left, versed in the post-Brechtian theatre of therapy and happening. It was a distorted view, but politics can never encompass the totality of truth, only discern what most urgently needs to be done and who most urgently deserves support. It was in this respect that the New Left's vision was most penetrating.

The Old Left fully accepted industrial and technological progress: more consumer goods for everyone, and the deadening assembly lines which produced them. Its quarrel was with "exploitation" rather than "alienation." The Blakean, pastoral, ecological, media-conscious counterculture of the New Left, by contrast, was at war with a corporate technology enslaving human beings to the cycle of production and consumption: "the system." Not only Madison Avenue but also the dominant academic ideology were held guilty of manipulating popular consciousness into acquiescence. "Alienation" was the crucial term in the vocabulary of the New Left.

For the Old Left, politics was a part of life strictly bounded by trade union meetings, occasional demonstrations, sending small checks to good causes. It was "out there" rather than "in here." Normally politics did not extend to the family, to private life; returning home, the worker resumed his role as patriarch. New Left politics were "existential" and directly related to the individual's immediate environment, whether factory, college, or ghetto—here and now. (Even so, it was rampantly male chauvinist.)

Socialists of the Old Left rarely challenged the paternalism of the schools and universities they attended, the moral right of administrators and faculty to lay down the law on curriculum, examinations, and rules for personal conduct. Nor did they question competition at the service of personal ambition. They demanded "equality of opportunity," the great legacy of the universal bourgeois revolution. The most far-reaching innovation of the New Left was to challenge these time-honored hierarchies. For the Old Left, the existence of elites—whether based on power or skills—was a fact of life. For the New Left, it was an unacceptable fact of corporate society: power and privilege invariably corrupt. Hence the influence of C. Wright Mills's books, *New Men of Power*, *The Power Elite*, and *Listen, Yankee*. The road to liberation was interpreted as the long march through the institutions.

Despite its insurrectionary phase and its guerrilla image, the New Left was essentially a gradualist movement employing theatrical shock tactics to turn tigers into paper tigers. The New Left enveloped the Pentagon and burned the Paris Bourse, but the point of storming the presidential palace (wherever) was merely to be seen smoking the old man's cigars.

The Old Left was not without passion (and anger), but held that the mind must govern the heart. Many commentators have argued that the New Left was "antirational," Sorelian, bonded to myth. This is a mistake. The New Left must be divided between its intensely intellectual platoons—preponderant in Europe—and the apostles of instinct and feeling, whose sacramental playground was America, where the prevailing mood came closer to the spirit of "witness" more commonly associated with committed religious communities.

The Old Left was typically conventional in its life-style and social attitudes. Its adherents conducted themselves in a socially respectable manner and had long since abandoned any thought of an alternative culture. The New Left's relaxed, permissive attitude to sex and drugs often offended the adult Old Left, who in turn seemed "square," "hung up," and therefore repressive to the young. Happenings, ensemble theatre, audience participation, underground papers, and rock concerts remained alien terrain to the Old Left throughout the sixties.

Despite the common sensibility joining the New Left to the counterculture, they were by no means identical. Between the "politicos" and the hippies there was tension, even animosity. Many of the militant students of 1968 who occupied universities and confronted the police in the streets wore short hair and would rather have swallowed castor oil than LSD. The role of young Trotskyists and Maoists within the New Left complicated the libertarian image, for they had inherited the historical claim of the Marxist vanguard parties to seize centralized state power. The Black Panthers in America were likewise more Leninist than libertarian. Why, then, accord Maoists, Trotskyists, and Black Panthers a place within the New Left? A common composite enemy—the Vietnam War, racism, global imperialism—was the prime unifying force, leading to shared demonstrations and occupations (though sometimes not). The young Trotskyists, Maoists, and Black Panthers also shared the wider *zeitgeist* of the New Left, the romantic admiration for Che Guevara and the guerrilla insurgent, the communal spirit, the willingness to "do it here and now" and to break the law, bait the police, and challenge authority at every opportunity.

The alteration of attitudes was particularly dramatic in America. The journalist Jack Newfield recalled student life at Hunter College in the fifties, when politics involved running for student council on an innocuous platform, and dissent implied "a vague, emotional yearning for Adlai Stevenson." The life pattern that the campus rebels of the sixties recoiled from in disgust had been "deified" by Newfield's generation: "Marry well and early, don't be a troublemaker, start a career in daddy's business or in a large corporation, and save up for a split-level

home in the lily-white suburbs. . . ." To receive college loans, they signed loyalty oaths without complaint.

The first phase of the New Left, from 1960 to 1965, really belonged to America alone, despite the marginal influence of the post-1956 intellectual "New Left" in Britain and of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a movement of the Old Left led by clergymen and Labour MPs of the Tribune Group, with many youthful followers and with a brief civil-disobedience component, the Committee of 100. The early American New Left, inspired by the Cuban revolution and deeply concerned about atomic weapons, took shape mainly in the segregationist states of the South, where small groups of dedicated white activists arrived to support black students' demands for desegregation of lunch counters and bus stations, the right to vote, and genuine equality before the law. It was essentially a movement of personal commitment, of young idealists operating outside the political machines and more influenced by Albert Camus's existential humanism than by Jean-Paul Sartre's socialist ideology. The mood was warm, generous, self-sacrificial; it lacked the rancorous tone, the spirit of enmity characteristic not only of European political crusades but also of the New Left in its final confrontation, from 1967 to 1969, with imperial "Amerika."

The nuclear issue was (and remains) vitally important on its own account. But it also drew attention to the irrationality of advanced technocratic systems committed to rational social engineering. As Theodore Roszak commented in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, all the automobiles and television sets were one minute from midnight all the time. The debate about nuclear weapons broke the seal of the stifling Cold War consensus of the fifties and subverted Daniel Bell's "end of ideology" (which denotes a fundamentally conflict-free society cemented by consensus about goals and values, intellectually dominated by pragmatic arguments among problem-solving experts). In Roszak's words, men and women awoke in rebellion against "an evil which is not defined by the mere facts of the bomb, but by the total ethos of the bomb, in which our politics, our public morality, our economic life, our intellectual endeavor are now embedded with the wealth of ingenious rationalization." Whether one agrees with him or not, this perception was crucial to the emergent New Left.

The most influential voice in the new philosophy of alienation belonged, perhaps paradoxically, to a veteran Marxist of the Frankfurt school who had emigrated to the United States, Herbert Marcuse. The word "influential," however, begs several questions. Marcuse's abstract formulations were less accessible than, for example, the urgent, fact-intensive polemics of C. Wright Mills, and mainly appealed to an

intellectual elite versed in Marxian dialectics, particularly in Germany. In *Eros and Civilization* (1955), and more intensively in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse had argued that man could avoid the fate of a Welfare-through-Warfare state only by reconstructing the productive apparatus without the repressed asceticism that provided the basis for a system of domination. The erotic energy of the life instincts could not be freed under the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence. Marcuse rejected Freud's insistence on an inherent conflict between the reality principle and the pleasure principle, offering instead the perspective of a nonrepressive sublimation, allowing the pleasure principle to liberate man from the performance principle (non-stop automated work) and to discover himself as both subject and object of his needs and desires. (On the other hand, Marcuse saw no hope in the pleasure principles and unbridled libido of the new Bohemia; beatniks, hipsters, and hippies had become the pathetic refuge of a deformed humanity. Existentialism and Zen were harmless revolts, easily assimilated.)

Marcuse's most provocative thesis dismissed pluralistic capitalist democracy as a sham, a system of false needs and illusory freedoms designed not only to turn people into mere commodity producers but, further, to induce them to recognize themselves as commodities. He also poured scorn on the empiricism and positivism of bourgeois social theory, which had abandoned the critical tradition in its abject eagerness to serve the system's values by presenting man's domination of nature as inseparable from man's domination of man ("progress," "experts," "representative government"). Every alternative perspective had been dismissed as utopian, totalitarian, or inconsistent with the "facts." But these "facts" were merely those understood by robots. Contemporary ideology thus ensured that the cycle of production and consumption reproduced political domination and perpetuated man's alienation from his own potential.

## SDS

Founded in 1960, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was originally the renamed student section of the League for Industrial Democracy. Its first convention was not held until June 1962, when SDS articulated its philosophy through the marvelous Port Huron Statement: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably at the world we inherit. . . . Many of us began maturing in complacency." But then

came awareness of degradation in the South and "the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb. . . ."

The Port Huron Statement expressed in embryo most of the ideas and attitudes that were to characterize SDS and the New Left throughout the sixties. It attacked nuclear deterrence theory; capitalism and the paternalistic welfare state; the military-industrial complex; the university *in loco parentis*; the Soviet Union because of its "total suppression of organized opposition"; and America's support of right-wing dictatorships.

Here was the beginning of the search for a synthesis of individual idealism and mass activity, but without the fetters of a programmatic orthodoxy. The Movement was reaching out for a "third way"; as the historian Staughton Lynd expressed it, "So long as revolution is pictured as a violent insurrection it seems to me both distasteful and unreal. The traditional alternative, the Social Democratic vision of electing more and more radical legislators until power passes peacefully to the Left, seems equally illusory." What Lynd proposed was a series of challenges to the system at its morally most vulnerable points: refusals of the heart, mind, and body, which should remain nonviolent but not necessarily legal.

In the mid-sixties occurred a second phase of American New Left activity, based on community projects in the North and the demand for free speech in the universities. This may prove to be the most enduring legacy of the New Left and the counterculture: the project of an "alternative" society composed of grassroots, "counter institutions" designed both to challenge the bureaucratic structures of official society and to endow common people with an awakening sense of their own capacity.

The European New Left surfaced in the mid-sixties as the horror of the Vietnam War became a global issue. Paradoxically, the accession to power, or shared power, of social democracy in Britain, Germany, and Italy after a decade and a half of uninterrupted conservative governance only accelerated the radicalization of the young. The new growth was fertilized by a powerful chemical—a sense of betrayal. The Marxian critique of capitalism had yielded to the revisionism of social democrats, who redefined socialism as a "welfare state" founded on a capitalist "mixed economy" in which the public sector served as a kind of hospital for sick or non-profitable industries and services. This third and final period of the New Left, the *Götterdämmerung*, was intensely ideological, confrontational, and violent; waves of protest swept across the advanced countries, each intensely conscious of its solidarity with the others. Indeed, a new "International" was born among students. It is by the street scenes and campus occupations of 1967–69 that the New Left is remembered—and rejected—by the population at large.

Friction, sometimes enmity, characterized the New Left's relationship with the Old throughout the sixties. As the decade progressed, fraternal arguments gave way to fratricidal knifeplay: In Britain, the New Left and the Wilson government; in Germany, the SDS and the Social Democratic Party within the coalition government; in France, Cohn-Bendit and the Communists; in Italy, the rioting students and Pietro Nenni. Only where pluralistic democracy had not yet been achieved—in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Spain—did this not occur; the New Left is almost by definition a product of pluralistic democracy.

In America, the quarrel between the Old and New Lefts (which must include not only the beleaguered socialists but also the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, whose role in American political life was analogous to that of social democracy in Europe) had begun early. The Port Huron Statement of 1962 immediately got SDS into hot water with its parent body, the League for Industrial Democracy. Anti-communism was the main bone of contention. The essays and memoirs of Irving Howe, the distinguished literary critic and editor of *Dissent*, provide a sensitive commentary on the long-running battle, as well as a large window onto the mind and sensibility of the Old Left abruptly confronted by the New. No one else wrote so perceptively, yet with such cancerous animosity, about the fatal moat separating two generations of radicals.

Howe was exasperated both by the New Left's "anti-anti-communism" and by its loose, informal, libertarian style. As Howe recalled, several founding figures of SDS came in for a chat with the editorial board of *Dissent*: "At this meeting two generations sat facing each other, fumbling to reach across the spaces of time. We were scarred, they untouched. . . . We had pulled ourselves out of an immigrant working class, an experience not likely to induce romantic views about the poor; they, children of warm liberals and cooled radicals, were hoping to find a way into the lives and wisdom of the oppressed." The young idealists seemed to be presenting "participatory democracy" as an alternative to "representative democracy" rather than as its complement. "We winced." And why, if they were libertarians, did they insist on admiring Castro's Cuba?

Return visits were paid. Attending SDS board meetings, Howe found them "interminable and structureless. . . . In the blur of fraternity nothing was thought through." The ideal community seemed to be "an anarchy of pals, in which anyone dropping in at a meeting could speak as long as they [*sic*] wished. . . ." Howe didn't like the prevailing cultural styles either: "the wish to shock" and to say "fuck." By the mid-sixties, Howe was complaining that the New Left had merely

reversed the blind ultrapatriotism of the 1950s; their anti-Americanism, it seemed to him, went hand in hand with uncritical admiration for Third World nationalist movements of the Communist-authoritarian variety.

In 1966–67, the New Left's rejection of the coalition between socialists and liberal Democrats (recommended by Irving Howe, Michael Harrington, Bayard Rustin, and Norman Thomas as America's way forward) was sharpened by revelations about the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) covert funding and penetration of liberal organizations; the National Student Association, the Institute of International Labor Research, the American Newspaper Guild, the National Council of Churches, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the London magazine *Encounter* had all been compromised (as was first revealed in the *New York Times* in April 1966, and later, in more detail, by the *Ramparts* issue of March 1967).

Compromised, also, were the liberal intellectuals who had served in the Kennedy administration: John Kenneth Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., did not now deny that they had known about CIA funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The grand old man of American socialism, Norman Thomas, was likewise tarred. The *New York Times* published a letter from Thomas on February 22, 1967, claiming that he had not known where the money for his Institute of International Labor Research was coming from. However, Diana Trilling, the literary critic and essayist, recalled a meeting of the executive board of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, when its chairman, the same Norman Thomas, reported insolvency and suggested that he should "phone Allen." He did, returning with the news that a check for \$1,000 would be mailed the next morning. They all knew that "Allen" was Allen Dulles, director of the CIA: "None of us, myself included, protested," reflected Trilling. She was unrepentant.

The CIA revelations brought the New Left a fringe of fellow travelers from the ranks of the middle-aged intellectuals who felt themselves to have been cruelly duped. Some of them hauled stiffening limbs through the windows of occupied universities in search of rejuvenation. Stephen Spender, who had indignantly resigned as co-editor of *Encounter*, found himself in President Grayson Kirk's occupied office at Columbia. Dwight Macdonald, a prominent New York intellectual and a regular contributor to *Encounter*, hurried up to Columbia on news of the insurrection in April 1968. "I've never been in or near a revolution before," he reported. "I guess I like them. There was an atmosphere of exhilaration, excitement. . . ." Once a Trotskyist, he saw Mathematics Hall as "the Smolny Institute of the revolution. . . ."

Irving Howe regarded Herbert Marcuse and other professorial

friends of the New Left as bandwagoners flattered by juvenile applause. Professor Edward Shils, of the University of Chicago, was equally contemptuous of the "middle-aged courtiers who offer their legitimacy services. . . . From Sartre and Marcuse to Paul Goodman and Dwight Macdonald, they provide agreeable but unsought applause." The angry divide separating the Cold War generation from the New Left persisted. Diana Trilling, although increasingly convinced that the Vietnam War was a tragic mistake, had to ask herself why she had taken part in no march or demonstration. The answer was obvious: The protest movement had been preempted by anti-Americanism, by those who talked of genocidal imperialism, "as if America were uniquely greedy and rapacious among nations." She added: "I will not march under the flag of the Viet Cong, and where has there been a protest against American error under an American flag?" The poet Robert Lowell (imprisoned during World War II as a conscientious objector) damned her as a "housekeeping goddess of reason, preferring the confines of her mind to experience, and pronouncing on the confusion of the crowd. . . ." She seemed to him "more preoccupied with the little violence of the student uprisings than with the great violence of the nation at war."

As the decade progressed and the New Left embarked on dramatic acts of insurrection, Irving Howe's temper burned on a shorter fuse. Theatrical violence had nothing to do with creating a better America, so why did they do it? One reason, he suspected, was that the New Left was so utterly American. "It took to the arts of publicity like Tom Sawyer to games of deceit, offering the mass media the verbal, sometimes actual violence on which it dotes." Himself a born polemicist with a Talmudic gift for disputation, Howe began to feel the scars of too many arrows. There was something peculiarly wounding in the New Left attacks on older liberals and radicals. "They wanted to deny our past, annul our history, wipe out our integrity, and not as people mistaken or even pusillanimous but as people who were 'finished,' 'used up.'" In 1968, finding himself on a platform at the University of Kansas with the SDS leader he increasingly distrusted, Tom Hayden, Howe "taunted" [his word] Hayden about the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. "And he says he isn't prepared to condemn the Russians since there may well be 'counter-revolutionaries' among the Czechs. We spar viciously." The audience was mainly with Hayden.

Howe felt the spirit of fraternity yielding to dogmatism and a romantic-nihilistic fascination with the "politics of the deed." The New Left had caught the habit of breaking up meetings and hobbling speakers they disapproved of. On December 5, 1968, for example, members

of SDS closed down two meetings at the Loeb Student Center of New York University, wrapping South Vietnam's representative to the United Nations in a Nazi flag and pouring water over his head, then invading the platform from which James Reston was addressing an audience of five hundred and tearing up his notes. Howe himself suffered verbal abuse on campus; in his bitter retrospective judgment, the movement "burned itself out in the ecstasy of its own delusions."

Herbert Marcuse did not agree. On December 4, 1968, he spoke at a meeting in New York to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Marxist monthly, the *Guardian*. Although the majority of Americans and Europeans remained content with the prevailing system and were unaware of their own self-alienation, Marcuse believed that the integration of the working class would not continue indefinitely. The New Left must work patiently, at the local level, to demonstrate what libertarian socialism meant in practice, setting itself the "superhuman" task of combating the false consciousness fostered by the media monopolies. "I believe," he concluded, "that the New Left today is the only hope we have." Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation*, published in 1969, marked a startling change of emphasis (which further angered the liberals). He now embraced the youth culture as the authentic agency of change and applauded the revolutionary potential not only of its politics but also of its life-style. In the context of the Great Refusal, obscenities ruptured the false definitions of Establishment language, while catchphrases such as "flower power" and "black is beautiful" reversed traditional symbolic values: ". . . the exotic belligerency in the songs of protest; the sensuousness of long hair, of the body unsoiled by plastic cleanliness. . . ." Humor was now a revolutionary weapon.

## CUBA, SÍ

The Havana Cultural Congress of January 1968 lasted for two weeks and attracted some four hundred intellectuals from Latin America, Europe, and the United States (despite State Department harassment). After nine years the Cuban revolution continued to exercise its fascination. Boldly defiant of the United States, it had recently given the life of its most admired spirit, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, to the cause of transcontinental revolution. Cuba was also admired for its nonbureaucratic style, for Castro's impassioned rhetoric, its modernist films and bold poster art, lithographs and lino-cuts, its innovative architecture, its Teatro Nacional de Guinól, the vigorous patronage disbursed

through La Casa de las Américas. Cuba's exuberant sense of display made a refreshing contrast with the dour puritanism of Moscow and Peking.

In the Third World Exhibition at Havana, old American advertising signs were grouped together, sterile and useless, like items from some twenty-first-century museum. Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck stared up at a grotesque roof mural of Lyndon Johnson creating the world, while elaborate photomontages of GIs in Vietnam blotted out the sun. Some nightclubs and cabarets were functioning, the daiquiris were delicious, the calypso music enchanting. The playwright Arnold Wesker spent the first three months of 1968 in Cuba, directing his play *The Four Seasons* in Spanish. "It was just marvelous. I've never known anything like it. . . ."

The legend of Cuba was inscribed on the heart of the young radicals. It was *the* revolution of its time, and its spirit both inspired and echoed the New Left's own. Cuba had been a client state of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898. The ruthless dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista had suited Washington, the sugar-plantation magnates, the owners of the great ranches, and the tourists in search of sunshine, gambling, and prostitution. Yet within a year of taking power, the Castro government was faced with urgent American concern for democratic elections. The reason was clear: Castro had expropriated American-owned land and property on a large scale. In April 1961, a covert, CIA-sponsored military operation, for which President John F. Kennedy took responsibility, came to grief at Playa Givón in the Bay of Pigs.

Three weeks before the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy had announced the Alliance for Progress: "Let us once again awaken our American revolution until it guides the struggles of peoples everywhere." Yet Kennedy granted diplomatic recognition to five of the seven military coups against constitutional regimes that took place in Latin America during his thousand days in office. In March 1965, Lyndon Johnson sent American troops into the Dominican Republic "to prevent a Communist takeover."

The Fair Play for Cuba Committee had been formed in 1960. Visiting authors like Jean-Paul Sartre and C. Wright Mills explained in sympathetic terms the historical dynamics and praxis of the Cuban revolution. Mills's *Listen, Yankee* exercised a profound influence on the young American radicals of the New Left. He depicted the new Cuba as genuinely and urgently committed to the emancipation of illiterate peasants, blacks, women—"the people." Castro's government expropriated the bloated landlords, slashed rents, sent teachers and doctors out of Havana into the countryside, armed the workers and peasantry,

and talked of abolishing not only the profit motive but money itself. The Cubans appealed to the New Left because their philosophy seemed to be hurrying in pursuit of their actions. As Norman Mailer noted, the New Left was drawing its political aesthetic from Cuba, first creating the revolution and then learning from it. The future of the revolution existed "in the nerves and cells of the people . . . rather than in the sanctity of the original idea."

Che Guevara told Americans who defied the State Department's ban on visiting Cuba that he would like to become an urban guerrilla in the United States, to fight "in the belly of the beast." Then, in an existential gesture irresistibly appealing to the New Left, he resigned his ministerial posts and committed his fate to the jungles of the Congo and Bolivia. On October 8, 1967, the Bolivian military captured and shot him; a photograph of his corpse flashed around the world, followed by the publication of his war diary. The younger generation had its supreme martyr, its Jesus. No idealized medieval portrait of Christ achieved a greater beauty and serenity than resided in Che's perfect features and dark, lustrous eyes. Posters of Che plastered the walls of a generation: Che alone, Che with Fidel, Che in China, Che playing chess, Che deep-sea fishing with Fidel, Che moving among the Cuban people with long hair and rifle, Che pacing his ministerial office, Che cutting sugarcane, Che orating, Che reading, and Che dead.

Shortly before Guevara's death, the Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli flew into La Paz loaded with bank notes, spread out an array of maps in the Hotel Capablanca, and pondered how to rescue two of his authors: Guevara, still at liberty with his dwindling band of guerrillas, and the French intellectual Régis Debray, arrested in April 1967 after spending forty-three days in the mountains with Guevara's guerrillas and now facing a possible death sentence by a military court. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation despatched a team of young intellectuals disguised as journalists. One of them, Tariq Ali, explained: "My task was to photograph all the top military officers in Camiri so that we could identify the men in charge of the anti-guerrilla operation." Heady stuff, but easier said than done; as soon as he pulled out his camera, an officer pulled out his revolver.

Other members of the mission, Robin Blackburn and Perry Anderson (of *New Left Review*) did succeed in interviewing Debray in prison, while Russell's secretary, Ralph Schoenmann, attended the young French Marxist's trial, denounced the court procedures, and was deported. After Guevara's death, Debray told the Bolivian court that he shared responsibility with the guerrillas and regretted not having died at Che's side. The revolutionary vanguard-elite recommended in Debray's book *Revolution in the Revolution*, actually ran counter to New

Left libertarianism, but nobody seemed to notice, and Grove Press's paperback edition sold handsomely. Appreciations of Che came from famous pens: John Berger, Italo Calvino, Julio Cortazar, André Gorz, Graham Greene, Robert Lowell, David Mercer, Thomas Merton, Herbert Read, Jean-Paul Sartre (who described Guevara as "the most complete human being of our age"), Jorge Semprun, Alan Sillitoe, Susan Sontag and Peter Weiss, to name a few.

Susan Sontag had visited Cuba for three months in 1960; since then Fidel and Che had been "heroes and cherished models" to her. Sontag found in Cuba a rare symbiosis of political radicalism, avant-garde art, and liberty of artistic expression. While regretting the absence of a free press, she described Cuba as "in some respects the most genuinely democratic country in the world today . . . [a country] astonishingly free of repression," which, unlike previous revolutions, had not begun to consume its own children. (One may dissent. Not all of Castro's 20,000 political prisoners had been henchmen of Batista; Hubert Matos was only one of many who had fought alongside Castro and Guevara for his vision of a democratic Cuba.)

Sontag noticed certain paradoxes involved in the New Left's love affair with Cuba. In "Some Thoughts on the Right Way (for us) to Love the Cuban Revolution," she argued that overdevelopment had driven the American Movement to search for the authentic "self" against public and official values, whereas Bohemianism, long hair, drugs, pornography, and homosexuality were condemned in Cuba as relics of underdevelopment. The Protestant work ethic (careers, competition) was now suspect in the United States, whereas the Cuban voluntary work brigades demanded manual labor of everyone, and Castro constantly exhorted his people to overcome lethargy and unpunctuality. The American Movement distrusted all forms of patriotism, while Cuba proudly paraded its militia and tanks.

So why did the love affair endure? A common enemy was no doubt one factor, but there was also an affinity of style. The Cubans were warm, outgoing, talkative, informal—so unlike the stolid, regimented Eastern Europeans or the chillingly uniform, disturbingly predictable, and seemingly sexless North Vietnamese. To Cuba came the young American idealists of the Venceremos Brigade, cutting sugarcane, engaging in savage existential politics among themselves, and purging racial and sexual guilt (but not always) in the current iconoclastic slang of disillusion and exaggeration; they were refugees from "total fascism."

A succession of black American visitors, from Robert Williams and Leroi Jones to Julius Lester came to Cuba, saw, and were conquered. Sound judgment did not always prevail. "The West says a 'cult

'personality' exists in the figures of Mao and Fidel," wrote Lester. "That is not true. Revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary commitment have destroyed the ego in Mao and Fidel, and in that destruction, they as men became free." One could doubt this—and doubt it even more on reading Lester's next line: "Fidel is Cuba. China is Mao. Cuba is Fidel."