

Fidel castro, the new
prime minister of
cuba



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On Monday, September 26, 1960, Fidel Castro, the new prime minister of Cuba, gave a speech to the United Nations concerning the current state of Cuba both socially and economically. His speech outlined the terrible condition of his nation and proposed several methods necessary for returning Cuban enterprises to Cuban people. The following year, President John F. Kennedy proposed the creation of the Alliance for Progress, an organization dedicated to satisfying "the basic needs of the American people" (Holden and Zolov, p. 227).

Both Castro and Kennedy strove (or claimed to strive) for the same ultimate goal - peace and prosperity in Latin America, though through vastly different means. What were these means, and how were they different? What were the most crucial issues facing not only Cuba, but also all of Latin America? What were some possible solutions? Whose means, Kennedy's or Castro's, would better serve the Latin American people? Fidel Castro's speech to the United Nations in 1960 brought to attention a number of social and economic problems occurring in several Latin American countries.

His bold claims included that much of the devastation and poverty in Latin America was a result of government-favored American monopolies on many of the most critical necessities, including electricity, telephone services, public services, mines, land ownership, and the notorious United Fruit Company. Also, Castro argued that his Revolutionary Government was facing the ire of the United States based on the fact that his regime had come into power by force.

The United States opposed such insurgence despite the fact that Castro hailed it as necessary to improve living conditions in underdeveloped countries. Indeed, according to Castro, the deplorable conditions in a plethora of Latin American societies (six hundred thousand unemployed Cubans, three million without electricity, three and a half million living in slums, thirty-seven percent illiterate, and ungodly high rent rates (Castro's Speech at the United Nations, p. 5)) were caused in large part by the giant corporations controlling most, if not all of the nation's industry.

The monopolies were supported and even granted special concessions by Fulgencio Batista, former Cuban dictator - another reason Castro's government was oppressed by the United States. Much of the capital produced and goods exported from Cuba and Latin American ended up in the hands of the United States. Therefore Castro saw one relatively clear solution: phase out foreign control of big businesses and return them to the people. Also, let the governments implement both social and economical reforms from within.

The United States government saw this idea as being detrimental to the economic success of Latin America, but may well have only argued this in order to protect its monopolies. However, if Castro's speech was any indication, and if the claims he made about reforms were true, there would be no harm done to Cuba's economic or social success. Among the reforms his government established were lower rent payments (reduced by a whopping fifty percent), reduction of electricity costs, a twenty-five percent tax on mineral exports, and removal of concessions on telephone companies.

Ten thousand new schools opened, twenty-five thousand new houses were built with an emphasis on poorer rural areas, education became mandatory, efforts to conserve natural resources led to an increase in agricultural production, and the first Cuban factories were built. Most controversial were his proposed agrarian reforms, as United States monopolies owned the largest bulks of land. The United States saw this turn toward nationalization as early stages of Communism and naturally balked.

However, according to Castro, if Latin America was ever to become free and ruled by its own people, eventually these monopolies would need to come under national control. Fidel Castro sought to give Latin America back to the Latin Americans, wishing for a people's investment without political strings attached. John F. Kennedy, the following year, took center stage in an attempt to improve the social changes he saw necessary for Latin American progress. He pledges an enormous twenty billion dollars (although Cuba requested thirty), and called his program the Alliance for Progress.

Although on the outside the Alliance for Progress was a selfless, benevolent offer of assistance to Latin American, I do believe it was more of an effort to protect U. S. interests in certain countries in the wake of fears of social revolution. Among Kennedy's pledges in his speech were claims that " economic progress and social justice can best be achieved by free men working within a framework of democratic institutions" (Holden and Zolov, p. 227). Interestingly enough, Kennedy also quotes that " millions of men and women suffer the daily degradations of poverty and hunger.

They lack decent shelter or protection from disease... children are deprived of the education or the jobs which are the gateway to a better life" (p. 227). These are the very same things the American dominance in Latin American commercialism caused by charging exorbitant rates on rent, land, and utilities. Kennedy goes further by saying, " Political freedom must accompany material progress. Our Alliance for Progress is an alliance of free governments... to eliminate tyranny from a hemisphere in which it has no rightful place" (p. 27-228).

If a free government is not one that is supported by the people, as Castro's originally was, what then can be considered a free government?

Furthermore, the U. S. monopolies, which virtually ruled Cuba, had all the appearances of tyranny, keeping half the nation's population in dire poverty, threatening military action should the Soviets become Cuban allies, regularly bombing Cuban sugar fields, and imposing unfair quotas and tariffs on sugar production and exportation. And this wasn't just occurring in Cuba.

Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Costa Rica, and Guatemala all experienced situations similar to Cuba's. The Americans went so far as to overthrow a legitimate government in Guatemala to protect the interests of UFCO. So Kennedy's Alliance for Progress pledged billions in aid for Latin American nations. I think most of the aid was given on account of fears of communist Russia establishing ties in the Western Hemisphere. But again, had the United States not become near dictatorial powers in these fledgling nations it would not have been necessary to push democracy in the area.

The desire for many nations to nationalize their industries was fed by the United States, and this is the reason the States saw such a communist threat. I do believe that Castro's wish to bring the interests of Cuba back to the Cubans was superior to Kennedy's idea of pushing democracy for the elimination of tyranny. Castro held legitimate claims against the government of the United States. Aside from Castro's own testimony, those separate incidents in Central American lands only further the argument that the United States only wants to protect its own interests and not those of who they seek to " support.

The social and economic problems of Latin American were severe. Unemployment, disease, poverty, and semi-tyrannical monopolies were just a few of the major dilemmas needing recognition. Economic aid and encouraging democracy were two major solutions broadcast by the United States. Nationalizing industry and bring the control to the public were major solutions favored by Fidel Castro and most of Latin America. Either way, it was most critical that these social and economic problems be immediately resolved.