

Cuba



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The 1959 Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, triggered enormous social, political and economic change for the Cuban people.

Following Batista's oppressive regime, Castro transformed Cuban society by providing equal opportunities for everybody in social welfare, however, Castro's rule was considered ruthless, causing many Cubans to flee the country. This created conflict between Cuba and the United States, as the US assisted Cuban exiles in an attempt to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The tension heightened when economic circumstances caused the US to instigate an embargo. Cuba then became reliant on support from the Soviet Union, a similarly socialist state, which impacted heavily on Cuban society. Castro's rule revolutionised the lifestyle of the Cuban people, granting equality in sectors including housing, education, employment and healthcare.

Under Batista's dictatorship, Cuba suffered from poverty and corruption. Though the country profited from numerous US investments in construction, Batista ensured he received a large portion of the nation's wealth, resulting in extreme poverty throughout Cuba. The revolution transformed this inequality by implementing new laws such as the Agrarian Reform Law, where large holdings of land were divided and distributed amongst peasants. Additionally, this and the Urban Reform Law, provided housing for all, with reduced or no rent. Developments were also made to create balance in healthcare between rural and urban areas. Castro provided free medical care to all Cubans, and medical facilities were constructed in the countryside. Similarly, education was of high priority, thus Castro launched several campaigns and offered education to all at no cost.

These campaigns were highly successful, with the percentage of children between the ages of 6 and 12 enrolled in schools increasing from 56% to 77% between 1953 and 1970. Improvements in education led to increases in employment and Castro ensured that all Cubans secured a job. According to Dunn, "?? even the poorest Cuban has shelter, food, electric power, medical care, access to education and a job?" (2005). Hence, Castro's push for equality had a significant social impact as the living standards of many Cubans were raised. Despite Castro's endeavour to rid Cuba of social inequalities, his brutal leadership could not be overlooked. Once Castro came into power, he imprisoned supporters of Batista and those who opposed him, with between 75,000 to 150,000 political prisoners in Cuba in 1962.

Perez argues that, "?? virtually no suspected opponent of the government remained free in Cuba," (1988) as Castro aimed to prevent counterrevolutionaries from potentially overthrowing the government.

Furthermore, Castro took control of the media, including newspapers and broadcast companies, to maintain order and censor his people from foreign political ideals. Castro also took radical action to ensure his people's loyalty to him. In 1960, the government established the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) which recruited members to spy and keep files on every Cuban.

Any suggestion that a person opposed Castro was reported to the government. In his speech on the CDR, Castro commanded to know, "?? What does each do What relations does each have with tyrants To what is each dedicated In what activities are each involved?" (1960). His strictness resulted in masses leaving Cuba for other countries, particularly the United

States. 200, 000 Cubans left the island between 1966 and 1971, many of which were educated professionals from the upper and middle class, such as doctors, teachers and engineers, as Castro's reforms benefitted them the least. This made certain developments in social welfare difficult, as Cuba's most skilled technicians had departed, thus, Castro's regime also impacted harshly on Cuban society.

Cuban expatriates in the United States contributed to the political conflict between Cuba and the US, leading to the Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961. As Cuban exiles voiced their discontentment with Castro to the US government and the US became uneasy about Cuba's relationship with the socialist Soviet Union, the United States began to plan an invasion at the Bay of Pigs, hoping that Castro would be overthrown. Cuban exiles were trained by the US and the invasion was expected to encourage the Cuban population to join the invaders. However, as Chasteen notes, "despite their hopes, the anti-Castro Cubans who landed at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 sparked no internal rebellion" (2001). The United States suffered a humiliatingly quick defeat, while Castro's image and support for the revolution were boosted.

Tension between the US and Cuba heightened during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which strained Cuba's relationship with both the US and the Soviet Union, as Castro was excluded from communications between the US and the Soviets. Furthermore, Cuba, which held the nuclear weapons, was under great pressure as the world was in fear that a nuclear Armageddon would occur. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union agreed to do remove the missiles and Cuba was safe from another US invasion. Both the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrate the hostility between the United States

and Cuba, which had dire effects on Cuba's economy. Cuba's conflict with the United States resulted in a trade embargo which had a critical impact on the Cuban economy. In response to Cuba's expropriation of US property in Cuba, the United States government declared a total trade embargo against Cuba in 1960. This caused great economic disruption in Cuba as the US provided more than 70% of total Cuban imports in prerevolutionary times, including supplies used in Cuban industry, agriculture, transportation, communications and utilities. The embargo also prevented Cuba from receiving medicine and pharmaceuticals which complicated medical care and slowed developments in medicine.

Perhaps most importantly, the embargo hindered the import of food from the US, which was essential as Cuba did not produce the majority of its own food. The prevention of food and medicine being imported brought problems of health and nutrition to Cuba, resulting in the rationing of food and the redevelopment of agriculture. Furthermore, after Cuba was expelled from the OAS, the US encouraged other countries from the Organisation of American States (OAS) to discontinue trade with Cuba, and by 1964, virtually every member had done so. Thus, the US embargo disturbed the Cuban economy and affected the lives of all Cubans. The impact of the US Embargo forced Cuba to become dependent on the economic and political support of the Soviet Union. Previously, the Soviet Union knew little of Castro's Revolution in Cuba, however, when the US lowered their quota of Cuban sugar, the Soviet Union agreed to import large amounts and sold crude oil to Cuba at low prices in return.

This agreement provided Cuba with strong economic support and relations continued to improve as the Soviets also offered military assistance. Perez agrees that Cuba's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union strengthened the government's position against internal opponents and foreign opposition (1988). Following the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Castro allowed the Soviet Union to deploy nuclear weapons in Cuba, which would provide defence should the US attack again. This led to the Cuban Missile Crisis wherein the US agreed it would not invade Cuba. The dependence on the Soviet Union also contributed to Cuba's movement towards Communism. Carey states that before the revolution Castro had been a lukewarm Socialist (2004) but in 1961, Castro announced himself as a Marxist-Leninist and in 1965 the Cuban Communist Party was founded.

Hence, Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union greatly influenced the economic and political situation in Cuba. Therefore, the Cuban Revolution had a huge impact on Cuba, socially, economically and politically up to 1970. Castro's bid to equalise the social and economic state of the country lifted the standard of living for many Cubans, however his brutal leadership was one that many feared and caused thousands of Cubans to leave the country.

These exiles contributed to the tension between Cuba and the United States, demonstrated by the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The endless conflict is further demonstrated by the enduring US embargo against Cuba which greatly impacted the Cuban economy and caused Cuba to rely on political and economic support from the Soviet Union.