

# Correspondence

## Cuba, '73

To the Editors: In a generally perceptive article about the Cuban revolution ("The Cuban Revolution, 1973," *Worldview*, July, 1973), Prof. Jorge I. Domínguez listed equality and education as the two major achievements of Premier Castro's government. Inasmuch as there seems to be a growing quantity of data which challenges these assertions, I would like to clarify these two points.

I must begin by saying that Prof. Domínguez's statement is correct as far as the official position of the Cuban government is concerned; for example, Cuban Minister of Education, Army Major Belarmino Castilla reported to UNESCO in October of 1970 that illiteracy had been reduced from 23.6 to 3.9 per cent (as reported in *Granma*, official organ of Cuba's Communist Party, November 1, 1970).

Unfortunately, the record is not that clear. In September of 1970 the National Director of Adult Education had announced at a workers' meeting that illiteracy had been increasing in recent years (*Granma*, September 19, 1970) and Premier Castro acknowledged in January, 1971, that up to 400,000 children between the ages of 6 and 16 were not in school (*Granma*, January 10, 1971).

As far as the mechanics of the literacy campaign, it should be noted that the fact that a person could write his name in block letters was considered proof that he had been *alfabetizado*, or alphabetized, i.e., proven literate. I came across various cases along these lines while conducting interviews with recent arrivals from the island during the summer of 1972.

As Prof. Domínguez probably knows, the reliability of Cuban official statistics has been in doubt at least since 1965, when Premier Castro acknowledged in a major speech that the Cubans had deliberately released false production figures in order to mislead the enemies of the

revolution (*Granma*, Jan. 2, 1965).

The attitude of Cuban university students sheds some interesting light on the issue of "equality." The French press has reported that students at the University of Oriente had refused to participate in some of the regime's "voluntary" programs. As a result, Premier Castro visited the school, but to his surprise various students refused to be pressured and instead asked him in a general assembly to explain why the new élite—mostly party cadres and army officers—drive imported Alpha-Romeos while the Cuban people suffer the strictest rationing in the republic's history. The students were subsequently expelled from the university and sent to "rehabilitation camps."

To say, as Professor Domínguez does, that there are differences of perception about the Cuban revolution is merely to point out that there is a difference between the victims and the executioners. Professor Domínguez sadly overlooks the precious fact that equality is not a term in a vacuum, that equality in a jail or in a prison camp where everyone is terrorized "equally" is not what is usually associated in our culture with the egalitarian approach.

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Jorge I. Domínguez Responds:

Let me reply briefly to Mr. Calzon's four major comments. If the reader was left with the impression that there were no educational problems left in Cuba, I apologize. I do not think, however, that the kind of standard Mr. Calzon wants to apply to judge Cuba's educational performance is useful or fair. Relative to what the educational system was in 1959 (which, as I indicated, was *not* backward but weak), the growth is indeed impressive. None of Mr. Calzon's facts contradict this, though they certainly point out the dimensions of the remaining problems after much has been done.

I noted in my essay that one of the inequalitarian trends is the exis-

tence of privileges for "bureaucrats, technicians, foreigners and some of the remaining formerly rich." Mr. Calzon cites precisely an example of what I had in mind. Nevertheless, the bulk of the evidence—and even a part of Mr. Calzon's example—indicates a strong trend toward equality over the long haul, that is, compared to the prerevolutionary situation.

It is peculiar that Mr. Calzon uses Cuban statistics in three paragraphs of his letter, only to doubt them in yet another; Everyone who works on Cuba is—or should be—fully aware of serious problems of statistical availability and reliability. Steps must be taken to test one's statistics against other available evidence. I think I have taken such reasonable steps. In fact, the statistics published by the Cuban government can be used to criticize its performance in a number of areas—as I did in my essay. Does Mr. Calzon want to challenge the reliability of these too?

If I understand the thrust of Mr. Calzon's last paragraph, then he did not read a fair part of my essay. I noted that the problem of lack of liberty is persistent and severe, by any standards, historical or comparative, that can be usefully devised to appraise today's Cuba. And it was for this reason that I wrote about my lack of fundamental sympathy with the revolutionary government.

## "Rabin & the Nixon Jews" cont'd.

To the Editors: It was with great dismay that I read Seymour Siegel's recent response to the article by Fred Lazin in the May, 1973, issue of *Worldview*, "Rabin and the Nixon Jews" (Correspondence, August). Though Mr. Siegel ludicrously grants that Mr. Lazin or any other individual is as much entitled to his opinion as Itzhak Rabin, the former Israeli ambassador to the United States, and affirms that the question of our choice of a President and the shaping of U.S. policy toward the Middle East is "a matter of  
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legitimate debate," nevertheless he resorts to an "argumentum ad hominem" in order to attack the author's arguments. He seems to impugn Lazin's Jewishness when he brands him as a Liberal who believes that "Jews should be universal." Siegel implies that the author lacks any commitment to the particularist Jewish cause and, therefore, cannot be a supporter of the State of Israel. With due respect to Rabbi Siegel, I beg to differ.

A careful reading of Lazin's article shows that, far from being motivated by a purely "universalist" attitude, he reacted to Rabin's unfortunate and totally unwarranted remarks out of a deep commitment to the future security and existence of the Jewish State. He states explicitly his overriding concern for both Israel's image as well as the eventual harm Rabin's statements might have done to support for Israel. Such remarks reflect that his criticism of Rabin was motivated by a real love for the State of Israel and not merely by his belief in the Jewish social ethic.

That this is the attitude of the author is confirmed by his long involvement in Jewish communal activities and his ardent support for Israel. Those of us who have participated in Zionist affairs have had the pleasure of witnessing firsthand the positive effect he has had on hundreds of Zionist Jewish youth with whom he has worked for many years. We also have seen him debate the "Palestinian" question with numerous representatives of Arab organizations on behalf of the Israeli Consulate. If these be the actions of a Jew who, as Siegel quips, denies to his people any particularist concerns, then I say that the greatest blessing would be to have more "universalists" like Mr. Lazin.

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To the Editors: I read with great interest Mr. Siegel's response to my article "Rabin and the Nixon Jews."

His use of ad hominem arguments shocked me. . . . I will restrict my own comments to his criticism of my arguments. (Mr. Siegel's objections to the title of the piece should be taken up with the *Worldview* editors: they changed my original title, "Was Rabin Wrong? Israel, American Jews and the 1972 Presidential Election.")

First, I argued that Rabin's identification of himself and Israel with Nixon's reelection alienated many Jewish and non-Jewish Americans of the non-Left liberal community. Typical of this group might be persons in their twenties or thirties who support Israel but who also identify Richard Nixon with the Cambodian invasion, Kent State and bombing. As a secondary point, I stated that extreme leftists might view Rabin's statement as evidence of Israel's being an outpost of American imperialism. In his retort, however, Mr. Siegel disregards the major argument and confines his comments to the possible alienation of radicals and leftists already anti-Israel in belief. Either Mr. Siegel believes that anyone who took offense at the Rabin statement must be a radical, or he sidestepped a crucial issue.

Second, I referred to the Glazer article in the 1972 *Commentary* symposium to support my position that, regardless of who occupies the White House, factors other than the Jewish vote are more important determinants of United States Middle East policy. While Mr. Siegel correctly notes Himmelfarb's endorsement of Nixon on the Israel issue, Himmelfarb does not refute Glazer's argument.

Third, I was surprised at the statement that "Rabin was entitled to his opinion" (Siegel). Rabin was an official representative of a foreign government. Traditionally such persons and their governments refrain from participation in the American electoral process. In no way does Mr. Siegel justify Rabin's role in an American Presidential election.

Fourth, I did question the positive impact that the Holocaust and Israel have had on the consciousness of the leadership of American Jewry.

With the exception of the Suez crisis (1956), which does not necessarily refute my argument, Mr. Siegel brings no evidence to bear against my basic assertion that "American Jewry has been, is and probably will continue to be concerned primarily with its own self-interest, defined more by events within the United States than by events affecting Jews in the rest of the world, including Israel."

Take, for example, the Jewish response to the Jackson Amendment. Ostensibly, organized Jewry publicly supports Senator Jackson against the President. Mr. Siegel suggests that this stand represents the new militancy of organized American Jewry. However, the outcome of a private meeting on Soviet Jewry held last spring between Jewish leaders, President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger presents a less optimistic picture. As a result of that private briefing, one of the major Jewish organizations is considering changing its public stand on the Jackson Amendment. One wonders what its (and others') "behind the scenes" position is.

Finally, I am not like "people like Lazin" (Siegel) who do not see the validity of Jewish interests. I agree with Nathan Glazer that "the survival of Israel is for Jews an interest that must transcend all other interests." I wrote that the broad issues of blacks and social change, and not Israel, motivated Jewish defections to the Nixon camp. In my opinion, one cannot justify getting tough on crime, cutting welfare expenditures or opposing busing for racial balance as a legitimate Jewish interest. A possible exception here is quotas. Yet it is extremely difficult to make a case for Jewish support of Nixon on this issue, since the Nixon Administration instituted quotas as national policy.

Therefore, I still fail to see the legitimate Jewish interest that justified certain self-proclaimed spokesmen for American Jewry to endorse Mr. Nixon. I believe such persons wrongly used Mr. Rabin and Israel to hide their real motives.

Fred Lazin