

REVOLUTIONARY Cuba is 35 years old, having been established in January 1959. Today, the revolution is in grave danger, threatened, not internally by a counter-revolution, but externally, by the rulers of America, the same power from which Cuba was liberated.

The rulers of America want the State and Government of Cuba overthrown; they want the Cuban society, as presently constituted, dissolved; they want the Communist Party proscribed, Fidel Castro and other party and state leaders killed or at least permanently neutralised, and a new society modelled on Puerto Rico, constructed; they want Cuba to revert to its pre-1934 status when under the so-called Platt Agreement, enshrined in the 1901 "constitution," Cuba was virtually an American protectorate. In short the rulers of America want to reverse the course of Cuba's history and thereafter, as victor and conqueror, set about re-writing the accounts of the world-historic events with which Cuba and its revolutionary leadership have been identified.

But then, Cuba is not Russia, and Cubans are not Russians. Russians had never been directly colonised or enslaved by American imperialists in their own land. But Cuba and Cubans had suffered both indignities. Those who are today puzzled by the resoluteness of the Cuban people — in the midst of hardship — and the undiminished popularity of its leadership should appreciate this humiliating national experience. The national and nationalist consciousness which grew out of this bitter experience has remained and has grown stronger

To Cuba at 35, a salute

By Edwin Madunagu

over the years.

On the eve of the 1959 Revolution, one-third of Cuba's territory (representing about 90 per cent of the cultivated land) and 80 per cent of the sugar industry were owned or controlled by American businessmen and companies — the rest being mortgaged to American banks and creditors. A similar situation existed in the tobacco, banking, transport, and telecommunication industries as well as in the social sector. Ninety-nine per cent of the refineries, 90 per cent of the mines, 90 per cent of the cattle ranches, 80 per cent of utilities and 70 per cent of the external trade were controlled from America. But even with this degree of domination, "American investments in Cuba together employed less than one per cent of the population." Seventy-five per cent of all cultivated land was held by eight per cent of the population; and about three-quarter million peasants — in a population of 6 million — had no land at all.

In January 1958, a year before the triumph of the Revolution, the labour force was 2.2 million. Of this number 0.36 million were unemployed during the preceding year, 0.15 million were employed part of the year and 0.16 were employed in unpaid labour, such as domestic work for American capitalists. Of the rest more than half earned less than 75 dollars a month "in a country where the peso was at par with the dollar and had less purchasing power in Havana than in New York." Most Cubans were underfed and undernourished, lived in earth-floor huts, wore rags and went without medical care.

Life was harsh and short.

American leaders had hoped that the Cuban Revolution would go the way of other "revolutions" in the Third World, that the new leaders would merely renegotiate the terms of their people's dependence and the conditions of their poverty. But this illusion, springing from a mis-reading of Cuba's history was shattered after the first two years. By the end of 1960 the direction of the revolution was clear. Foreign businesses had been nationalised, land had been re-distributed in favour of the landless and the poor, a massive programme of social and economic rehabilitation had been introduced, bourgeois privileges had been abolished, structures and institutions of popular power had been established and diplomatic relations had been established with socialist countries, including China and the Soviet Union.

Diplomatic relations between America and Cuba were broken off in January 1961. Three months later, in April 1961, American leaders sponsored an abortive armed invasion of Cuba — the *Bay of Pigs* Invasion — and 18 months later, in October 1962, a nuclear war between America and the Soviet Union was only narrowly averted. The issue was the alleged installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba. By the end of 1965, the socialist goal of the revolution had been proclaimed, the Communist Party of Cuba had emerged, and the revolutionary and internationalist character of the country's foreign policy had become

manifest.

Within four years of victory illiteracy was wiped out; school enrolment rose from 0.82 million in 1958 to 2.21 million in 1968, that is an increase of 170 per cent. The population had only increased by 25 per cent. Within the same period (1958-1968) the number of hospitals increased from 57 to 170 and those in the rural areas from one to 47; polyclinics increased zero to 250; the total number of hospital beds in the rural areas increased from 10 to 1,300; and the total number of medical and dental clinics in the rural areas increased from zero to 50. Unemployment was wiped out.

Between 1965 and 1990, life expectancy grew from 67 years to 76 years; infant mortality decreased from 38 to 12; population per physician decreased from 1,150 to 530; daily calorie supply *per capita* grew from 2,461 to 3,141.

With the possible exception of the former Soviet Union, revolutionary Cuba has extended more concrete assistance to the African continent than any other country has done. All the main armed organisations which fought wars of national liberation in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, including the ANC, SWAPO, ZANU, FRELIMO, PAIGC and the ETHIOPIA owed a lot to Cuba's combative solidarity. In Ethiopia and Angola thousands of Cuban soldiers — mainly youths — took part in combat. Not less than 15 African countries are still making use of Cuban doctors, technicians and engineers. Even in this difficult period, not less than 22,000 Africans are pursuing various courses, *free of charge*, in Cuban colleges and universities.

Suddenly tragedy struck. With the collapse of Cuba's main allies and trading partners in Eastern Europe (1989-1991) the scale swung in favour of the imperialists who now want to press that geo-political advantage to solve the "problem of Castro's Cuba" once and for all. They have so far failed.

The imperialists know the invasion of Cuba will be catastrophic and have — at least for now — ruled out that option. For Cuba is not Puerto Rico, Panama or Grenada. They know that no other regime in the world enjoys the credibility and solidarity which the Cuban regime enjoys amongst its peoples. They know that for almost four decades Fidel Castro and his revolutionary associates have known no life other than that of the revolutionary combatant in defence of the people's freedom and dignity.

The imperialists know that the struggle against any imperialist aggression will be carried over to the American territory where it will be joined, on the side of Cuba by Americans themselves — black and white. They know that the invasion of Cuba will immediately invite violent reactions across the globe — in Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

For 35 years the Cuban Revolution has remained armed and vigilant. For so long Fidel Castro has enjoyed no rest, no holiday; nor has he removed his combat fatigue. He has no family, no property, no privacy. He lives solely for the people. History has so far produced very few figures like that.

To Revolutionary Cuba at 35, a salute!