

*The Economic Transformation of Cuba.* By EDWARD BOORSTEIN. New York, 1968. Monthly Review Press. Tables. Notes. Index. Pp. x, 303. \$7.95.

A topic sentence on p. 252 puts this entire book in perspective: "Despite the superiority of socialism to capitalism, the task of running a socialist economy is anything but easy." Edward Boorstein writes about socialist difficulties with a certain amount of inside information. From May 1960 to the fall of 1963, when he returned to the U.S. for unspecified "personal reasons," he worked as an economist for the Castro government. That viewpoint makes for informative writing of the period when he was indeed an insider. The early struggles of the Castro government with the problems of foreign exchange, import priorities, planning, and the establishment of national goals are object lessons for any revolutionary or newly independent developing nation.

Where Boorstein's book breaks down, however, is in his blithe assumption that Cuba is completely independent today. He argues that being in the Communist economic bloc does not entail foreign ownership, but few know what price Soviet Russia exacts for its continuing \$1 million daily subsidy of the Cuban economy. Whatever the price, it is a valid question how Cuba and Castro would fare, should internal Soviet circumstances force withdrawal of this aid. Moreover, if Cuba has indeed achieved what today's parlance calls its "own thing," one wonders if its juxtaposition to the "imperialist" U.S. should not have some of the credit.

Also questionable are Boorstein's optimistic projections for Cuba's future. One of his more interesting chapters concerns the basic, almost agonizingly achieved decisions that Cuba had best remain sugar-oriented and buy the things which its resources cannot economically provide—grain, heavy industrial products, and the like. These decisions rested on the premise that a sugar crop of 10 million metric tons could provide enough foreign exchange to meet Cuba's needs, and that this goal could be reached in 1970. Yet drought has held the 1968 crop to 5 million tons, 3.5 million short of the goal. Boorstein's book concedes Cuba's water problem, but he writes grandiosely of the huge irrigation projects that will solve it.

Significantly on May 31, 1968, Castro dedicated the "first of a series" of irrigation dams. More significantly, the dam will permit increased rice production. According to Boorstein, Cuban economists concluded in 1962 that it was better to raise sugar and buy rice, because land that would produce the \$25 million worth of rice needed

could produce \$150 million worth of sugar. But at the dedication of the dam Castro spoke of Cuba's being self-sufficient in rice production by 1971.

Boorstein makes the point that Cuban peasants are now better housed, better fed, and better clothed. Perhaps they are; but at this writing the drouth and the exportation of food for foreign exchange are reported to have produced the most severe food shortage and the most stringent rationing since Castro came to power. Part of the blame for Cuba's economic difficulties must be placed on the red tape and bureaucracy of centralization which Boorstein thinks could be overcome by the proper balance of centralization and decentralization. But part may be attributed to the fact that socialism-communism has thwarted the basic instinct for human enterprise. In the spring of 1968 Castro ordered the nationalization of thousands of small private businesses—almost everything except bootblacks and small farmers. Bourgeois? We wonder. Castro noted at the time that more than half of the businesses taken over had sprung up since the revolution.

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*The Labor Sector and Socialist Distribution in Cuba.* By CARMELO MESA-LAGO. New York, 1968. Frederick A. Praeger for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. Praeger Special Studies in International Economics and Development. Tables. Figures. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Pp. xix, 250. \$15.00.

This is one of the most serious books to appear so far about the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath. It is certainly the best study of labor conditions under the Castro regime. The author is a Cuban who fled the island in 1962, received a Ph. D. at Cornell subsequently, and is now teaching economics at the University of Pittsburgh. The study is based largely on Castroite sources—newspapers, speeches by leaders of the regime, official decrees, and publications.

The author is interested in studying how the Marxist-Leninist labor policies developed earlier in the Soviet Union, China, and other communist-dominated states have been modified and applied to the Cuban Marxist-Leninist system. He opens a preliminary chapter sketching perhaps too summarily the theoretical constructs of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Mao Tse-tung concerning the role of labor in the period of transition from capitalism to Communism and particularly their ideas on distribution of income in this phase. Mesa-Lago then studies in some detail various aspects of the problem so far as Cuba is concerned.