

*History Will Absolve Me. The Moncada Trial Defence Speech. Santiago de Cuba. October 16, 1953.* By FIDEL CASTRO. London, 1968. Jonathan Cape. Pp. 110. Cloth. \$3.00. Paper. \$1.50. (Distributed in the U. S. by Grossman Publishers, New York.)

*Castro, the Kremlin, and Communism in Latin America.* By D. BRUCE JACKSON. Baltimore, 1969. Johns Hopkins Press. Studies in International Affairs. Notes. Bibliography. Pp. vi, 163. Cloth. \$6.50. Paper. \$2.45.

*Fidel Castro.* By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS. New York, 1969. Simon and Schuster. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 382. \$6.95.

The first item is an accurate version of the famous speech which Fidel Castro made after the failure of the attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, July 26, 1953. The translator has lightened the long, heavy paragraphs of the Spanish original—I have the edition of 1958, issued by the 26th of July Movement in Miami—dividing them into shorter sections and thus making them easy to read. The document is preceded by a short introduction highly complimentary to Fidel Castro, and the book ends with a very useful section of clarifying notes concerning names and places mentioned in the speech.

D. Bruce Jackson's study is more limited in scope and area than the title suggests, for it really covers the period 1962-1967 and pays full attention only to the relations of Castro and Moscow with the Venezuelan Communist party. Jackson has made a concise and serious effort to unravel some of the intricate relations between Castro, the Kremlin, and some of the official Communist parties of Latin America, as exemplified by that in Venezuela. Putting together diverse pieces of information, basically Cuban and Russian, he manages to give us an "inside" picture of what really went on during the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana and its implications for Cuban and Russian foreign policies. He also deals remarkably well with the internal problems of the Venezuelan Communist party, its relations with the public, and its bitter confrontation with Castro in 1967.

Apart from a certain chronological disorganization, the principal weakness of the book is Jackson's tendency to base many conclusions and generalizations on one or two quotations taken from Castro's speeches or certain Communist documents. Considering the complexity of the subject, the ambiguity of Communist rhetoric, and the frequency and length of Castro's oratory—which offers quotable ma-

terial for almost every position—Jackson sometimes approaches the danger zone of historical guessing.

Since the basic research for the book was apparently finished in 1967, some points seem a little out of focus today. For example, it is debatable that because of Russian influence, and after Guevara's sudden disappearance, many of his protégés in the Cuban government "lost their position of influence, and Guevara's ideas became invisible as Guevara himself" (p. 34). Jackson provides a good analysis of Régis Debray's challenge to the Latin American Communist parties, but I doubt that it could be maintained today, as Jackson does, that Debray was destined by Castro to "replace Guevara as chief ideologist" (p. 121). After several guerrilla defeats, and the multiple doctrinal attack of several Latin American Communist parties, Régis Debray's ideas have lost much of their original impact.

As for the third item, Herbert L. Matthews has written an amazing book. After two careful readings, I conclude that he believes Fidel Castro to be a sort of powerful, enigmatic, benevolent God and himself Castro's prophet. Only Matthews can interpret Castro's words, read his silence, and perceive what even Fidel does not realize he is saying. This assumption is the only explanation for such a superficial, ahistorical and contradictory book as this, so partial to Castro—and to Matthews, who never ceases to remind us who "discovered" him—that almost any review must appear biased.

Fascinated by the Castro phenomenon, Matthews pays attention only to what Castro says, eats, and drinks or to favorable reports about him. Almost all criticism is rejected as unreliable; almost all favorable testimonies are accepted at face value. It is a fact, if we accept Matthews' account, that Fidel was full of impressive rebelliousness since early childhood. When he was six years old his father refused to send him to school. Fidel threatened to burn down the house. The menace carried such weight that his father complied. The source for this remarkable feat? Fidel's own account (p. 21). As a young man Fidel was extraordinarily tenacious and brave. Although beaten several times by a boy, Castro continued to fight until the other boy gave up. The source? "This is a true story of Fidel's boyhood (I heard it from his brother Raul and from others)" (p. 31). That is more than enough for Matthews. These phrases, "Fidel told me," "Raul told me," are the cement of his structure.

Sometimes Matthews looks to others than Castro brothers to substantiate his arguments, but here again his blinders prevent him from making any effort to qualify his sources. For example, to demolish

the theory that Cuba's economic dependence on the Soviet Union would force the country to follow a satellite role, Matthews has only to quote an old member of the Cuban Communist party, at present working with Castro. "Carlos Rafael Rodriguez . . . an orthodox Communist told me in 1967 that the Russians and Eastern Europeans do not consider Castro or his Cuban system to be communist" (p. 325).

Matthews' unbounded admiration for Fidel is comparable only to his contempt for valid sources and for Cuban history. "Spain held Cuba for four hundred years. . . . They were, on the whole, years of misrule, spoliation and brutality" (p. 39). So much for four centuries of Cuban colonial history. In 1933, following the downfall of Machado, "there was a period of confusion and virtual chaos, out of which came 'a sergeant named Batista' . . . and Cuba went back to its muddle of graft and corruption" (p. 50). With this brief account Matthews dismisses the important revolutionary episode of 1933, which did influence affairs in Cuba, and all the rest of Cuban history B. C. (before Castro).

Matthews offers no aid to those seeking an understanding of Fidel's relationship to the revolutionary movements and ideologies preceding him or contemporaneous with him. In summarizing the reasons for the success of Castro's revolution, Matthews credits no other factor than that "romantic revolutionary" (p. 16), in "superb physical conditions" (p. 194), "without an iota of cruelty that Spaniards have often displayed in history" (p. 125), who accomplished a "true epic without parallel in the Western Hemisphere" (p. 129). At one point, however, the prophet gives us a perhaps inadvertent clue to his poor performance as a biographer and historian: "All Fidel had to do, to put it in common terms, was to sell himself to me—and being the man he was, he simply had to be himself to do that" (p. 127). No further comments are necessary.

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*The Great Rebel: Che Guevara in Bolivia.* By LUIS J. GONZÁLEZ and GUSTAVO A. SÁNCHEZ SALAZAR. New York, 1969. Grove Press. Illustrations. Map. Appendices. Pp. 254. \$7.95.

*"Che" Guevara on Revolution. A Documentary Overview.* Edited and with an introduction by JAY MALLIN. Coral Gables, 1969. University of Miami Press. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 255. \$7.95.