

OBSERVATIONS ON LAMAL

Jerome D. Ulman
Department of Special Education
Ball State University

Lamal (1993) gives credit to Malott (1993) and Linger (1993) for providing informative accounts of aspects of contemporary Cuban society, agrees with them that Cuba has made some success in improving the well-being of its people, and concedes that it is possible that people will act in altruistic ways for the long-term common good. In his next breath, however, presumably in quest of "proper academic objectivity," he condemns Cuba for failing to provide its people sufficient food, economic well-being, and freedom from aversive control (i.e., "human rights").

Like Lamal, I too value objectivity and balance. To approach this goal, however, we must take into account the unique conditioning histories within our particular verbal communities, especially when we enter the world of international politics. Having toured revolutionary Cuba on two occasions, I have become quite sensitive to this problem. I find that, with rare exceptions, U.S. citizens, having been exposed throughout their lives to the corporate-controlled media, are least qualified to comment on contemporary Cuba. When the big business media does on occasion say something positive about Cuban society — about the standard of living, level of education, or quality of medical care — it is often perfunctory, serving merely as a point of departure for an incessant and unsupported diatribe against the Cuban revolution. This life-long history of verbal conditioning surely takes its toll on us.

By all means, as Lamal advocates, let us be critical. But that sword cuts in both directions. Let us be just as critical in taking into account our reinforcement history in capitalist society and become sensitized to the alternative perspectives of those who have had different experiences. On this score, it is noteworthy that both Maria Malott and Eloise Linger have visited Cuba and have interacted with the Cuban people. It is evident that P. A. Lamal has not had this experience. For example, as "proof" of the accusation that the Cuban people do not have enough to eat, Lamal (1993) cites a silly joke quoted from *The Washington Post*. No doubt

Author's Note:

Please direct all correspondence to: Jerome D. Ulman, Department of Special Education, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

such jokes about difficult living conditions circulate in Cuba. But this kind of humor should be considered within the context of the situation in Cuba today. There are indeed serious shortages of consumer goods in Cuba, due in part to loss of the favorable trade relations with the former Soviet Union, but much more so due to the economic, commercial, and financial embargo the United States has maintained over thirty years with the aim of crippling Cuba's economy (and recently intensified with the passage of the Torricelli Bill). Unlike much of Latin America, however, there is apparently no malnutrition in Cuba. Further, all Cuban citizens share equally in this shortage. Every family has a ration book. Faculty members at the University of Havana showed us their ration books, and they were no different than those issued to anyone else, regardless of his or her occupation or position. The Cuban people are well aware of what has caused these hardships and understand that their government is doing all it possibly can to ameliorate them. While they may make jokes about their difficulties, the population is prepared to defend their revolution at any cost. Consequently, Cuban socialism is stronger today, not weaker. These are obvious conclusions for anyone who has come to know the Cuban people in this special period of their history.

Lamal goes on to make an even more serious charge against Cuba, calling into question its record on human rights. He does so by citing a book by Brown and Armando (1991) in which the authors allege that dissidents have been committed to mental hospitals, then abused, solely because of their political beliefs. Lamal accepts the authors' "data" on good faith. In contrast, I take the positions that one should be considered innocent until it is proven otherwise. Where is the independently verified evidence of systematic repression of political dissidents by the Cuban government? Such books attacking Cuba are in no short supply in the U.S. The Freedom of Information Act has led to the exposure of extensive disinformation efforts by the CIA and other secret police agencies of the U.S. government — in concert with right-wing academics and publishers — aimed at discrediting the Cuban government. Additionally, the anti-Castro community in Miami is notorious for promoting and funding such efforts. In short, I prefer to think that Lamal's failure to approach Brown and Armando (1991) with the same criticalness as he did Malott (1993) and Linger (1993) is due, not to any deliberate anti-Cuban malevolence, but to political naiveté. Accusations by the Americas Watch and Amnesty International (to which Lamal refers) notwithstanding, I have found no convincing evidence to doubt the claim of the Cuban government that political dissidents are incarcerated in Cuba, not because of their beliefs, but because of their actions — sabotage, attempted assassinations, and other criminal acts. Again, let us examine the evidence rather than rely on hearsay and innuendo. From the Cuban point of view, respect for human rights is measured by the quality of life of all of its citizens — the right to a healthy, educated, and socially useful existence.

I will end on a point of agreement with Lamal (1993). I totally concur that "what is needed is information about the incidence of such altruistic behavior in

ON LAMAL

various societies...[and] a delineation of the variables responsible for the development and maintenance of altruistic behaviors" (Lamal, 1993, p. 43). Because he took the trouble to comment on the work of Malott (1993) and Linger (1993), I presume that Lamal would want to include Cuba among those various societies. It is my sincere desire that he will avail himself of an opportunity to study altruistic behavior by visiting Cuba and observing for himself what is going on there, perhaps by becoming a participant observer in a mini-brigade. Unfortunately, due to undemocratic U. S. laws, it is a serious federal offense for a citizen to travel to Cuba without special permission (e.g., to conduct research). But it can be done. Before traveling to Cuba, however, it is useful to study the history of the Cuban revolution vis-a-vis the United States (e.g., Franklin, 1991).

Speaking of restrictive U.S. laws, it was my intention to write a comprehensive introduction to this set of papers on Cuba. Sadly, one very important paper is not included, a direct result of the aforementioned undemocratic laws. The missing paper is by Carlos Tablada, Cuba's foremost political economist, a scholar who has traveled throughout North America and Western Europe giving lectures on the revolutionary economic theory of Ernesto Che Guevara and on recent developments in Cuba (see Tablada, 1989, 1991). Because the U.S. does not allow direct mail service, Tablada's paper did not arrive in time for it to be included here. However, I anticipate that his article, along with my introduction, will appear in the next issue of this journal.

REFERENCES

- Brown, C.J., & Armando, M.L. (1991). *The politics of psychiatry in revolutionary Cuba*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Franklin, J. (1991). *The Cuban revolution and the United States: A chronological history*. New York: Ocean Press.
- Lamal, P.A. (1993). "Observations on Malott and Linger." *Behavior and Social Issues*, 2, 136-138.
- Linger, E. (1993). Combining moral and material incentives in Cuba. *Behavior and Social Issues*, 2, 118-135.
- Malott, M. (1993). Designing a humanitarian culture: An analysis of the Cuban experiment. *Behavior and Social Issues*, 2, 98-117.
- Tablada, C. (1989). *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*. Sydney: Pathfinder/Pacific and Asia.
- Tablada, C. (1991). The Creativity of Che's Economic Thought. *New International*. No. 8, 67-96. [Original work published in *Cuba Socialista*, May-June, 1989.]