

REVOLUTION IN CUBA

By 1960, the small island nation of Cuba, only 90 miles from the southeast coast of the United States, had aligned itself with the Soviet Union. In this section, we will take a look at how this happened and at some of the consequences of Cuba's turn to communism.

On New Year's Day, 1959, Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro overthrew the **dictatorship** of Fulgencio Batista. Batista had been very friendly with the United States and the Americans had supported his **regime** until just before he was forced from power. The United States supported

the Batista regime mainly because it was anti-communist and protected the numerous American business interests (companies) in Cuba that made very good money producing and exporting Cuban sugar and tobacco, among other products, to the United States. Due to Castro's successful **revolution**, however, Batista was forced to **flee** Cuba. The American government was suspicious of Castro's new government and his **left-wing politics**, as well as his harsh treatment of members of the former Batista government. Also, he seriously angered the United States when he began to

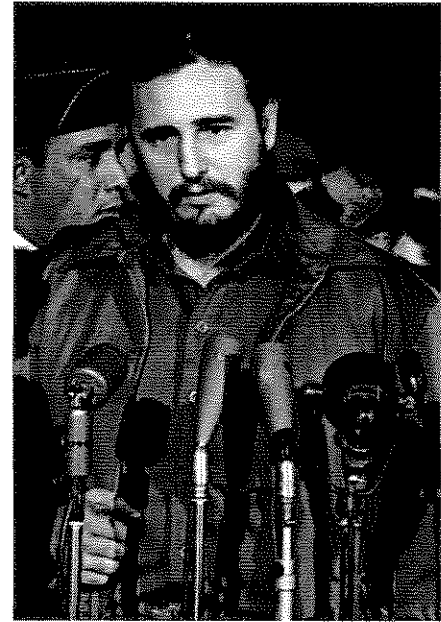


IMAGE 3: Fidel Castro arrives at MATS Terminal, Washington, D.C., April 15, 1959

nationalize some of the American **corporations** located in Cuba.

1. What does it mean to “nationalize” foreign property? (Refer to the exercise you did at the beginning of this lesson, if necessary).
2. Why might Castro have sought to nationalize American businesses in Cuba?
3. How might you have reacted, if you had been an American business owner, when Castro nationalized your company's assets in Cuba? Who might you have turned to for help?

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Glossary

flee: to run away, as from trouble or danger.

left-wing politics: a term referring to a set of political beliefs in support of the ideology of socialism or communism.

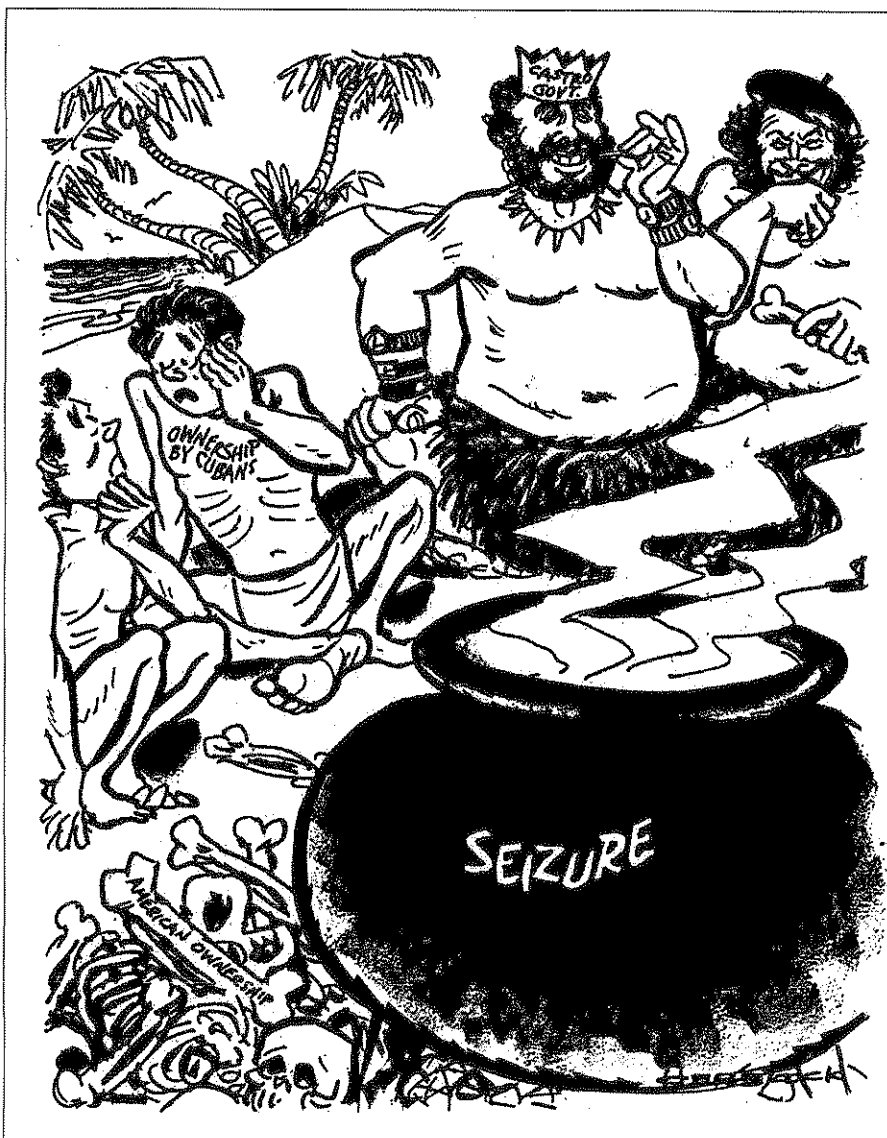


IMAGE 4: Herbert Block's October 20, 1960 cartoon, "What happens when they run out of foreigners?" from *Straight Herblock* (Simon & Schuster, 1964).

Examine the political cartoon above, which was created in response to Castro's decision to begin nationalizing foreign assets in Cuba. Answer the questions on the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet on the next page as you carefully analyze the cartoon. Remember to refer to specific aspects of the cartoon when answering the questions.

The Bay of Pigs

America's growing fury with Castro, and the Cuban Revolution in turn, pushed the Cubans closer to America's great enemy, the Soviet Union. Castro and the Soviet Chairman [leader] Khrushchev became more and more friendly, and as a result, Soviet-style communism came to dominate Cuba.

Castro's growing friendship with the Soviet Union made the United States, unsurprisingly, even more upset. The American government also worried that Communism would spread from Cuba to other Latin American countries, like Mexico.

It is important to recognize how deeply Americans feared the Soviet Union. Although the two countries had fought together to defeat Nazi Germany just fifteen years before, many people in the United States believed that the U.S.S.R. wanted to take over the world and force everyone to embrace communism. By 1960, both the Soviet Union and the United States possessed thousands of nuclear missiles that were so powerful that a full-

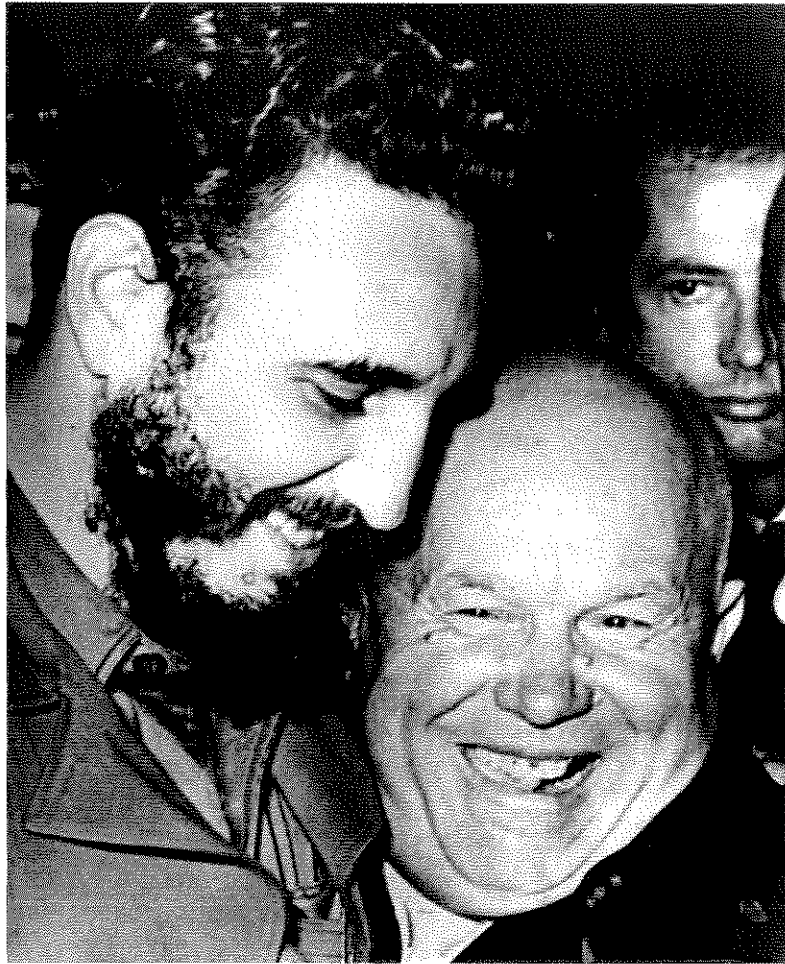


IMAGE 5: Khrushchev and Castro at the United Nations, 1960

scale nuclear war between the two countries could have destroyed life on this planet. When Cuba, only 90 miles from the U.S., moved towards communism and friendship with the U.S.S.R., Americans were intensely concerned.

The U.S. government decided that Castro had to go. The Americans wanted to

get rid of Castro and replace him with a Cuban leader who would be friendly to the United States and to American companies (as Batista had been). After all, Americans said, Cuba was "right next door" to the United States.



IMAGE 6: Cuba's distance from the United States: only 90 miles!

1. In your opinion, did the United States have the right to try and change the government in Cuba by force? Why or why not?

In order to get rid of Castro, the United States began to give money, weapons, and military training to a group of unhappy, anti-Castro Cuban *exiles* who were preparing for an invasion of Cuba. These exiles wanted to **depose** Castro and rid Cuba of communism.

On April 17, 1961 the

United States helped about 1,400 of these anti-Castro Cubans to invade Cuba at a place called *Bahía de Cochinos*, The Bay of Pigs. Although the United States denied actively taking part in the invasion, the world soon found out that this was not exactly true. Many nations, especially the Soviet

Union and its allies, spoke out against American military support for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Soviet Chairman Khrushchev and President of the United States John F. Kennedy exchanged a series of messages during the invasion.

Glossary

depose: to remove from office or power.