

THE UNDISPUTABLE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

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Defenders of Mussolini's fascist state used to say that that at least it kept the trains running on time. Similarly, sympathizers and apologists for Fidel Castro's tyranny credit it with what are said to be remarkable progress in Cuba's literacy and infant mortality rates since 1959. But, as the accompanying table demonstrates, these "achievements of the revolution" are bogus.

In the 1950s, Cuba had a better infant mortality world ranking than in the 1990s, ahead of France, West Germany, Austria, and Japan. Furthermore, today's touted low infant mortality rate has to be viewed in light of the extraordinarily high abortion rate, which amounts to two for every three live births. In fact, this figure is so high that it raises the suspicion that, as the Soviet Union used to do, the regime is manipulating demographic data, passing off infant deaths as abortions. As to literacy, during the same period other countries, such as Paraguay, made gains that are even more impressive than those claimed for Cuba. Yet, nobody trumpets Paraguay's literacy gain under Gen Stroessner, or sympathizes with his regime on that account. Finally, note the reduction in consumption for the presumed beneficiaries of the regime, the poor. This is evidenced by the decrease in per capita caloric intake and the production of domestic staples, such as root crops (Kirby and Llorens, 1998).

I leave it to students of fascist Italy to evaluate the performance of its trains. As for the "achievements of the Cuban revolution," the one that is truly indisputable is that it made Fidel Castro an international power player, feted the world over while the ordinary Cuban has less bread and no freedom (Cuzán, 1999).

CUBA IN STATISTICS: 1950's vs. 1990's

INDICATOR	YEAR	
	1950s	1990s
Infant mortality	32/1,000 live births lowest in Latin America, 13 th lowest in the world, ahead of France, Belgium, West Germany, Ireland, Israel, Austria, Italy, Japan, Greece, Spain, and Portugal, all of which would overtake Cuba during the following decades	10/1,000, still lowest in Latin America but 25 th in the world, overtaken by all the countries mentioned in the first column. Also, Cuba has one of the highest abortion rates in the globe, 0.71 per live birth, or two abortions for every three births. Many of these abortions are of high-risk pregnancies, which would naturally reduce the infant mortality rate. Moreover, in the tradition of communist manipulation of statistics, it may very well be that infant deaths are being shifted to the abortion column.
Physicians and dentists per capita	128/100,000 people, third in Latin America (behind Uruguay and Argentina) and ahead of the UK, Finland and even the USA	UN <i>Statistical Yearbook</i> no longer publishes these data, so comparisons are not possible
Literacy	76%, fourth highest in Latin America, behind only Argentina (87%), Chile (81%) and Costa Rica (79%)	96%, tied for first place in Latin America with Argentina, but other countries one doesn't hear much about have made even more remarkable progress, e.g., Paraguay (from 68% to 92%) and Ecuador (from 56% to 90%), and unlike Cubans, these peoples enjoy a relatively free press and an abundance of information
Newspapers	58 daily newspapers, second only to Brazil, a much bigger country	17 dailies (all government or party-controlled)
Television receivers per capita	45/1,000 inhabitants, 1 st in Latin America, and 5 th in the world, behind only Monaco, the USA, Canada, and the UK	170/1,000, 4 th in Latin America (and considerably lower in the world)

Radio receivers per capita	169/1,000, 2 nd only to Uruguay in Latin America and ahead of Japan	Just above average in Latin America, behind even Bolivia, El Salvador, and Honduras
Television stations	23 stations, more than twice the number in Mexico, again, a much bigger country	UN <i>Statistical Yearbook</i> no longer publishes these data, so comparisons are not possible
Radio stations	160 stations, 1 st in Latin America and 8 th in the world, more than Austria, UK, and France	UN <i>Statistical Yearbook</i> no longer publishes these data, so comparisons are not possible
Caloric consumption per person per day	2,730, behind only Argentina and Uruguay	2,357, last in Latin America
Per capita supply of root crops	91 kg per year	63 kg per year
Per capita meat supplies	33 kg per year	23 kg per year
Rice production (1,000 metric tons)	261, 4 th in Latin America behind only Brazil, Colombia and Peru, bigger countries	223, 12 th in Latin America and the only country experiencing a decline
Milk production (tons)	828,000, 5 th in the region	920,000, only 11 percent higher than in the 1958 whereas all other countries have doubled or tripled production; 9 th in the region,

Source: Smith and Llorens, 1998.

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