

EMŐKE HORVÁTH

The Catholic *Diario de la Marina* and the New Political Power in Cuba (1959–1960)

Fidel Castro's speech, delivered on 30 June 1961 at the *Biblioteca Nacional*, Havana, was addressed to the Cuban intellectuals who had been engaged in three days of debate and discussion. The core concept of his message was the question of freedom of creation, and in this context Fidel Castro declared that "the socio-economic revolution must inevitably bring with it also the cultural revolution..."¹ Although Article 33 of the Basic Law (*Ley Fundamental*) of February 1959 guaranteed Cubans freedom of expression, both orally and in writing, and Article 47 allowed the free expression of art, artists had to defend their artistic freedom in 1961 in a fierce debate with the state power. The cultural revolution in the arts was accompanied by the restructuring of mass media and the abolition of the freedom of press, one of the victims of which was the flagship of the Cuban press, the Catholic daily *Diario de la Marina*, which had a large circulation. It was not the only newspaper to disappear, *Avance*, *El Mundo*, *Prensa Libre*, *El País*, *El Crisol*, *Bohemia* and *Carteles* shared the same fate, i.e. all the printed newspapers that were critical of the Revolution, sometimes even hostile to it. Some radio stations (*Radio Mambí*) and TV channels (CMQ) had the same fate of the critical press, but the fervent watch over the defence of the revolution spared neither *Hoy Domingo*, the cultural supplement to the communists newspaper (*Hoy*), nor *Lunes de Revolución*, the cultural weekly to the newspaper of the 26th of July Movement (*Revolución*), published since April 1959; both of them were last published in November 1961. Che Guevara, showing Jacobin fervour, stated once: "The defect of most of our intellectuals and artists is the original sin of not being authentic revolutionaries".² With this single sentence of Che Guevara's, the new political regime – the so often mentioned „Revolution” – had alienated a large part of Cuba's intellectuals and artists, including journalists.

In this article I will try to analyse the process that led to the *Diario de la Marina* being classified among the unacceptable category of press products for the new political regime and finally being clearly placed in the group of newspapers to

¹ Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario y Secretario del PURSC, como conclusión de las Reuniones con los Intelectuales Cubanos, efectuadas en la Biblioteca Nacional el 16, 23 y 30 de junio de 1961. The speech can be accessed at: cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html (downloaded: 17 March 2021).

² Cited by Carlos TELLO DÍAZ: "Cultura y política en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana: el caso Padilla". *Cuadernos Americanos*, CLVI, 2016/2. 177–194. 178. About the question in Hungarian: CSIKÓS Zsuzsanna: "Alkotói szabadság vagy forradalmi hűség? A Castro-rendszer viszonya az írókhoz és az irodalomhoz az 1960-as években". In CSIKÓS Zsuzsanna-HORVÁTH Emőke (szerk.): *Diktátorok és diktatúrák a Karib térségben*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2020. 201–220.

be closed down. Basically, the problem can be grouped under four headings: freedom of the press, agrarian reform, the nationalization of private schools, and communism. In this case, I will focus on the issue of freedom of the press, a little-known topic which is certainly of general interest.

I. Background

The daily *Diario de la Marina* was founded in 1840 by the Spanish-born journalist Don Nicolás Rivero as a successor to *El Noticioso* and the *Lucero de La Habana*. The newspaper had strong links with its founder's former homeland, Spain, and – even under the leadership of its founder's son, José Ignacio Rivero and later under his grandson – it maintained its conservative orientation till the end.³ Although it was privately founded and owned, it was considered a Catholic daily, because of its close links with religion and the Catholic Church, an identity it maintained.⁴ Its ties to the Catholic Church were also reflected in its coverage of all the major church-related issues, its regular publication of circulars from ecclesiastical leaders, including the Primate of Cuba, and its strong anti-communist tone.

By 1959 a tradition of high-quality journalism had developed in Cuba. The first steps can be traced back to the second half of the 18th century, when genuine periodical newspapers began to appear in increasing numbers throughout Europe and their influence spread to the Americas. In 1762, at the initiative of Ambrosio de Funes y Villapando the newspaper *Gazeta* (Gazette), which was similar in content and structure to the French newspaper of the same name, was launched in Havana, but its existence proved short-lived, lasting only two years. *Pensador*, published by Gabriel Beltrán de Santa Cruz and Ignacio José de Urrutia, was launched at the same time as the *Gazeta*; the newspaper had a similar structure to its sister paper, with both political and economic columns. The first real Cuban newspaper, however, only appeared in 1790 at the initiative of the Governor of the island, Luis de Las Casas. The right to publish *Papel Periódico de La Habana* (1790) was later acquired by *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* [Economic Society of Friends of the People] until its dissolution in 1828. The newspaper published both national and international news, advertisements and a special literary section. In addition to the capital, newspapers gradually appeared in the larger rural centres (*El Amigo de los Cubanos*; *Espejo de Puerto Príncipe*; *El Fénix*), providing regular news and information on events in the local community. The most important journal of the Cuban colonial period, and one of the most prestigious Spanish-language organs, was the *Revista y repertorio bimestre de la Isla de Cuba* (Bimonthly Journal and Repertory of the Island of Cuba).

³ William Luis: *Culture and Customs of Cuba*, Westport, Greenwood, 2001. 59, 61.

⁴ The newspaper just mentioned that in its article written about Fidel Castro's speech in Havana on 8 January 1959. „El deber de todos los cubanos”, *Diario de la Marina*, 9 January 1959, 1-A.

In order to maintain the quality of journalism, the first journalism academy was established in 1942, and within a decade and a half the number of schools had grown to six, with 200 students leaving each year. The National College of Journalists was founded in 1943; the organization advocated compulsory membership in the interests of professional journalism. In the year of the Cuban revolution's victory, sixteen dailies were published in the country. Cuba had the first public radio station in Latin America (1922) and the Island became the third country to broadcast television, along with Mexico and Brazil.⁵

THE PRESS AS PROPAGANDA AND THE PROBLEM OF THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

ATTRACTING FOREIGN PRESS

Following the victory of the Revolution, in a TV speech in April 1959, Castro reassuringly indicated that the new regime intended to act according to the rules of democracy and, in the spirit of the Basic Law, showed tolerance on the issue of freedom of expression when he stated:

To persecute the Catholic because he is a Catholic, to persecute a Protestant because he is a Protestant, to persecute the Mason because he is a Mason, to persecute the Rotarian because he is a Rotarian, to persecute *La Marina* because it may be a newspaper with a rightest tendency, or to persecute another because it is of a leftist tendency, one because it is radical and of the extreme right and another of the extreme left, I cannot conceive of, nor will the Revolution... We are doing what is democratic: respecting all ideas. When one begins by closing a newspaper, no newspaper can feel secure; when one begins to persecute a man for his political ideas, nobody can feel secure.⁶

Castro's words above are all the more remarkable given that months earlier he had announced an operation called *Operación Verdad* (Operation Truth). It was launched because after the victory of the Revolution, in January 1959, the government had already initiated political trials to punish officers who had fought alongside the Batista regime during the civil war against Castro's *Ejército Rebelde* (Rebel Army). In several cases, the death penalty was imposed on officers sentenced to prison in politically motivated trials, without any legal guarantees, because they were

⁵ On the history of Cuban journalism, see: Claudia LIGHTFOOT: *Havana. A cultural and literary companion*, Oxford, Signal Books, 2002. 25; Alejo CARPENTIER: *Obras completas. Conferencias*, Madrid-Bogotá, Alianza, 1991. 183; Juan ORLANDO PÉREZ: "The Media in Castro's Cuba: Every Word Counts". In Jairo LUGO-OCANDO (ed.): *The Media in Latin America*. Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2008. 116–130, 116–117; LUIS *op. cit.* 57–79, 57–58.

⁶ Cited by William E RATLIFF: *The Selling of Fidel Castro. The Media and the Cuban Revolution*, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1987. 95.

considered war criminals. These trials and sentences attracted the attention of the Cuban Catholic Church and the foreign (particularly the North American) press. In a phone conversation with Radio WBZ in Boston, President Manuel Urrutía encouraged US journalists to visit Cuba and see for themselves what was happening in the country and to attend the public trials of the convicted.⁷ In addition to journalists, US Congressmen were invited by the Cuban government, including Democratic Party representatives Adam Clayton Powell and Charles O. Porter, who travelled to Cuba and reported on their personal experiences to the relevant US State Department officials.⁸

During the guerrilla fighting in the Sierra Maestra during the civil war, Fidel Castro realised that the way to political success was through the mass media, the written press and the radio, not only through arms. Already in hiding, the 26th of July Movement tried to create its own written press suitable for distribution. The guerrilla fighters' first newspaper had the title *Revolución* (Revolution), and its first issue had the basic task of informing the world that Fidel Castro was alive, despite all the rumours following the failed landing of the *Granma*. These included the *Sierra Maestra* monthly, first published in 1958, whose editorial work was carried out in Miami, USA. *Radio Rebelde*, founded by Che Guevara and then run by the rebel high command, also had a decisive role in spreading revolutionary ideas, with the rebel secret radio station starting to broadcast and agitate for the Revolution from February 1958. For effect, it was always mentioned in each announcement that it was broadcasting from "free Cuban territory".

Fidel Castro invited journalists to the Cuban mountains, where through the cleverly dosed personal, political, and occasionally romanticised aspects of the guerrilla lifestyle, he was able to ensure both himself and the 26th of July Movement regular press coverage and primacy over other anti-Batista forces. Between February 1957 and December 1958, 17 foreign journalists covered the Cuban insurgents. The journalists came from various Latin American countries (Uruguay, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Venezuela), but mainly from the United States (*The New York Times*, *Columbia Broadcasting System*, *Look y Coronet*, *The Chicago Sun Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, *United Press*), and even a French newspaper, *Paris-Match*, sent a correspondent to the Cuban mountains. A number of Cuban newspapers and radio stations (*Bohemia*, *Noticuba*, *Cineperiódico Unión Radio*, *Noticuario Nacional* and *Zigzag*) also had the audacity to defy the partial censorship and sent journalists to the resistance fighters in the mountains.⁹ Fidel Castro owed a lot to journalists, especially to Herbert Matthews, a correspondent from *The New York Times*, who in 1957, after personal experience of the resistance in

⁷ *Diario de la Marina*, 17 January 1959, 1A.

⁸ *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Cuba, Vol. VI. 238. Editorial Note; *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Cuba, Vol. VI. 260. Memorandum of a Conversation, Washington, 12 March 1959.

⁹ Patricia CALVO GONZÁLEZ: "Percepciones de la Sierra Maestra. La visión de la insurrección cubana (1957–1958) a través de los periodistas latinoamericanos". *Revista internacional de Historia de la Comunicación*, N°7, año 2016, 92–115. 96.

the mountains, published his observations in a three-part series of articles.¹⁰ Both Matthews and Hugh Thomas later cited the role of *The New York Times* in establishing Castro's domestic and international reputation. In his 1967 memoir, Matthews recalls that ten years earlier, during a chilly morning in the Sierra with the Castro brothers and Che Guevara, he had been aware of the historical significance of the situation and the publicity his newspaper offered the guerrillas. On the other hand, Thomas highlighted the international opportunity created by *The New York Times*.¹¹

Castro was therefore fully aware of the role of the media in politics, which is why the aim and task of *Operación Verdad* was to persuade the international press personally and to bring them on the side of the Revolution through the experience of the journalists invited to Cuba. They wanted to show the world that the government acted appropriately in the criminal trials, because they were treating the soldiers on trial as war criminals.¹² The Cuban press, including the *Diario de la Marina*, reported the launch of *Operación Verdad*. The newspaper reported that the government had invited a significant number of foreign journalists, including 150 North American journalists, to the country on 20 January 1959. The next day, Fidel Castro and other members of the government held a press conference for them and later invited them to a public trial. This program was part of a major operation to invite 350 foreign journalists to Cuba.¹³ As part of *Operación Verdad*, Gabriel García Márquez also visited Cuba and attended the trial of Jesús Sosa Blanco, but this was not the beginning of his friendship with Castro.¹⁴

The creation of the *Prensa Latina* news agency on 16 June 1959 is another example of the authorities' attention to the press. The institution was based in Havana and its mission was to represent and defend the ideas of the Cuban Revolution against the news of the major international news agencies. The management of the *Prensa Latina* was entrusted to the Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti, a friend of Che Guevara, who built up the organisation of the *Prensa* in five months.¹⁵ By establishing the *Prensa Latina*, Cuba gave itself a face to be seen by the outside world, and the press served a political purpose first and foremost. In addition to the *Prensa Latina*, radio was seen by Fidel Castro and his comrades as another effective means of transmitting the ideas of the Revolution and Cuban news abroad. The idea of setting up such a radio station was reportedly already mooted in the Sierra Maestra during the final stages of the struggle against the Batista regime.¹⁶ *Radio Habana*

¹⁰ *The New York Times*, 24, 25 and 26 February 1957.

¹¹ RATLIFF *op. cit.* 3; on the debates on Matthews's personality, see: DEPALMA: *Myth of the Enemy: Castro, Cuba and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times*, Kellogg Institute, Working Paper # 313 – July 2004.

¹² *Diario de la Marina*, 21 January 1959, 12A.

¹³ Uo., 1A, 12A; *Diario de la Marina*, 2 January 1959, 1A

¹⁴ Melanie CEBRIÁN: *Representación histórica en la obra de Gabriel García Márquez*, Hamburg, Diplomica Verlag, 2009, 5.

¹⁵ See: Piero GLEIJESES: "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961–1965". *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb. 1996), 159–195. 160.

¹⁶ See the official homepage of *Radio Habana Cuba*: radiohc.cu/quienes-somos (downloaded: January 20, 2021). In addition to radio, film also played an important role in building political propaganda.

Cuba started broadcasting in May 1961 as Cuba's only shortwave radio station, broadcasting to the Caribbean region, the United States and Latin America, among other destinations.¹⁷

The achievement of control over the domestic press was a complete success, following a process of about one year and a half after the victory of the Revolution. Immediately after 1 January 1959, five newspapers and three radio stations whose owners had close links with the former regime were closed down. At the same time, several of the newspapers that had been silenced during the Batista dictatorship were reopened, so that, for example, *Hoy*, the newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, could once again operate.¹⁸

THE RELATIONSHIP OF *DIARIO DE LA MARINA* WITH THE BATISTA REGIME AND WITH THE RESISTANCE

On 11 March 1952, the *Diario de la Marina*, in keeping with the importance of the subject, ran a headline on the coup d'état carried out the previous day by General Fulgencio Batista. Without any interpretation, each article was limited to a mere statement of the facts.¹⁹ However, the news that the new government's Minister of Propaganda, Ernesto de la Fé, together with some of his fellow ministers, had paid a so-called 'courtesy' visit to the newspaper at 1 a.m. is certainly a surprising and thought-provoking fact, although not a unique phenomenon. After the victory of the *Ejército Rebelde*, Fidel Castro, representing the revolutionaries who had marched on Havana, paid a similar visit to the *Diario de la Marina*. It seems that winning the favour of Cuba's leading daily newspaper was extremely important for all political tendencies, and they wanted to personally and immediately inform the newspaper's management of their goodwill. This intention also draws the attention to two facts: the recognition of the political role of the press and the dominant role of the *Diario de la Marina* among Cuban newspapers.

Following Batista's takeover, the situation of press freedom and individual press products varied. Following the coup, parts of the 1940 Constitution were suspended,

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See: LÉNÁRT András: *Film és történelem Latin-Amerikában. A 20. század a filmtörténet tükrében*, Szeged, JATEPress, 2020; LÉNÁRT András: "A kubai film a politikai-társadalmi változások tükrében (2010–2015)". In HORVÁTH Emőke (szerk.): *Tanulmányok a Karib térségről*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2016. 89–104; LÉNÁRT András: "A film mint történelmi forrás". *Aetas*, 2010, XXV/3., 159–171; LÉNÁRT András: "A latin-amerikai film múltja és jelene". *Tiszatáj*, 2011, LXV/1., 89–96.

¹⁷ John A. LENT: "Cuban Mass Media After 25 Years of Revolution". *Journalism Quarterly*, 1985, LXII (3), 609–615. doi:10.1177/107769908506200322 609.

¹⁸ JAIRO-LUGO *op. cit.* 116–117.

¹⁹ *Diario de la Marina*, 11 March 1952. 1-A. The articles to be found on the page: "Depuesto el Presidente Carlos Prío y su Gobierno por un golpe militar que encabezó el general Fulgencio Batista"; "El Presidente Carlos Prío dejó Palacio a las 9 de la mañana"; "Cabrera, Soca y Uría llegaron a Miami en un avión militar"; "Discurso a la nación del general Batista"; "Celebra Consejo de Ministros el nuevo Gobierno"; "Visita de cortesía de E. de la Fé al Diario".

and on 14 April the 1940 Constitution was ratified with the entry of some additional provisions, including an article on freedom of the press (Article 33).²⁰ At the same time, the new Article 41 provided for the possibility of temporarily suspending, in whole or in part, freedom of the press in the event of war or invasion, terrorism and arms trafficking, for the “necessary period” (*por el tiempo que fuere necesario*), as the law puts it (Article 33), if the Council of Ministers deemed such a measure necessary. The indefinite duration clause extended the specific 45-day period laid down in the 1940 Constitution to a virtually unlimited period, leaving the press at the mercy of the authorities.²¹ The provisions of this article were generally enforced as a result of the escalation of sabotage by the opposition and the armed resistance of the 26th of July Movement, i.e. the situation of the written and other press in Cuba became more difficult, particularly between 1953 and 1958.

As a result of the attack on the Moncada barracks the *Ley de Orden Público*, 997/53 [Public Order Law, 997/53]²² was published, punishing those who spread false news and rumours and engage in illegal propaganda; it restricted individual and collective freedoms, including freedom of expression. The legislation extended the provision to all forms of media, including the written press.²³ In addition to direct legislative measures, the written press was strongly ‘oriented’ by regular government news bulletins issued by the Ministry of Propaganda (*Ministerio de Propaganda*) (later known as the Ministry of Information, *Ministerio de Información*). Later, when the newly created Consultative Council (*Consejo Consultivo*) replaced the Congress and took control of part of the press in a more indirect way, above all the small, unviable newspapers, of which there were several among the fifty-eight Cuban dailies of the time. The Batista government also used a method familiar from the history of the press, which has been used for centuries, when it expected subsidised newspapers to propagate government ambitions in return for state subsidies and advertising. According to Spicer’s calculations, the Batista government spent approximately 450,000 pesos (!) a month to finance the press.²⁴ In conclusion, in the years between 1953 and 1958, and especially in the period between 1956 and 1958, during the armed resistance of the 26th of July Movement, the Cuban press experienced periods of censorship, depending on the political-military situation, and from March 1958 until Batista’s escape, there was continuous censorship in the country.²⁵

²⁰ *Ley Constitucional para la República de Cuba de 4 de abril de 1952, conocida como los Estatutos Constitucionales del Viernes de Dolores*. Biblioteca Jurídica Virtual del Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas de la UNAM. juridicas.unam.mx (downloaded: January 14, 2021)

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² The law was promulgated on 6 August 1953.

²³ Juana Marta LEÓN IGLESIAS: “Evolución de las ideas filosófico penales en Cuba. El Código de Defensa Social y otras normativas penales (1938-1958)”. *Revista de Historia del Derecho* Sección Investigaciones N° 45, INHIDE, Buenos Aires, enero-junio 2013, III-140, 126-127.

²⁴ Data cited by CALVO GONZÁLEZ i. m. 349.

²⁵ *Diario de la Marina*, 13 March 1958. I-A.

In spite of the periods of censorship for longer and shorter periods, the *Diario de la Marina* reacted to the series of interviews with Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra in 1957, already referred to above, by the renowned North American journalist Herbert Matthews, published in *The New York Times* on 24 February 1957. On 27 February 1957, it reported on the first page, in a completely objective tone, stating the concrete facts²⁶, and in the 1 March issue it returned to the question, also on the first page, and in the supplement of that day it also published one of the photographs taken by Matthews.²⁷ The issue was brought to the fore again by the controversy that Batista questioned the veracity of the report, calling Matthews' writing fiction. In response to this comment, the American author and the *Diario de la Marina*, following the events, published the photo as evidence, noting that it was taken on 17 February in the Cuban mountains, and Castro signed a letter to Matthews confirming that they had met in the Cuban mountains. Articles in the *Diario de la Marina* did not make any negative comments on the facts.

One of the most significant and symbolically powerful political events of 1957 was the armed attack on the Presidential Palace (*Palacio Residencial*) on 13 March. According to an article in the *Diario de la Marina* the following day – and to historical research – the attack was organised and carried out by the military wing of the University of Havana's long-standing political organisation, the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria*, (University Students' Federation, FEU) the *Directorio Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Directorate, DR). The main aim was to eliminate Fulgencio Batista by occupying the Palace, but this plan failed because the attackers reached the presidential study on the second floor on the building, but Batista was not there. According to the newspaper, he was having lunch with his family in another room, in the company of two of his ministers, Santiago Rey²⁸ and Andrés Domingo.²⁹ In parallel with the siege of the Presidential Palace, the *Directorio Revolucionario* tasked another group with the capture of *Radio Reloj*. In the case of the radio station, the attackers seemed to be more successful, taking it over and reading a proclamation that Fulgencio Batista was dead, and announcing the removal of General Tabernilla.³⁰ José Antonio Echevarría, the leader of the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria*, who led the attack on *Radio Reloj*, and Menelao Mora Morales, a former member of parliament, who led the besiegers of the Presidential Palace, were both

²⁶ *Diario de la Marina*, 27 February 1957. 1-A.

²⁷ „New York Times” publica foto de H. Matthews of Fidel Castro”, *Diario de la Marina*, 1st of March 1957. 1-A.

²⁸ Santiago Rey Pernas participated in the work of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1940 Constitution; he was Governor and Senator of the Province of Las Villas, and he was Batista's Minister of Administration in 1957.

²⁹ Andrés Domingo Morales del Castillo had had a distinguished political carrier in Cuba, serving as Secretary of the Presidency and Council of Ministers during the siege of the Presidential Palace.

³⁰ Francisco Tabernilla Dolz swapped his diplomatic career for military service, and in 1957 he was appointed Chief of General Staff when the three branches of the armed forces (army, navy and police) were merged.

killed in the fighting.³¹ There is no doubt that the newspaper's reporting was from the perspective of the Presidential Palace, but in this case there were two reasons for this: the information was only available from the presidential residence and the journalists, who were there, and the nature and significance of the attack.³² The siege of the presidential palace was a failure in all respects, and it was a caesura in the history of the *Directorio Revolucionario*, as it lost its legendary leader and failed to push through the idea of transforming the capital into a theatre of combat. The coup de grace for the *FEU-Directorio Revolucionario* came when, not unrelated to the joint actions of the police and the army that followed the siege of the Presidential Palace, four FEU leaders were ambushed and killed in their apartment at 7 Humboldt Street in Havana on 20 April 1957, as a result of a search by the Military Intelligence Service (*Servicio de Inteligencia Militar*, SIM), during the so-called "Operation Humboldt 7". With the deaths of Fructuoso Rodríguez Pérez, Eugenio Francisco Pérez Cowley, José Manuel Machado Rodríguez and Juan Pedro Carbó Serviá, the FEU was virtually decapitated and its activities were relocated from the capital to the countryside in the Escambray mountains. The report of the *Diario de la Marina* on the news about the student leaders is once again only factual, with no commentary.³³

Fighting and systematic sabotage in the country continued to be regularly reported, and when a group of twenty-five journalists representing Havana newspapers and foreign correspondents working in the country visited Oriente province in April 1957, also the *Diario de la Marina* was represented in the delegation. An article announcing the possibility of the journalists' departure makes it clear that Fulgencio Batista personally took the initiative to organise the visit, in order to avoid rumours of personnel changes in the army's leadership, and to avoid the public associating this with the idea of a larger number of resistance soldiers fighting in the mountains. According to official figures, there are not even 2,000 soldiers in the Sierra Maestra, so the number of guerrillas could not have required a change of personnel.³⁴

The 19 June 1957 issue of the newspaper included the testimony of two peasants from the Sierra Maestra mountain town of La Plata, who testified in Havana, Military City of Columbia (*Ciudad Militar de Columbia*) that guerrillas had burned both their homes to the ground and killed several soldiers, sailors and civilians who were staying there. Although the two desperate peasants painted a rather negative picture of the guerrillas, the financial losses of the people living in the area and the

³¹ "Frustrado asalto al Palacio Presidencial por un grupo de 40 hombres con numerosas armas", *Diario de la Marina*, 14 March 1957. 1-A.

³² In addition to the front page, the newspaper devoted almost all of page 14 to this topic.

³³ "Cuatro muertos en un encuentro a tiros con fuerzas de la policía", *Diario de la Marina*, 21 April 1957. 1-A.

³⁴ José Ignacio Solís represented the newspaper, "No hay 2000 soldados en Sierra Maestra ni tampoco 200 alzados", *Diario de la Marina*. 11 April 1957. 1-A. Even today, the exact number of people fighting in the mountains remains uncertain, with figures ranging from 300 to 8000. On the question, see: Neill Macaulay: "The Cuban Rebel Army: A Numerical Survey". *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2 (May 1978), 284-295.

fears of the peasantry about them, it cannot be said that the news was specifically for government propaganda, because the newspaper gave space to a report without any comment or interpretation. There is no doubt that the opinion of the peasants was not very flattering either about Fidel Castro or about his fighters, but these were two private opinions that cannot be held against the newspaper.³⁵ Another report in the same issue, in a similar style, also focused on events in the south of Cuba, mainly around Manzanillo.³⁶

The list of examples could go until December 1958, but it is not the purpose of this study to analyse in detail the content of articles published during the Batista era. On the whole, it can be said that, despite the difficulties of periodic censorship, the *Diario de la Marina* tried to report on the events in Oriente province and on Fidel Castro in a basically objective tone in the period leading up to the victory of the guerrilla fighters. Despite the fact that one of the paper's contributors, José Ignacio Solís, reported daily on government reports, the *Diario de la Marina's* dry, strictly factual reports were skilfully avoiding the traps of official government propaganda, even if its main data came from within or close to the government. In fact, *Diario de la Marina* helped the protagonist concerned to dispel the news of Castro's death, even if this was not its intention, since it was one of the newspapers with a large circulation and the most influential, and it distributed the photos and news stories to 28,000 readers.³⁷

2. *The relationship of the Diario de la Marina to the Revolution and Fidel Castro*

On 1 January 1959, the country's leading daily newspaper only reported, in an almost obscure place at the bottom of its front page, that government forces had entered the city of Las Villas, where, reinforcing soldiers fighting against concentrated rebel forces, the rebels had suffered hundreds of casualties.³⁸ At the time of printing, the editorial staff could not have been aware that Fulgencio Batista had left the country at dawn. However, the next day at the latest, the newspaper was informed of the incident, and as a result, the next edition was not published until 6 January. In proportion of the importance of the political events, practically all of the paper's political news was devoted to the new situation and its effects. In his first press conference at the Presidential Palace, the new interim president, Manuel Urrutía Lleó made it clear that he intended to run the country on the basis of the 1940 Constitution, and that only a few changes to the Constitution – which were not specified – would be made as the situation required. Responding to a question from a journalist, he tried to reassure the press representatives present

³⁵ “Relatan dos testigos cómo fue el asalto Rebelde a La Plata”, *Diario de la Marina*, 19 June 1957. 1–A.

³⁶ “Siguen de cerca a los rebeldes en la zona de Purial de Jibacoa”, *Diario de la Marina*, 19 June 1957. 1–A.

³⁷ On weekdays 28,000 copies were published, on Sundays 35,000. From the U.S. Embassy, Havana to the Department of State, Washington, November 5, 1953. 937.61/11–553.

³⁸ “Informe del Estado Mayor del Ejército”, *Diario de la Marina*, the 1st of January 1959. 1–A.

that the new government would crack down on the censorship practices of the Batista regime, and that journalists would not be influenced in any way, because, as he stated, a healthy democracy can only be achieved in a well-informed society.³⁹ Echoing the President's words, Fidel Castro, who was in the countryside, also told journalists that he would no longer apply press censorship.⁴⁰ Castro declined the presidential invitation to join the government, saying that he would only be an observer of events, and as a result Urrutía Lleó announced to the public that Fidel Castro would be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.⁴¹ Among the US financial dailies, the *Journal of Commerce* put everyone on hold regarding Fidel Castro's economic policies, i.e. Castro was seen as the most powerful and influential political figure who would play a decisive role in the country's governance, and completely ignored Urrutía Lleó.⁴² From all these moments, we can conclude that already in the euphoric early stages of the victory, dual power began to take shape in Cuba, with Urrutía Lleó becoming a weightless political figure, overwhelmed by the shadow of Fidel Castro. This was not, of course, against the will of the person who was casting the shadow.

The 6 January issue of the *Diario de la Marina* also gave a detailed account of the foreign repercussions of the revolution's victory, with more space devoted to the Spanish reception, in keeping with the newspaper's orientation. The tone of the articles is restrained, factual, and in other cases rather enthusiastic. Batista's regime was referred to as a dictatorship on several occasions. The newspaper, which had close ties with the Catholic Church, featured on its front page a telegram sent by Pope John XXIII to Archbishop Manuel Arteaga Betancourt of Havana, on 4 January, in which the Catholic head of church asked for God's blessing on the Cuban people.⁴³ Also included in this issue are statements by the Auxiliary Bishop of Havana, Alfredo Müller San Martín, on the revolution, its hopeful democratic direction, the supportive role of the chaplains in the revolutionary army, and the participation of the leaders of the Catholic organizations *Acción Católica*, *Agrupación Católica Universitaria* and the *Juventud Obrera Católica* in the fighting, including the 26th of July Movement or in the ranks of the MRC (*Movimiento de Resistencia Cívica*, Civil Resistance Movement).⁴⁴ The revolutionary activity of the members and leaders of these organizations is confirmed by a report of the US Interim Havana Chargé d'Affaires dated 10 January 1958, in which Daniel M. Braddock informed the State Department partly on this very issue and partly on the rather negative attitude of the high clergy towards the Batista regime.⁴⁵

³⁹ "Mi gobierno será...", *Diario de la Marina*, the 6 January 1959. 2–B.

⁴⁰ "Aclaman al Jefe de la ...", *Diario de la Marina*, the 6 January 1959. 2–B.

⁴¹ "Aclaman al Jefe de la Revolución a su paso por la nación", *Diario de la Marina*, the 6 January 1959. 1–A.

⁴² "Opiniones de los diarios financieros de N. Y.", *Diario de la Marina*, the 6 January 1959. 2–B.

⁴³ "Pide su Santidad la protección de Dios para Cuba", *Diario de la Marina*, 6 January 1959. 1–A.

⁴⁴ "Declaraciones de Mons. Alfredo Müller S. Martín", *Diario de la Marina*, 6 January 1959. 8–A.

⁴⁵ FRUS (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba), Volume VI. Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, Havana, January 10, 1958. Doc. 2.

The next important stage in the assessment of the relationship between the newspaper and the new political power is the newspaper coverage of the arrival of the revolutionary convoy led by Fidel Castro in Havana and Castro's speech on that occasion. The *Diario de la Marina* reported with enthusiastic words in its issue of 9 January 1959 on the events of the previous evening, when, during Fidel Castro's speech, one of the white doves that had flown up landed on Castro's shoulder and the other remained on his right hand, a fact the editorial explained: "Along with the overwhelming majority of Cubans, we do not believe that such an event was a coincidence, an unimportant story. No, we see in the white dove on Fidel Castro's right hand a clear plan of the Most High..."⁴⁶ The members of the editorial board could not have said more glowing things about Fidel Castro. Castro's speech also touched on the free exercise of freedom of speech and freedom of press. In the latter case, the *Diario de la Marina* welcomed, on behalf of all its journalists, Castro's promise of coverage and expressed its intention that, in line with the newspaper's long history, free expression of ideas would always be respected. They would recognise what was worthy of recognition, they would lead the way, if they thought they knew the truth, not with servile praise, not with unfounded criticism, but with the cooperation of the Cuban nation. It is from this almost idyllic starting point that the *Diario de la Marina* began life in the "brave new world".

Fidel Castro had already pledged in the Sierra Maestra that he would restore the 1940 Constitution if they came to power. This promise was only partially kept, a Basic Law was issued on 7 February 1959 and Cuban society had to wait until 1976 for the Constitution until 1976, of course by then far removed from the democratic principles of 1940. Many points of the Basic Law were identical to the 1940 Constitution, including Article 33 on the freedom of the press, which speaks of the freedom of expression without prior censorship. In both cases, it was possible to collect books, records, films, newspapers or other published publications if they threatened someone's honour, the social order and public peace, based on a previous substantiated decision of the competent judicial authority. Castro, both during his trip with the revolutionary convoy in January and in April 1959, when he was in the USA at the invitation of the *American Society of Newspaper Editors* and spoke at an event in Washington, made some statement in favour of the free press, although in the latter case he could not have said much else at the meeting of American newspaper editors and in the heat of the moment he may even have meant what he said.⁴⁷

The new government in Cuba was fighting on all fronts and the Revolution was paying attention to every little issue, and as a result, on 4 June 1959, a rather astonishing article appeared on the front page of the *Diario de la Marina*, entitled "The Times criticizes the tax on reporting social events". At first sight, the topic may

⁴⁶ "El deber de todos los cubanos", *Diario de la Marina*, 9 January 1959. 1–A.

⁴⁷ Marvin ALISKY: *Confused Cuba: Printers Who Edit – Government by 'Television'*. Nieman Reports, April 1960. 12–13. 13.

not seem appropriate to the issue of freedom of the press, but the subtitle provides orientation: “Restrictions on freedom of the press”. The *Times* article quoted acknowledges that there is freedom of the press in Cuba at the time, but considers the draft law to be an openly committed reduction of it. *The Times* had been covering the issue for days and reported for the first time on the amount of the proposed fees, which would cost the person \$1 to have their names on the company page, and \$100 if they had a noble title. You would pay \$5 for a photo or \$10 if there was more than one person in the photo. The newspapers would collect the tax and could keep 10% of the proceeds for their expenses.⁴⁸ However, the bill was eventually withdrawn following a national outcry. We must agree with the journalist in *The Times* that the aim of the tax was clearly to abolish the social news columns, which were very popular in newspapers, and that this was clearly a way of influencing the content of newspapers, i.e. the authorities would have deliberately interfered in the restructuring of newspapers in order to remove as quickly as possible an element that they considered incompatible with the ideology of the Revolution, which would have been a move against freedom of the press.

November is clearly a harsh turning point in the relationship between power and the *Diario de la Marina*. In November 1959 Fidel Castro repeatedly referred in his speeches to newspapers and journalists hostile to the revolution, and specifically to the *Diario de la Marina*. They launched a determined campaign against the newspaper, organising demonstrations against it across the country, burning and burying issues, and calling for a boycott of the newspaper by readers and advertisers alike.⁴⁹ The last time Castro mentioned the newspaper was on 21 November, in his speech at the closing of the 10th Labour Congress. The newspaper responded to this speech in two articles the following day. They explained that the only “sin” of the newspaper is that it wanted to use its freedom of expression, because, they wrote, the government respects and guarantees freedom of the press, and when the newspaper wants to use it legitimately and judge a national issue according to its own point of view, the Prime Minister does not challenge these views, but uses verbal aggression against the newspaper and calls it counter-revolutionary. In a letter entitled “The *Diario* is not the enemy of the Cuban Revolution”, the editorial board summarised its own opinion in several points, in point 3 expressing its wish to see democracy restored and the right of the people to freely elect their leaders, and also stressing the need to stop politics by force, to stop imposing laws on the country and to stand up for freedom of expression without official intimidation. In the end, the courageous article sought to make the editorial position even clearer: support the revolution if it means freedom, democracy and social justice. But they are against revolution if it means the abolition of private property, the death of freedom, the hatred of social classes against each other, collaboration with the red

⁴⁸ Kelsey VIDAILLET: “Violations of Freedom of the Press in Cuba: 1952–1969,” *Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy*, 2006. ascecuba.org/asce_proceedings/violations-of-freedom-of-the-press-in-cuba-1952-1969/ (downloaded: 9 January 2021)

⁴⁹ “Ante la agresión y el boicot”, *Diario de la Marina*, 22 November 1959. IA.

totalitarian forces. The editorial board made it clear that it did not wish to change its views, based on Christian philosophy and moral teaching, the democratic traditions of the Cuban philosophy and moral teaching, the democratic traditions of the Cuban people and the social teachings of the Church, crystallised in the politics of European Christian Democratic parties.⁵⁰ Clearly the editorial board was aware that its articles had crossed the imaginary red line, and indeed, in the months that followed, the newspaper faced another difficulty.

On 26 December the Havana Provincial College of Journalists, the United Union of Graphic Arts and the National Broadcasters' College, not independently of the pressure of political power, agreed to add a note to any news item that contradicts the reality of events in Cuba, explaining the reality. This note is known as the "coletilla" in the history of Cuban journalism.⁵¹ Two newspapers, the *Información* and the *Diario de la Marina*, took the matter to the Supreme Court of Justice on the ground of violation of press freedom, but on 4 January 1960 the use of the "coletilla" became official. On 15 January, the first notes appeared in the *Información*, and on 17 January the editorial staff of the *Diario de la Marina* used the suffix, with the articles mainly being publicist articles expressing editorial opinions, with the name "clarification". In the few lines of the note, no specifics on the subject were given, only that the journalists and graphic designers of the paper considered that the content of the article did not comply with the truth or the most basic journalistic ethics. Among other things, *coletilla* was at the end of *Pluralidad de Partidos, sí. Partido unico, no*⁵², in which the author reported on the political advance of the Communist Party of Cuba and feared the country might be facing the possibility of a one-party system. Then, two days later, an explicitly anti-*coletilla* tone was struck by the editor-in-chief with the mocking title "La muy ilustre Orden de la Coletilla".⁵³

The most vehement opposition to the *coletilla* genre came from *Avance*, where a heated debate erupted between the owner Jorge Zayas and the newspaper's staff over who was responsible for exercising press freedom. The controversy became so heated that Zayas, along with some of his colleagues, had to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy for fear of public anger. Following opposition from newspapers owners, the official decision was taken to set up so-called Freedom of the Press Committees (*Comités de Libertad de Prensa*) at all newspapers declared anti-revolutionary, and to determine the placement of *coletillas*. These committees, contrary to their name, were capable of crushing press freedom and destroying critical newspapers, playing into the hands of the government.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "El DIARIO no es enemigo de la Revolución cubana", *Diario de la Marina*, 22 November 1959. 1A.

⁵¹ Sarah BEAULIEU: *Política cultural y periodismo en Cuba: trayectorias cruzadas de la prensa y de los medios independientes (1956–2013)*, Granada-Avignin, Universidad de Granada, Tesis doctoral, 2013, 60–61.

⁵² "Pluralidad de Partidos, sí. Partido Unico, no", *Diario de la Marina*, 17 January 1960. 1A.

⁵³ "La Muy Ilustre Orden de la Coletilla", *Diario de la Marina*, 19 January 1960. 1A.

⁵⁴ Ada Ivette VILLAESCUSA PADRÓN: "La prensa cubana en el primer decenio de la Revolución". In: *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Agrícolas*, vol. 2, octubre, 2015, 101–109.

A similar situation to *Avance* occurred in May at the editorial office of the *Diario de la Marina*, but until then the newspaper had been subjected to a number of harassments. There had been occasions when loud protesters had been trucked to the newspaper's headquarters, demonstrations outside the owner's house, verbal abuse of José Ignacio Rivero and several symbolic burials of the paper.⁵⁵ Despite this, in 29 April 1960 issue, the owner-editor-in-chief declared that they would not give up, that they would persevere, that they would fulfil their Christian and democratic obligations.⁵⁶ The coup took place on 11 and 12 May 1960, when the newspaper's staff accused its owner-editor-in-chief, José Ignacio Rivero, of collaborating with Rosa Blanca, an anti-revolutionary political organisation founded by Cuban exiles in the USA, and turning the paper into its mouthpiece.⁵⁷ The workers wanted to take over the management of the newspaper, which would be transferred to the Provincial College of Journalists of Havana and the National Association of Graphic Arts. The workers' farewell article disavowed the past 128 years, the newspaper must disappear, they wrote, because it has been nothing but an instrumental servant of the interests of the anti-Cuban forces. As a culmination of the events, a symbolic funeral of the newspaper was announced for 8pm on 12 May, which also marked a stand for the revolution by those present.⁵⁸ José Ignacio Rivero had no choice but to leave Cuba and go into exile in the United States.

In the light of what has been said so far, the only "sin" of the *Diario de la Marina* was that it consistently adhered to the rules of quality journalism, sought to report on all major events at home and abroad, and was courageous in expressing its views on specific political issues, confronting the government and Fidel Castro personally with his previous statements. It was critical on four issues in particular, the first agrarian law, freedom of the press, the nationalisation of private schools, and the threat of communism, which led to the permanent silence of the leading Cuban daily.

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⁵⁵ Nadie con más méritos que J. I. Rivero ganó la Medalla de Héroe de la Libertad de Prensa", proclama el "Washington News", *Diario de la Marina*, 18 April 1960. 1A.

⁵⁶ "Palabras de gratitud", *Diario de la Marina*, 29 April 1960. 1A.

⁵⁷ "A la opinión pública", *Diario de la Marina*, 11 May 1960. 1A1; "Un día con el pueblo. 128 años al servicio de reacción"; "Al pueblo de Cuba y al Gobierno Revolucionario", *Diario de la Marina*, 12 May 1960. 1A.

⁵⁸ "¡Cubanos!", *Diario de la Marina*, 12 May 1960. 1A.

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Abstract

The article examines how the abolition of the freedom of the press took place – at the same time as the Cuban Cultural Revolution – in Cuba. The chief victim of this process was the Cuban press's flagship, the Catholic daily Diario de la Marina. The paper analyzes how the new regime broke its promises, made the press a tool for political propaganda, and made the situation of critical newspapers and magazines impossible.

Keywords: Cuban Revolution, journalism, censorship, Catholic Church, State-Church relations, Cold War, Fidel Castro

Resümé

A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a kubai kulturális forradalommal egy időben hogyan zajlott a sajtószabadság felszámolása Kubában. Ezen folyamat meghatározó áldozatát a kubai sajtó zászlóshajója, a katolikus napilap, a Diario de la Marina megszüntetése jelentette. Az írás azt elemzi, hogy az új politikai kurzus hogyan szakított ígéreteivel és tette a sajtót a politikai propaganda eszközzévé, lehetetlenné tette el és számolta fel a kritikus hangvételű napilapokat, folyóiratokat.

Kulcsszavak: kubai forradalom, újságírás, cenzúra, katolikus egyház, állam-egyház kapcsolat, hidegháború, Fidel Castro