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Title: A Dictator's Errors

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Abstract. With this article, IBPP initiates a series written by Ismael Sambra Haber. Sambra has published poetry, short stories, literary criticism, and essays in both Cuban and international magazines and journals. He also has worked as a stage actor and as a consultant, screenwriter, actor, and director of Tele Turquino. Sambra has published *Para Ti Mujer (For You, Woman)*, Coleccion Plegables, 1978; *Las Cinco Plumas y la Luz del Sol (The Five Feathers and the Sun Light)*, Editorial Oriente, 1987; *Para No Ser Leido en Recital (Not to be Read at a Poetry Reading or Recital)*, Editorial Oriente, 1991; and *Remolino de Luz (Whirl of Light)*, Editorial Oriente, 1992. He founded the literary magazines *Museo* and *El Grupo*. Sambra's book of essays, *El Unico Marti: Principal Opositor a la Tirania de Castro (The Unique Marti: Principal Opponent to Castro's Tyranny)*, has recently been published by *La Otra Cuba*, Mexico City.

Sambra is currently Writer-in-Exile, York University, Toronto, Canada. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison and imprisoned on February 14, 1993 for writing and distributing pamphlets against Fidel Castro during the 1992 Cuban elections. He obtained his freedom thanks to the Government of Canada and--as Sambra writes--the diligent and patient work of PEN Canada. *A Dictator's Errors* has been translated from the Spanish by Miguel Martin and has undergone minor editing by IBPP.

The principal problem that encircles the Cuban enigma is the insistent persistence and permanent insistence of Castro as the head of the nation. For those who do not know, Fidel Castro holds in his hands five high powers. He is President of the Ministerial Advisory Board, Prime Minister, President of the Advisory Council of the State, Secretary General of the Cuban Communist Party, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army. This is to say no one makes any move behind his back. To all this, we have to add the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive powers concentrated in his hands. In effect, all institutions and organizations are under the control of the State, which is to say in the hand of Fidel Castro Ruiz.

As a poet, writer, and journalist in my country, I lived the experiences of the transformations created by a successful revolution in 1959 under the direction of a leader who turned, sadly, into a tyrant over the same people that admired, trusted and helped him. Castro surprised many when he declared Communism to be the official ideology of the state. But many had already warned of his true intentions, although he always denied he was a Communist to both the public and the press. With a stern face he said the following while on trial after Commander Hubert Matos accused him of being a traitor: "Because it's enough, it's a very comfortable position to stand here and accuse the revolution of Communism....When has anyone seem me lie to the people?....Who has seen our government be based on secrets kept from the public?" (Havana, December 14, 1959). We can say this was the great virtue of Castro: his capacity to lie to and trick people. I was also his victim.

I put my pen and my labor to the service of this swindler and censor of liberties until I opened my eyes to reality. I refused to believe the truth until I received on my flesh the disgrace of his whip and went to prison for daring to ask for liberty and democracy in the 1992 elections. "No to Castro, vote for liberty" were my words distributed in pamphlets. My son, 22 years of age, and I were sentenced to 10 years in prison for this crime.

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Castro cannot be criticized or be shown his errors in this way. In Cuba, one cannot freely express opinions that diverge from the official Communist Party line. This is to say that Castro is a person who has committed and continues to commit many errors. He criticizes those within his government who err. He speaks openly of everyone else's shortcomings and, as is well known, has gone as far as to execute for his friends for these shortcomings. But never in any declaration has he talked about any of his own mistakes. He has never admitted, for instance, his mistake of eliminating the Farmers' Markets that distributed food to the nation. He had to reinstate the markets with the fallout of the Soviet Union's collapse, for the Cuban economy had been completely intertwined in the arms and tentacles of the Soviet imperial system. Yes, the Soviet imperial system, because this is what Castro's government literally did: move us from the hands of American imperialism and into the hands of Russo-Soviet imperialism--in the complete contradiction of our hero of Cuban independence, Jose Marti.

Some may still say that Castro has done good things with regards to health and education, giving free medical attention and education to the people. But Marti, our national hero, our apostle of independence, liberty, and democracy, said that tyranny is one in its various forms--even when dressed in beautiful names or great works. Marti further wanted Cubans "to express frank and free opinions on anything--and that these opinions be respected. Because if, of all my country's benefits, I had to choose one right above all else, I would pick a healthy fundamental that would be the principle and basis of the country's political discourse. I would like the first law of our country to be the homage of the Cuban people to the dignity of all men, and homage to the dignity alluded to in the terms political liberty and freedom of expression. With and for the well-being of all."

In any case, there has never been nor is there anything free in Cuba. The people have had to pay a very high economic and moral price. The Soviet Union gave Castro a subsidy of \$4-5 billion annually to train Cubans for the Guerras Internacionalistas (International Warriors)--directed by Castro from his throne in Havana so that Cubans could die overseas. Cuba lived from the Soviet subsidy. But no social revolution not based on solid economic ground can be certain, nor can it survive. It is a sad story--that of my people before Castro, and after, with Castro staggering and foolish, contradictory and erratic in his alienation of power. But that is how he is: very authoritarian and dangerous even towards his own friends and terribly cruel towards his enemies.

There are the testimonies written by political prisoners. These are their own declarations. In almost 40 years Castro has never signed a political amnesty. There are the Mario Chanes de Armas', the longest political prisoner in the world who spent 30 years in Castro's prisons after being an attacker in the Moncada Quarter and for being a combatant of the Gramma and the Sierra Maestra alongside Fidel. There is the testimony of the Armando Valladares', the Carlos Alberto Montaners', the Boffils, the Hubert Matos', whose writings from prison provided a chilling and accurate prediction of what life under Castro would be like: I have not been permitted to say anything, or speak to lawyers or journalists. To write I have to trick the guards, who never lose sight of me. Is this what we fought for in Cuba? Is it treason to think and speak without hypocrisy the teachings of Marti? I pass the time reading the book *Between Liberty and Fear* by G. Areiniega and I see Fidel walking down the road to tyranny, if hasn't arrived there already, with the danger of a teacher to inflame the population. How mistaken we were to think we were disciples of Marti. (From *Declarations by Castro* published in December 1959. Castro used fragments of this letter to accuse Matos of treason and condemn him to 20 years of prison.)

In the light of the actual events, Castro was mistaken. His practices and history have put him in financial difficulty and ridicule. He was mistaken with the Zafra [sugar cane] of the 10 millions, thereby ruining the sugar industry with this absurd idea. He was mistaken with the cord agriculture of Havana, with the

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Farmers' Markets, with the dollar, with the paralyzation of the tourist industry, with Angola and the International Wars, with the persecution of youth who dressed like the Beatles, with his conception of the new man, with the Concentration Camps where dissidents and homosexual were imprisoned for forced labor, with respect to religion and liberty, and with the Pope. In short, he was mistaken with the selection of Communism as an ideology. Castro is a man who has committed so many errors that he is no longer a man who commits errors; he is an error. (See Castro, F. (1992). Selected speeches of Fidel Castro. Pathfinder Press; Castro, F., & Borge, T. (1993). Face to face with Fidel Castro: A Conversation with Tomas Borge. Ocean Press; Geyer, G. (1991). Guerrilla prince: The untold story of Fidel Castro. Boston, MA: Little, Brown; Ramirez, C.E., & Suedfeld, P. (1988). Nonimmediacy scoring of archival materials: The relationship between Fidel Castro and "Che" Guevara. *Political Psychology*, 9, 155-164; Rice, D.E. (1992). The rhetorical uses of the authorizing figure: Fidel Castro and Jose Marti. Praeger; Szulc, T. (1986). Fidel: A critical portrait. William Morrow & Co.; Torres-Robles, C. (1992). Grotesque humor in Virgilio Pinera's short stories. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 5, 397-422.)(Keywords: Castro, Cuba, Ideology, Revolution, Smbra.)