

The End of Ideology in Cuba?

By [Arnold August](#)

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*In 1960, the American sociologist and academic Daniel Bell (1919–2011) published *The End of Ideology*. It became a classic book in official political science. The publication was listed by *Times Literary Supplement* as one of the 100 most influential non-fiction books in the second half of the 20th century. While there were other “end of ideologies” in the 1950s and early 1960s, Bell’s is considered the most authoritative. The many varieties that emerged from this school of thought have a common denominator. While not oversimplifying this important trend, for the purposes of this article one can say that it surfaced out of the perceived failures of both socialism in the former U.S.S.R. and capitalism in the West. It was born out of opposition to “extremism.”*

In November 1968, along with other political science students at McGill University in Montreal, I founded the Political Science Students Association. It organized a strike around two basic demands. The first was student participation on faculty hiring committees; the second, linked to this potential student empowerment, demanded a more inclusive faculty and curriculum. This would include writings other than by Daniel Bell (who, of course, was considered mandatory reading and enjoyed uncontested reference in political science), progressive social scientists and the works of Marx and Lenin. These were all excluded at the time. After a 10-day occupation and strike, the students’ demands were finally met by the university.

Bell was blind to the inevitable uprisings that were about to take place in the U.S. among African-Americans shortly after his best-seller rolled off the press. These progressive struggles, like those of the Native peoples, who also revolted, have their origins in the Thirteen Colonies. In the 1960s, American students were also attracted to alternative ideologies and politics. In fact, the youth movement was omnipresent throughout North America and much of Europe. While this inclination in the 1960s was characterized by different left-wing political and ideological features, and experienced its ups and downs, it was the death knell for the End of Ideology hypothesis. However, Bell’s heritage keeps coming back to haunt us.

In Cuba, in the last year or so, there has been a steady increase in the End of Ideology code words and buzz phrases emitted by some marginal Cuban bloggers and intellectuals. They were timid at first but became increasingly bold. To mention just a few: complaining of what they see as a “sterile dichotomy between socialism and capitalism”; advising Cuban revolutionaries to be “balanced and more profound in offering their criticism” of U.S. imperialism; opposing what they consider the extremist “Fidelista” and “anti-Castro” positions, placing both on the same footing; labelling those who are Marxist-Leninist or Fidelista as “extremists” or “fanatics”; writing about “two major fallacies of what it means to be a revolutionary in Cuba, from the left and right,” both being based on “exclusive dogma”; and, finally, asserting that “life is much more profound than even ideology.”

Reading these pieces, my university days back in 1968 kept piercing through my thought process. How was it possible that we opposed the End of Ideology in the heart of capitalism yet now it rears its head in Cuba, of all places? One can argue that the opposition in Cuba is coming from the “left,” that is, from those who claim that they support the Revolution. Well, where else can it emerge if not from the so-called left? This is Cuba. Let us not forget that Bell had identified as a leftist. His opposition to ideology was ostensibly from the leftist outlook and not the right. This, after all, was how he won his credibility and credentials. Bell became disillusioned with socialism. He could not see an alternative so he decided to wage a struggle against both capitalism and socialism. His work is a reflection of his own personal/political predicament. Objectively, however, this so-called neutrality against extremes consists in throwing a life jacket in support of capitalism. It is no accident that he is so appreciated by the ruling elites of the West.

I have always maintained that the most dangerous opposition to the Cuban Revolution comes from the so-called left, and not from the openly right Plattists, or annexationists. It is a cancer in Cuban society that, if left to grow without sharp ideological resistance, can influence the most naive, especially among youth, intellectuals and artists.

When Bell wrote his essays in the late 1950s, which were eventually compiled in his 1960 volume, Cuba was the scene of the most glaring refutation in the world of his theory: the 1953 Moncada attack, its ensuing program and the Triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959. Fidel Castro and the July 26 Movement initiated in embryonic form the road toward a new Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology for Cuba. Far from being a period characterized by the end of ideology, Cuba provided the world with a resurgence of – and confidence in – the need for ideology. It represented the *end* of the End of Ideology. The Cuban Revolution erupted at the height of the Cold War yet it dug in its heels against any intimidation from the left or from imperialism. It did not represent the politically correct action and thinking at the time, not of the left and even less so of the right. Thus, in the initial period, Fidel had the acumen to not reveal the entire scenario. However, ideology was at the centre of the action and spirit.

Since 1953, Cuba has been and continues to be the quintessence of cultivating ideological principles. Every written and spoken word of Fidel is impregnated with ideology. It is not stagnant; on the contrary, it is continuously evolving according to the context. Otherwise, Cuba would not have been able to outlast its enemies all this time.

I am convinced that one of the main implicit objectives of the international corporate media campaign against the persona of Fidel right after his passing was imperialism’s revenge against him for not capitulating on ideology. Why, they may ask in frustration, did the Cuban Revolution never buy into the End of Ideology? It should have, according to official political science. Yet, after all these years, from July 26, 1953 to November 25, 2016, Fidel lived and died as he asked of others: a humble revolutionary.

In this historical context today, to try to impregnate Cuban political culture with “neutrality” on ideology, opposition to “extremes,” “equidistance” between socialism and capitalism, and so forth does not constitute a challenge to dogmatism of the left as it tries to portray itself. The real defiance is against socialism and Marxist-Leninist ideology. In the 1960s, Bell’s theory appealed to the ruling circles, who wanted to preserve the status quo. The elites were in power. They were not in any danger of being dislodged by their own capitalism! The End of Ideology critique of capitalism was then just a convenient cover for the critique of socialism. At McGill, in 1968, that was the main argument of the conservative

faculty and administration. They were supposedly not in favour or against any ideology. All political options were welcome, but Bell was more welcome. He was supposedly against capitalism and socialism. However, those who favoured the capitalist status quo relied on the End of Ideology. Those who opposed the “extreme” ideology of the left were fully merged with the capitalist ideology, serving to propagate and elaborate it. The purpose of the End of Ideology, in the 1960s and now in Cuba, is to put an end to Marxist-Leninist and socialist ideology.

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<http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=7822&SEO=the-end-of-ideology-in-cuba>

Arnold August, a Canadian journalist and lecturer, is the author of Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections and, more recently, [Cuba and Its Neighbours: Democracy in Motion](#). Cuba's neighbours under consideration are, on the one hand the U.S. and on the other hand, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Arnold can be followed on Twitter [@Arnold_August](#) and [FaceBook](#)

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