

# A HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION: HOW THE WORKING CLASS SHAPED THE GUERRILLAS' VICTORY

Fidel Castro's victory over the Batista regime and his march into Havana in January 1959, are well known events to unconventional warfare practitioners. However, the urban underground support to the guerrilla force is less well studied. If the predicted shift to urban megacities holds true, as has been proposed, a deeper understanding of the historical context of clandestine urban operations is warranted. Steve Cushion's recent book *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory* is an excellent choice to expand one's knowledge in this aspect of unconventional warfare.

Cushion's book is based on multi-archival research and extensive interviews and fills an understudied gap in the literature of this episode of Cuban history. His background as a career bus driver and labor organizer in London, allowed him to build rapport with Cuban socialists and gain unique access to historical documents. It also allowed him to pull out rich detail during interviews with participants in the events. While Hugh Thomas in his 1971 tome *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* identified the importance of the underground movement in the cities he does not dwell on it. Julia Sweig in *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* is an important work on this subject, but she focuses mainly on the July 26 Movement's operations. Other authors have challenged the myth of the guerrilla, which is central to the *foco* theory and the fact that it was never successfully exported outside of Cuba demonstrates there was more to Castro's success. Cushion argues convincingly that the working class and organized labor were a critical adjunct to the guerrilla victory.


An important contribution of the book is the look inside the clandestine urban activities. These activities cross the spectrum of what unconventional warfare doctrine would consider to be separated among the underground and the axillary. Prior to Castro's return to Cuba in 1956, July 26 Movement operatives prepared inhabitants of the rural Sierra Maestra Mountain range in southeastern Cuba to support the guerrilla fighters. They also instigated an armed

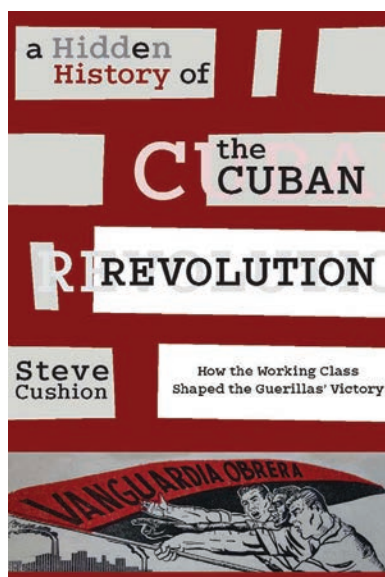
uprising in Santiago to divert the attention of the security forces from Castro's landing, while this event was not well coordinated; it shows the importance of the urban movement. The auxiliary element provided recruits, weapons, ammunition and other critical supplies to the guerrilla force in the mountains. The underground conducted intelligence operations, propaganda activities, agitation, small-scale raids and attacks on lines of communications. They also

facilitated the infiltration and exfiltration of media representatives that allowed Castro to message target audiences both inside and outside Cuba. The book provides a unique perspective on how these operations were planned and conducted.

Perhaps Cushion's most significant contribution is the detailed account of organized labor that fought the Batista regime in parallel to the guerrillas. After examining the economic conditions in Cuba, he parses the multitude of groups within the labor movement and makes it understandable to the reader. He describes the nuanced interplay between local, regional and national leaders as well as the relationship between the Cuban Socialist Party, the July 26 Movement and other groups. Cushion makes a compelling argument that many of the general strikes were not spontaneous as they have been described by other observers of the period. He provides heretofore unpublished detail on how labor leaders planned and executed the strikes. Many experts on the revolution have shown that the strikes were a vital aspect of the ousting of Batista making this assertion a critical aspect to the re-evaluation of the importance of the urban underground.

In Havana at the Museum of the Revolution there is a small display honoring the contribution of the ur-

ban fighters, but the overwhelming theme of the museum is to the rural guerrillas. While Castro has acknowledged the urban contribution it has been largely lost in the shadow of the heroic guerrilla. Cushion has made a compelling argument that the clandestine urban movement had a larger impact than it has previously been given credit. The result for unconventional warfare practitioners is a book that offers a rich historical case study in the application of urban operations. 



## BOOK DETAILS

By Steve Cushion

New York:

Monthly Review Press,  
336 pages:

ISBN: 978-1583675816

Price: \$27.00 Paperback

## REVIEWED BY

Mr. Jason Heeg

is civilian assigned to the U.S.  
Special Operations Command.