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('The Ending'), directed by Fausto Canel, both proved problematic. Ugo Ulive quotes someone saying that *Elena* was 'so absurd that it was unprojectable'. Failures were inevitable if the policy was to let untried film-makers experiment.

The problem, in the effort to build a film industry from scratch, was how to train the personnel. As Alea wrote about filming *Las doce sillas*:

The main collaborators during the filming were young, without much previous experience. The director of photography, the camera operator, the focus-puller and the camera assistants were all working on a feature film for the first time. Similarly the assistant director and the continuity girl. Even the film we were using (Agfa NP20 and Ultrarapid) presented problems which hadn't been technically resolved by our cameramen.

We wanted to launch out with a crew of new people in whom we had hope. Fortunately the lighting technicians, carpenters and production team included compañeros who were old hands and highly disciplined, which gave us relative peace of mind, even though they also had apprentices engaged in this work for the first time. Perhaps not everything would go well. We had accumulated too many risks in the key positions and this at times prevented our always proceeding smoothly...⁴

Largely to help deal with this problem of training, ICAIC followed the development of the Revolution in looking towards the socialist countries for assistance, and the years 1962-4 saw three co-productions, one each with the Soviet Union, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In each case the co-producing country supplied not only the director but other principal personnel too. From the GDR, Kurt Maetzig directed *Preludio 11* ('Prelude 11'). Wolfgang Schreyer wrote the script with José Soler Puig, a story about counter-revolutionaries in the service of the CIA making preparations for the Bay of Pigs. The director of photography and the editor were also Germans. A team of Czechs came to make *Para quien baila La Habana* ('For Whom Havana Dances'), directed by Vladimir Cech, with a script by Jan Prochazka and Onelio Jorge Cardoso, and again a Czech director of photography and editor, this time sharing credits with Cubans. The story concerned the different paths taken after the victory of the Revolution by two friends who had fought the dictatorship together, one of whom now found that his personal interests were challenged by the new social order. Finally, Mikhail Kalatozov (director of *The Cranes Are Flying*) directed *Soy Cuba* ('I Am Cuba') with a script by Yevgeni Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet, and a Russian director of photography and editor. This was a film of four episodes showing different aspects of life in Cuba before the Revolution. It was the most ambitious of these co-productions, and ICAIC knew enough about Soviet production practices with their lengthy and leisurely shooting schedules to prevail upon their comrades to bring their own transport and equipment, so as not to tie up ICAIC's limited facilities and halt their other productions; by informal arrangement the equipment was then left behind in Cuba when they finished.⁵ None of these films was very successful.

The Czech film grafted its plot on to a superficial and picturesque vision of the Carnival in Havana; the German one was a miscalculated action movie; and the Soviet effort was a kind of 'delirium for the camera' from an impossibly baroque screenplay – the description is Ulive's, but no-one in Cuba thinks much of these films today either. The truth is that while it made sense for ICAIC to undertake these co-productions for both artistic and material reasons, the foreign visitors didn't do their homework properly – even Yevtushenko, who was especially enthusiastic. Still, even he was unable to get beneath the skin and go beyond the traveller's image of the island which Soviet revolutionary poetry inherited from Mayakovsky's visit in the 20s.

The truth is that the visiting film-makers were no better equipped to respond to the expressive needs of the Cuban Revolution than the engineers of their countries to the need for projectors to be used in a tropical climate. This was the kind of problem that cropped up continually with the aid that Cuba received from the socialist countries. Many were the disruptions caused by the wrench which the country's fixed productive forces underwent as the US blockade took effect, and technicians and engineers of another breed stepped into the breach. ICAIC's experience was entirely typical. Most of the cinemas were in terrible condition, the projection gear was old and decrepit and the previous managers had relied on the readily available supply of spare parts. As US trade investigators had reported years before, most of the equipment was purchased second-hand in the first place. Now it urgently needed maintenance and replacement. The Institute conducted a technical survey and discovered that they had inherited seventy different types of projector – a real nightmare. They made a count of the most common types and sent samples of the basic set of spare parts to their East European partners so that they could make moulds from them and stave off disaster. They found, when the new parts arrived and were installed, that they were not correctly engineered for tropical conditions, and they buckled in the heat.

It is true, of course, that these co-productions may also have served a political purpose by helping to take the edge off sectarian criticisms of ICAIC. Fidel himself directly addressed the problem of sectarianism in the strongest terms in the Spring of 1962, when he declared in a television broadcast that 'the suppression of ideas was a myopic, sectarian, stupid and warped conception of Marxism that could change the Revolution into a tyranny. And that is not revolution!' The occasion was his denunciation of the behaviour of Anibal Escalante and others working through the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (Integrated Revolutionary Organisations – ORI) which had been set up in 1961 with the object of integrating the old Communist Party, the 26th July Movement and the Directorio Revolucionario (the group which carried out the attack pictured in the first episode of *Historias de la revolución*).