

Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout; Castro Is Still Alive and Still Fighting in Mountains

Fidel Castro, the rebel leader of Cuba's youth, is alive and fighting hard and successfully in the rugged, almost impenetrable fastnesses of the Sierra Maestra, at the southern tip of the island. President Fulgencio Batista has the cream of his Army around the area, but the Army men are fighting a thus-far losing battle to destroy the most dangerous enemy General Batista has yet faced in a long and adventurous career as a Cuban leader and dictator. This is the first sure news that Fidel Castro is still alive and still in Cuba. No one connected with the outside world, let alone with the press, has seen Senor Castro except this writer. No one in Havana, not even at the United States Embassy with its resources for getting information, will know until this report is published that Fidel Castro is really in the Sierra Maestra. This account, among other things, will break the tightest censorship in the history of the Cuban Republic.

The Province of Oriente, with its 2,000,000 inhabitants, its flourishing cities such as Santiago, Holguin and Manzanillo, is shut off from Havana as surely as if it were another country. Havana does not and cannot know that thousands of men and women are heart and soul with Fidel Castro and the new deal for which they think he stands. It does not know that hundreds of highly respected citizens are helping Senor Castro, that bombs and sabotage are constant (eighteen bombs were exploded in Santiago on Feb. 15), that a fierce Government counterterrorism has aroused the populace even more against President Batista. Throughout Cuba a formidable movement of opposition to General Batista has been developing. It has by no means reached an explosive point. The rebels in the Sierra Maestra cannot move out.

The economic situation is good. President Batista has the high officers of the Army and the police behind him and he ought to be able to hang on for the nearly two years of his present term that are still left. However, there are bad spots in the economy, especially on the fiscal side. Unemployment is heavy; corruption is rife. No one can predict anything with safety except that Cuba seems in for a very troubled period. Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement are the flaming symbol of this opposition to the regime. The organization, which is apart from the university students' opposition, is formed of youths of all kinds. It is a revolutionary movement that calls itself socialistic. It is also nationalistic, which generally in Latin America means anti-Yankee. The program is vague and couched in generalities, but it amounts to a new deal for Cuba, radical, democratic and therefore anti-Communist.

The real core of its strength is that it is fighting against the military dictatorship of President Batista. Truly Terrible Risk To arrange for me to penetrate the Sierra Maestra and meet Fidel Castro, dozens of men and women in Havana and Oriente Province ran a truly terrible risk. They must, of course, be protected with the utmost care in these articles for their lives would be forfeit-after the customary torture-immediately if any could be traced. Consequently, no names are used here, the places are disguised and many details of the elaborate, dangerous trail in and out of the Sierra Maestra must be omitted. From the looks of things, General Batista cannot possibly hope to suppress the Castro revolt. His only hope is that an Army column will come upon the young rebel leader and his staff and wipe them out. This is hardly likely to happen, if at all, before March 1, when the present suspension of constitutional guarantees is supposed to end.

Fidel Castro is the son of a Spaniard from Galicia, a "Gallego" like Generalissimo Francisco Franco. The father was a pick-and-shovel laborer early in this century for the United Fruit Company, whose sugar plantations are on the northern shores of Oriente Province. A powerful build, a capacity for hard work and a shrewd mind led the father up in the world until he became a rich sugar planter himself. When he died last year each of his children, including Fidel, inherited a sizeable fortune. Flight to U. S. and Mexico

Someone who knew the family remembers Fidel as a child of 4 or 5 years, living a sturdy farm life. The father sent him to school and the University of Havana, where he studied law and became one of the student opposition leaders who rebelled against General Batista in 1952 because the General had staged a garrison revolt and prevented the presidential elections of that year. Fidel had to flee from Cuba in 1955 and he lived for a while in New York and Miami.

The year 1956, he announced, was to be the "year of decision." Before the year ended, he said, he would be "a hero or a martyr." The Government knew that he had gone to Mexico and last summer was training a body of youths who had left Cuba to join him. As the end of the year approached the Cuban Army was very much on the alert, knowing that something would be tried and that Fidel Castro was coming back. He was already, in a measure, a hero of the Cuban youth, for on July 26, 1953, he had led a band of youths in a desperate attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. In the fighting then about 100 students and soldiers were killed but the revolt failed. The Archbishop of Santiago, Msgr. Enrique Perez Serantes, intervened to minimize the bloodshed and got Senor Castro and others to surrender on promises of a fair trial. Fidel Castro was sentenced to fifteen years in prison but there was an amnesty at the time of the Presidential elections of Nov. 1, 1954, and he was let out. It was then he crossed to the continent and began to organize the 26th of July Movement. It is under this banner that the youth of Cuba are now fighting the Batista regime.

The blow, which at the time seemed an utter failure, was struck on Dec. 2, 1956. That day a 62-foot diesel-engined yacht, the Gramma, landed eighty-two young men, trained for two months on a ranch in Mexico, on the Oriente shore below Niquero at a spot called Playa Colorada. The idea had been to land at Niquero, recruit followers and lead an open attack against the Government. However, the Gramma had been spotted by a Cuban naval patrol boat.

Planes flew in to strafe and the men on the yacht decided to beach her. Playa Colorada, unhappily for the invaders, was a treacherous swamp. The men lost their food and most of their arms and supplies and soon were being attacked by army units. They scattered and took to the hills. Many were killed. Of the eighty-two no more than fifteen or twenty were left after a few days. President Batista and his aides were remarkably successful from then on in hiding what happened. The youths they captured were forced to sign statements saying that they had been told Fidel Castro was on the Gramma with them but that they had never seen him. Thus doubt was cast that he had ever come to Cuba.

Because of the complete censorship, Havana and the other Cuban cities crackle with the most astonishing rumors one constantly encouraged by the Government has been that Fidel Castro is dead. Only those fighting with him and those who had faith and hope knew or thought he was alive-and those who knew were very few and in the utmost peril of their lives if their knowledge was traced. This was the situation when the writer got to Havana on Feb. 9 to try to find out what was really happening. The censorship has been applied to foreign correspondents as well as Cuban. What everybody, even those who wanted to believe, kept asking was: "If Fidel is alive, why does he not do or say something to show that he is?" Since Dec. 2 he had kept absolutely quiet-or he was dead. As I learned later, Senor Castro was waiting until he had his forces reorganized and strengthened and had mastery of the Sierra Maestra. This fortunately coincided with my arrival and he had sent word out to a trusted source in Havana that he wanted a foreign correspondent to come in.

The contact knew as soon as I arrived and got in touch with me. Because of the state of siege, it had to be someone who would get the story and go out of Cuba to write it. Then came a week of organization. A rendezvous point and a time had to be fixed and arrangements made to get through the Government lines into the Sierra Maestra. After the first few weeks the Army had given out the report that the remnants of Senor Castro's forces were being starved out in the Sierra. In reality the Army had ringed the Sierra with fortified posts and columns of troops and had every road under heavy guard. The reports reaching Havana that frequent clashes were taking place and that the Government troops were losing heavily proved true. Arrangements for Interview The first problem was to get through the Government road blocks and reach a nearby town that would be a jumping off place.

Late on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 15, Senor Castro's contact man got in touch with me in Havana

with the news that the meeting was set for the following night in the Sierra and that Senor Castro and his staff would take the chance of coming a little way toward the edge of the range so that I would not have to do too much climbing. There are no roads there, and where we were to meet, no horses could go. To get from Havana to Oriente (more than 500 miles away) on time meant driving all night and the next morning, so as to be ready Saturday afternoon to start for the Sierra. The plan worked out to get through the Army's road blocks in Oriente was as simple as it was effective. We took my wife along in the car as "camouflage." Cuba is at the height of the tourist season and nothing could have looked more innocent than a middle-aged couple of American tourists driving down to Cuba's most beautiful and fertile province with some young friends.

The guards would take one look at my wife, hesitate a second, and wave us on with friendly smiles. If we were to be questioned a story was prepared for them. If we were searched the jig would be up. In that way we reached the house of a sympathizer of Senor Castro outside the Sierra. There my wife was to stay amid warm hospitality, and no questions asked. I got into the clothes I had purchased in Havana "for a fishing trip," warm for the cold night air of the mountains and dark for camouflage. Weather Turns Bad After nightfall I was taken to a certain house where three youths who were going in with me had gathered. One of them was "One of the Eighty-two," a proud phrase for the survivors of the original landing. I was to meet five or six of them. A courier who owned an open, Army-type jeep, joined us. His news was bad.

A Government patrol of four soldiers in a jeep had placed itself on the very road we had to take to get near the point where we were to meet the Castro scouts at midnight. Moreover, there had been a very heavy rain in the Sierra in the afternoon and the road was a morass. The others impressed on him that Fidel Castro wanted me in there at all costs and somehow it had to be done. The courier agreed reluctantly. All across the plain of Oriente Province there are flat lands with sugar and rice plantations, and such farms have innumerable crisscrossing dirt roads. The courier knew every inch of the terrain and figured that by taking a very circuitous route he could bring us close enough. We had to go through one Army roadblock and beyond that would be the constant risk of Army patrols, so we had to have a good story ready. I was to be an American sugar planter who could not speak a word of Spanish and who was going out to look over a plantation in a certain village.

One of the youths, who spoke English, was my "interpreter." The others made up similar fictions. Before leaving one of the men showed me a wad of bills (the Cuban peso is exactly the same size and value as the United States dollar) amounting, apparently, to 400 pesos, which was being sent in to Senor Castro. With a "rich" American planter, it would be natural for the group to have the money if we were searched. It was interesting evidence that Fidel Castro paid for everything he took from the guajiros, or squatter farmers, of the Sierra. Our story convinced the Army guard when he stopped us, although he looked dubious for a little while. Then came hours of driving, through sugar-cane and rice fields, across rivers that only jeeps could manage. One stretch, the courier said, was heavily patrolled by Government troops but we were lucky and saw none. Finally, after slithering through miles of mud we could go no farther. It was then midnight, the time we were to meet Castro's scouts; but we had to walk some first and it was hard going. At last we turned off the road and slid down a hillside to where a stream, dark brown under the nearly full moon, rushed its muddy way.

One of the boys slipped and fell full length in the icy cold water. I waded through with the water almost to my knees and that was hard enough to do without falling. Fifty yards up the other slope was the meeting point. Patrol Was Not There The patrol was not there. Three of us waited while two of the men went back to see if we had missed the scouts somewhere, but in fifteen minutes they us ahead, returned frustrated. The courier suggested that we might move up a bit and he led but obviously did not know where to go. Senor Castro's men have a characteristic signal that I was to hear incessantly-two low, soft, toneless whistles. One of our men kept trying it, but with no success. After awhile, we gave up.

We had kept under cover at all times, for the moonlight was strong, and we knew there were troops around us. We stopped in a heavy clump of trees and bushes, dripping from the rain, the ground under foot heavily matted, muddy and soaked. There we sat for a whispered confab. The courier, and another

youth who had fought previously with Castro, said they would go up the mountainside and see if they could find any of the rebel troops. Three of us were to wait, a rather agonizing wait of more than two hours, crouched in the mud, not daring to talk or move, trying to snatch a little sleep with our heads on our knees and annoyed maddeningly by the swarms of mosquitoes that were having the feast of their lives. At last we heard a cautious, welcome double-whistle.

One of us replied in kind and this had to be kept up for a while, like two groups meeting in a dense fog, until we got together. One of our party had found an advance patrol and a scout came with him to lead us to an outpost in the mountains. The scout was a squatter from the hills, and he needed to know every inch of the land to take us as he did, swiftly and unerringly across fields, up steep hills, floundering in the mud. The ground leveled out blessedly at last and then dipped suddenly. The scout stopped and whistled cautiously. The return whistle came. There was a short parley and we were motioned on, sliding down into a heavy grove. The dripping leaves and boughs, the dense vegetation, the mud underfoot, the moonlight-all gave the impression of a tropical forest, more like Brazil than Cuba.

Appointment at Dawn Senor Castro was encamped some distance away and a soldier went to announce our arrival and ask whether he would join us or we should join him. Later he came back with the grateful news that we were to wait and Fidel would come along with the dawn. Someone gave me a few soda crackers, which tasted good. Someone else stretched a blanket on the ground and it seemed a great luxury. It was too dark in the grove to see anything. We spoke in the lowest possible whispers. One man told me how he had seen his brother's store wrecked and burned by Government troops and his brother dragged out and executed. "I'd rather be here, fighting for Fidel, than anywhere in the world now," he said. There were two hours before dawn, and the blanket made it possible to sleep. With the light I could see how young they all were.

Senor Castro, according to his followers, is 30, and that is old for the 26th of July Movement. It has a motley array of arms and uniforms, and even a few civilian suits. The rifle and the one machinegun I saw were all American--discarded models. The captain of this troop was a stocky Negro with a black beard and mustache, a ready, brilliant smile and a willingness for publicity. Of all I met, only he wanted his name mentioned--Juan Almeida, "One of the Eighty-two." Several of the youths had lived in the United States and spoke English; others had learned it at school. One had been a professional baseball player in a minor league and his wife is still in the United States. [Camilo Cienfuegos] Logistics of Rebellion The part of the Sierra we were in grows no food. "Sometimes we eat; sometimes not," one rebel said. On the whole, they obviously keep healthy.

Supporters send in food; the farmers help trusted couriers go out and buy supplies, which the storekeepers sell them at great risk and against Government orders. Raul Castro, Fidel's younger brother, slight and pleasant, came into the camp with others of the staff, and a few minutes later Fidel himself strode in. Taking him, as one would at first, by physique and personality, this was quite a man---a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a straggly beard. He was dressed in an olive gray fatigue uniform and carried a rifle with a telescopic sight, of which he was very proud. It seems his men have something more than fifty of these and he said the soldiers feared them. "We can pick them off at a thousand yards with these guns," he said.

After some general conversation we went to my blanket and sat down. Someone brought tomato juice, ham sandwiches made with crackers and tins of coffee. In honor of the occasion, Senor Castro broke open a box of good Havana cigars and for the next three hours we sat there while he talked. No one could talk above a whisper at any time. There were columns of Government troops all around us, Senor Castro said, and their one hope was to catch him and his band. The personality of the man is overpowering. It was easy to see that his men adored him and also to see why he has caught the imagination of the youth of Cuba all over the island. Here was an educated, dedicated fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership. The Eighty-two Formed As the story unfolded of how he had at first gathered the few remnants of the Eighty-two around him; kept the Government troops at bay while youths came in from other parts of Oriente as General Batista's counter-

terrorism aroused them; got arms and supplies and then began the series of raids and counter-attacks of guerrilla warfare, one got a feeling that he is now invincible. Perhaps he isn't, but that is the faith he inspires in his followers. They have had many fights, and inflicted many losses, Senor Castro said.

Government planes came over and bombed every day; in fact, at 9 sharp a plane did fly over. The troops took up positions; a man in a white shirt was hastily covered up. But the plane went on to bomb higher in the mountains. Castro is a great talker. His brown eyes flash; his intense face is pushed close to the listener and the whispering voice, as in a stage play lends a vivid sense of drama. "We have been fighting for seventy-nine days now and are stronger than ever," Senor Castro said. "The soldiers are fighting badly; their morale is low and ours could not be higher. We are killing many, but when we take prisoners they are never shot. We question them, talk kindly to them, take their arms and equipment, and then set them free. "I know that they are always arrested afterward and we heard some were shot as examples to the others, but they don't want to fight, and they don't know how to fight this kind of mountain warfare. We do."

"The Cuban people hear on the radio all about Algeria, but they never hear a word about us or read a word, thanks to the censorship. You will be the first to tell them. I have followers all over the island. All the best elements, especially all the youth, are with us. The Cuban people will stand anything but oppression." I asked him about the report that he was going to declare a revolutionary government in the Sierra. "Not yet," he replied. "The time is not ripe. I will make myself known at the opportune moment. It will have all the more effect for the delay, for now everybody is talking about us. We are sure of ourselves.

"There is no hurry. Cuba is in a state of war, but Batista is hiding it. A dictatorship must show that it is omnipotent or it will fall; we are showing that it is impotent." The Government, he said with some bitterness, is using arms furnished by the United States, not only against him but against all the Cuban people." "They have bazookas, mortars, machine guns, planes and bombs," he said, "but we are safe here in the Sierra; they must come and get us, and they cannot."

Senor Castro speaks some English, but he preferred to talk in Spanish, which he did with extraordinary eloquence. His is a political mind rather than a military one. He has strong ideas of liberty, democracy, social justice, the need to restore the Constitution, to hold elections. He has strong ideas on economy, too, but an economist would consider them weak. The 26th of July Movement talks of nationalism, anti-colonialism, antiimperialism. I asked Senor Castro about that. He answered, "You can be sure we have no animosity toward the United States and the American people."

"Above all," he said, "we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to the dictatorship. We are not anti-military; that is why we let the soldier prisoners go. There is no hatred of the Army as such, for we know the men are good and so are many of the officers." "Batista has 3,000 men in the field against us. I will not tell you how many we have, for obvious reasons.

He works in columns of 200; we in groups of ten to forty, and we are winning. It is a battle against time and time is on our side." Confident of Financing To show that he deals fairly with the guajiros he asked someone to bring "the cash." A soldier brought a bundle wrapped in dark brown cloth, which Senor Castro unrolled. There was a stack of peso bills at least a foot high-about \$4,000 he said, adding that he had all the money he needed and could get more. "Why should soldiers die for Batista for \$72 a month?" he asked. "When we win, we will give them \$100 a month, and they will serve a free, democratic Cuba." "I am always in the front line," he said; and others confirmed this fact. Such being the case, the Army might yet get him, but in present circumstances he seems almost invulnerable. "They never know where we are," he said as the group arose to say good-by, "but we always know where they are.

You have taken quite a risk in coming here, but we have the whole area covered, and we will get you out safely." They did. We ploughed our way back through the muddy undergrowth in broad daylight, but always keeping under cover. The scout went like a homing pigeon through woods and across fields where there were no paths straight to a farmer's house on the edge of the Sierra. There we hid in a back room while someone borrowed a horse and went for the jeep, which had been under cover all night.

There was one road block to get through with an Army guard so suspicious our hearts sank, but he let us through. After that, washed, shaved and looking once again like an American tourist, with my wife as "camouflage," we had no trouble driving back through the road blocks to safety and then on to Havana. So far as anyone knew, we had been away fishing for the weekend, and no one bothered us as we took the plane to New York.

This is the second of three articles by a correspondent of The New York Times who has just returned from Cuba. Rebel Strength Gaining in Cuba, But Batista Has the Upper Hand By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS February 25, 1957, Monday NY Times page1 President Fulgencio Batista of Cuba is fighting off a revolutionary offensive. As of today he has the upper hand, and with any luck he can hang on until his Presidential term ends in February, 1959. The economy is good and most workers are contented. There are profitable sugar, coffee and tobacco crops. Tourism has been satisfactory. Investments from the United States are high and General Batista has been made to feel he has the United States behind him. The upper echelons of the Army and the police are his men and they give him his power.

Yet the President needs luck, for Cubans are a violent, unpredictable people, and the forces lined up against General Batista are strong and getting stronger every day. These and other developments have been hidden by the strictest censorship ever imposed in Cuba. Even the best-informed Cubans do not know what is happening outside their immediate circles. This has been the case since Jan. 15, at which time constitutional guarantees were suspended for forty-five days in all of Cuba. It is still true, though censorship on outgoing dispatches of foreign correspondents was eased on Thursday.

The only way to get complete information about Cuba today is to go there, as this writer did, to talk with every type of Cuban and to travel around the island. One must then leave the country to write the story. On such a trip one gets to understand why President Batista is so generally unpopular and why such a formidable opposition is building up against him. The dictator has lost the young generation of Cuba. The group of young rebels, led by a former law student, Fidel Castro, that dominates the Sierra Maestra at the eastern end of the island and that is fighting off successfully the cream of General Batista's army is only one element-the most dramatic one-to prove this.

Señor Castro's men, the student leaders who are on the run from the police, the people who are bombing and sabotaging every day, are fighting blindly, rashly, perhaps foolishly. But they are giving their lives for an ideal and for their hopes of a clean, democratic Cuba. The extent of the violence and the counter-terrorism of the Army and the police are among the things that have been hidden by the censorship. The bombs have wounded some persons and killed a few, but that is not the purpose of the bombers.

The aim is to do a little sabotage (power lines, water mains and communications damaged, sugar cane fields set afire here and there) and above all to register a violent protest against the dictatorship. Perpetrators Are Unknown The public does not know who is doing the bombing, for the police have thus far caught only one small group in Havana and none elsewhere. As a desperate measure of counter-terrorism, therefore, the police kill someone virtually every time a bomb is exploded in Havana, riddle his body with bullets, put a bomb in his hand and call the press photographers to come and take photographs. This macabre procedure is sardonically called by Habaneros, "Batista's classified advertisement." Yet the bombings go on. In the seven nights the writer spent in Havana there were seven or eight bombings. In Santiago, at the other end of the island, there were eighteen on Feb. 15 alone.

The whole of Oriente Province, the eastern-most district, is literally or figuratively up in arms against the Batista regime. However, this does not apply to the sugar cane and other workers, who are making good money now. But permanent unemployment, which is a grave problem, affects the youth especially and contributes to their disaffection. Communism has little to do with the opposition to the regime. There is a well-trained, hard core of Communists that is doing as much mischief as it can and that naturally bolsters all the opposition elements.

But there is no Communism to speak of in Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement, the student movement or the disaffected elements in the Army. The brutality of Cuban to Cuban is always horrifying to foreigners. While it is taken as part of the game in Cuba, as in Spain, there is no doubt that counter-terrorism is not effective with Cubans. In Holguin, Oriente Province, the tough Army commander sent by General Batista gave what the citizens now ironically call "Batista's Christmas present." The bodies of youths began showing up in the mornings in the streets, until there were twenty-six by the turn of the year.

800 Women Demonstrated At the same time in Santiago, down on the coast, four bodies turned up, one of a 15- year-old boy who, according to medical testimony, had been tortured for twenty-four hours before being killed. Eight hundred women of Santiago, including the mother of the boy, marched through the streets of Santiago with placards on Jan. 4 in one of Cuba's most bitterly impressive demonstrations. Eugenio Cusidó, a Deputy, planned to read in Congress Jan. 15 the names of the men who perpetrated these crimes. A brother of the Deputy had been dragged from his home in Holguin by the dreaded Rural Police and hanged. On Jan. 15 Government supporters were ordered to stay away from Congress.

There was no quorum, but the Government announced that its measures of censorship and suspension of constitutional guarantees were automatically in effect. Most lawyers say this was illegal. Señor Cusidó arose, nevertheless, and tried to speak, but the chairman suspended the meeting because there was no quorum. For obvious reasons, Señor Cusidó fled to Miami. It is universally agreed that there is more corruption than ever under the Batista regime and this is saying a great deal in Cuba. The enormous peculations, in which President Batista is said by everyone to take a large share, is more concentrated now, being mostly in the hands of Army generals and public works contractors.

There is smuggling on a great scale and Havana is becoming a wide open city for gambling. With all the advantages he has had, President Batista merely had to avoid mistakes to coast through this term of office, to which he was elected Nov. 1, 1954. However, he has made bad mistakes and seems rattled. Otherwise he would not have introduced the tightest of all Cuban censorships, which has been proving such a boomerang that the people have even doubted that the economic situation was good. The rumors going around Havana and the other Cuban cities are all far worse than the reality. The Cubans are a volatile, tough and brave people. Their anger and disappointment have been rising steadily. It is being said in Cuba that because of this the future looks more hopeful. Tomorrow: the danger to the dictatorship of General Batista and the current wave of civil resistance in Cuba.

This is the last of three articles by a correspondent of The New York Times who has just returned from Cuba. Old Order in Cuba is Threatened by Forces of an Internal Revolt Traditionally Corrupt System Faces Its First Major Test as Reform Groups Challenge Batista Dictatorship By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS February 26, 1957, Tuesday NY Times The old, corrupt order in Cuba is being threatened for the first time since the Cuban Republic was proclaimed early in the century. An internal struggle is now taking place that is more than an effort by the outs to get in and enjoy the enormous spoils of office that have been the reward of political victory. This is the real and deeply significant meaning of what is happening in Cuba today, and it explains the gravity of the menace to the military dictatorship of President Fulgencio Batista. This writer has studied Cuban affairs on repeated visits since General Batista seized power by a garrison revolt on March 10, 1952, and he has just spent ten days in Cuba talking to all sorts of conditions of men and women, Cuban and American, in various parts of the island. Majority Rule Is Lacking At last one gets the feeling that the best elements in Cuban life-the unspoiled youth, the honest business man, the politician of integrity, the patriotic Army officer-are getting together to assume power. They have always made up the vast majority of Cubans, but Cuba has never had majority rule, least of all since General Batista interrupted a democratic presidential election in 1952 to take over by force.

The Cuban people have never forgiven him for that. By coincidence, economic and fiscal developments are going to bring a crisis of their own that will affect politics. This year's sugar crop will be very profitable and next year's also promises to be so, but the experts agree that after that a recession is

almost certain. The public works program, an enormous slush fund providing colossal graft, but also much employment and accomplishment, will end in the summer of 1958. Economic Figures Unknown To finance the program, amounting to \$350,000,000, the Government led by Joaquin Martinez Saenz, Governor of the National Bank, resorted to inflationary tactics, pledging the gold reserves and increasing the public debt. Even those best informed on the Banco Nacional and what it is doing do not know the real figures of reserves, public debt and the like.

Economists believe that statistics and information are being twisted, and many believe that if present policies are continued the Cuban peso, now on a par with the United States dollar, will have to be devalued next year or protected by exchange regulations. The trade balance is still heavily against Cuba. These calculations are making many Cuban and United States bankers and business men critical of the Batista Government's fiscal policies. The Cuban elements ask whether President Batista should not be got out of the way in 1957 while the currency is still sound and the economy prosperous. They want to face the hard times with an honest, orthodox, democratic, patriotic Government. Opposition Is Anti-U. S. It is disturbing to find that the opposition, which contains some of the best elements in Cuban life, is today bitterly or sadly anti-United States.

This is a recent development in Cuba and it is one of the sharpest impressions a visitor from the United States now gets. It does not, of course, apply to United States tourists, who are not held responsible for the situation and who meet unfailing friendliness. The opposition says there is an infinitely harder problem because Washington is backing President Batista, and many proofs are offered. The first is the public cordiality and admiration for General Batista expressed on frequent occasions by United States Ambassador Arthur Gardner. Another is the friendliness of the United States investors and business men who, despite their misgivings, naturally want to protect their investments and businesses. "We all pray every day that nothing happens to Batista," one of the most prominent directors said to me. They fear that the alternative would be much worse, at least in the beginning, perhaps a military junta, perhaps a radical swing to the left; perhaps chaos.

Sale of U. S. Arms an Issue There is also bitter criticism in Cuba, as in all Latin-American dictatorships, over the sale of United States arms. While I was there, seven tanks were delivered in a ceremony headed by Ambassador Gardner. Every Cuban I spoke with saw the delivery as arms furnished to General Batista for use in bolstering his regime and for use "against the Cuban people.

" Also while I was there, the United States aircraft carrier Leyte came on an official visit with four destroyers, and this, too, was taken as evidence that the United States was displaying its support of President Batista. An appeal in English was circulated in Santiago de Cuba during my visit. "To the People of the United States From the People of Cuba." "We do not wish to harbor resentment against you, our good neighbors of the North," it said. "But do give us your understanding and fairness when considering our crisis." A movement of civic resistance has been formed in Santiago, which is the capital of Oriente Province at the eastern end of the island where Fidel Castro, the rebel leader, is fighting a guerrilla war in the Sierra Maestra.

Business and professional men of the highest type are the leaders. The women of Oriente have cooperated so impressively that for many weeks they have refused to send their children to school. The University of Oriente is closed. A similar movement of civic resistance is getting tinder way in Havana. It is a nonviolent movement of influential citizens in support of honesty, decency, democracy, apart from the political parties and movements, which are hopelessly divided and discredited, and also apart from the Army.

The citizens want to demonstrate to the decent, patriotic elements in the Army that the people of Cuba, moderate, bourgeois people, will support them against the regime as the Argentine people did their Army and Navy against General Juan D. Perón. In this struggle one other element of prime importance must be added-the Cuban university students with their long traditions of struggle against Spanish oppressors and Cuban dictators. Student Faction Accused The directorate of the Federation of University Students has been on the run from the police for many weeks, thus far successfully. The authorities

accuse them of complicity with Fidel Castro, with whom they signed a pact in Mexico City, but they say they are fighting a parallel, separate fight for the same goals. The real reason the police want them is that they are out for trouble, and the Superior Council of the University of Havana, headed by the rector Clemente Inclán, whom I saw, is clearly afraid to reopen the university in present circumstances.

Through underground connections, I was able secretly to see five members of the student directorate, including their leader, José Antonio Echeverría, whom the police want most of all, and who therefore has considerable fame in Cuba at the moment. His friends call him "El Gordo" (the Fat One), but in reality he is merely heavy set, florid, handsome, with a mass of hair in a pompadour, prematurely touched with gray. He is only 24 years old and is an architectural student. Señor Echeverría said the students were active in the present resistance, which may or may not have meant they were taking part in the bombings and sabotage.

The students, he said, would get behind a respected civic resistance movement, but meanwhile they are waiting their chance to get into the streets and join a revolution, if there is one. They concede that they are in no position to start one. The directorate maintains that it has the almost solid backing of the student body. The students obviously are not seeking anything for themselves. As a whole, their traditions are anti-Communist and democratic. One boy said: "My father fought against Machado (Gen. Gerardo Machado, the brutal President and dictator of the Nineteen Twenties); my grandfather fought in the War of Independence (which began in 1895 and resulted in the Spanish-American War). I must fight now for the same ideals and the same reasons."

Their talk was studded with phrases such as these: "Cuban students were never afraid to die," and "We are accustomed to clandestine struggle." This is true. So one sees three elements lining up against President Batista today—the youth of Cuba, led by the fighting rebel, Fidel Castro, who are against the President to a man; a civic resistance formed of respected political, business and professional groups, and an honest, patriotic component of the Army, which is ashamed of the actions of the Government generals. Together these elements form the hope of Cuba and the threat to General Fulgencio Batista.

Fuente:

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URL de origen: <http://www.fidelcastroruz.name/es/node/24171?height=600&width=600>