

# CUBA A LIVE VOLCANO OF POLITICAL UNREST

## By Keeping the Army Contented, Batista Can Maintain Control

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS

Cuba is like a live volcano. Every now and then it is going to erupt. Last week end a group of young rebels armed with machine guns unaccountably attacked the garrison post at Matanzas, sixty miles east of Havana. Fifteen were killed, others wounded and captured and the remainder are hunted men.

Cuba and the regime of Gen. Fulgencio Batista are unshaken, although the President has suspended constitutional guarantees for the time being.

All the same, it would be cynical and foolish to say that incidents of this sort mean nothing. "Something is rotten" in any state that is continually blowing up. In this case, it is a country right on our doorstep, of paramount importance to the defense of the eastern shores of the United States and of great economic importance, thanks to sugar and to United States investments that are about as heavy as any in the Hemisphere. We need to understand Cuba and the attractive, intelligent, emotional, violent people who live on the island.

### Racial Mixture

There are many racial strains in the Cuban but the main components are Spanish and Negro. There is always plenty of fight in the Cuban. He was the last to win his independence from the Spaniard, because Cuba was an island on which Spain could concentrate all her strength; but there are few braver stories in the hemisphere than the fight for freedom that the United States helped the Cubans to win.

This was recent history, for it was by then the turn of the century. The American stayed around—too long from the Cuban viewpoint. It was 1934 before the last hold on Cuba's internal affairs was relinquished, in the abrogating of the so-called Platt Amendment by

which the United States, from the founding of the Cuban Republic in 1901-20 had reserved a right to intervene in Cuban affairs.

However, Cubans who blame "Yankee imperialism" for their political ills conveniently overlook the fact that things have been no better in the last few decades than before. The general rule has been corruption, mismanagement, popular discontent and violence. The bravery, the fierce impulse toward personal liberty, the high ethics and abilities of the exceptional man in public life—these have been like bright strands in the somber and lurid pattern of Cuban life; they are not yet enough to change the picture.

Politics became the profession of a small minority and it became a spoils system.

### Fast-Moving Game

Few political atmospheres in the hemisphere have been so intricate, so subtle, so full of twists and shifts. A Cuban politician has to be fast on his feet. Some of the most expert were caught flatfooted when General Batista staged his garrison revolt on March 10, 1952.

It was in the midst of a Presidential campaign. There had been Presidential elections in 1940, 1944 and 1948 and Congressional elections in between. General Batista was a candidate, but he had no chance of being elected, so he restarted to the time-honored but now discredited method of the military coup. In a matter of hours he held the effective reins of power through control of the Army which always has the last word—or is in a position to have it—in Latin-American countries.

More than four years have passed and Fulgencio Batista is still the strong man of Cuba. He got himself elected to the Presidency again (he was President from 1940 to 1944) on Nov. 1, 1954, and he has nearly three

'FIRST VICTIM'



Valtman in The Hartford Times

more years in office. As a matter of fact, the one-time Sergeant Batista has been the power on the throne or behind the throne since 1933, with the exception of the eight-year period between 1944 and 1952 when the Presidents were Ramon Grau San Martin and Carlos Prío Socarras.

General Batista has what it takes in Cuba—personal charm, quick intelligence, courage and tolerance. The tolerance is a willingness to let supporters milk the Treasury and rig elections. Each of the three Presidents named above made millions of dollars through the Presidency. There is tolerance also on the side of the people, of course, or corruption and mismanagement would not be allowed to continue.

The actual power is exercised through the military forces. The first thing General Batista did after his coup in 1952 was to raise the pay of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and police. He has kept them contented and on his side ever since.

### Resentment Remains

Yet he cannot relax and he cannot really feel safe. The reason lies in the character of the Cubans. They have not made good use of their liberty, but they love and crave liberty. They were slowly and painfully evolving a democracy, but General Batista smashed the delicate

structure that was being erected. Many Cubans resent this greatly. The focus of resentment is in the student body, as it has been throughout Cuban history. Students wrote some glorious pages in the wars of independence.

The political opposition is hopelessly divided. There are political parties of which two are important—the Autenticos and the Ortodoxos. But, until they compose their quarrels and get unified leadership, they are powerless.

### Military Dictatorship

In effect, Cuba has a military dictatorship, even though there are elements of democracy such as a free press and free speech. The country carries on because it is relatively prosperous and wonderfully fertile. Sugar prices are profitable, and "as sugar goes, so goes Cuba."

There is a vitality about the Cuban people that nothing can repress. Cuba is a country that has yet to find herself, yet to work out a solution for her social economic and political problems. There is a traditional, ingrained feeling for revolution, but there has never been a social revolution, as in Mexico. The uprising last weekend was symptomatic of the ferment under the lid that General Batista sits upon. One of these days the lid may blow off—but not now.