

20 YEARS WITH FIDEL

On the anniversary of the Cuban revolution, Castroism is firmly entrenched on the island. But will it endure after Castro?

of all rewards, a state that at times can be as jealous as one of the old forgotten saints in its demand for devotion.

Today, the revolution has been integrated into the fabric of Cuban society to a point where even the exile community has tacitly conceded that the dreams of counterrevolution are not realistic within the lifetime of Fidel Castro. But Mr. Castro and his revolution have a long way to travel before it will be safe to make any basic assumptions about Cuba.

If the experience of the past 20 years provides any guideline to the future, it is that twists and pivotal turns in Cuba's internal and foreign policies can be expected. It would appear that the 21st year of the revolution will be an eventful one. Mr. Castro is taking steps to normalize relations with the United States. And there is the unfolding drama of what can only be described as the liberalization of Cuban society.

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"Last year I could not sit here and talk with a foreign journalist," a merchant seaman named Jose said over a bottle of Czechoslovak beer in a hotel lounge. "Someone would be watching and report me. I would be criticized. Now it is O.K."

The liberalization is slowly extending into other areas. Recently, Mr. Castro met with an exile delegation for talks on the release of political prisoners and the reunification of families. In addition to the thousands of former political prisoners who now occupy marginal roles in Cuban society, there are 3,000 political prisoners in Cuban jails and some 600 others imprisoned for attempting to leave Cuba illegally. Mr. Castro's decision on the matter could mean that as many as 100,000 Cubans may be free to leave the island in 1979.

A theatrical hit of the year in Havana's Teatro Musical was a play written by Hector Quintero entitled, "La Ultima Carta de La Baraja," a reference to the last card in a playing deck that is rejected in a card game. It is a fairly hard-hitting social commentary that is critical of the way old people are cast off in Cuban society.

And though it is a small thing by American standards, the smash new program on Cuban television is "Para Bailar" ("To Dance"), a teen-age dance contest that is vaguely reminiscent of Dick Clark's "American Bandstand" of the 1950's. American pop music has always had its following in Cuba, easily picked up on Miami radio stations and increasingly finding its way into Cuban radio programming. Recently, more traditional Cuban rhythms like the mambo and tango were added to the format.

The show's creator, Eduardo Caceres, had consulted with the Union of Young Communists, which informed him what it believed young Cubans wanted to hear. Asked in an interview if Cuba had reached a point where television dance programs were consistent with the ideals set forth by the Ministry of Culture, Mr. Caceres replied: "It demonstrates the tremendous enthusiasm of the young Cuban workers who are able to die (Continued on Page 28)



Then (left): Castro entering Havana in triumph in 1959. Now (above, in a laser photo): Fidel, at 52, is still running the country. He will be a hard act to follow.

By Jon Nordheimer

Some pilgrims arrive at the shrine of San Lázaro in El Rincón on their knees. Some come crawling in the dust on their bellies in garments of sackcloth that rub the skin raw. Most Cubans walk to El Rincón, however, and in the week before Christmas — during the Feast of San Lázaro — two or three thousand pilgrims make the 18-mile journey from Havana on foot. The trek is the most open display of defiance against the regime of Fidel Castro that is countenanced in Cuba today.

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In the old days, before Fidel Castro and his revolution changed the way of life for 9.5 million Cubans on the island, tens of thousands trekked to El Rincón as penance to San Lázaro for answering their prayers to spare a sick child or a dying parent. Those still making the pilgrimage every year do so at the risk of antagonizing a government that officially permits religious activity but makes lists of those who participate.

This Tuesday, Jan. 2, marks the official 20th anniversary of the revolution. Twenty years have erased many memories and customs in Cuba. Religious practice hangs on, surviving on the fringe of a Communist society, but there is difficulty in attracting young converts. In Cuba, the state and its mass organizations are the dispensers



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in a trench to defend the principles of the revolution as well as enjoy themselves dancing."

It is difficult to assess just how heartfelt these ideological expressions are; they are rarely injected into ordinary conversations. Indeed, with American correspondents, the average Cuban is extremely friendly. He is curious about the United States, and appears to go out of his way to inform the foreign visitor that Cuba's ideological comrades and benefactors, the Soviets, are unfriendly, need a bath and look physically funny. He refers to the estimated 9,000 Russians based in Cuba, with whom there is little fraternization, as *bolos*, the Spanish word for bowling pins.

It is doubtful that Cubans privately discuss Americans in the same way. The alienation and scarcities brought on by the revolution and the U.S. trade embargo appear to have exaggerated public opinion about the cornucopia of American life and products.

"Forget what you hear about 'Cuba Si, Yanqui No,'" said José, the merchant seaman, sporting American jeans picked up on a voyage to Rotterdam. "Just the opposite is true. Cubans think the Americans are like us. They like to laugh and enjoy life ... drink and dance and sing."

But these frank conversations turn cold and hollow if a stranger enters a room or walks within earshot. It has become a reflex.

"In Cuba today," a resident explained, "everyone has learned that if you play the game you have no problems."

He gave an illustration. After an all-night party, a man wakes up on a Sunday morning with a hangover. He has no taste for the weekly cleanup organized by the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. (A mass organization that polices all aspects of neighborhood life from trash pickup to counterrevolutionary activity, the C.D.R. has in its network 80 percent of the country's adult population in 78,000 neighborhood units.) The cleanup usually takes two to three hours, but a man who knows the game drags himself out into the street, makes a big show of sweeping for a few minutes in front of everyone, and returns to bed. At the next C.D.R. meeting, the party members will say, "Poor Carlos, he did not accomplish much but at least he made an effort. But Pedro! He did not even bother to show up." Carlos's name, not Pedro's, ap-

pears on the next list prepared by the C.D.R. of those entitled to buy appliances under the rationing program.

"You never make the mistake of saying you don't want to do something," the resident explained further. "Everyone is prepared to accept a lie, but they won't take defiance."

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Renewed contacts with the United States has produced inevitable side effects. For Cubans who have lived under the Communists for 20 years, these contacts serve to magnify and exacerbate their longing for the material rewards that the revolution has promised but has never fully delivered. Mr. Castro and his lieutenants constantly chide foreign journalists for focusing on the lack of consumer goods in the store windows. According to Mr. Castro, these journalists are choosing to ignore certain other facts: that Cuban children no longer go hungry, as they did in prerevolutionary days; that every sick child receives free medical care; that no child is denied an education because of class or race.

Foreign journalists, too, have been wont to note that a country that can send 20,000 of its young men and women to Angola to assist a Marxist insurgency movement is still unable to supply to its own people anything but a minimal ration of clothing, food and health goods.

Grumbings about the shortages can be heard nowadays, although the criticism is circumspect and does not implicate the revolution or its leaders in the failure to improve the everyday lives of Cuban workers. That would be counterrevolutionary.

Clothing, usually of poor quality, is tightly rationed. Individual coupons permit the average Cuban to buy one pair of pants and one shirt a year, or three shirts and no trousers. Moreover, purchases can be made only on special days that come on the average of once every six weeks for most Cubans. Shopping for basic merchandise is further complicated by shortages of goods.

Carlos, for example, is like a man possessed when he talks about his search for a comfortable pair of shoes. Under the rationing system, a Cuban may purchase one pair of dress shoes a year. Laborers and farmers can buy as many work boots as they want, but office clerks like Carlos are

limited to the one pair, and the selection, style and fit are of supreme importance when the shoes must be worn daily for the next 12 months.

Last year Carlos bought Cuban-made shoes that pinched his feet and made his job a daily exercise in discomfort. This year, armed with a new coupon, he resolved to find a pair of imported shoes of a different style and better fit. But dozens of trips to the shops of San Rafael Boulevard near Old Havana produced no selection other than the same Cuban shoes that in his mind had come to represent the pinching inadequacies of the Cuban system.

Finally, on one recent outing, he spied, in a shop window, a handsome pair of shoes in exactly his size. But the store did not have them in stock, and the clerk said she could not sell him the display model. It was the regulation and no one at the store had authority to change a regulation.

Years ago, in the bright dawn of the revolution, Carlos had gone into the countryside to plant fruit trees, the thrill of the promise of a new social order deep inside him. Now all he can think about are his aching feet.

Cars are viewed with like passion. Many Cubans long for a private automobile even if the only vehicle available to them is a U.S.-made relic of the 1950's, a pre-trade-embargo beauty recycled through a series of garages.

There are practical reasons for a car. An office worker in Havana may spend two to four hours a day commuting on a crosstown bus. In the countryside, bus schedules are illusory and the bus stops along a rural highway, as well as in the city, are called *banco de paciencia* (benches of patience). It is not uncommon, after a long wait, for would-be passengers to see the bus so heavily loaded that the driver stops 100 yards short to disgorge a passenger and then pulls away before those waiting can sprint over.

Since housing is subsidized by the state, the purchase of a car is the biggest investment in a Cuban's life. A 25-year-old American car, one of those fish-tailed classics, can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$15,000. New cars such as a Fiat may cost slightly less, but there are long waiting lists for the imports, and many Cubans find it desirable to come up with the money to pay for older cars rather than be suspended for long periods of time without transportation.

Higher-priced models, such as Peugeots or Alfa-Romeos, are not only out of the price range of the average Cuban, who makes less than \$200 a month, but they end up in the

driveways of Government and party officials and the elite professionals whose life styles reflect the two-tiered structure of a supposedly classless society.

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The persistent shortage of consumer items has spawned what Jorge I. Domínguez of Harvard University calls "a corruption of access." It is true that a conviction on a bribery charge almost always resulted in a lengthy prison term, but obtaining access to the centers of power and privilege is still the best way to improve one's life style.

For the ordinary Cuban, this may be achieved on a limited scale. Winning a job in one of the foreign embassies, for example, usually means getting an allowance of 25 to 30 pesos a month in convertible currency (pesos acquired with hard foreign money) that can be used in the Diplomats — shops set up for foreign-service personnel that are better stocked with quality goods at lower prices than the stores where Cubans shop. A person with convertible pesos may buy a bottle of Cuban rum for 2.50 pesos. The same bottle for a Cuban with plain, hard-earned pesos costs 25 pesos or more.

Quality cigars, the pride of Cuban agriculture, cost about \$1 each in shops for foreigners. They are simply not available to average Cubans at any price, since they are all earmarked for export to bring home foreign exchange.

Even relatives who live in Miami are seen as a marvelous asset now that the Cuban Government is permitting exiles to visit the island. The exiles will bring gifts of clothing and appliances, as well as dollars that can buy goods at the tourist shops that are sure to proliferate.

The jockeying for access to the centers of power and privilege is not illegal in the strictest sense, and only mildly embarrassing to a Socialist state, but it is corrupting on a personal level because the loss or gain of privilege has to be measured against every decision a bureaucrat or military careerist makes in the anthill of Cuban life.

Privilege also exists in less exalted form outside the party elite and higher levels of the bureaucracy and armed forces. In recent years, wage differentials have been reintroduced as economic incentives; the economic fiasco in 1974 dashed the dreams of those who believed that revolu-

tionary zealotry and moral incentives alone could, without the benefit of a transitional period, transform Cuba from a capitalist state into a pure Communist one.

Many professionals and technicians who elected to stay in Cuba while their colleagues went into exile in the early years of the revolution have been rewarded with wages that are high by Cuban standards. Musicians, for example, may earn more than 700 pesos a month (\$950, according to the exchange rate in Cuba), compared with an unskilled worker who gets 85 pesos a month, or a factory worker paid 200 pesos monthly. A professional couple may have a combined income of more than 1,000 pesos a month.

With tax-free income, free education and health care, rationed food and clothing, low rents, limited foreign travel and prohibitively high black-market prices, the spending of surplus cash is a problem.

This year, the creation of a "red market" under Government auspices has meant that rationed goods could be bought without a coupon but at twice or three times the normal cost. A person who can afford to do so can buy the personal belongings of another.

Going away for the weekend to one of the few resorts is also a good way to spend money. By U.S. standards, the accommodations, food and service at a hotel like the Havana Riviera (one of the last Miami Beach-style hotels to go up along the Malecón before the revolution) are less than first-class. Yet a couple can spend \$250 dollars over a weekend without doing much more than eating, sleeping, having a few daquiris around the pool, and dancing at a hotel discothèque.

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The peasant farmers of Oriente Province were the first allies of Fidel Castro's band of radicalized bourgeois who sought to topple the Batista regime. By an odd twist, today the peasant farmer of Cuba is the last holdout of something resembling capitalistic free enterprise on the island.

Antonio Roque is such a farmer. He is pleasant, with a ready smile. He helps his older brother work his privately owned land, which in the three-month winter planting season yields a tobacco crop that will net the brothers an average of \$2,000 after interest-free loans from the Government are repaid. During

the spring and summer, the fields are planted in corn and other vegetables, which the brothers share and sell.

Mr. Roque, his wife, two sons, a daughter-in-law and grandchild live in a thatched *bohío* that has a living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen that has running water and an old Kelvinator refrigerator. In the backyard are pens housing numerous chickens and a half-dozen mature hogs and two litters of piglets. Fruit trees shade the yard.

Mr. Roque appears quite content with his lot. Rationing does not plague him as it does the city dwellers and the agricultural workers who own no land. A 360-pound hog, for instance, will supply his family with meat for four months, and enough lard for a year. At the end of every December, residents of the city come to his farm to buy chickens or pigs for a special dinner at Christmas or New Year's. He acknowledges, with a quick smile, that they will pay almost any price he asks.

Sixty percent of Cuba's tobacco is grown on private farms, and because it is a specialty crop, the small tobacco farmer is spared the pressure for collectivization. The land, however, cannot be passed on

to sons at the death of the owners; it must be turned over to the state. Mr. Roque's older son plans a career in the army and the younger son is studying to be a doctor.

Cuba's educational system has grown by such leaps and bounds that it is possible for the sons of peasants like Mr. Roque to aspire to better-paying positions. For the moment, though, the training is far easier to get than the jobs, a situation that has generated another level of frustration in Cuban society.

José Ramon Hernandez, former Minister of Education who is now a Vice President of State, recognizes the problem, but he has argued that higher education should transcend utilitarian considerations.

"Education is an asset for a man, like a car or a house," Mr. Hernandez is fond of saying. "Its purpose is to create habits of a lifetime. Work has an equal value in Cuban society. Hard physical labor imparts to those fortunate to receive a higher education a sense of respect and pride in those who must do the difficult and menial tasks of society."

Work in the fields and factories is now part of the learning process for those entering secondary schools. The demands placed upon the students is fairly rigorous, but the system seems to be producing young people who understand the relationship between their studies and work in the adult world. The political conditioning is also complete, given the absence of anything resembling dissent, and only time will tell how much the Cuban character and temperament are being reshaped by the indoctrination that starts as early as the day-care center and continues relentlessly throughout life.

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The wild swings of economic and social experimentation that characterized Cuba in the 1960's have been checked by a shift to central planning based on the Soviet model. Yet, Cuba is still locked in a sugar monoculture that the revolutionaries had despised as the curse of the era when the economy was dominated by Americans. If anything can be said of the Cuban economy today, after 20 years of Socialism, it is that when the world price of sugar is up, things are good; when it goes down, things are bad. It's pretty much the same, then, as it was 20 years ago, except the good times and the bad times are divided more equally among the people.

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Fidel Castro, at 52 years of

age, is still a young man; he could still be in charge after the turn of the century. Should anything happen to him before then, it is assumed that the transition will be orderly and the power turned over to his younger brother, Raúl. Raúl is the first Vice President of the Council of State and head of the powerful armed forces. He fought at his brother's side in the Sierra Maestras, and by virtue of blood, experience, position and power should have no difficulty assuming the top post. Staying there may be another matter.

Despite the marks of Cuban progress, the fact remains that Fidel Castro is the personification and glue of the revolution. He asks the people to sacrifice and they sacrifice. It is an unchallenged contention here that, despite the inadequacies of Cuban life, if free elections were held today Mr. Castro would win by a landslide. In a land that fosters many elements of a Big Brother mentality, he is a Big Brother in a loving, benign way.

Raúl Castro or any other successor would find it an extremely difficult act to follow. Raúl is not a popular figure. He lacks charisma, and is something of a mystery man even to Cubans. It is doubtful whether he possesses the remarkable flexibility of his older brother, a skill that Fidel Castro has used both to extricate himself from mistakes and to push Cuba to a position of international power far in excess of its size, population and economic resources.

The Cuban people may not be as tolerant with a successor as they are with Fidel Castro on the sore point of consumer scarcity. It is unlikely that anyone but a secure and confident Mr. Castro could go to the people, as he did on Dec. 2, and tell them that additional sacrifices were needed, that conditions will not markedly improve for many years, adding: "All the generations to come will always remember with gratitude what this revolutionary generation is doing."

It is not easy for a people to be told that their generation is a lost generation, the one sacrificed to prepare for the future, as the Cuban people have been told for 20 years.

"Whether you agree with him or not," said Dr. Mesa-Lago, looking out over the skyline of Havana as the setting sun softened the old facades of the buildings with delicate shades of orange and pink, "the man is a political genius, perhaps the only true genius among the world's leaders today. And at his relatively young age, he should be around for many more years, and it should be interesting, at least, to watch where he goes from here." ■