

# CUBANS DEBATING REBEL INTERVIEW

## Public Tends to Accept Story on Castro While Regime Continues to Discount It

**By R. HART PHILLIPS**

Special to The New York Times.

HAVANA, Feb. 28—The question of the veracity of a personal interview by Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times with Fidel Castro, rebel leader, in the Sierra Maestra of Oriente Province is rapidly becoming a national issue in Cuba.

The interview, published in The Times last Sunday, was removed by Government censors from copies of the newspaper entering Cuba. However, with the lifting of censorship Tuesday copies circulated throughout the island.

Newspapers headlined the interview and radio stations broadcast excerpts. The Government quickly denied such an interview had taken place. Dr. Santiago Verdeja, Minister of Defense, termed it a "chapter in a fantastic novel."

Gen. Martin Diaz Tamayo, military chief of Oriente Province, whose troops are attempting to dislodge the Castro group from its mountain stronghold, called it "an imaginary interview." He said it was impossible for anyone to get through the lines of troops surrounding the section in which Señor Castro is operating without being stopped by Government patrols.

"This interview was prefabricated for the purpose of aiding the psychological war that is going on in Cuba," the general said.

The Opposition to the Government is hotly defending the veracity of the interview. José Pardo Llada, who recently organized a new Opposition party known as the National Revolutionary party and is a popular political commentator, broadcast a telephonic interview with Mr. Matthews. Señor Llada told the radio audience The Times article was true.

The Matthews-Castro interview is a prime topic of conversation on the streets, in places of business and homes. The public is somewhat inclined to accept the story by Mr. Matthews. However, Government adherents declare it untrue.

The arrival of today's edition of The Times in which there was a picture of Mr. Matthews and Señor Castro together has added fuel to the fire of controversy. Copies shipped to Havana sold out in a few minutes.