

Right, left wing

Little Havana on the

By CAROLE FELDMAN

By daylight Bill Novo works as a car salesman. But when the doors to the Chevrolet dealership here in Union City are locked, he becomes self-proclaimed Cuban nationalist Guillermo Novo, trafficking in militant anti-Castro ideology and tactics.

Novo is one of many Cuban refugees here working toward a non-communist Cuba. So many, in fact, that Union City has become a hotbed of secret anti-Castro activity.

The Cubans, who form 54 per cent of this community, are largely responsible for uplifting the economy of Union City, which calls itself "The Little Havana on the Hudson."

"We don't have an empty stores in Union City," boasts police chief Herman Bolte.

Shops along Bergenline Avenue display signs that read "English spoken here" and advertise sales on black beans, plantains and other ingredients basic to Cuban dishes.

"The Cuban people have enabled Union City to hold its own, to tread water when all other cities are sinking," says school board president John Powers.

But a decade and a half after Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba, outspoken anti-communism beliefs continue to simmer here, law enforcement officials say. And the simmering is sometimes violent.

Novo is on probation for conspiring to blow up the Cuban consulate in Canada in 1969. While he says he doesn't advocate violating any law "right now", he doesn't rule out violence in the future.

"Violence is possible," he says. "Many Cubans are in a state of desperation and complete frustration. The Cuban people have a legitimate right to fight," he says, adding that Cuban nationalists have "no desire to see any innocent people get hurt."

Novo has been questioned about last September's bombing murder of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and about several other violent incidents in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. He thinks he was questioned because of his participation in a Union City rally of Cubans and Chileans against communism.

The rally was held to raise bail for three Hudson County men later sentenced to jail for taking part in an attempt to blow up a Manhattan theatre where a pro-Castro rally was scheduled.

"They just wanted to do a little damage to the entrance to attract attention," Novo explains.

The use of violence is one way that political activists attract attention to their causes, law enforcement officials say.

Groups like Novo's, which have a following among young people, "make noises to try to get the public's attention," says one police official. "The noisier they get, the bigger they think they are."

Members of other exile groups and of the Cuban community

here in Union City say they have little respect for such groups.

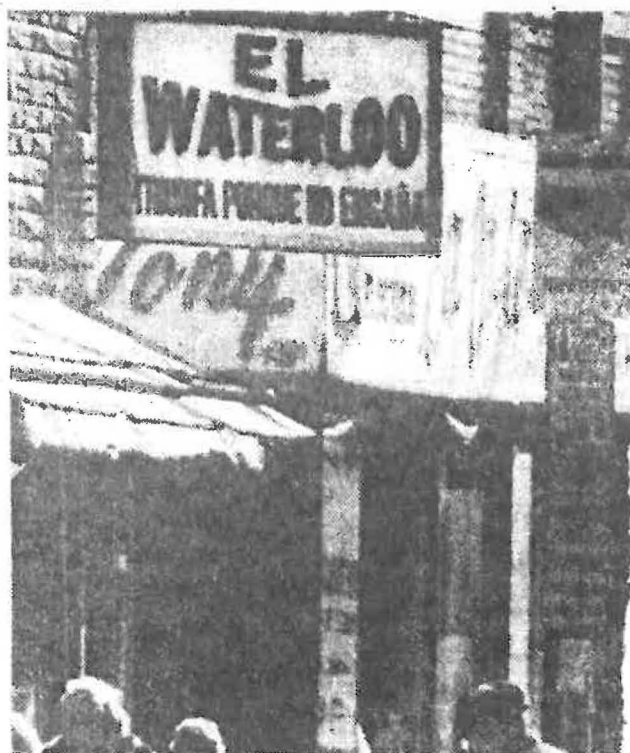
Luis Fernandez, a member of the Abdala group, cringed when Novo's name and the Cuban Nationalist movement were mentioned.

The Nationalists are "rightwing extremists and fascists," said Fernandez, while "Abdala has a different ideology and strategy. We are social Democrats. We are one and the same with the people in Cuba."

Fernandez said his group has embarked on a letter-writing campaign to make as many contacts inside Cuba as possible and let those still on the island know they have friends outside.

He said his group is seeking freedom for all political prisoners in Cuba, freedom of speech and assembly and freedom of international travel.

This difference in ideologies between Novo and Fernandez and their reluctance to work together is a major problem for



Clutter of signs, occupied stores, shoppers on the sidewalk and cars competing for parking spaces are all evidence of the retail

groups at odds

Hudson a mixed city

the Cuban exiles, says one man familiar with the community here.

The strident Cuban exiles here "are going to get the shock of their lives when they return to Cuba. The people inside, those who have been suffering, are not going to take these people in. They are the ones who fled," he said.

Although most anti-Castro groups oppose resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, law enforcement officials say this may be the best way for their organizations to build strength and spread their ideas.

"If the island is open, maybe something can be done," one official said. "Nothing can be done from the outside."

Others say many Cubans who have become prosperous in the United States wouldn't want to return to Cuba even if they could.

But Novo, who left his native land as a teenager, disagrees.

"I have been happy. I have been comfortable. But there is

still a necessity to return," he said, adding that Cubans still regard themselves as foreigners here.

The United States has turned its back on the Cuban refugees, he charged, noting that the CIA previously had supplied the anti-Castro forces with explosives, arms and intelligence.

Despite the lack of help, Novo says "the morality doesn't change. U.S. policy is one thing, our determination to liberate our country is another."

But even if Cuba were liberated from Castro, it is unclear how many Cubans living here would return to their homeland.

Many of the blue-collar Cuban workers seem to have established roots here, even though this community has a history of attracting an everchanging population of immigrant groups.

As one official close to the Cuban community put it, "These people were forced to give up everything they lived for once. Now that they've been able to get a taste of American prosperity, they're not going to be that willing to start over again."



Dispatch Photo by Jed Kinschtein

resurgence of Bergenline av. in Union City thanks to the influx of Cubans.