

The Price of Achievement Under Castro

Cuba now has racial equality, public health programs, rural schooling, low rents, bare cupboards, black markets, a state-controlled press, and forced-labor camps.

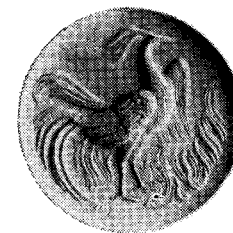
ALMOST a generation of Cubans has grown up under communism. Thus, whether Fidel Castro is here to stay or not, the bearded “maximum leader” has left an imprint which will never be erased either from the Caribbean island or the world. However, although very real, that imprint is not always clear. As Herbert L. Matthews puts it, “Fidel Castro—hated or worshiped—has always provided excitement. Each day a new life begins and the Lord only knows what the next day will bring. Very often, not even Fidel Castro knows.” This, perhaps, is the most important message that the veteran *New York Times* correspondent delivers in his political biography, *Fidel Castro* (Simon & Schuster, 382 pp., \$6.95).

I find myself in agreement with Matthews when he says that Cubanologists in the United States have wasted their time in doctrinal arguments about Cuban socialism, and/or Cuban communism. This is one of the countless truths brought out in his valuable book. The pity is that Matthews, a meticulous researcher and a fine writer, produces such a distorted view of the Cuban revolution, not by what he says but by what he omits.

Although Matthews has skillfully documented the “why” of the revolution, he has been notably remiss about documenting its abuses. Certainly, the Cuban revolution has achievements to show. But at what price? The author never really says.

Matthews, whose early articles in the *Times* about Castro paved the way for his initial support by the U.S., emerges as the super-apologist, forever excusing and justifying. “But at least,” he writes, “revolution is a mechanism by which tyranny, corruption and injustice are overthrown.” In the case of Cuba he could not be more wrong. For, after ten years, there is still tyranny in Cuba—this time, hiding behind the guise of “revolutionary justice,” which is in fact a perpetuation of injustice. True, little if any corruption exists, but this does not make the tyrannical grip of the totalitarian régime any the less harsh. I felt the heavy shadow of the police state in Batista’s Cuba; I felt it equally ominously in Castro’s Cuba. And the tragedy of this unpredictable Fidelean society, with its shrill, aggressively nationalistic attitude, is that it is the victim of a revolution that is more emotional than rational. As a result, Cuba is sinking in economic quicksands as it gropes for the stars of ideological promise.

Matthews knows his Cuba and he has traveled it well, which makes it all the more disappointing that his chronicle dwells so on the brutal aspects of the Batista dictatorship and devotes so little attention to the abuses that have taken place during the past decade. He is right, of course, to spotlight the Batista atrocities and the U.S. foreign policy follies that



SR: BOOKS

Book Review Editor: ROCHELLE GIRON

-
- 23 “Fidel Castro,”
by Herbert L. Matthews
- 26 **Literary Horizons:** *Granville Hicks* reviews “Tike and Five Stories,” by Jonathan Strong, and “What I’m Going to Do, I Think,” by L. Woivode (Fiction)
- 27 **European Literary Scene,**
by Robert J. Clements
- 28 **Book Forum: Letters from Readers**
- 29 “Styles of Radical Will,”
by Susan Sontag
- 30 “Inventory,” by Michel Butor
- 31 “Against the Current: Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters of Konstantin Leontiev”; “The Egyptian Dove: The Story of a Russian,”
by Konstantin Leontiev, edited by George Icaak
- 32 “Mr. Bridge,”
by Evan S. Connell, Jr. (Fiction)
- 32 “An American Marriage,”
by Hilary Masters (Fiction)
- 33 “Supper with the Borgias,”
by Richard Jones (Fiction)
- 48 “Die Nigger Die,” by H. Rap Brown;
“The Black Messiah,”
by Albert Cleage
-

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contributed to the advent of Castro, but Matthews is very much to be faulted for not doing an equally thorough job on the police state aspects of Castro's Cuba.

A small Havana hotel where I have stayed has, for instance, become a local headquarters of the "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution," the two-million-member network of neighborhood spy groups which keeps Cubans and foreigners under constant surveillance.

Memories of the brutal Batista dictatorship—toward which the United States for so long had a closed-eye policy—remain unfaded in the minds of older Cubans. But, as in the days of Fulgencio Batista, the jails are again packed with political prisoners—perhaps 40,000. An army of 90,000 tough, well-trained men commanded by Castro's brother, Raul; an air force equipped with 175 Soviet-built jets, and a militia numbering 250,000 snuff out any hope of militant protest from an unarmed population.

In 1966, I had the unique experience, for a Western journalist, of tracking down a forced-labor camp hidden in the lush sugar fields of central Cuba. Tucked away near the hamlet of El Dos de Céspedes, the camp was one of 200 such compounds. Inside, behind barbed-wire fences, an estimated 30,000 Cubans were living under armed guard. In the terminology of the Cuban Communist Party the camps were known simply as UMAP. These are the Spanish initials for *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* ("military units to aid production"). But they were military units without guns, and the men within them aided the production because they appeared petrified to do otherwise. Photographs I brought out of Cuba, the first uncensored pictures taken inside one of the establishments, testify to the harsh living conditions.

The army lieutenant in charge of the camp seemed amazed that I had located its whereabouts without being accompanied by a government official. Twice he asked me, "You are alone? There is no one with you?" He then asked me for identification, and I produced a foreign ministry press pass permitting me to travel throughout Cuba. "Why have you come here?" was the next question. In Spanish, I explained that I was a Canadian correspondent and that I was interested "in all facets of the revolution."

The 120 inmates were neither political prisoners nor criminals. Rather, they had been active in what is left of Cuba's shattered religious life—particularly Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses—or were among those loosely termed "social misfits" by the government. They had been sent to the UMAP camp for at least three years of so-called



—Photos by Paul Kidd.

Sign of "Committee for the Defense of Revolution"—neighborhood spy network.

military service, although none would ever handle a gun, and the only implements they would ever touch would be machetes for cutting sugar cane or hoes for tilling the earth. All the guns were in the hands of ten security guards running the camp. The power of its commandant was virtually absolute.

For working an average sixty-hour week the inmates received \$7 a month—scarcely the price in Cuba of one half-decent meal. Except when they were toiling under the eyes of an armed guard in the nearby countryside, the inmates were usually confined to the camp compound for at least six months. Supposedly eligible for brief leave after ninety days, few UMAP draftees were allowed to visit their families until they had been in a camp at least twice that long.

The system of discipline was simple. Inmates who didn't work didn't get fed. And unless their labor reached its allotted norm, they didn't receive leave. On the second Sunday in each month draftees were allowed visits from their families, who could bring cigarettes and other small items. If an inmate didn't obey orders, such gifts were withheld. Reports of physical brutality in the camps circulated widely in Cuba.

The camp at El Dos de Céspedes was divided into two sets of living quarters. The security section, where the guards slept, had small, neat bunk beds. But the two long white concrete buildings where the inmates slept resembled cattle pens. Strips of sacking slung between wooden posts served as beds. On the outside wall of a large, bare building just inside the camp entrance, a picture of Lenin glowered. Underneath it were the words "*¡Proletarios del mundo uníos!*" ("Workers of the world unite!"). The nightly two hours of ideological indoctrination and Communist propa-

ganda were designed to help develop a "correct attitude toward the revolution."

Providing a ready-made source of cheap—almost slave—labor, UMAP camps were being used to develop big areas of land in remote regions. Virtually anyone could be drafted into UMAP; ages of inmates ranged from sixteen to more than sixty.

THIS, then, is the type of device used to keep the Cuban population in line. No mention of it, however, is made in Mr. Matthews's book. The commendable has a safe place in this sample of history; the deplorable does not. There is a need for precise details of the horrors of the Cuban revolution, as well as the benefits. Matthews generalizes, "No one can deny that Fidel Castro and his revolution have brought tragedy to thousands of Cuban families. Revolutions can no more be made without bringing suffering to many people than wars can be fought without sacrificing lives." This, of course, is true. But if one is to absorb the total Cuban picture, then graphic glimpses of that suffering should be etched in.

Mr. Matthews does report that on a visit to the island he and his wife lunched with some old Cuban friends whose son had been arrested and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment on the Isle of Pines. But he does not mention what the son's offense was—surely a pertinent fact. In any event, Matthews attempts to justify it all by saying that the sad story of his friends' imprisoned son "can be countered . . . by happy stories of happy families." It is specious reasoning. One might as validly say that the story of one happy family could be countered by sad stories of sad families.

The eminent scholar Theodore Drap-



Cuban forced-labor camp—for beds, strips of sacking between posts.

er wrote in 1964, "For three years, the Castro régime has fed people far more fantasies than food." The observation holds true today.

In Havana last year I went for a stroll along a narrow street called Obispo, which used to be sprinkled with smart, well-stocked shops, and had always been bustling and colorful. Not any more. This time there were few pedestrians. And almost every store was closed. Notices in the windows of the few that still had severely rationed goods stated that they would be open but four hours one morning a week—and that only those Cubans with valid ration books need wait in line. With their precious ration books Cubans receive one shirt, one pair of pants or one dress, and a couple of sets of underwear and pairs of hose a year. Most signs in shop windows announced that the employees had closed their premises and joined thousands of other "volunteers" in the 100,000-acre "green belt" around Havana, which is being cleared of weeds and planted with coffee, vegetables and fruit.

"Capitalism," Castro screamed, "has to be dug out by the roots, parasitism has to be dug out by the roots, the exploitation of man has to be dug out by the roots!" Implemented by neighborhood "Big Brother" spy teams, his so-called "revolutionary offensive" against the remaining 55,000 small businesses and self-employed "businessmen" has crushed even such tiny independent "businessmen" as the portrait photographers in Havana's Central Park.

No longer, I found, were any of Cuba's 3,900 privately-owned taverns open. "We cannot encourage drunkenness . . . we must promote the working spirit," said Castro. I soon learned that it wasn't so much "drunkenness" as ram-

phant black-marketeering which was upsetting the Cuban premier. The bars had long been among the principal outlets for illicit deals in scarce foods and goods. Neighborhood courts have been busy trying black-marketeers.

Through such tough measures, Castro reasoned, "we are little by little sanitizing our environment, cleaning it up, creating a country that is really a country of workers." But for most Cubans the "revolutionary offensive" has only made an already Spartan existence even more harsh.

Along Havana's Prado were shell-like buildings that had once been busy restaurants. In a country where food rationing is more acute than in England during the Second World War, only a limited number of restaurants can survive. Scattered groups of Cubans stood talking in the shade of the Prado's trees—their conversation sporadically drowned out by the noise of Chinese-made roller skates on the deft feet of youngsters hurtling down the boulevard. The roller skates are one of the few items that have arrived to break the gray monotony of life in Cuba.

A store on the Prado, even emptier than when I had seen it eighteen months earlier, displayed a few radios and a television set in its window. But to qualify for such a luxury item a Cuban must have worked countless "voluntary" hours cutting sugar cane or planting coffee and proved himself to be an "exemplary worker."

Although the national minimum wage is \$85 a month, the average Cuban earns about \$150. However, because of the paucity of goods, he has little on which to spend the money. What spare cash he does have is siphoned off into black-market food and goods or restaurant meals. The available remnants of

"capitalistic decadence" bring high prices: a set of automobile tires, \$1,000; a nine-year-old refrigerator, \$2,000; a 1960 Buick, \$10,400. Scarcely edible food in cafeterias is expensive enough, but at the remaining good restaurants an average meal costs from \$12 to \$15. Even so, the eating places are packed. Bare cupboards at home are the cause.

Each Cuban is rationed per month to three pounds of rice, one pound of beans, one pound of lard, three cans of condensed milk and, for children under eight years, one-quarter pound of butter; weekly, each gets two pounds of sugar, three-quarters of a pound of meat, and one and a half ounces of coffee. Chickens are virtually unobtainable, and only small children receive fresh milk. Eggs, no longer rationed, are plentiful. Cuba is a lush country, but when I was last in Havana there wasn't a banana or orange in sight.

One state enterprise, however, does a perennially lively business. Claiming to be the biggest ice cream parlor in the world, the Copelia offers some fifty flavors. The varieties have such exotic names as "Tricontinental Copa Lolita," and the quality is good. Throughout most of the day, lines of patient Cubans wait up to an hour for their ice cream. It is virtually the only luxury on an otherwise drab daily menu.

CASTRO epitomizes much of what is wrong with the Cuban approach to its economic problems. A self-taught expert on sugar, coffee, bananas and cattle-raising, he is impatient for instant panaceas. Revolutionary enthusiasm, however, is no substitute for expertise—and, with many of Cuba's best professionals now in exile, the result is a mishmash of many failures and some successes created by wild bureaucracy and incompetent management.

Currently Cuba is mobilizing labor battalions for the sugar harvest, the source of the nation's survival. Reportedly, before the six-month harvest ends in June about 500,000 Cubans will be in the fields. Some 700 Soviet-built sugar harvesting machines have proved a disappointment, and 95 per cent of Cuba's crop is still cut by hand.

Many of the "voluntary" workers—recruited in the schools, factories and government offices of Havana—are amateur cane-cutters. But it is only through adopting such a "correct revolutionary attitude" that Cubans get the favors, in scarce goods and job opportunities, that the régime offers.

Although Castro has been boasting that Cuba will be harvesting 10,000,000 tons of sugar by next year, the yield in 1969 is expected to be no more than 6,500,000 tons. Of this, almost half is already committed to the Soviet Union

(Continued on page 45)

Literary Horizons

Granville Hicks

I can imagine a present-day Scott Fitzgerald saying, "The very young are different from us," and a hard-boiled Hemingway replying, "Yes, they aren't so old." At most periods in history this might be an adequate answer, but at the moment I think it falls short. I feel in my bones that the generation gap is becoming an abyss. If this is true, it is because of something that is happening to Western civilization, not because the young are particularly wicked or stupid or perverse.

There are many young men and women who are eager to tell us just what the younger generation is up to, but most of them seem to me to clarify nothing. I realize that this may be my fault, but I don't really think so. These would-be writers fail to make me believe in their characters, probably because they don't believe in them themselves. But there are a few writers who have been able to make me believe that their characters, no matter how bizarre their ideas or how outrageous their behavior, are real people. Thomas Rogers, in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, is one, and Marilyn Hoff, in *Rose*, is another. And now there is Jonathan Strong, whose *Tike and Five Stories* (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$5.75) has hit me very hard indeed.

Tike, the hero of the novella, is twenty-one years old, has dropped out of

college, and has taken a room of his own. His mother and father are open-minded, gentle people who are eager to understand and help him, and it might have been better for him if they had been stupid, conventional tyrants, for then he would at least have had something definite to revolt against. After being in a mental institution for a while, he is working in a college library shelving books. As the story begins he is miserably lonely, but there are other young people in his boarding house, and soon he becomes acquainted with them.

Strong writes for the most part in short declarative sentences, and this becomes tiresome at times; but the device helps Strong, as it helped Hemingway, to emphasize the specific detail. By writing about things rather than emotions he avoids phoniness. He has also learned from Hemingway that what is left out of a story can be more important than what is put in. Tike represents himself as being cool as an iceberg, yet what the reader feels between the lines is bewilderment and despair.

The five short stories aren't about Tike, but they are about boys who are very much like him. One of them, "Quilty," describes a boy of fifteen or sixteen who is involved in a family celebration of the Fourth of July. He is a nice boy and has a nice family, and he is only beginning to realize how much of life lies outside the family circle. Two stories touch delicately on the problem of homosexuality, "Supperburger" and "Sayin Goodbye to Tom." In the former we are never sure what has gone on between the boy and an older man, a composer, but we see how it has changed their lives. The latter portrays a boyhood friendship that is on the edge of a deeper involvement. "Suburban Life" presents a boy and girl who are shacking up and are having a good time in spite of the girl's broken leg. In "Tike" the boy has an affair for which he is really not ready, and he is hurt. In "Suburban Life" both the boy and girl are enjoying the new sexual freedom, and that is fine, but one sees the problems that lie ahead for them.

I began *What I'm Going to Do, I Think*, by L. Woiwode (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$5.95), because it also deals with the problems, sexual and marital, of the young. (Believe it or not, the publishers say that the author's name is pronounced "Why-wood-ee," with the accent on the first syllable.) His young couple are a little older than the boy and girl in *Tike*:

Christofer Van Eenanam, a graduate student in science, has just won a fellowship; Ellen Strohe, who was a student at the University of Wisconsin when he first met her, was brought up by stern grandparents, against whom she is ineffectually in revolt.

The story opens as Chris and Ellen are beginning their honeymoon in the grandparents' summer home. We learn that Ellen had become pregnant and that they have had to choose between abortion and marriage. Chris, who, as the title indicates, is an indecisive young man, finally came out for marriage, but he has recurring doubts about the future. Ellen has her doubts, too, but mostly she worries about his doubts. What happens between them is, of course, the theme of the story.

Like Jonathan Strong, Woiwode is fond of specific details, but he is not so skillful as Strong in selecting those that will do most for him. There is, for instance, a long account of an interview Chris and Ellen have with the minister they have selected to marry them. This is a good piece of realistic reporting, but so far as contributing to our understanding of Ellen and Chris is concerned, Woiwode could have got the same effect in a fifth of the space. For another example: A neighboring farmer asks Chris to help him with a day's haying. After Chris has worked himself to exhaustion, the farmer doesn't even give him a decent day's pay. Woiwode is surely describing Chris's ordeal out of his own experience, and the reader's muscles almost ache in sympathy, but fewer words would have done as well.

The problems of Chris and Ellen recur in every generation in many varieties, and haven't much to do with the dilemmas that seem to be peculiarly modern. That, of course, is nothing against the novel. The trouble is that Woiwode has brought so little to his theme that might illuminate it. In the first part, as I have said, there is a clutter of details. In the second part the reader does feel the tension between the two, but even here there are distractions, and the passages intended to hint at a violent ending seem contrived. Everywhere one misses the sureness of touch that Strong seems to have come by naturally.

Woiwode's novel does remind us that the really radical young people, the ones who are furthest out, the ones who seem not to understand the language we older people speak, are in the minority. Chris and Ellen may have had their wild moments, but if they are able to settle down at all, it will be in Squaresville. That's all right too, but they interest me less than Tike does. Tike may crack up, but for the moment he is living his own life. His is a new way of looking at the world, and Strong is artist enough to make us see at least part of what Tike sees.



—Arthur Richardson.

Jonathan Strong—"avoids phoniness."