

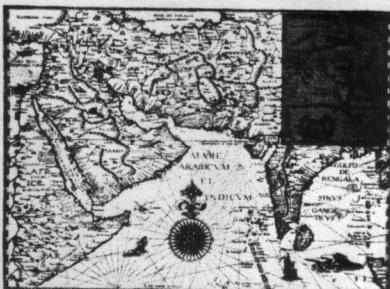
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notes from the underground

LETTER FROM HAVANA

Just back from a twenty-day sojourn to the province of Oriente, the main culprit for the fact that Cuba didn't reach the 10-million goal. And it wasn't the people's fault—they worked like demons. Fidel, in his speech announcing the news, complimented the workers for their "heroism" in the Zafra. Then he did what one would be hard put to find in other countries: he took the blame for the failure on his own broad shoulders—broader perhaps from his own four-hour-a-day stint in the cane fields with machete in hand during many months of the long harvest.

Back in March, I, along with everybody else, said that the Cubans would make the 10 million. Well, the fact was that the entire Cuban people were sure they were going to make it because Fidel had even said that it was a matter of honor for the Cuban Revolution. Over the year, I've seen the Cuban people do epic things on the basis of consciousness and will. Moreover, this time it seemed the planning was better than ever. A daily record was being kept of sugar-making activities in every zone of the country, and forces were rushed to the weak points to bolster them up.

In Oriente I was able to talk to many people who were on the front lines of the sugar harvest. What went wrong? Why did the giant sugar mills of Oriente fail to produce as much as was expected of them? The answer was clear. Fidel and the leadership had spent their main efforts in assuring that enough cane would be planted and cut and transported to the mills. That has always been the main problem—getting cane to the mills.

What they didn't foresee was that the problem would occur at the sugar mills themselves. Tens of millions of dollars were put into an expansion and renewal project in many of the mills. Technicians from socialist and capitalist countries accompanied the new machinery, and helped the Cubans to install it. What the leadership didn't know was that the process of expansion for the 1970 harvest should have begun not two, but at least five years before. There was an underestimation of the problems involved in superimposing new machinery on top of the old. And little thought was given to the problem of "bugs" that have to be ironed out—a process that sometimes takes years. All this led to unforeseen breakdowns in equipment and lack of

productive efficiency. This is reason number one for the short harvest.

Reason number two is that the expansion required qualified people to run the machinery. Again, there was an underestimation of the difficulties that would ensue due to a shortage of skilled men. Like the installation of machinery, training these people should have begun at least four or five years ago.

These two factors led to breakdowns and, what is more important perhaps, a lower productivity for each ton of sugar cane ground at the mill. In effect, statistics prove that enough sugar was ground to produce the 10 million, but that the low productivity reduced the final output substantially.

It all adds up to an eight-and-a-half million-ton crude sugar production—more than a million tons over the former record of 1952. Not bad, but at the same time, a great disappointment for the Cuban people.

In spite of the failure to achieve the goal, the Cubans are quite proud of their effort, and even prouder of their leadership which admitted its own errors. Instead of weakening the Revolution, it seems that the failure strengthened it. There is more consciousness of the need for training people, a more careful approach to goals, and a recognition that, as important as enthusiasm is, production is based on organization and techniques. Moreover, the harvest itself has been a tremendous teacher—lots of people gained lots of experience. The new areas of sugar cane and the new machinery are all there for future use, so, in that sense, there has been a gain that will reflect itself in the future. The Cubans are working hard to overcome their shortcomings under a new slogan: Turn Defeat into Victory. All in all, one becomes even more impressed with the difficulties involved in lifting a Third World country out of underdevelopment. But at least the Cubans are facing problems of development rather than the problem of stagnation like so many other countries of the Third World.

—Lionel Martin

CATALOGUE OF SMALL DEFEATS

Rosalyn Drexler's new novel, *One Or Another*, is an extraordinary achievement. It is an uncommonly beautiful book, devoid of pretense and self-indulgence, and wholly true. By saying it is true, what I mean is: It is like us. About us. At times it is funny, at times embarrassing, at