

# Cuban revolution is 26 years old

HAVANA, (Reuters). Twenty-six years ago, Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista left a New Year's Eve Party and fled from Cuba, marking victory for a Cuban revolution led by 33-year-old Fidel Castro.

Within two years the Cuban revolutionary government under Castro had carried out radical reforms which, though not then publicly labelled socialist, nationalised foreign and Cuban-owned real estate, factories and big land-holdings, including sugar plantations.

### Reforms

Over a half million Cubans, primarily from the upper and middle classes, fled Cuba in the first years of revolutionary rule. Of 6,000 physicians in Cuba in 1958 only half remained by 1961.

The United States government, which had recognised Castro's administration, bolstered its opposition with each new radical reform on the Caribbean island only 90 miles from US

shores.

Under President Dwight Eisenhower, Cuba lost the right to sell its main export product, crude sugar, to US firms. By 1961 the US had broken diplomatic and trade ties with Cuba.

Attempts to overthrow the Cuban government by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the early years of the revolution failed.

### Ties

The most ambitious attempt, the Bay of Pigs invasion which was conceived under Eisenhower and carried out under President John Kennedy was defeated in 72 hours by Castro's rag-tag revolutionary soldiers. It was at that time that Castro declared for the first time that Cuba was making a socialist revolution.

The CIA, according to a Senate Intelligence sub-committee report, also devised numerous but unsuccessful schemes to



Castro: Stride

murder Fidel Castro. In one case it planned to sprinkle powder on his boots that would make his beard fall out, thus depriving him of his heroic image.

Notwithstanding the animosity of seven successive US presidents, Cuba's ties with Communist nations and especially the Soviet Union have become more intimate with each year. The Soviet Union provides all the weapons for Cuba's armed forces free of charge, sells its petroleum at half the world price and buys more than half its crude sugar for 10 times the world price.

### Health

Today, more than 85 per cent of Cuba's trade is with the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc.

Despite a shortage of many consumer goods, Cuba boasts that the daily per-capita nutritional intake of the population is 3000 calories and almost 80 grams of protein.

Basic food products are guaranteed to all Cubans through a rationing system with government-subsidised prices

that has been in force since 1961.

According to Planning Minister Humberto Perez, Cuba's economic growth rate over the past five years averages eight per cent annually.

Cuban strides in public education and health care for its population have been recognised internationally.

Cuba has 14,000 more doctors that it had in 1958 and Castro has declared that Cuba is on its way to becoming a major Third World medical power.

Havana's revolutionary internationalism has been a major stumbling bloc in the way of improved relations with the US.

In the 1960s Cuba supported revolutionary movements throughout Latin America and in the late 1970s sent troops to Ethiopia and Angola to help defend and consolidate revolutionary governments.

Cuba has also been accused by

the Reagan administration of sending arms to left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador and large-scale military aid to Marxist-ruled Nicaragua. These charges have been denied by Castro.

In mid-December 1984 the United States and Cuba signed an immigration agreement which Castro called "a positive and constructive event."

Under the agreement Cuba will accept the return of 2,746 undesirable Cuban exiles now in US prisons and the United States will establish a 20,000 person-a-year quota for Cubans who wish to emigrate to the United States.

During 1984 Castro said repeatedly that he favoured dialogue with the United States which would lead to a lessening of tensions and a normalisation of relations.

He said recently that Cuba would take a wait-and-see attitude to determine whether the Reagan administration in its second term will abandon its policy of confrontation with Cuba and seek an improvement in relations.

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