

CUBA-ENGLISH (ATTENTION CANADA):

FIRST CANADIAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM HELD IN CUBA

(1999)

HAVANA, Dec. 5 (Reuter) - Cuba's growing interest in Canadian culture and literature was highlighted this weekend during the islands' first symposium on Canadian studies.

The symposium took place within the Second Annual Congress of Cuba's Association of the English Language Specialists (GELI).

Three hundred Cubans, twenty five Canadians, professors from the University of Edinburgh and several professors from England attended the Congress.

The Canadian ambassador, Mark Entwistle, spoke about Canada to the gathering and noted that Canadian-Cuban trade had increased and that 100,000 Canadians visited Cuba as tourists each year.

David Morrison, a Canadian diplomat, said the embassy had provided help to the symposium by providing books and other materials about Canada.

"There is an increased interest by Cubans in Canada," he said.

Although GELI is an association of English language specialists, French-Canada was not forgotten. The keynote address to the convention, delivered by Ben Shek, Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto, took French-Canada in English literature as its theme.

"Cuba and Canada have good relations which were never broken as they were in the case of the United States," Shek said, adding, "I think it is quite normal for these academic and cultural relations to develop."

Ian Martin of York University said "there is a lot of professional brotherhood between Cubans and Canadians and with the creation of the Cuban Association of English-Language Specialists, these relations are becoming more concrete."

Martin said GELI now had ties with the English Teachers' Associations of Quebec and Ontario.

"Countries that have more access to English are able to develop themselves and make use of English to build stronger international relations and Canadians and Canada are here to help the Cubans in any way that we can," Martin said.

While both the Canadian and British ambassadors spoke at the GELI congress, the United States diplomatic mission in Havana did not send any official observer.

Madeline Monte, President of Geli said her organization was denied membership in the world's most important English-language teachers' association two years ago because international association's headquarters is in the United States.

The organization told the GELI that it cannot accept membership fees from the Cubans because of the provisions of the thirty-two year old U.S economic embargo on trade with Cuba.

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