WR 259
politics

07May95 CUBA: CUBA PUTS OWN SPIN ON OPPOSITION TO HELMS BILL.

By **Lionel Martin**

HAVANA, May 7 (Reuter) - Although both U.S. President Bill Clinton and Cuban President Fidel Castro have voiced opposition to a bill that would tighten the embargo on Cuba, they put entirely different spin on the issue.

Clinton voiced concern over opposition by U.S allies to the provisions of the legislation that would punish them and their citizens for doing business with Cuba. He said that the present three-decade-old embargo is sufficient.

Canada, Great Britain, the European Union, Mexico, Russia and China have condemned the bill proposed in the U.S. Senate by Republican Jesse Helms, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and in the House of Representatives by Representative Dan Burton, a Republican of Indiana.

But Cuban leaders and many ordinary citizens view the bill from another perspective. They charge that the real aim of the bill is to topple the island's regime and replace it with a government subservient to Washington that would undo all of the revolution's social legislation.

The newspaper Juventud Rebelde said on Sunday, "The final goal of this legislation is to convert the biggest island of the Antilles to a colony of its northern neighbour."

In remarks to reporters on Saturday night Castro, referring to the Helms-Burton bill, said wryly: "We have to thank them for the degree of political consciousness that it has generated among our people."

At a public audience on the bill last week, one speaker after another spoke about how the return of capitalism and Miami exiles to Cuba would be a throwback to the past which they perceived as a society run by the privileged rich.

"We will not go back," Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, defiantly declared.

In addition to making return of nationalised U.S.-owned property one requirement for lifting the embargo, the new bill, for the first time, calls for the return of all property of Cubans who left the island and later became U.S citizens.

Many Cubans, among them some that are critical of the present regime, express their fear that if the island's old property owners come back, they will be evicted from their homes or be forced to pay high rents.

If enacted, the Helms-Burton bill would severely punish foreign nations and companies that have any business or financial dealings with Cuba by a compulsory restriction on their imports to the United States.

This would apply to Canada, whose manufacturers put Cuban sugar into some food products, and European industries that use Cuban nickel. It would also affect dozens of tourist agencies outside the United States that offer Cuban vacations.

Cuban officials say the law might slow foreign investments but would not do away with them entirely.

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