WR 390
politics

hav837 yy ljp
1030:coops (profeatures): 1982.

by lionel martin

havana, july 3, reuter -- the passage of a law on july 1 by the cuban national assembly which defines the role, rights and duties of agricultural cooperatives within the nation's socialist system relfects the dramatic changes that are taking place in farm tenure in cuba, according to a high, cuban official.

since the first communist party congress in 1975 called for the nation's private farmers to organise +higher forms of production+ the number of agricultural production cooperatives has mushroomed from forty three to over one thousand with over 40,000 members.

today, thirty five per cent of non-state farmland is in in the hands of coops in this nation where the government owns eighty per cent of the arable land.

when the first agrarian reform law was promulgated by the new revolutionary government on may 17, 1959, cuban prime minister fidel castro promised farmers' land would never be taken from them by force. last thursday, following passage of the new law on coops, the president of the cuban national association of small farmers (anap) jose ramirez, said in a press conference that the government has scrupuloi ly adherred to its promise.

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ramirez told reuter that +every farmer that joins a cooperative does so of his own free will.+ +but,+ he added, +we have encouraged them by persuasion and especially by the example set by existing cooperatives which have raised the standard of living of their members and brought to them the benefits of community living with its running water, electricity, clinics, schools, transportation and cultural activities.+

when a farmer joins a cooperative, ramirez explained, he makes his land and impliments a part of it. the cooperative is managed by an elected council and coop members vote on all important decisions, such as how to distribute income, how much of each crop to plant and whether or not to buy a tractor.

ramirez, who was raised on a farm himself, declared that coops develop a community spirit among farmers whose inclinations are individualistic. he said that the coops have also improved the lot of women since as members of coops they enjoyn under the law, equal rights with men.

castro's guerrilla army that overthrew the old regime in cuba was made up largely of peasants. while still battling in the mountains of eastern cuba, castro promulgated the first agrarian reform law in liberated territory which gave land to the landless farmers.

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1100:coops 3 havana (profeatures):

but castro explained later that he was never a great believer in the small homestead -the minifundia- inasmuch as it was an obstacle to technological change. when the revolution triumphed, a land reform was promulgated which gave title to the farms to those who were then working on them but, at the same time, swallowed whole the large landholding which composed four-fifths of the arable lands, making them state property.

castro told the fifth congress of anap two months ago that the coops represent a higher socialist form of production.

but ramirez has voiced dissatisfaction with the fact that the majority of cooperatives have only twenty or twenty five families in them and some even less. he calls them +embryos of cooperatives.+ since the anap congress, he has become convinced that what is needed is a +union of cooperatives+

his +union+ woild consist of all cooperatives in a municipal district beiing united within a centralised +cooperative enterprise+ with its own elected officers. the +cooperative enterprise+ would coordinate the work of all the cooperatives of the district and would make available to them greater resources than they themselves would be capable of acquiring individually. under his plan, the ministry of agriculture would sell to the +cooperative enterprise+ trucks, implementsand other resources.

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until now, many of the smaller cooperatives have been forced to HIRE workers for specified tasks. ramirez said that under the +cooperative enterpirse+ plan, coop members from farms with less pressing work could be moved to others where labour was urgently needed, thus saving the cost of contracting labour.

ramirez argued heatedly in favour of the inclusion of a clause in the new coop law which would explicitely mention +union of cooperatives.+ fidel castro and others, however, opposed the clause and won out. they argued that the +union of cooperatives+ idea was only in a testing stage and that it would be premature to legitise it in the law. they did say, nevertheless, that other clauses in the law allowed implicitely for the establishment of +unions of cooperatives+:

at the press conference following the vote, ramirez complained affably that +many people including many of our leaders don't fully understand the idea yet.+ but ramirez, whose eyes light up as if he's seen the future when he speaks of +unions of cooperatives+, is certain that it is an idea whose time has come in cuba.

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