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CARNIVAL TIME - THEN AND NOW

BY FELIX OLIVERA

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LA HABANA:

Before the Cuban revolution, King Mammon ruled the Queen of the Carnival with unabiding jealousy. The funmaking carnival days in Havana, Santiago de Cuba and other cities was tempered by the mercantilist attitudes of the carnivals' ~~and~~ sponsors and by violence.

The contest to choose the Queen and her "Dames" was, in effect, a business publicity enterprise. The prospective candidates were sold to the public as if they were a brand of soap, beer or lady's lingerie. Victory meant the publicity spotlight for the merchant-sponsor and his products.

The contests for selection the Queen and her Dames were filled with dirty-business. In 1951 the young woman chosen as Queen of the carnival in Havana was disqualified at the insistence of a group of powerful interests. It was a highly unpopular decision. One "benefactor" came to her rescue and built a magnificent float for what he called "The Queen of the People". ~~Introducing~~ a clever move which gave added publicity to his ~~advertising~~ business enterprise.

The floats that highlighted the procession, especially in Havana, were little more than rolling advertisements, replete with flashing signs announcing products and scanty-clad girls.

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carnival...two

Crime inevitably accompanied the carnivals. The thick crowds ~~xxxx~~ gave an excellent opportunity for those bent on vengeance: a bullet or a knife in the back of their enemy. It was also a time when the pickpockets were out in full force, victimizing Cubans as well as tourists.

Carnivals continued to be held in Cuban cities but today the mercantile and crime lement has been eliminated. In the post-revolutionary carnivals the Star and Starlets (they are no longer called Queen and Dames) are nominated by student organizations and trade unions and then chosen by a jury without financial commitments of any kind. In choosing them, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ a new criteria is used. The Star and Starlets of today are young women respected by their fellow workers or students. This is in consonance with the ethic of the Cuban revolution where work and study are stressed and where mercantilism, prostitution and gambling have disappeared.

The floats, often pulled by a tractor, are as lavish as ever. Workers, many of whom volunteer their time, spend weeks building these floats. A substantial budget is allotted for the purpose.

The merry-making at these "Carnivals of the People", as they have been called, is much more profound than it was in the days when mercantilism prevailed. There is a new atmosphere, a

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~~carnival....three~~

result of the fact that unemployment is unknown in Cuba, education is obligatory and free and health care is available to all free of charge. This allows for a relaxed, free and easy atmosphere. The lumpen and criminal elements, ~~not~~ so prevalent in yesterday's Cuba, have disappeared. The new ethic which pervades Cuban society allows men and women, families, x teenagers and children, to attend the Carnivals without fear of robbery or assault. The escapist frenzy that characterized past Carnivals has been replaced by a much more pure form of funmaking.

~~Stamps~~