

FA-86

Quintero

What is Cuba like these days? The articles that appear in the U.S. press seldom give a fair idea. They either distort through a prism of maliciousness, incomprehension or one-sidedness.

Naturally it all depends on your point of view. For instance, it is a fact that there are a lot of old cars to be seen on Cuban streets. One observer interprets this to mean, "See, socialism doesn't work". The more analytical witness says; "Cuba, an underdeveloped country has to spend its limited foreign currency on necessary products for the people and for machines and spare parts that will maintain and increase productions. Cars for individuals don't do this; therefore, few new cars".

A kaleidoscopic view of Cuban life might help to give insights into some fundamental questions. Here is a potpourri of things that the curious visitor will observe and learn during his stay here.

-There is a strict regime of food rationing. Cubans receive per month and per person 3 lbs of rice, 3 cans of condensed milk (children are entitled to a quart of fresh milk daily), 1 lb. of lard or its equivalent in vegetable oil and 3 lbs of beans.



Every member of a family receives 3/4 lb. of meat per week.

All these items are in short supply at this time and must be rationed to assure a just and equitable distribution.

-Eggs, fish, bread, fruit and vegetables are not rationed.

-Restaurants and cafeterias are abundant. Among the moderately priced eating places the Pizzerias and Seafood restaurants are the most popular. A plain cheese pizza costs \$1.20; one with shrimp, \$1.60. A big filet of baked ruffe, a salmon like fish, costs \$1.50. Many cafeterias serve sandwiches filled with about ten slices of pressed ham and cheese from .80 cents to \$1.20.

There are many high priced restaurants in Havana where one must spend a minimum of \$3.00 for a good meal. These restaurants have the economic purpose of skimming the surplus money off the top and lessening inflationary pressures.

-Beer costs .60 cents a bottle. Beer prices have been maintained at this level for a specific purpose: to pay for the free school texts that all Cuban students receive. Soda pop costs a nickel.

-Almost every work center has a dining room where employees can get a lunch from .50 cents to \$1.00.



-Tens of thousands of Cuban families have one or more child enrolled in special scholarship programs that provide food, housing and clothing free of charge.

-Thousands of nursery and primary school children receive free school lunches. The government plans to expand this service to all schools when production permits.

-Although average wages are still fairly low in underdeveloped Cuba (from \$100 to \$150 a month although many receive a good deal more) most families have two or more breadwinners. There is no unemployment. Therefore family income is usually sufficient to eat out occasionally.

-Medical and dental care is free in Cuba although there are doctors and dentists with private practices.

-Rents are never more than 10% of income. Thousands of families have already been given the deeds to their apartments and houses. By 1970 rents will have been abolished.

-Funerals are free of charge.

-The coin holes in public telephones have now been filled with lead. Telephoning is free of charge at these public telephones.

-Bus fare is 5 cents. The nickel is dropped in a coin box. The honor system is used and the public brings pressure to



bear on the sharpies. The driver attends only to his driving; change is given voluntarily by other passengers.

-Cubans are still crazy about baseball. There is now a nation-wide league of 12 teams manned by non-professionals of professional quality. Many games are televised. Admission to all games is free of charge.

-Lockers and other facilities in recreation centers is free of charge. Huge crowds visit the formerly exclusive clubs along the ocean front of the Miramar zone of Havana.

-Cuba, an island with all year swimming that never developed competitive swimmers now has thousands of youngsters in special 12 grade schools devoting all their spare time to swimming. By the middle of the next decade Cuba should have strong contender in international meets.

-There is a going tourist trade in Cuba. The visitors come individually or in groups from socialist countries, from western Europe, from Canada and even from the U.S, with or without State Department permission.

-There are no brothels or gambling halls, as common in pre-Revolutionary Cuba.



-Former prostitutes have been rehabilitated and integrated into the normal economic activities of the country.

-Study and work are the two key words that define the methods of rehabilitating delinquents and criminals. There are a number of rehabilitation farms that have neither fences nor guards.

-Publishing of books in Cuba is coordinated by the Institute of Books. Technical and school books lead the way followed by all other types of literature.

-Old Marylyn Monroe pictures are very popular as are new Fantomas pictures. Better movie houses cost \$1.00 admission; neighborhood movies, .50 cents.

-Musical artists from all over the world appear in Cuba. The Cuban Symphony Orchestra often with guest conductors of international reknown is excellent. Admission price to concerts is \$1.00.

-The Cuban ballet company has a regular season and a wide repertoire. Under the guidance of Alicia Alonso, Cuban ballet has won international recognition. on Sunday night

-The custom of the youth to promenade around the town plaza under the watchful eyes of the adults continues in full



force. Havana now has its version of this Spanish tradition. Several blocks of the La Rampa zone are blocked off from time to time and well known bands play on the street corners.

-Cuba boasts of Copelia, one of the best quality ice-cremans in the world (as visitors to Expo 67 can attest). A huge modernistic structure houses the Copelia ice-cream parlor that serves more than 25 flavors.

-There will be an International Cultural Conference in Havana in early January 1968 to discuss problems of culture in the Third World.

-The government maintains a number of special motels (called posadas) where young (or old) lovers can spend there time in privacy. One of the major reasons for this institution is that so many young couples must live ^{with} the in-laws because of the housing shortage.

These are a few highlights of life in Cuba today. All this must be seen against the backdrop of Cuban historical development. After 60 years of U.S. semi-colonial domination Cuba was a poor country with a one-crop economy where unemployment ^{expensive} was high, medical care scarce and poor, marasites and malnutrition epidemic and education almost impossible for the masses. The



stores were full of U.S. made products but millions of Cubans couldn't buy them. In this light one can better sympathize with little Cuba trying to pull herself up by her own bootstraps and doing in a few decades what wasn't done in all her long history.

The overwhelming majority of the Cuban people understand why there country is underdeveloped and what must be done about it. This popular consciousness is the motive force behind the vast number of Cubans who offer to do voluntary work in the countryside on Sundays or during several weeks of the year. Cubans from all walks of life go voluntarily and with a contagious enthusiasm to work in the fields because they understand that the future of the society is in their own physical hands and that while Cuba is mechanizing their efforts are needed.

