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ON THE CULTURAL FRONT IN HAVANA

by Lionel Martin

The day following the inauguration of the Oriente-Camaguey agricultural project, Dr. Osvaldo Dorticos, the President of the Republic of Cuba, spoke to 1400 intellectuals at the closing ceremonies of the Cultural Seminar of Havana. His speech touched on the problems of intellectual creation in the socialist society. Referring to the Oriente project, he said:

"... And tonight we finalize an event that, together with the one celebrated in the countryside where a prodigious and intensive agricultural task is being carried on, is undeniable evidence of the cultural development of our country.

"It is a good idea to call your attention to the fact that the great gathering in the agricultural zone of the Cauto whose public consisted of farmers, and this meeting whose listeners are writers and artists, are both genuine expressions of a real and transcendental cultural development.

Tonight, in the capital, we meet with the representatives of culture, that is, the owners of the intellectual instruments, of technical knowledge, of literary and artistic culture, as yesterday we met with workers and farmers. The latter do not reach the level of intellectual development of this audience; nevertheless, that too was a meeting with cultured men, what with their incorporation in a task that is also the expression of the cultural development of a people, under the guidance

of science and technology.

"Because of all this we can say that a miracle is taking place, that only a genuine revolution is capable of producing, of transforming a starved, underdeveloped, unlettered and partially illiterate people, into one that gains access to culture through their participation ... in the fundamental objectives of the revolution.

"These gatherings, the one with those men in sweat-soaked shirts and straw hats and this one with intellectuals, are not meetings with different types of men, but for us... they are the same men coming from the same revolutionary breed, heirs of the same tradition of revolutionary rebelliousness and of an internationalist sense...

"The material conditions for the cultural development of a person,... are created within the inevitable limitations of a given historical stage: limitations that all of us should understand.

"Because when one aspires to have more books, more reading possibilities, more knowledge of the modern sciences, technology, literature and art, it is good to remember how much groundwork... as important as the work of intellectual creation -- it takes to obtain the resources which which to import pulp to manufacture paper, to obtain replacement parts to keep our paper factories going, and to buy books in foreign countries.

"Remember that this is not fundamentally the work of planners, or of government leaders, but of the workers who cut cane, who grow our fruits and vegetables and our export products, and who are not intellectuals."

"Do not forget, comrade intellectuals, that in order for you to create, to develop yourselves intellectually, every day one million acts of creation must take place, protagonized by plain men in sweat-soaked shirts, with their backs to the sun."

"Do not forget that these men of labor, only recently out of illiteracy, have not had the privilege of university class rooms, nor even in many cases do they have real reading skills or the rudimentary ability for self-study... but ~~now~~ even so, today they are not alienated men, nor slaves; they are also creators. Thus when you speak of creation and creators, remember that those millions of men and women, young and old, are also creators."

"And in this respect, speaking with absolute revolutionary sincerity, we would say that it is necessary for the cultured man of our countryside to acquire culture. This might seem a contradiction, but I want to explain it. I mean that the problems of a revolution are not only those on an individual plane... which are debated in the intellectual world -- problems of culture, books and art -- but rather problems in a more fundamental sense."

"And if we have the obligation not only to create but through your efforts to bring to the people cultural and artistic values, we must guarantee that the people have access to these values and be able to interpret these values, not by lowering the quality of cultural expression but rather by raising the level of intellectual comprehension of the people.

Since it is necessary that the people acquire culture through your efforts, I believe that ... it is indispensable --- although this does not refer to strictly cultural problems in the narrow sense of science, technology, literature and art --- I believe that the intellectuals should not that the revolutionary world in our country is not restricted to only these questions.

"To call yourself revolutionary and affirm that you are linked to the people is not only a theoretical attitude and an intellectual position, but an essential of human conduct. One must, in the first place, have a knowledge of all the problems of a revolution, of a revolutionary society, of a people in revolutionary construction.

"And these problems, that form part of the daily economic life, our difficulties and our solutions, ought to be informative material for the full development of our intellectuals, not only the great problems of culture, in the sense that one usually uses the term, but the great problems of culture in their global

sense, that is, all the work of revolutionary creation...

"And it is not that we expect the intellectuals, scientists, technicians, writers or artists to be experts in agricultural, economic or industrial questions. Our criterion is very far removed from that kind of foolishness. We simply mean that the intellectual should have the elementary information and understanding of these problems, the difficulties and the efforts we are making to overcome them.

"Study and physical and spiritual ~~in~~ proximity to the people would give the intellectuals not only information of the daily life of the people but also provide a rich source for creative work.

"Because it is not only in Havana, in this apparently developed world of the capital, where the life of the people is laid out, nor even where the principle task of creative revolutionary work is expressed. .. It is, we believe outside the perimeter of this capital and of this small world in which we at times live, that there exists a broader world where a new life is generating itself, new values are being created, and new ~~things~~ ~~have~~ ~~discovered~~ which we all must form the

understand this not only in the capitalist sense: a culture to satisfy the pseudo-esthetic and cheap appetites of the masses in the gregarious and dehumanized sense; we refer to a culture close to the masses, understood in terms of the sum of individual passions fully developed in virtue of a revolutionary miracle, as a consequence of that process of personal liberation of every man and woman. Work that yesterday meant inevitable suffering is today the opportunity for full individual realization and offers the only possibility of a happy life for those who are beginning to interpret life in a new sense ... and as an agreeable revolutionary obligation."

a part of the work of our writers and artists, so that they do not create in only one part, a tiny part, of the world of this people...

"Therefore when we speak of culture and of the masses we