# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# THE CHOSEN ENEMY: THE CUBANS

WHO ARE these Cubans we have sacrificed so much to try to "liberate"? How many are followers of Castro? How many really want to get in a boat and go to Miami—and what motivates the ones who do? If we as a nation are going to expend so much of our foreign energy on Cuba, and on preventing "other Cubas," we had better be sure we have the right answers to these questions.

Recently, the U.S. mission in Havana (called an "interests section" rather than an embassy because the U.S. government doesn't recognize the Cuban government) was sitting on 50,000 applications from Cubans to emigrate to the U.S. Though most Americans presume otherwise, it is the United States's reluctance to admit more Cubans, not Castro's reluctance to let them go, that impedes the "liberation" of these people.

U.S. diplomats in Havana have estimated that 10 percent of the island's remaining population, about one million people, would like to join the one million who have already exited to the U.S. since the Cuban revolution. But a reporter who traveled the length and breadth of Cuba by bus, train, and taxi, talking with hundreds of Cubans from all walks of life, in their homes and in public places, using an American interpreter and mostly unaccompanied by any Cuban official, failed to find this army of malcontents.

The only Cubans who expressed serious interest in leaving were a few young men just out of school, who talked about their desire for rock music,

cars, and the good life, and some lonely looking retirees who say they have family ties in the U.S. and also miss a free-market society. Considering that throughout the Third World there are endless millions of people who at least *think* they would like to emigrate to the land of two-car families with a Sony in every bedroom, and that the U.S. now faces big immigration problems from the so-called "free" nations of the Caribbean basin, the number of people wanting to leave Cuba today is not extraordinary. If you were to open a port in El Salvador and provide boats and U.S. visas, you would see a yacht race at least the equal of any flotilla that ever left a Cuban port.

Cuba has had its émigrés. It was clear from the moment Castro rode into Havana in January 1959 that a lot of Cubans would be better off elsewhere. No small number had attained privileged status by selling out their countrymen's freedom to the Yankees. Still more, though, were honest, upper middle class victims of Castro's decision to reorient the country's economy toward the service of the millions who had been powerless. Many hard-working Cuban business and professional people and their families chose, years ago, to flee to places like the U.S. where markets had long been relatively free, and thus where no such sudden leveling need occur.

But Cuba started over. More typical of today's Cubans are these:

## THE DOMINO PLAYERS

After a working day, hundreds of Cienfuegos men gather at social clubs for dominoes and conversation. Sitting at a table picked at random, one finds Andrew, who left school a year ago at age seventeen to work on a shrimp boat. His base pay is 192 pesos, about $233, a month. But most of his earnings come from bonuses paid for exceeding his quota. When he and the other five men on his boat haul in more than 8,000 kilos (17,600 pounds) of shrimp a month, which they have done a couple of times, they earn about 1,100 pesos each—a staggering $1,320.

Andrew's friend, Elario, twenty-two, jokes that Andrew works too hard for this money, often night and day, and risks his life on rough seas. "He is hardly ever here to live," Elario says. He says he's happier working as a hauler on the docks, earning $196 a month base pay and up to $360 more a month in bonuses for extra work.

A third friend, Ernesto, thirty-eight, says he earns $186 a month assembling large industrial refrigerators, and averages another $240 to $360 in productivity bonuses. Almost every worker and farmer interviewed in Cuba was making well over the $114.36-a-month government guaranteed bottom wage. What is the one message that Andrew, Elario, and Ernesto would like to send to the U.S. people? "How good the work is paid here," each responds.

## THE MECHANIC

Roger Rojas, thirty-two, is chief mechanic of the Talleres Provinciale, a busy, five-man automobile repair shop in Santiago, Cuba's second-largest city. He is one of the small army of wizards who keep Cuba's fleet of 1940s and 1950s U.S. cars running despite the embargo on parts. Though an increasing number of Soviet bloc and Argentine cars have arrived in recent years, Cuba still relies on relics from Detroit's tail-finned heyday—so much so that an American visitor sometimes feels he's walked into a time warp.

Some cars are still privately owned, and the owners pick up extra money by operating their cars as taxis. The government encourages them, though, to turn their cars over to the state in exchange for guaranteed jobs as drivers.

How do they keep these old flivvers chugging? "Sometimes we put a Soviet piston in them," Rojas says. "We bore out the cylinder to make the piston fit. We adapt Soviet carburetors to American cars. Transmissions also. For us, it's nothing abnormal. You've got to do it or the car just stops."

Today, he is installing a new Soviet-made four-cylinder Volga engine into a 1952 Willys station wagon. "The original engine was just getting too old and we were putting in too much work on it," he says. His black face drips with perspiration. Even though he has found an engine of matching horsepower, he is having trouble adapting it to the original U.S.-made transmission, which may also have to be replaced with Soviet parts.

Rojas was born about 50 miles north of Santiago, one of seven children of a sugar cane inspector. He wanted to leave school to fight at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, "but they wouldn't let me. I was too young." A year later, on finishing seventh grade, he was allowed to join the army. He drove heavy equipment, near Havana. In 1968, he left the army to do the same work on civilian road crews. Two years later, he moved back to Santiago to marry a teacher he had fallen in love with. He got a job as a chauffeur for a government official, then, when he learned a mechanic was needed at the repair shop where he took the official's car, and which was close to his home, he took it. He started at $196 a month and now makes $305, a big jump in real earnings because most Cuban prices haven't risen as U.S. prices have.

Cuban salaries also understate real income in other ways, because much of the cost of living is subsidized. Medical care and education are free. Rent is no more than 10 percent of the income of the head of the household, and most households have more than one income earner. Subsidized lunches are served to 3.1 million Cubans daily at work or school. Working women are offered free child care.

In 1978, Rojas volunteered for the army reserve, and applied to join Cuban forces in Angola. So far, he says, there hasn't been a place for him. "There

are a lot of us that want to go," he says. Though the trip might cost him his job, separate him from his family, and expose him to danger, he wants it. "We've had a great experience with all the help our revolution has received from the Soviet Union," he says. "All Cubans have a debt to other countries that want their freedom."

These words were volunteered privately, out of earshot of other Cubans. They were typical of those heard from many young men. Rojas was interviewed without prearrangement; a reporter simply asked at random on the town square where to get a car repaired, went straight there, and started asking questions. Also typically, after most of the interview had taken place, a government official dashed in, allegedly to get his car fixed, and insisted on taking over the bulk of the conversation from Rojas. The official left as soon as the reporter did.

## THE VIGILANTES

Juan Denysiuk, about seventy, son of a Ukrainian immigrant, is a retired airport worker and the elected president of his local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in a Havana suburb. CDRs are in every neighborhood, whether it covers a city block or a country mile. Officially, the CDRs are a grass roots way to give people control of their revolution. Often, though, it's obviously the other way around.

Denysiuk and his wife, Mercedes Fortes, who is the "political orientator" for their CDR, live on a narrow street lined by one- and two-story houses. From their door, they can—and do—watch everything. Their house is clearly marked, as it has been for most of the past twenty years, as CDR headquarters. She is past president of the CDR, as he was before her. They take turns at it. They are thin, gaunt, cheerless replicas of the couple in the painting *American Gothic*, but without the pitchfork.

Their assigned neighborhood has eighty residents over the CDR minimum membership age of fourteen. Of the eighty, seventy-two have joined the committee. Eight have chosen not to. Two other neighbors who weren't members quit the country for the U.S. a year earlier, when Castro opened a port for anyone who wanted to leave. These ratios appear typical.

One of the nonmember neighbors is actually an African witch doctor, who performs pagan rituals with chickens and various vegetables. People with problems, usually concerning love or money, come from all over the metropolitan area to see him. They pay what he asks, and he performs his witchcraft. He is a seemingly free entrepreneur, although he makes what he says are "large donations" to the state. Says Denysiuk, "There's never been any problem."

According to Ms. Fortes, who does most of the couple's talking, the CDRs have three assigned functions: "The first job is to be vigilant—to see that

no one does anything against the revolution. Then comes ideological education... that they understand the plight of other people in the world and the friendship with the Soviet Union and other peoples of the Americas, including the workers [as opposed to the government] of North America [the official euphemism for the U.S.]." Finally, she says, comes "social work... to help the children who don't study, old persons who live alone," and others who need help.

But she seems most interested in the vigilance. Daytimes, she and her husband handle it. At night, they and other volunteers take turns guarding the street, wearing arm bands but not weapons. Strangers are questioned, packages searched. It is a legacy from the Bay of Pigs and other U.S. attacks, although obviously it serves other purposes.

Denysiuk and Fortes are helping organize elections for local parliaments known as People Power, which in turn elect national figures. Street windows display posters that contain the candidates' résumés, sometimes their pictures, but never their positions on issues. Midway through the interview, a girl of eight or ten bursts through the open door and asks if her costume is ready for an upcoming pageant. Fortes says the costumes will be ready in a few days. The girl leaves. The pageant is to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the CDRs.

## THE OLD WOMAN

She is seventy-seven, lives alone in a one-room Havana apartment, and every day goes out for a nice restaurant lunch, alone. Before—in Cuba, "before" means 1958 or earlier, before the revolution—she earned $300 a month working in the office of an American steamship company. The husband of her only child was an aviator, and his father a general, in the army of Fulgencio Batista, the U.S.-backed dictator.

At 1:00 A.M., January 1, 1959, she recalls, Batista called the two men in for a New Year's drink. When they arrived, he told them the revolutionary army was nearing Havana and that they had better collect their wives and fly to the U.S. before daylight or they might be killed. They did, and that was the last that the old woman saw of her family.

A few weeks later a new boss arrived in her office. He told her she would have to leave because she had family ties to the old regime. She refused. She was, she recalls, taken to a mental hospital. "They told me I would be there a month for observation because they thought by then I would be driven crazy," she says. "But the doctor wasn't a revolutionary. He was a Catholic. He said he'd sign that I wasn't crazy, just to stay [at the hospital] and take it easy." She stayed the month, then went back to work.

Four years later she completed twenty-five years in the office and qualified for a pension. "They didn't want me to retire, they needed me," she says.

But she retired. Her pension is $106 a month. She also has $27,000 in the bank, including proceeds from the sale of her jewelry. The government lets her withdraw what she wants, but doesn't pay interest. She says all she has to spend it on are the lunches, the movies, and the gifts she likes to give to people.

She had a large apartment, but five years ago the ticket seller at the movie theater mentioned that she and her husband were expecting a child and were desperate to get out of their one-room quarters. The old woman figured one room was all she needed, so she agreed to swap. Finding someone to swap with is about the only way people can move in Cuba because of the housing shortage.

"I'd like to go to the U.S.," the old woman says, "but I'm too old now to start over. I made a mistake not going before." If she left, she couldn't take her money. She also complains about her CDR. "Everybody in my apartment house is watched," she says. "When you go out you have to say where. They clock you out and in. They want to know everybody's business. If I buy something, they know. If I bring a guest back, they observe. If it's a man, I have to leave the door open." (Not all CDRs are so nosy. Rules seem to vary from neighborhood to neighborhood.)

## THE FARMERS

In a stucco and wood farmhouse on a hill a few miles outside the little village of Sibonicu, Andre, a thirty-four-year-old veterinarian, talks about the surrounding farm where he grew up. It is still owned by his father and grandfather, and he helps them run it. In rural Camaguey province, around Sibonicu, horseback is the major means of transportation. People wear big straw hats and real spurs on their cowboy boots. It's been called Montana with palm trees.

Andre says the family sold off eighty cows this year, almost double the rate in past years, because the government increased beef prices more than it increased milk prices. Because of the sale, the farm has produced 20 percent less milk. (Inquiries in Havana produced no sure explanation for these price changes. It's not even certain that there *is* a reason, or that the incentive to shift from milk production to beef was intended.)

Andre's family installed its own electric generator six years ago, "with a little old motor I bought." The government supplied subsidized fuel to run it. But the electric lights haven't been turned on for several months. Andre says the motor is broken, and that no one has had time to fix it. The family has its own outdoor water well. Another family, across the road, with only fifteen cows, doesn't have a generator and goes to a neighbor's well for water.

Andre's family sells through a cooperative that the government organized

right after the revolution. "You give them 2 percent, they give you wire, rope, hammers, all kinds of things. They bring two empty milk cans every day to replace what you had," Andre says. A government truck comes around every morning to pick up the full ones and leave the empties.

Like many private businessmen in Cuba or the U.S., Andre is edgy about disclosing finances. But with prices running about $360 for a cow and 48 cents for a liter of milk, the farm would seem to have grossed about $42,500 for the first nine months of this year, with many expenses covered by the government.

The cooperative's twenty-six members are all private farmers. They have approved a plan to increase the cooperative's sales of beef and milk to the state by about 15 percent this year. But the co-op intends to increase pork production by almost twice as much, because pork can be sold on the free market; beef and milk can't be. The government says it has to keep greater control over cows because they reproduce slower than pigs.

One day, Andre thinks, he won't be on the farm, though under Cuban law he would have the right to inherit it. "When the old people can no longer work," he says, "perhaps it will be good to turn it over to the state." Six miles down that dirt road is a state-owned co-op where the farmers have new housing, TV sets, and electricity that they don't have to generate themselves. It seems to Andre a more efficient way to operate.

Unlike many Third World countries, Cuba is trying to keep rural incomes and amenities moving apace with those in industry and the bureaucracy. This encourages people to stay on the land and grow food.

## THE COMPETITORS

The afternoon sun is broiling the sweat-drenched throng at the Matanzas market. They lined up on the west side of the market stall this morning, because it was in the shade. Now, after eight hours of waiting, they aren't in the shade anymore. Still, they wait, fanning themselves, because beans are on sale in 25-pound bags for 72 cents a pound without regard to ration coupons, which normally allow only 20 ounces of beans per person a month.

Inside the small cinderblock market stall, Jorge Diaz supervises a crew of several men who are shoveling beans and weighing sacks. Diaz is the accountant for the government cooperative that is holding the sale. "It's our gift to the people," he explains. "The harvest was good, and there was a surplus." He says he earns only $205.20 a month, much less than the farmers who grew the beans.

At another market stall about 50 yards away, the supervisor is not nearly so happy. His crew has little to do. They are from a 100-man private co-operative that also sells beans without regard to ration coupons. But they charge $2.40 a pound. The government sale is driving them out of business.

"Those are leftover beans, broken beans," he scowls. But all the customers remain at the government stall.

The members of the private co-op are sugar cane farmers, who took to planting beans on some spare land in the hope of exploiting the new free market. They pay the government $24 a year to rent the stall, and they must sell 30 percent of their beans to the state at low official prices. Then they are free to sell the rest for whatever they can get. But now their own low-price beans may be coming back to haunt them as the government offers a sale of its own.

## THE DIVORCÉE

She gets off the bus in a little town west of Matanzas, enters the cafeteria, and buys lunch. Her husband just left her to move in with his girlfriend in Santiago. So she is moving from Matanzas to Havana where there are lots of men. She just arranged to swap apartments with a Havana woman whose husband just left *her*, and who wants to move back to Matanzas, where her family is. "Everything here is done for love," she says.

Separation and divorce are frequent and casual in Cuba. "If he stopped loving me, why do I want him?" the woman off the bus says. The main problem is finding a new place to live. Once housing is arranged, the state employment office will always come up with a decent job, the woman off the bus says. Now she works in an office. In Havana, they'll find her another.

Her brother, on the other hand, fled the country for Boston last year, with his wife, children, and father-in-law, a former Batista military officer who served two years in jail after the revolution. She says her brother wanted cars, stereos, and other goods unavailable in Cuba. She condemns this as "youthful clownery." She wants to keep in touch with him, and even exchange visits, but never to leave Cuba for good. "I'm a revolutionary," she says.

## THE ENTREPRENEUR

While working for the revolution as a college student, Eugenio Balari spent three months in a Batista prison. Soldiers who raided his home had found revolutionary propaganda and several revolvers. An uncle, an official under Batista, pulled strings to get him free. Since then, Balari has been an editor, a municipal politician, a fruit-farm operator, a dress designer, a pollster, an economist, and a publisher.

But his big innovation was bringing classified advertising to revolutionary Cuba in 1979. Restless running the economic research institute he had founded, Balari plowed part of his institute's budget from the government into starting a monthly tabloid called *Opina*. With features, jokes, and even cheesecake

showgirl photos instead of the usual official announcements, *Opina* comes as close to irreverence as a communist newspaper is likely to get. But its most controversial facet is a pullout middle section carrying such items as:

> OFFERED: House Miramar [a Havana suburb], 3 bedrooms, porch, garage, patio terrace, telephone 79–1442 after 6 P.M.
>
> NEEDED: House or apartment Vedado [another suburb], 2½ or 3 bedrooms.

Until *Opina*, people found a place to move, if at all, by word of mouth, bulletin board, and a not-highly-thought-of government housing office. Balari boasts that he has almost put the housing office out of business. *Opina* sells more than 500,000 copies a month, one for every twenty Cubans. People use it not only to swap housing, but to buy and sell TV sets, pianos—almost anything.

*Opina* was almost shut down by the bureaucracy, and Balari put in hot water. "At first, there were some people in official circles who didn't understand," he says. "But the population understood."

Now, with his research institute spending $2.4 million a year and his magazine turning a $300,000-a-year profit (he says it's rebated to the state), Balari has won approval to take over a textile factory with 200 employees to produce blue jeans and high-fashion sports clothes. He says the minister of light industry was very upset about this, because he wanted to use the factory to turn out school uniforms.

Balari concedes that much of his success is due to an influential old friend—Fidel Castro—who personally approved the fashion idea. Balari says he convinced Castro at a get-together one evening that "if fashionable clothing isn't available, young people will be disaffected and it will cause political problems."

Balari says he still lives in the house he grew up in, and that his $500-a-month salary hasn't changed since before *Opina*. His institute's budget does now include a sporty new Soviet car he tools around in. Told that with his ingenuity he might fast become a millionaire in the U.S., he laughs, and says, "There are some things more important than money. What is the value of a smile? People here are happy."

## THE MUSICIAN

He'd love to be a famous recording star, but at age twenty, he is content to be a class B guitarist with the Ministry of Culture, earning $240 a month. The salary affords him such essentials as the two bottles of imported Czechoslovakian beer he consumes while breakfasting daily at a pleasant rooftop

restaurant in Camaguey. If the government "norm setter" ever classifies him a class A guitarist, which apparently is a very unscientific determination, he'll get $420 a month; class C gets $180. (The government has norm setters to classify almost all workers A, B, or C.)

He went to work for the Ministry of Culture right out of music school. It placed him in a rock band with five other musicians, most of whom he hadn't met before. The ministry assigns the group to various dances and affairs. Sometimes he hires himself out freelance to earn extra cash. If a club or organization wants to select its own musicians and pay them, rather than rely on what the ministry sends over cheap, it can.

There are no starving musicians in Cuba. "The government wouldn't allow someone to try to work full time as a freelance musician," he says, smiling at the notion. "If you refused to look for work, the government would assign you to an office or factory or wherever. If you didn't do it, you'd go to jail."

There are musicians working at office or factory jobs, he says, who occasionally scrounge up freelance gigs performing. And if he finally does get to cut a record, he will be paid on a scale according to how many copies the record sells. Meantime, he says, "girls are easy to come by after dances." What with the housing shortage, though, he still lives at home with his mother.

## THE JOB COUNSELOR

Felix de Valois Mejias is chief of the labor-resources department at the Ministry of Work for Santiago. He has been a job counselor in Cuba's eastern provinces for fourteen of his thirty-seven years. As head of the Santiago office for the past four years, he still sees individual job applicants, as well as supervising a staff of other counselors.

Never in these fourteen years, he says, has he had an applicant for whom there was no job. The reason is obvious: in every administrative zone, the government always has some big project under way that can absorb anybody. Officials acknowledge that this leads to inefficiency in whatever project is involved. But the inefficiency is factored into the project's budget, and the guarantee of jobs is considered worth the price.

Today, for example, de Valois says he has sixty-eight *empresas*, or "work centers," that have notified him they have job openings for which no suitable applicant has applied on his own. The *empresas* include the tourist office and the railway station. But the big fallback project that can hire anyone is the construction of a textile factory that will become Cuba's biggest when it comes on line in a year or two. Santiago was chosen for the factory precisely to fill its employment needs, de Valois says.

The first applicant today is an eighteen-year-old who wants any kind of

job he can get while he studies for the university entrance examinations. De Valois sends the young man to Construction Empresa No. 11, which is building the textile factory. Because the work is construction, the pay is higher than for other work even though it is staffed with surplus labor. The applicant will receive $144 a month, $30 over the minimum wage for "service worker," which is the lowest classification. The pay could go over $240 a month depending on the danger, the difficulty, and the skill shown.

The next applicant is a thirty-two-year-old class B solderer. He, too, was sent to the textile factory. Explains de Valois, "All I had in hand was a document saying he had dropped out of his previous job about a week ago because it was too far from his home and he had to get up really early. When we advised him that there was work in the textile factory, nearer his home, you can imagine how glad he was." Class B solderers get $291.72 a month. De Valois himself, who picked up a university degree a year ago by studying part time, gets $300 a month.

When you get a new job classification, the Ministry of Work registers it on page twenty-two of your identity papers. If you are just entering the job market, or if you have a job you aren't satisfied with and you want to look for a better one during off hours, you must first check in with the Ministry of Work. It will note on page twenty-two of your identity papers that you're on the market. If you don't have a job, the papers say you are in the "labor reserves."

Efforts are made to satisfy an applicant's preference. No one has to take the first job offered, or even the second, right on the day it's offered. But ultimately, everyone must go to work. Cubans fortunate enough to be in the 3.5 percent of all students who get to attend a university are also *un*fortunate enough to have the least say where they work. Government planners have jobs waiting for each graduate. The graduate must stay three years, and most stay longer. The government tries to keep husbands and wives together, but admits it sometimes fails.

Despite the government's stance for female equality, sex discrimination is clear. "We don't send women to work in construction," de Valois says. "It's not good for the women. We have specific jobs for women: administrative work [which pays $145 a month], service work [the lowest paid at $114 a month], technical work [$150 a month]. We're always looking to replace a man who's in an easy job with a woman, and to put men in a job only a man can do." The male jobs, of course, pay more.

Women you see in Cuba are generally secretaries, receptionists, office clerks, sewing machine operators, and tobacco sorters—jobs almost exclusively for women. On the other hand, women *can* leap to the highest levels of the bureaucracy. De Valois's boss, the provincial director of Work and Social Security, is female.

## THE CHRISTIANS

Roman Catholic clergy either refused to talk to a reporter, or couldn't be located in repeated visits to padlocked churches. Reports say membership is way down, composed mostly of older people who have held their faith since before the revolution. Protestants have fared similarly. One pastor in central Cuba says his church has forty-five members, down from 200 before the revolution. Most of the lost membership fled to the U.S., he says, including his predecessor as pastor.

Proselytizing is a problem. "Before, we could go to the park, and we could sing. Young people could go out and visit people in their homes, but now we can't do that," the pastor says, speaking gingerly in obvious fear of saying the wrong thing. Some of his church's members have gone to jail. Preachers say the government doesn't interfere with activities inside the four walls of the church. But when a Baptist rally overflowed the church in 1981, one preacher was jailed for four months, and another for three, for sponsoring an illegal assembly.

Says a Methodist minister, "They are Marxists and we are believers. They believe in evolution and we believe in God as the creator. But in many things they do, we also believe. They build hospitals. When a man retires, they see to it that he has money to live his life. And while the quantity of our membership may have gone down, the quality has gone up. They come now because they really want to."

## THE CIGAR MAKER

"At age eleven, I had to leave school to learn to roll cigars, to help my parents," Rene Perez says. "I am the grandson of a tobacco worker and the son of a tobacco worker." But now Perez is director of the Francisco Perez German Tobacco Factory, renamed in honor of a worker who was tortured to death for revolutionary activities under Batista. Before the revolution, the factory was known as Partagas, and many of its cigars are still exported under that label.

Partagas was one of four principal Cuban cigar brands, all of which are still being produced. The others are H. Upmann, Montecristo, and Romeo Y Julieta. None can legally be imported into the U.S. (except by visitors to Cuba carrying them back for personal use). Recently, the U.S. cigar market has been invaded by ersatz brands, grown elsewhere, with the identical names and logos as the Cuban. The Cubans consider this infringement of their trademark to be a great affront.

The men who owned the big four tobacco companies (and eleven others that are still producing cigars in Cuba) aren't around anymore. Presumably

they fled to the U.S. "That the owners left made no difference to us," Perez says. "We knew the work." Everyone insists the quality of the cigars has been maintained.

"What we wanted to change [in the revolution], we changed. Not the tobacco. Not the rum," says Carolos Rosada, leader of the workers' union at the plant (which in a communist system is tantamount to management). Some supervisors from the prerevolutionary management are still on the job. "Those who desired to leave, left," says Rosada. "And of those who stayed, those who maintained the proper socialist attitude continued in their work here."

Cuba now exports more cigars, with more market receptivity, than it ever did. "When the U.S. broke relations, it affected us," says Perez. "But we found new markets. We export now to forty-four countries. Spain, England, France, Switzerland, the Soviet Union. Right now, if the U.S. asked us to begin selling, well, we cannot meet the requests we have for tobacco already."

THE tougher and more threatening the U.S. gets, the more resolute the Cubans become. People waiting in long lines to buy scarce goods commonly blame the lines on the U.S. trade embargo, which is known in Cuba as "the blockade." Obviously, the embargo isn't responsible for all of Cuba's economic shortcomings. But the accusation is partly true, and subject to easy exaggeration by the government information monopoly.

The embargo was intended to make Cubans resent their own government and attract them to ours. It has done exactly the opposite. Cubans resent the U.S. for making life difficult. In Santiago, women defiantly insisted that they didn't mind waiting in line for an hour to buy fancy $17 scarves that had just arrived from Europe. When a reporter expressed doubts about this, they answered with calls of "Long live Cuba." Because of the scarf sale, their supervisors had given them time off from routine jobs that paid them $200 a month.

In a long line outside a Camaguey store where deodorant and talcum powder had made their first appearance in four months, there was similar cheerfulness, as well as agreement with a woman who said proudly, "With the force of all the people, things will get better."

This patriotism seemed spontaneous and genuine. When a long army train carrying tanks, armored personnel carriers, and trucks (all looking pretty worn and old) rolled through Camaguey one evening, dozens of surprised people waiting in the station for passenger trains moved to the platform to cheer enthusiastically, and exchange smiles and waves with soldiers riding on the equipment.

A room in the national museum features photographs of the throng that filled Havana's streets in 1980 to demonstrate support for the government. The occasion was the decision by thousands of other Cubans to emigrate to

the U.S. through the suddenly opened port of Mariel. The emigrés were augmented by thousands of criminals, homosexuals, and others who were considered undesirable. Castro took them out of captivity and dumped them on his enemy to the north, an idea that many Cubans found appealing.

ACHIEVING unity at home by exhorting against a foreign threat is, of course, a trick common to politicians of all continents and all ideologies. But with American help, Castro has needed no magic to make the trick work in Cuba. When Secretary of State Alexander Haig repeatedly threatened that the Reagan administration would take the war in El Salvador to what he considered "the source," meaning Cuba, he merely fanned the same flames that the Bay of Pigs invaders had fanned before him.

His remarks got big play in Cuban newspapers, and were generally reported straight; they didn't need the usual propagandistic embellishment to be effective. Cubans knew that the source of the rebellion in El Salvador was a lousy government in El Salvador. This was just one more affront to their own revolution.

Similar remarks, and the Reagan administration's bellicosity, had the same effect on Nicaragua. The Somoza family had been placed in charge of Nicaragua under Franklin Roosevelt, after a seven-year occupation by U.S. Marines. The Somoza government was supported by every U.S. administration including Jimmy Carter's, right up to the moment it was overthrown in 1979 by overwhelming nationalist opposition. Then, within a year or two, the Sandinista revolutionaries who replaced Somoza were carrying Nicaragua closer to a Cuban-style police state than many of Somoza's opponents had intended.

The U.S. might have strengthened the position of freedom-loving Nicaraguans by showing, through hands-off behavior, that Nicaragua could achieve its nationalist ends without creating a police state. If a Latin American country could obtain independence from Washington without going the Cuban route, it might set an example throughout the hemisphere, and the Cuban route might lose its appeal.

The main concrete interest Americans have in Nicaragua, besides promoting peaceful commerce by encouraging Nicaraguan prosperity, is in keeping out a Soviet military force that might endanger the U.S. homeland. The only reason a Soviet force is remotely in prospect is that the U.S. threatens Nicaraguan independence, just as we have long stifled popular government and free markets in the surrounding countries. Nicaragua's long-range interests don't lie with the Soviet Union, half a world away, any more than Cuba's do. In fact, the Sandinistas had been shocked from the start by their discovery that the Soviet budget doesn't include $4 billion a year for them and every Latin American country that wants to go independent. Nicaraguan requests for Soviet aid were being politely rejected, which would inevitably

have turned Sandinista heads northward, where their logical economic ties lay.

But the Reagan administration would not let the Sandinista revolutionary flames cool down for lack of fuel. Instead, the administration sprayed gasoline on the flames by threatening—and then waging—war. The administration funded various right-wing groups, including even the hated remnants of Somoza's army and aristocracy, in carrying out armed harassment against Nicaragua. This support was covert to the U.S. voters who paid for it, but hardly a secret to the Nicaraguans who suffered under it. It was a replay of the disastrous secret war against Cuba.

Washington publicly tried to embrace some Nicaraguans who were resisting the more radical Sandinista leaders. By doing so, the administration threatened to contaminate those very leaders it wanted to support, and make them an anathema to the main body of Nicaraguan nationalism. One of the moderates who begged not to be kissed in public, Alfonso Robelo Callejas (head of the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement and coordinator of the front representing the conservative opposition), actually said, "I wish the United States would keep quiet for awhile. Every time Haig opens his mouth, he strengthens the Sandinistas by justifying their arms buildup and stimulating the nationalism of the people."

YOU soon get the idea that if the U.S. wasn't galvanizing Latin nationalism in this way, supporters of Cuban-style police states in Latin America would have to plumb their imaginations to create a threat. In fact, during slack periods, that happens. The U.S. record is now so bad that the country can believably be blamed for almost anything.

In the summer of 1981, for example, Castro began spreading the word that U.S. germ warfare was responsible for a severe outbreak of dengue fever that hit Cuba. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans were incapacitated for up to a week by the epidemic, and at least 130 died, mostly children. Officials from the Cuban mission to the United Nations tried to get play in the U.S. press by offering reporters evidence to support Castro's charges. The evidence included newspaper clippings, excerpts from U.S. congressional hearings, and medical reports.

But interviews with leading international medical authorities, including those suggested by the Cubans themselves, make it seem highly probable that the epidemic was a natural occurrence, and that dengue fever would be an unlikely choice for biological warfare. Castro's evidence, though accurate, was incomplete and one-sided. Still, Castro repeated the charges, even reading some congressional hearings verbatim, in a speech in Havana before a gathering of legislators from some eighty countries. The speech was televised across Cuba. Afterward, everywhere on the island, people cited the dengue outbreak as an example of U.S. agression—one more reason to remain doggedly loyal.

The dengue fever charges appear to be false propaganda. But it would be a mistake to see them as nothing more. Nor is it fair to assume that the Cubans who spread the story, including Castro himself, knew it was false. They may well have believed it was true, for the same reason that the Cuban people readily believed it: so many similar stories in the past really *had* been true.

If Cubans have become suspicious by now that U.S. intrigue lurks behind every misfortune, you can hardly blame them. As for Castro, how would *anyone* feel if agents of the world's greatest military power had tried to kill him at least seventeen times and were still coming?

PERHAPS the saddest result of all this is the widespread notion in Cuba, and in many Latin American opposition movements, that independence from the U.S. can be obtained only at the price of civil liberties. To millions of people, political repression appears necessary to prevent the return to Cuba of military rule, a U.S.-dominated oligarchy, and the Mafia (which ran the casinos and other vice rackets in Havana before the revolution). The record of attempted U.S. subversion is the excuse constantly raised by Cubans to justify their Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

The record of U.S. attacks is the history that is drilled into the many students who come to Cuba from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mali, Angola, Palestinian exile camps, and elsewhere. These students, the future leaders of their countries, are taught that political surveillance and repression of dissent are essential for the survival of even the most popular independent government.

They are constantly reminded of the U.S.'s role in crushing the democratically elected Chilean government of Salvador Allende. Allende's death in a military coup in 1973 left his country in the hands of a U.S.-sponsored junta that has brought simultaneous political repression and economic disaster. This is repeatedly cited as evidence that Allende tolerated too much freedom. The lesson is that if nationalists like Allende in Chile and Arbenz in Guatemala had discarded the free political institutions they inherited—which both of them refused to do—the U.S. might not have been able to destroy their presidencies.

The intellectual disregard that these Third World students express for individual liberty is absolutely chilling. Their attitude is probably a far more dangerous Cuban export than the elusive arms deals the State Department has worked so hard to try to prove. The worst features of the Cuban revolution—its intolerance of political dissent, and its ruthless disregard for personal privacy in seeking to eliminate all deviation from prescribed norms—have become their model.

Yet these students, and people all over Cuba, are fond of pointing out that the Committees for Defense of the Revolution weren't started until five

months *after* the Bay of Pigs; that Cuba didn't expropriate U.S.-owned oil refineries until *after* the refinery owners refused to handle oil that Cuba bought from the U.S.S.R. at bargain rates; that Cuba didn't tie its sugar sales to Soviet purchases until *after* the U.S. cut its import quota in reprisal against Cuban policies; and that the U.S. broke relations with Cuba, not the other way around.

None of this, of course, proves that Cuba's revolutionary course wasn't precharted by Castro—that he wouldn't have headed toward repression and the Soviet bloc regardless of what the U.S. did. It does suggest, however, that every anti-Cuban action the U.S. has taken has backfired. The Cuban revolution has been strengthened, not weakened, by U.S. belligerence, both in the eyes of the Cubans and in the eyes of people who seek to overthrow right-wing dictatorships elsewhere.

In U.S. politics, the question is usually phrased thus: did Castro intend to take Cuba toward a Marxist dictatorship and the Soviet camp, or did the U.S. drive him to it? That question, of course, cannot be answered satisfactorily. But the answer doesn't matter. Even if we grant, for argument's sake, that Castro *did* intend from the start to steer Cuba toward Moscow—and there is substantial evidence that he did—there is no reason to believe that Cuba would have stayed on that course for a quarter century. Ghana didn't, Guinea didn't, Egypt didn't, Somalia didn't.

And geography argues more strongly in Cuba's case than in the case of any of these others that Cuba would have drifted back toward a U.S. commercial orientation if it hadn't felt its independence was threatened. Castro himself might never have survived his economic failures of the 1960s, before the Soviets raised his allowance. Indeed, it is entirely consistent with all the known facts that Castro cleverly, consciously, and successfully suckered the United States into providing the bellicose antagonism he needed in order to coerce Moscow and cajole his domestic constituency all these years. He may have known very well that if he couldn't rouse the U.S. into grabbing for the black hat, his own hero act might not have been able to stay on stage.

FIDEL CASTRO's government preaches and practices much that is repugnant to the principle that men and nations should be free to choose their own course. But the U.S., in its dealings with Cuba, shredded that principle also. It can't even be said that the U.S. answered Cuban transgressions in kind. The U.S. has tried to *anticipate* such transgressions, and thereby, in many eyes, has justified them.

There is still a great natural reservoir of goodwill toward the U.S. in Cuba, if the U.S. government were to seek to exploit it. For all the gratitude the Cubans feel toward the Soviet Union in an intellectual sense, they, like most other Third World peoples, don't really *like* the Russians close up. Where individual Americans abroad tend to be regarded as sociable, the Soviets are

cold and graceless. What is probably a fear among traveling Soviets of somehow offending their own repressive police state, translates abroad into an image of arrogance.

The 12,000 to 14,000 Soviet civilians and 3,000 Soviet soldiers in Cuba (U.S. estimates) keep mostly to themselves. Even Soviet civilian advisors live in segregated quarters. A reporter traveling around Cuba encountered them only at a beach resort, where they arrived together on chartered buses from Havana, and stayed together as a group.

When attacking U.S. policy, Castro goes out of his way to exclude the U.S. people, whom he describes as decent, hard-working, and admirable. But the biggest attraction the U.S. has is still the stereo sets, cars, and other items that socialism finds it so hard to provide. The Cuban people—*no* people—will ever be seriously convinced that these luxuries are really creations of the devil, as Castro sometimes tries to assert by way of justifying his shortcomings.

People *want* nice things. Many Cubans in the U.S. send packages of clothes and other items to relatives on the island (which can be received as long as they aren't sold). Everyone admires their quality.

Almost everyone you meet in Cuba seems to have family in the United States. This often causes confused feelings. On the one hand, the government characterizes those who flee Cuba as "scum." But when a boy, about ten, repeated such a remark in a restaurant line, apparently something he learned in school, his mother gestured as if to slap him. "Shhh," she said. "You're talking about your grandmother."

As a reporter waited in an anteroom to see a provincial official, the official's secretary burst into tears. She explained that her son had left for the U.S. the year before after being let out of jail, where he had gone for a robbery she insisted he didn't commit. She had heard from him once in Wisconsin, then lost touch. She said she still didn't understand why he left. "I never had any other children," she sobbed. "It hurts me very much. I am a revolutionary." Then she composed herself and asked that nothing of this be mentioned to her boss.

These scenes are particularly graphic; the confused feelings they represent are widespread. Yet instead of playing to this ambivalence by emphasizing the genuine attraction of American ideals and prosperity, the U.S. government has opted to affront the Cuban national pride—and bunglingly at that (you'd think that in seventeen tries on a man's life, the CIA could find somebody who could at least *wound* him!).

William Bader, former staff chief of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and now a Washington consultant, may have put it best: "Whether it's in revolutionary France, revolutionary Iran, or revolutionary Cuba, you need an external enemy. And in Cuba the U.S. has gladly and enthusiastically fulfilled that role."