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## **Castro is Backed, but Dissent Rises. Most Cubans Still Support Premier—Defections Are Linked to Austerity**

Max Frankel

„Castro is Backed, but Dissent Rises. Most Cubans Still Support Premier—Defections Are Linked to Austerity,“ in: The New York Times, Special (December 1, 1961)

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, Dec. 1—"Tell me what you do and how much you used to earn and I will tell you whether you are for or against this revolution," a Santiago student remarked. The student pointed to the gentle green mountains that ring this city's harbor—the mountains in which Fidel Castro's revolution was born. Then he pointed below to the squalid ranks of battered and misformed plastered homes, whose tenants prayed for that revolution, and to the slickly groomed houses and lawns on the hill, whose owners cheered it. The student shook his head in dismay and said:

"We don't realize it yet but it was good against evil at first, then poor against rich, now the not-so-well-off against the fairly - well - off.

"And in the middle, it is father against son, husband against wife, and Fidel says you must be with or against." The student did not know where he stood but he knew that his confusion was itself now a suspicious state. Here at the eastern end of Cuba, he testified to what a revolutionary had said in Havana 600 miles to the west: that the lines were being drawn and that the revolution's position was far better in the country at large than in the confused and quarrelsome urban student circles.

The lines of political allegiance across Cuba are as clear as the lines between the dusty, weary and ugly little villages and towns and the lush and vigorous countryside.

As Dr. Castro demands, people are in or out, for or against. They hang revolutionary slogans on their splintered doors and windowless huts; they strut proudly in the denim uniform of the People's Militia and they take their children for a Sunday stroll among the brilliantly pink, yellow and blue new apartment cities.

Or they commute sullenly between job and home, boast defiantly of their faith in the Roman Catholic Church and huddle uncomfortably as they whisper into beer glasses with eyes fixed on distant waiters.

### **Lines Are Not Fixed**

The lines are clear but they are not fixed. As the uneven shuffling of the economic and social order proceeds and as the reality of austerity comes into view, there are defections almost daily from supporters to opponents.

"When did you fall?" is a favorite question. It is asked more often than "Why?" The man who has "fallen," people seem to assume, has been hurt. He has lost his land, busi-



ness, income, profits, home, savings, reputation or confidence in the economic future.

A growing number of Cubans complain also of having lost the right to speak freely, or to acquire, move and dispose of property or employes. And there is a relatively new and uneasy concern about socialism and communism.

### **Majority Holds Hope**

On the other side are those with little or nothing to lose besides hope and an enormous faith in Fidel—the majority. They are the million or more jobless who would sit in their huts and on battered pavements, the high school youngsters in bright, starched blouses adorned "fatherland or death," the field hands in bamboo hats who point with machetes as they struggle to read a revolutionary Government notice warning against rabid dogs, and the clerks in still-foreign or still-prosperous stores and offices. They are for the revolution ardently or lukewarmly, realistically or fatalistically.

Some of these Cubans are demonstrative revolutionaries. They cheer at rallies and sip drinks with emotional gusto in once-inaccessible bars. But most are also largely uncommunicative; at least with a foreigner. "It is time something was done for our poor people, and Fidel will do it," is the kind of comment one hears most often in dank, narrow alleys of Havana, Camaguey and Santiago.

Relatively few Cubans today live better than they lived before Fidel Castro seized power twenty-three months ago. But the majority lives with a hope nurtured by impassioned oratory, a tendency to blame "enemies" for what has gone wrong and a satisfaction with the limited but dramatic symbols of what might be done for them.

Some of the symbols are physical: Startlingly incongruous and handsome modern new school buildings at the edges of towns of shacks; bright new little one-family suburbias and antiseptic new clinics and refurbished hospitals in some towns and cities; two sets of children's swings and a flag-bedecked radio in the grassy commons of a palm-enshrouded village of waterless shacks.

Some of the symbols are social: The destruction of gambling dives and blatant houses of prostitution, the opportunities for legitimizing marriages and grown children, the enthusiasm and concern of Government welfare workers who offer a few pesos or a clean bed for the night when needed, and the knowledge that few can bribe their way into luxurious privilege anymore.

### **Spiritual Symbols**

Some of the symbols are spiritual: The expansive chests and high heads of tens of thousands of militiamen, who receive no pay and even buy their own uniforms and are bivouacked in former cattle stalls, marched to exhaustion, drilled in the machinery of complex foreign mortars and machine guns and celebrated as the pride of the future, the saviors of Latin America, the personal charges of the "maximum leader" Fidel Castro.

Other such spiritual symbols are the dignity of a right to loll on once-exclusive beaches, the pride of black commanding white and of once-poor commanding once-rich, the fame of renown in the world and the heady security of a cause.