

Exiles' Weapons

Decay Within Cuba

By Roscoe Drummond

THE CUBAN EXILES, who are stirring things up with new drive and daring, have two weapons.

One is military. The other is economic—the continuing and mounting deterioration of the Cuban economy.



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The new military harassment should not be lightly dismissed. Obviously by itself it will not topple the regime. Its significance is not its size but its timing. It is beginning at the very moment when the internal economic decay is giving the Cuban government its most acute difficulties since Castro came to power.

The military harassment adds to the economic strain and makes it far harder for Castro to persuade the Cuban people that he can ever restore—let alone improve—the living conditions that prevailed before 1958.

The raids may be only a series of pin-pricks, but they are pin-pricking a very sensitive and problem-ridden regime.

CUBA'S economic difficulties stem from the regime's egregious mismanagement, from its lack of access to U.S. goods, and from the refusal of many other countries to sell it needed products.

Here's how things have been going:

1—Despite the temporary

boon of high sugar prices on the world market, which for a period fed Havana's foreign exchange, sugar prices are now declining and the prospect for the free-world purchase of Cuban sugar (the mainstay of its economy) is poor.

2—The whole Cuban economy has been moving backward. Cuba's gross national product had, by the end of 1963, slumped 10 to 15 per cent from the 1958 level of \$2.56 billion. Since its population increased from 6.5 to 7.1 million during these same five years, the per capita GNP is in effect down 20 per cent.

3—Cuban agricultural production has dropped substantially since Castro came to power: Rice is off 26,000 tons, sweet potatoes down 364,000 tons, with milk, beef, and pork all falling behind in varying degrees. And sugar output is at the lowest point since 1944. Attempted solution: Labor manpower was drafted into the army and forced to work at reduced soldiers' pay.

BY CONTRAST, the gross national product of the 19 other American republics gained an estimated 20 per cent from 1958 through 1963.

4—Cuba's industrial production has remained stagnant during the Castro period. Volume remains stuck and quality has gone steadily backward. Much of the regime's industrial plant, its sugar mills, its transportation—all primarily West-

ern—are now nearly obsolete or rapidly deteriorating.

5—Even though the free-world boycott of Cuba is less than total, Cuban exports have fallen catastrophically—from \$805 million in 1958 to an estimated \$475 million in 1963.

6—Some 3000 Cuban citizens are fleeing the island every month. Several hundred thousand Cubans, mainly managerial and professional, have already fled. Skilled labor is scarce and executive talent more scarce.

7—Today Cuba owes the rest of the world almost \$2 billion. Its debts to the Soviet Union and other Communist countries total nearly \$650 million for economic aid alone.

THIS is not wishful, anti-Castro propaganda. The foregoing facts have been documented from Cuban government publications. Competent Cubans, including competent Communists who are wringing their hands at what is happening, are acutely aware of these facts and seem helpless to do anything to arrest the trend.

Recently a French Communist, an agrarian specialist, was summoned to Havana to diagnose Cuba's agricultural ills. His report has fallen into Western hands. It proposes reforms that have been neglected in the past and concludes that, unless something better is done soon, there will be "catastrophe."