

NEW WAY OF LIFE

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Castro's Loss Gain for U.S., New Orleans

By GENE BOURG

One of the greatest losses Cuba suffered in its communization by Fidel Castro has been the thousands of professional minds which have left the country.

In this case, Cuba's loss has been the United States'—and New Orleans'—gain.

Working in the city today are more than 100 Cuban-trained engineers and architects, about 25 physicians and an unknown, but large, number of teachers in the area's professional schools and universities.

THE EASE with which the professionally trained Cuban refugee has been able to remain in his field varies among the different groups.

Lawyers have an especially high obstacle, since admittance to the Louisiana bar means several years of intensive extra study for them.

The problem is not so critical for engineers, whose licensing depends almost totally on pure technical knowledge and skills.

To qualify for private medical practice, physicians must have received three years of post-graduate training in an approved hospital in the United States, with one of those years preferably in Louisiana. They also must have obtained either U.S. citizenship or have filed a declaration of intent to do so.

"I WAS ONE of the two doctors who broke the ice in Louisiana," said Dr. Louis Balart, who received his full license from the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners in 1967.

A staff member at a local private clinic, Dr. Balart said opportunities for him and his colleagues in medicine have been good in New Orleans in spite of the obstacles.

"The majority of us are



ALBERTO MENESES



DR. LOUIS BALART



—States-Item photos.
CARLOS DE LA VEGA

below 50 years of age," he said. "Except for the elderly, all of the Cuban doctors I know are working in their profession — either as practitioners, teachers or technicians."

Dr. Balart and his wife Isabel arrived in New Orleans in 1961 with \$40.

"ALTHOUGH MY family has lived in Cuba since the early 19th Century, my ancestry is totally French," he said. "My great-grandmother was from Louisiana, and her people had lived here before the Louisiana Purchase. This

is why New Orleans is now my home."

The young physician firmly believes he is here to stay.

"We've established roots," he said. "My son is in medical school and is engaged. My friends are here."

Cuban physicians, said Dr. Balart, are now on the staffs of most of New Orleans' private hospitals. They also are listed on the faculties of the schools of medicine of both Tulane and Louisiana State Universities.

AMONG THE Cuban-born

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engineers licensed here is Carlos Quiroga, who worked for several years on water pollution projects in the area.

He was educated at Holy Cross High School and LSU.

"Engineers have an easier time of it," says Quiroga, "because to be licensed the important thing is technical knowledge, not language. I would say that no engineer has been prevented from working because of legal restrictions on aliens."

Most of the Cuban-educated attorneys in the city have either gone into business for themselves or have joined commercial establishments. Some also are teaching in law schools.

One lawyer-refugee now in New Orleans is Tulane-educated Alberto Meneses, director of inter-American relations for a bank.

"Cubans know the responsibilities of commerce and industry, and can make substantial contributions in those fields," said Meneses.

But he echoed Quiroga's opinion that more professional Cubans have not come to New Orleans because the city's economic base does not provide sufficient attraction.

"The climate, the hospitality and the customs are all ideal," said Meneses, "but more industry is needed."

HE ADDED that he finds it unfortunate that the country, and this city, cannot benefit more from the presence of Cuban attorneys.

"New Orleans could use very well at least three or four top Spanish-speaking lawyers," said Meneses. "But many of the Cuban-trained lawyers here have families to support and cannot afford to spend years getting expensive additional education."

Meneses said he decided to enter the business world rather than pursue more legal studies because when he relocated in the United States he already was past 50.

At least two experienced public relations specialists from Cuba are now working

in the area. Alberto Fowler is director of international relations for the city, and Carlos de la Vega is director of Latin American relations at Ochsner Foundation Hospital.

IN DISCUSSING the adjustments Cubans must make in this country, de la Vega singled out the Cuban woman as the real heroine of the exodus from Castro.

"Whether rich or poor, the Cuban household usually included servants, since labor was inexpensive," he said. "Now Cuban wives and mothers here must do the same chores as American housewives."

They have taken on many new responsibilities in keeping families together, de la Vega added, including getting jobs for the first time.

"Out of the 400,000 exiles in this country," said de la Vega, "I know of not a single case of suicide, even though these people lost all their possessions and most have relatives who were either killed or imprisoned."

ONE OF THE many active Cuban women in New Orleans is Dr. Emma Perez, editor of the Spanish-language bi-weekly Siempre, which is written and printed in the city's uptown area.

Working with her is her

husband, Carlos Montenegro, one of Latin America's masters of the short story.

A current project of refugee leaders is the erection of a monument in the city to Jose Marti, the father of Cuba's independence.

"It will be a gift of gratitude from the Cubans in New Orleans to the city," said Dr. Adrian Mesa, secretary of the Cuban Lyceum social organization.

The monument, as planned, would be a statue of Marti on Basin Street near Municipal Auditorium. Dr. Mesa said a Miami refugee sculptor has agreed to create the statue, whose \$2,700 cost will be borne by Cuban-Americans.

(Last Article in a Series)

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