

Ex-Cubans Eager for Citizenship

By Theodore A. Ediger

MIAMI (AP)—So many Cuban exiles are becoming U.S. citizens that courtrooms here are no longer big enough to hold them. The monthly swearing-in ceremonies are held in public halls.

A waiting list of more than 1000 is reported.

"If it weren't for the Cubans we wouldn't have many new citizens," commented U.S. District Judge Clyde C. Atkins, in charge of the committee for naturalization.

More than 80 per cent in each citizenship class are Cubans. Before the Cuban influx, the ceremonies were held only four times a year.

More than 750 new citizens were sworn at a hearing in the Dade County auditorium in December, Atkins reported. More than 350 were naturalized on Jan. 22 at a ceremony in Bayfront Park. The largest Federal courtroom here accommodates 250 persons.

The size of the citizenship

classes, Atkins explained, depends on the number processed by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

While official figures on the number of exiles taking citizenship are unavailable, Fernando Penabaz, Florida chairman on the nationalities division of the Republican Party, reported about 20,000 have registered as voters in the state in the last four years.

Cuban-born lawyer Carlos Fernandez, who watches the citizenship picture closely, estimated that nearly 20,000 Cubans have become U.S. citizens in the Miami area alone since Fidel Castro's 1959 takeover.

Projected nationwide, Fernandez said, a proportionate citizenship movement is occurring. An estimated half-million Cuban exiles live in the United States, more than half of them outside the Miami area.

"Citizenship applications will keep pyramiding, and in May there will be a flood of them," Fernandez predicted. He points out that a law giving Cuban refugees credit for 2½ years of the usual citizenship residence requirement of five years was passed Nov. 1, 1966. That period elapses May 1.

Fernandez, estimated that more than 1000 exile applicants still await processing by immigration authorities. Other observers place the figure higher.