

Cuba Peasants' Transition: From Muddy Feet to Prefab

By Terri Shaw

Washington Post Staff Writer

LA YAYA, Cuba—On a foothill of the Escambray Mountains, overlooking a large state dairy farm, stands a group of four-story prefabricated apartment buildings that somewhat resembles a garden apartment complex in Prince George's County.

Many such housing developments have been built in rural areas in Cuba since Fidel Castro came to power almost 16 years ago. The Cubans call them peasant villages, but they don't resemble peasant villages anywhere else in Latin America.

La Yaya's 840 inhabitants live in two- or three-bedroom apartments with fully equipped kitchens and bathrooms, complete with running water. When each family moved in, it found the apartment furnished with sturdy wood furniture, a refrigerator, television set and gas stove.

Like many Cubans, the residents of La Yaya pay no rent—just the electric bill.

"I used to wake up with my feet wet and trudge through the mud to the field," said Jose Miguel Perez, 46, whose family was one of the first to move to La Yaya three years ago.

Now, Perez takes a truck

to his job building cattle pens in the dairy farm in the valley.

Two of the four Perez children attend La Yaya's primary school, temporarily housed in three wooden buildings while a new school is being finished. The new school is to be what the Cubans call a "semi-boarding school," that will serve the children lunch and care for them during the afternoon so their mothers can work.

Many of the younger women in the new town work outside their homes. Twenty-five of them leave La Yaya at 4 a.m. to run milking machines at the dairy farm. They return at 9 a.m., then go back to work from 2 to 6 p.m.

Men and women in La Yaya earn salaries close to those earned by factory workers in Cuba's cities. This is in sharp contrast to most Latin American peasants, who live off the land and have little contact with the money economy.

Substantial investment in the countryside has been a hallmark of Castro's Cuba from its beginning. One of the first mass efforts by the Castro government was a countrywide literacy campaign during which half a million young people moved

to the country for a year to teach illiterate peasants to read and write.

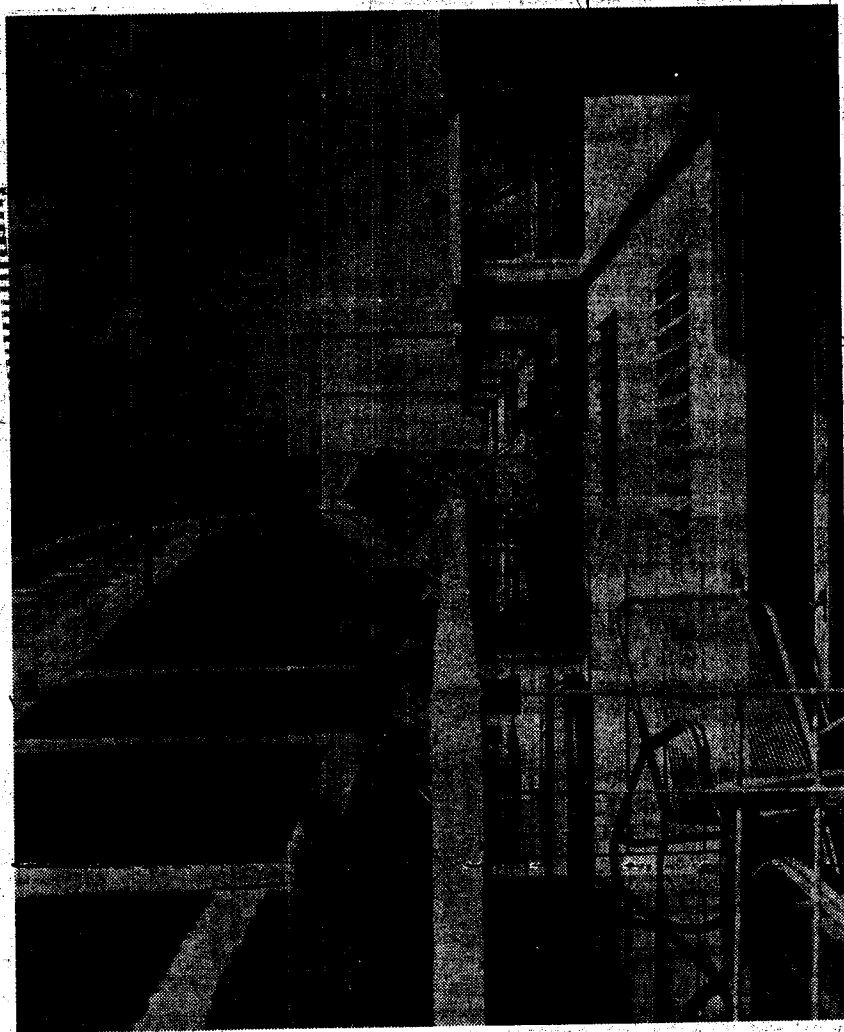
Hundreds of high schools are being built in the countryside so that the students can spend three hours a day working in the fields. Young doctors and nurses are expected to spend at least a year working in rural hospitals that have been set up in the most isolated parts of the island.

La Yaya has an infirmary staffed by a nurse and a fifth-year medical student. Also living in the village are teachers for the primary school and a night school for adults, an actress who has organized a peasant theater group, and a social worker.

The social worker, Dora Gutierrez, began working with the residents of La Yaya before the new village was built, explaining to them, as she put it, "what the new life is like."

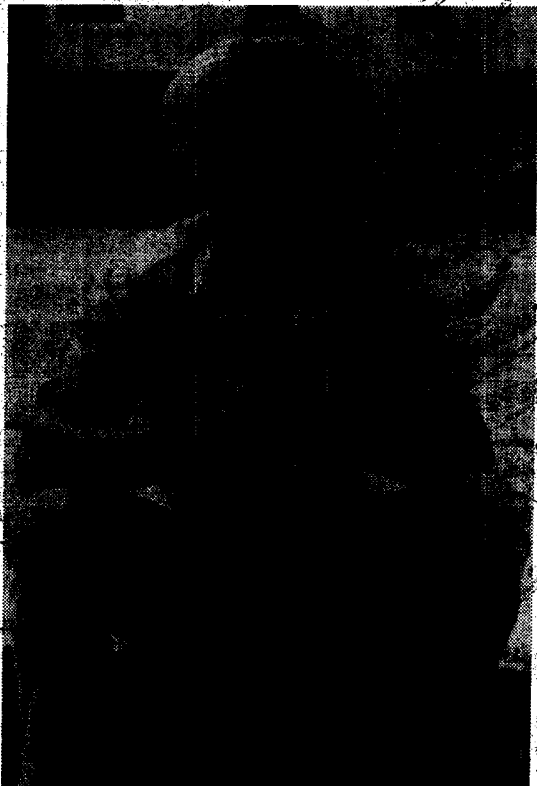
At her coaxing, the peasants agreed on certain "rules for living together" that included such restrictions as no wood fires in the apartment and no animals.

"Getting rid of the animals was the hardest part



By Terri Shaw—The Washington Post

A view of La Yaya from the balcony of the Pérez family's apartment.



Jose Aguilar, in front of the school he is building.

for them," Miss Gutierrez said. Most of the peasants in La Yaya previously had small plots of land and most kept cows and chickens.

Jose Aguilar, 30, a construction worker at the new school, said many peasants resist moving into the new villages because then they

must buy food under the same rationing system as other Cubans.

"Some people say if you move into a new village you'll starve," Aguilar said.

"But it's not true. My wife and I together earn 236 pesos a month, and there is more here than we can afford to buy. A peso is worth \$1.20 at the official, artificially expensive, exchange rate."

But La Yaya is not for everyone.

According to Miss Gutierrez, the inhabitants of La Yaya—which some day is to have 1,200 residents—are chosen for their family's needs and their "revolutionary orientation." To get an apartment, a family must support the government and participate in some mass organization, such as the peasant's union, the women's federation and the grass roots Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

Among those who are excluded are Jehovah's Witnesses, many of whom live in the surrounding area.

"It is a sect that goes against the principles of the revolution," Miss Gutierrez said. "They don't salute the flag and they don't give blood. They can receive all the benefits of other citizens—school, food, medical care; but they can't come here."

Reports in the Cuban press also indicate that members of the sect disrupted the region's agricultural plan by refusing to plant or harvest tobacco.

Miss Gutierrez seemed shocked at the thought of Jehovah's Witnesses living in La Yaya.

"When the Bay of Pigs attack came, many of them turned out to be CIA agents," she said. "Can you imagine them coming here? Can you imagine a child in our school who does not love his country?"

Cubans Prepare for 'Popular

By Terri Shaw

Washington Post Staff Writer

HAVANA — It's easy to be a "revolutionary" in Cuba, but for those who aren't, life can be very hard.

The word "revolutionary" is so broadly defined that it seems to include just about everyone who goes to work on time, attends political meetings and keeps his front porch clean.

Most Cubans appear genuinely proud to be considered revolutionaries, and firmly support the 16-year-old government of Premier Fidel Castro.

Others, while not as enthusiastic, have adjusted to the new way of life. These people, who make up a large majority, enjoy such benefits as free medical care, and complain about such drawbacks as rationing of food and clothing.

But some Cubans, because of their beliefs or lifestyles, are considered obstacles to the progress of the revolution. These minorities are left outside the mainstream of society and many of the benefits enjoyed by others are not available to them.

The most hated group of nonconformists are the "gusanos" (worms)—those people who openly oppose the government, especially those who have applied to leave the country. As in the Soviet Union, those who apply to emigrate lose their jobs and many are ordered to work in the countryside until they receive permission to leave, a process that can take years.

As many as 800,000 Cubans are believed to have left since Castro took power, and most of the 9 million who stayed behind feel very bitter about the exodus.



By Terri Shaw—The Washington Post

Cuba X cap News—F 2 col 8 on 10 hf BB with story Humberto Hernandez praised the lay judges' 'spirit.'

"Can you imagine how the people suffered when all the doctors left?" said a Cuban diplomat visiting Washington.

Many opponents of the government are in prison or work camps. Since 1967, when Castro said there were 20,000 political prisoners, no government figures have been published.

Cuba watchers in Washington hesitate to give even

a broad estimate of the number of political prisoners. Exile groups usually say there are between 50,000 and 60,000, figures that neutral sources believe are exaggerated.

A Cuban official said recently that one of Cuba's more notorious prisons, located in La Cabana fortress overlooking Havana harbor, had been closed. The fortress is now a military in-

stallation with housing for officers and soldiers.

The official said all prisoners are given an opportunity to join a "rehabilitation program," which includes political discussions and labor on the farms where the work camps are located. Prisoners in the rehabilitation program are granted furloughs and eventually can be paroled.

Exile groups have charged that those who refuse to join the rehabilitation program are mistreated.

The Cuban government has refused to allow any international humanitarian groups like the Red Cross or Amnesty International to send missions to Cuba to study prison conditions.

Another group of Cubans who are left outside the revolution but are not as hated as the "gusanos" are those who practice religion, whether they are Catholics, Christian Scientists or Jehovah's Witnesses.

The government guarantees freedom of religion. Churches and synagogues function without difficulty. But religious families often do not participate in the many political activities that other Cubans do, and therefore are not eligible for certain benefits, such as free vacations or scholarships to study abroad.

The pressures against religion are subtle, and appear to be directed mainly at children. It is rumored, for example, that young people who have received their first communion are not allowed to join the Young Communist League, although having been baptized is apparently not held against them.

As in many authoritarian societies, artists and intellectuals seem to be particularly vulnerable to pressure

Power'

against deviating from the official line.

While art appears to be freer from ideological restrictions in Cuba than in the Soviet Union, the current campaign against "ideological diversionism" stresses that art should be free of "harmful" foreign influences.

One group of artists, more than any other, has suffered from government pressure. A wholesale purge of homosexuals in the arts and education was carried out three years ago, and many homosexual artists have been unable to work in their field since then.

The only person I met during three weeks in Cuba who lived in fear was a homosexual artist. While he represents a small minority, his experiences as a political outcast are similar to the experiences described by other types of nonconformists, such as former political prisoners who have left Cuba. The circumstances of his life must be disguised to protect him.

The man, whom I will call Daniel, said that he was one of about 500 homosexual intellectuals fired from their jobs after the 1971 National Congress on Education and Culture, which ruled that "all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading."

Most of the people who were fired continued to receive their salaries, but could find no jobs in their field, Daniel said.

"There are authors here whose work is not published; painters whose paintings cannot be sold in Cuba; actors who cannot perform; singers who cannot give concerts," he said.

After losing his job, Dan-



By Joseph Mastrangelo—The Washington Post

iel continued to paint and to show his paintings privately. One night he was arrested on a minor political charge and jailed for 15 months.

"I was interrogated for hours about all my friends, asked whether they were homosexuals or not. I was questioned about writings that they found in my apartment, and finally I signed a confession saying that I was a homosexual."

Had he been tortured in prison?

"It's all the same when you're in prison," he said. "Don't be naïve. A prison is a prison. They threatened to shoot me, they pounded their fists on the table and shouted at me. They didn't pull out my fingernails or give me electric shocks. But the purpose was to terrorize."

After his release, the only jobs Daniel was offered were in construction or agriculture.

"I have a bad back," he said. "I can't do that work. I finally found a low-paying office job through friends."

Daniel and other homo-

sexuals who were fired have filed appeals. They have free legal counsel, and the cases are proceeding slowly.

"The cases violate everything in the labor law," Daniel said. "If you read it, you think it will protect you, but it doesn't."

A friend of Daniel's who also lost his job said he still has "faith in the revolution," and believes their appeals will be successful.

But Daniel, who says he "hates capitalism" and always considered himself a revolutionary, appears to have lost hope.

"Why don't they just deport us all?" he asked. "If they could cure me I would do it. If there were a pill or an injection I could take, I would. But there's nothing they can do to change the way I am so why don't they let me do my work?"

"At the place where I work now, there was a ceremony the other day to honor a man who had worked for 25 years. I had worked almost that long when I was fired, yet I have lost my la-

bor card, my opportunity for a pension, everything."

"I never feel safe now," he added. "The police came into my apartment once, and they could come in and take me away again."

The Cuban government has for years considered homosexuals "antisocial." In 1965 many were forced to join a paramilitary force, later disbanded, called the Military Unit to Aid Production.

Raúl Ruiz, a lawyer and Communist Party official, denied Daniel's statement that being a homosexual was illegal in Cuba.

"What is illegal," he said, "is to offend public morality. They can't go out in the street dressed as women, have young children. I don't want them influenced by things like that."

Ruiz said homosexuals are not permitted to be teachers or "make any display of their defect in public." This included performing on the stage or television, "where they could influence youth or children."