

CUBANS IN MIAMI PRESS FOR POWER

Long-Passive Refugees Now
Active in Political Life

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MIAMI, July 28 — Cuban refugees, who account for one-fourth of this area's 1.3-million population, are beginning to flex their political muscles.

In the last two or three years, the refugees have been becoming American citizens and voters by the thousands. After a long period of uninterest in local affairs they are also becoming politically active.

There are some 300,000 exiles in Dade County (greater Miami). Only about half of the 80,000 eligible Cubans have registered to vote, and a drive is under way to register the rest before the Presidential election.

Since over 80 per cent of the new Cuban voters register Republican, they could radically change the status of political forces in Dade, now a Democratic bastion.

A number of Cuban civic groups have sprung up here of late, too. In contrast with the now moribund anti-Castro organizations of the 1960's, these groups are principally aimed at participating in community affairs.

Leaders in Mid-30's

The new Cuban community leaders are in their middle 30's. Educated in this country, they are versed in operating within the American political system. The older, pre-Castro exiled politicians seem to have faded away.

Earlier this month, chiefly as a result of lobbying by various Spanish-speaking groups, the City of Miami named its first Cuban-born Commissioner.

"This is just the beginning," said the Commissioner, Manolo Reboso, a 38-year-old United States-trained architect and a veteran of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

Mr Reboso, a registered Democrat and former aide to Gov. Reubin Askew, is no kin to Bebe Rebozo, President Nixon's Key Biscayne friend.

In the near future, Mr. Reboso said, hundreds of Government jobs at all levels will be filled by Cubans.

"I hope," the Commissioner added, "that before November, 1973, when I'll run for re-election, Miami will be officially designated a bilingual city."

In a larger sense, the appointment of

here as a recognition by local power brokers that for the purpose of racial balance there ought to be a "Cuban seat" on Miami's City Commission. The existence of a "black seat" and a Jewish seat" on different elective bodies has been taken for granted here for many years.

Influence by Votes

"Our aim now is to exercise influence through our voting strength," said Armand Lacasa, head of a civic organization called Cubans Unite for Betterment and New Opportunities and Services.

"We are the largest minority in Dade County. In a short time we have attained an economic power, and now we have to unite to attain political power," added Mr. Lacasa, who is one of the promoters of a voter registration drive among Cubans.

The refugees are also slowly if gingerly establishing working relations with other minorities: Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans and the blacks.

An alliance between the Cubans and the blacks in Dade County has been advocated by Max Lesnik, editor and owner of *Replica*, a Spanish-language weekly news magazine published here.

"Powerful local interests are afraid of it and are trying to thwart this alliance which could result in a political power base without parallel in the county," Mr. Lesnik added.

However, Cubans are far from being united themselves for political action. There are two bitterly quarreling Republican factions in Miami, and a group that supports the Democratic Presidential nominee, George McGovern.

One G.O.P. group is headed by Edgardo Buttari, national chairman of the Cuban-Americans for Nixon in 1968, and the other by Dr. Miguel Suarez, a young Miami lawyer.

The Cubans for McGovern Committee, whose chairman is 36-year-old Bay of Pigs veteran Francisco Gonzalez, has about 50 active members, many of them professionals, including college and university professors.

The exiles' transition from being totally Cuba-oriented to becoming American-Cubans has been long and difficult. The large-scale Cuban exodus to the United States began in 1960. But not until five years later did most of the refugees seem to realize that, with the government of Premier Fidel Castro firmly in power, they were here to stay.

For the next five years, they turned to economic pursuits, and many did remarkably well. But only about two years ago they began to articulate interest in local affairs accompanied by complaints of "taxation without representation."