

## *Cuba's New Beat*

Stephen Barber's breezy Cook's tour of contemporary Cuban affairs (November 20) was laced with the kind of inaccuracy, gossip, and superficial judgment which too often fill the accounts of Western correspondents. It is true that the Castro regime has in the past year moved rapidly towards institutionalization and shown signs of settling down to a better-organized, more business-like approach to its internal economic problems. But if Mr. Barber thinks that "the Bay of Pigs is only a dim memory," he ought to look around him a little more, read the Cuban press (still violently anti-Yankee and filled with admonishments to the people to stay on guard against the constant threat of US aggression), and talk to more Cubans.

Of course the sense of a national military emergency, with every able-bodied citizen out armed and drilling in some

militia unit, is largely a thing of the past. This is because the Soviet Union, in recompense for the affront to Cuba that was the Missile Crisis, has since then fully armed, equipped, and helped to train Cuba's armed forces into the biggest and best-prepared military establishment in Latin America. There is even one highly-equipped special force, called "Battalion 500," which is constantly on maneuvers in some part of the island, a sort of terrestrial version of the Strategic Air Command.

Nevertheless, during May and June when the Dominican crisis was at its height the entire island was on military alert, including the women. At the 26th of July celebration in Santa Clara this year, thousands went to the carnival with hats and fans which bore a picture of Fidel and the inscription, "If they want peace, there will be peace; but if

they want war, we are not afraid to give them war," a typical quote from a Castro speech. School children in Cuba still drill with real weapons and are taught how to fire them, after a fashion. Mr. Barber noticed that the 105mm anti-aircraft guns are gone from the Malecon (antiquated, clumsy to fire, and too exposed, they were taken away nearly two years ago); but had he lifted his head he would have seen that they have been replaced by four mobile anti-aircraft batteries of late Russian manufacture, manned day and night by a company of Cuban GIs in emplacements on the grounds of the Hotel Nacional, the famous old tourist watering-spot. . . .

Castro is not "holding back" technicians from leaving the country but merely requiring those in important or difficult jobs to wait until replacements are found and trained, which may take up to one year. But he has guaranteed that they, and doctors too, will be permitted to go under those conditions — scarcely an unreasonable position. And since when does any country allow men of draft age to depart in large numbers before they have served military service, the United States included? Mr. Barber says that early errors, such as that of "pressing headlong into industrialization," can now be freely admitted, implying that the lid on self-criticism has recently been lifted. But Castro and other officials have been publicly admitting this and other mistakes since 1963 at least. . . .

Every journalist who visits Cuba these days feels obliged to make a contribution to the gossip about the departure of Ché Guevara, and I will only say that Mr. Barber has nothing new to add. Too bad, because the mystery of "El Ché," that mercurial figure so intimately a part of the warp and woof of the Cuban revolution, is a complex and fascinating subject for analysis. The fact that Guevara's name is still high in public and official acclaim is not, as Barber claims, only possible because he is politically "dead" in Cuba, since his popularity and official recognition were just as great when he was Number Two man in the regime. Rather, it represents a painfully candid admission by everyone, from Castro on down, that the galvanizing normal force which Ché's character always generated to the revolution is a fundamental loss not likely to be replaced. To put it simply, it

shows how much they are missing him. I would also differ from Mr. Barber's opinion that Ché's departure has been responsible for a sharp reduction in the program of training rebel cadres from other Latin American countries in Cuban guerrilla war tactics. One may only speculate, but I feel that it was probably the other way around. That is, I believe that Ché and Fidel found themselves increasingly in philosophical disagreement on what programs Cuba should allow — industrialization *vs.* agriculturalization; moral incentive *vs.* material incentive for the workers; military support *vs.* political support to other revolutions — and that Ché, finding himself at ideological odds with his old comrade-in-arms, and realizing that he could neither modify his own position nor serve loyally when Fidel was following other courses, had only one decision left: to leave.

Finally, I think Mr. Barber is quite dangerously mistaken in his conclusion that Fidel Castro is an insincere Marxist-Leninist who is playing the game with Russia because, as he says, "he who pays the piper calls the tune." I cannot stress too strongly that what Barber (and others) see as the "improvised" quality of Fidel's Communism must be viewed not as a sign of insincerity but rather, on the contrary, as an indication of deep conviction and commitment to Marx and Lenin. It means that Cuba is not going to base itself slavishly on the model of any other Communist country, that it eschews adherence to any party line, even though the Soviet Union, which has been responsible for Cuba's economic and military survival, might prefer it so. Instead, Cuba's leaders are striving to evolve an original species of Communism tailored uniquely to Cuba's people's needs and aspirations.

Whether they can do it or not is a question only time can answer. Meanwhile, the Party is being organized on all levels and will probably hold its first congress at the end of next year. If the newly-appointed Central Committee includes but a handful of old Moscow party-liners and is comprised mainly of revolutionary Fidelistas whose theoretical grasp of Marxism is rudimentary, no matter; they know enough to be Communists, and they are all studying. And so are the youth who in not too many years will begin

replacing the old prerevolutionaries; they will know their Marxism well.

Barring an American invasion in the very near future, or a similar cataclysm, Communism in Cuba is there to stay. Mr. Barber's speculations to the contrary are simply wishful thinking.

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