

# Castro's



**FIDEL CASTRO ON THE MOUND**  
*Excellent control and fading opposition*



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# Cuba Today

All things are possible in Cuba under the Castro revolution, Cubans are told. Fidel, baseball pitcher, commander in chief and eccentric messiah, tells Cubans what they need, wish and think. And, against long odds, he has lasted six years. This is the story of Cuba as told by a reporter who recently spent three weeks on the island. Al Burt has been a frequent visitor to Cuba both before and after the Castro revolution. Here is the first of his running accounts of Cuba today.

BY AL BURT

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The keeper of a Havana museum was tracing the history of the Castro revolution. She flipped on a machine that lighted a huge map of Cuba in several colors.

"Now this," she said, as a recording of young voices began to play, "is a song that young teachers and students made up all by themselves about their work and the revolution."

The tune was "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

In Cuba, the revolution changed everything, even some of the facts.

"Battle Hymn of the Republic" becomes a joyous expression of revolutionary children; the reality of six years of sacrificial living becomes a spiral road to glory.

The revolution is a state religion, never conceded to be imperfect in concept, though sometime admitted to be defective in human performance.

**THE LEADER**, Fidel Cas-

tro, is a man of many faces, a folk god whose frailties have been developed into a personality cult, an instinctive rebel and individual who professes to follow a rigid political system that curbs individualism.

"Fidel is Fidel is Fidel," his aficionados say, and few more precise definitions are sought.

He is at once, to his disciples, a baseball pitcher and a commander in chief, a table tennis player and an agricultural expert, a roving fixer of all things, a humanly eccentric dictator garbed as a messiah, a man passing as a legend.

He speaks for all the people with one voice, a gifted orator who tells them what they need, wish and think.

His greatest accomplishment probably has been survival for six years against long odds and despite many mistakes. His greatest burden has been to convince the people that his success is also success for them.

**FACTS MUST** bend to promises. If the Cuban people are to achieve this success, they must overlook rationing of food and clothing, a hous-

ing shortage, a crippled transportation system, the overflowing prisons, and a regimented life in which the state peers even into homes and justifies it as a necessity for survival.

Here when you "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's," Fidel Castro gets it all, because there is a place for no other Caesar and no other God.

The multiple arms of the state extend into every phase of life and the control is nearly

absolute. Though dissatisfaction with an uncomfortable way of life is widespread, opposition appears dormant and apparently tends toward resignation.

Those who live here insist the government grows stronger each month, that it has demonstrated an ability to recognize certain areas of discontent and methodically to pacify or divert the people without loosening control.

**THERE IS** a steady drain of opposition out of the country, which contributes to the evidence of abandonment rather than a will to fight. There are shades and levels of opposition to the government, but many now appear silent. The estimation is that the majority will sit the fence and bend with the wind that blows strongest.

Observers here estimate the fanatical core of opposition to Castro is as low as 15 per cent and as high as 40 per cent.

Massive programs of diversion and propaganda mechanically ease tension and attempt to persuade the people that imperialists are responsible for their plight. It is an appeal based on the idea of Cubans fighting an outside threat.

The psychological campaign eventually penetrates even the most fanatical opponents of the government. Exiles are the target hit strongest. In newspapers, speeches, on television, there is a concerted effort to ridicule and discredit them.

An example of the effect on some came in the comment of a strongly anti-government Cuban here. "I would like to go to Miami. I have many friends there, but I would not go. I am afraid of what it might do to me, afraid I might also become one of those cackling geese."

**THE ROOM** for dissent here is small, and the location is bad—in one of the many prisons, in the mob of more than one thousand which clamors at the gates of the Mexican embassy (not the consulate) each morning for visas to leave the country, among

those who wait a year and more for space on a plane to Spain.

Dissent means jeopardy. There is a fringe area where non-believers exist silently, but the government is squeezing this in the hopes that it will gradually disappear.

Religion, for example, is tolerated as long as it carefully stays in the churches and out of political affairs. But to attend is an expression of dissent, and there are daily pressures of dissuasion.

Small private businesses exist, but they feel the squeeze because all goods must come from the government. Na-

tionalized businesses get more and better goods. All new doctors take a "voluntary" oath not to practice privately, and time thus will eliminate all but state medicine.

**THE PATTERN** reaches in all directions.

The revolution split the country like a civil war, dividing families, brother against brother, parent against child, in bitter political disputes that uprooted lives.

The rebuilding process here, from destruction wrought by the first confused years, mistakes, and a turning to new systems, captures youth above all.

The young are lured by in-depth programs of education,

sports, health, arts, all of which carry the moral pricetag of producing young Communists. These programs reach into areas never touched before, and accord privileges never known before.

The process caters to those who once had nothing or little, and to whom even small measures of progress draw enthusiastic reaction. These are directed by better trained and more professional persons, either dedicated to communism or enchanted by the idea and practice of rebellion.

The revolution exploits the racial issue, dwelling on U.S. faults and catering to color both for support at home and abroad, capitalizing on emotions easy to stir and the fact

that people of color are the majority in the world.

**IT IS AN** island of reward and punishment, all administered by the state, where to "volunteer" brings promises of the former and not to "volunteer" raises possibilities of the latter. This, therefore, is called freedom of choice.

When the government announced a long list of prizes, including refrigerators and trips to socialist countries, for volunteer canecutters, a wry comment began making the rounds here as a joke.

"The government has made a big mistake with those prizes," the comment goes. "If it offered a trip to Miami, all that cane would be cut in one month."



The steady drain of Castro's opposition out of Cuba continues, as evidenced by this plane-load of refugees arriving in Miami.