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### Lay Those Rifles Down, Boys

Everybody ought to have a gun, Fidel Castro maintained—until lately. At a 1960 rally in Havana, he explained that “This is how democracy works: it gives rifles to farmers, to students, to women, to Negroes, to the poor, and to every citizen who is ready to defend a just cause.” Weapons ranging from Czech submachine guns to Belgian FN automatic rifles were handed out to 50,000 soldiers, 400,000 militiamen, 100,000 members of the factory-guarding popular defense force, and to many men, women and children in Cuba’s 1,000,000-strong “neighborhood vigilance committees.” Now Castro no longer wants all those guns in the hands of the people. For three weeks, Radio Havana has been warning: “All citizens must turn in their combat weapons.” Civilians must take arms to police stations, soldiers to military headquarters.

The measure may be only in the interest of public safety. *Olive Green*, the Cuban army magazine, has complained that Cubans tote around lethal automatic weapons “as if they were adornments,” and there has been an appalling number of cases of civilians shooting one another with military firearms. Radio Havana’s explanation was somewhat contradictory: 1) the guns were in bad shape anyway, and 2) the “struggle against our enemies requires a rigorous control of all combat weapons.”

Miami Castro watchers speculated that he was so shaken by the overthrow of his Algerian counterpart, Ben Bella, that he doubts his own popular support. In any case, there was a touch of urgency about the new policy that suggested serious concern. Failure to turn in military weapons by Sept. 1, warned Radio Havana, would be punished not by criminal courts but by the dreaded Revolutionary Tribunals—those kangaroo courts that have already sentenced to death at least 1,100 Cubans since Castro took over in 1959.