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# Fidel Purging Old Reds?

By Don Bohning

**MIAMI (CDN)** — The rapid shuffle with which Cuban dictator Fidel Castro dealt old guard Communist Carlos Rafael Rodriguez out of the island's top agricultural post and himself in still has Cuban specialists sifting its considerable significance.

Castro's announcement at a special press conference that he was taking back control of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) came three years to the day he had relinquished the post to Rodriguez.

The sudden switch in the ministerial level position is seen as probably the most important governmental change in Cuba since another old guard Communist, Anibal Escalante, was purged March 26, 1962.

**REPLACEMENT** of Rodriguez is viewed by Cuban specialists as another indication of the chaotic condition of the island's agriculture and the continuation of a power struggle within the government between the old and new Communists.

The goateed, 51-year-old Rodriguez is among the top old guard Cuban Communist leaders and ranked seventh in the Castro regime hierarchy. His removal is a severe blow to both the prestige and

influence of the veteran Reds.

A Communist since 1932, Rodriguez had held cabinet rank under Fulgencio Batista in 1944 during the period in which the Communists cooperated with the former dictator.

**HE LATER** reportedly worked out a secret agreement with Castro in the Sier-



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Carlos R.

Rodriguez  
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ra Maestra in September, 1958, which brought Communist Party support to Castro's July 26 movement.

After Castro's rise to power, Rodriguez played a prominent part in the 1960 Communist takeover of the University of Havana.

As dean of the university School of Economic he was one of an inner circle that planned Cuba's 1960-62 transformation from a capitalist to a socialist economy.

**CUBAN** specialists say there have been indications of a weakening in Rodriguez' position since the trial last March of Marcos Rodriguez Alfonso, another old guard party member.

Rodriguez Alfonso was convicted of betraying four students to Batista police in 1957. He was executed.

Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was not directly involved in the case although he was called as a witness and denied that Marcos Rodriguez Alfonso was a cousin, as had been rumored in Cuba.

Since that time, sources

here note, Castro has taken a more active hand in agricultural matters, by-passing Rodriguez in affairs that directly concerned him.

**LAST JULY** a sugar ministry was created, diminishing the INRA minister-president's stature even more.

Finally, the veteran Red was apparently as unsuccessful in his two late 1964 visits to the Kremlin to negotiate a 1965 commercial treaty (just signed in Moscow) between the two countries as he had been with his agricultural policies.

Castro hinted at the direct cause of Rodriguez' removal from the INRA post when he said that "Although we have favorable conditions (for the development of Cuban agriculture) it is not enough that they exist; it is necessary to put them into action to the maximum."

The implication was that Rodriguez was not capable of inspiring greater agricultural effort. "That is the principal reason for my presence in INRA," Castro added.

**IT WAS** announced publicly that the change had come at Rodriguez' request and that he would remain in the cabinet as a minister without portfolio in charge of "the study of numerous problems of the national economy which the party and the government have decided to undertake."

Other officials of the Castro government already have been affected by Rodriguez' dismissal, notably his right hand man, Severo Aguirre Cristo, another old guard party member.

Only other old guard party member remaining in the cabinet is Manuel Luzardo Garcia, chief of the internal trade ministry, considered a second post.