

Castro's Snoopers Sniff Peril

CDN BY AL BURT
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HAVANA — Late one evening in a block near downtown Havana, an exciting and uncommon smell stirred the interests of the neighbors. Someone was roasting a pig.

Among those who wrinkled their noses in appreciation was the block chief of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR).

"But I did not report him," the chief said. "If that's the way he wants it, OK. One day he will get caught and spend three years in jail."

Roast pig, a Cuban favorite, has all but disappeared in rationed Cuba.

But this man had risked prison for a pig. He drove to the country, bought the pig on the black market and smuggled the meat back to his home in the city.

This man now lives at the whim of the CDR chief, who has knowledge that can jail him.

FROM ONE end of Cuba

to the other, divided into blocks, zones, sections, districts and provinces, the defense committees watch their neighbors and each other.

They watch as people come and go from their houses, investigate unusual packages, note visitors, carefully listen for anti-government remarks and detect lack of revolutionary spirit, and categorize their neighbors as "revolutionary" or gusano (literally worm, the name is applied to all opposed to Castro).

If a crisis occurs, those labeled gusano are jailed — "temporarily detained," they say — as a precautionary measure.

The committees, backed by Cuba's powerful military, are the core of the island's defense against an attack from within. When combined with the rationing system, the diminishing means of private transportation, scarce housing administered by the government and the fact that nearly everyone works for the government in one fashion or another, the CDR is an effective instrument of control.

OFFICIALS cite the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, in April, 1961, as the CDR's greatest achievement. Although committees had not one-tenth the strength they have now, a roundup of suspected gusanos put between 150,000 and 200,000 persons into public buildings temporarily converted into prisons.

The roundup effectively throttled any internal resistance.