

Fidel a 'False Prophet'?

Latins No Longer See Magic in Castro Name

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MEXICO CITY—Is Fidel Castro becoming the forgotten man of Latin America?

In terms of the popular enthusiasm his name evoked only two or three years ago, the answer could well be "yes."

To the oppressed masses of Latin America, whatever magic the Castro name once bore has been largely dissipated.

It has also lost much of its glamor among students, labor unions, intellectuals of all varieties, newsmen, and others who saw in "Fidelismo" the great wave of the future.

DURING a recent assignment in South America, it struck me forcibly how little people in various walks of life had to say voluntarily about

the Cuban Red leader. It was only when pressed that they reluctantly discussed Castro.

The same thing is largely true here in Mexico, where Castro adherents were always far noisier than numerous. Today they seldom shout, and presumably are fewer.

What has happened to Castro's appeal?

In many conversations in South America and Mexico, I have heard many answers.

THEY vary from individual to individual, from group to group, and they reflect different degrees of disillusionment, disgust and dismay. In many cases, enchantment has turned to hostility—even among Fidel's Communist comrades.

"I don't know why Russia continues to put up with him," said a Moscow-oriented Communist in Buenos Aires. "He defied the party on the nuclear test ban and now he's trying to play (Red) China off against Russia. It's time he was subjected to some discipline from the Kremlin."

Outside the Communist fold, a relatively small one in Latin America, the comment is broader.

Take the case of the young Uruguayan mother, an intellectual born and married to wealth who had espoused many leftist causes because she felt they offered the only means of social justice in Latin America:

"When Fidel rose to power, I said to myself, 'This is it, the synthetic revolution that will sweep through the rest of the Americas in no time at all. It can't miss.'

"BUT IT did miss, partly

because he got himself involved so deeply in communism — to the extent that today he thinks he can arbitrate between Russia and Red China. What's arbitrating between the warring Communist camps got to do with the social and economic betterment of the poor people of Cuba?"

At a coffee counter in Lima (Peru) International Airport, a liberal lawyer who had been an early admirer of Castro said:

"You can't give the people guns instead of butter and call it a social revolution of the type we need in so many Latin American countries. But that's

what Fidel has done under communism. What true liberal could go along with that approach?"

A **SMALL** truck gardener on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile, professed to have once liked Castro because of his promise of land reform.

"I am not a smart or a learned man," he said. "I am a poor farmer who would like to have more land of my own. So when Fidel came on the stage, I said, 'This is the best thing that can happen to me and my kind.' But I know today how little Fidel has done to redistribute land in Cuba among the peasant farmers.

"It isn't that I believe everything I read in the capitalist press here in Chile — because I don't. But when Fidel says in his own words, and it is printed in the press, how much more the Cuban people must suffer before reaching the goals he promised six years ago, I say to myself, 'What a liar that

man has turned out to be,' and I am reminded of what the Bible has to say about not putting your faith in false prophets."

TAKING the opposite view was the young, militant pro-Peking Communist in Uruguay who said:

"I'm for Fidel or anybody else who will stand for action. The only real action that Fidel is sponsoring is in Venezuela, Colombia and Guatemala. But that won't amount to a great deal until Fidel throws in his lot completely with China . . .

An economics professor in Chile pointed out:

"Since Fidel's heyday, some new leaders have come up in Latin America who are closer to our own way of life and who are at the same time reform-minded. I mean men like our own President (Eduardo) Frei and (President Fernando) Belaunde (Terry) in Peru.

Of course, Castro is not wholly without friends, admirers and supporters, especially among the guerrillas he is training or has trained for "national liberation" movements in Venezuela and other countries.

But the broad popular following he once enjoyed in Latin America is gone—at least for the present, and quite possible forever.