

THE HEMISPHERE



OUTBOUND CUBANS LINING UP AT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE IN HAVANA
Flowers, shrubs, lobster, steak—but leave everything behind.

CUBA

Gusanos' Paradise

The queue stretched on for blocks outside the Cuban Ministry of Justice in downtown Havana—people of all ages and descriptions seeking birth certificates, marriage licenses, exit permits, any document that would enable them to leave their Communist homeland. Other hopeful lines formed at the Interior Ministry, at the former U.S. embassy, now administered by a small Swiss staff, and at cable offices, where Cubans by the thousands were either sending word to friends and relatives in Miami or awaiting word back.

Washington was waiting, too—for a yes or no from Fidel Castro to President Johnson's speech offering a haven to any and all Cubans who want to get out. At 2 a.m. one morning last week, a telephone call came into the State Department from the Swiss in Havana. Castro, who had made the original refugee suggestion himself (TIME cover, Oct. 8), was now willing to negotiate a formula for the evacuation.

The dictator agreed that top priority should go to refugees who have immediate relatives in the U.S. He also accepted "in principle" the suggestion that both Havana and Washington discourage any ragtag exodus of Cubans outside the framework of a formal U.S.-Cuban agreement, although up to now Castro did not seem to care how they got across. One point Castro avoided was whether he would give his 50,000 political prisoners "second priority" as the U.S. suggested. Nor did he reply to the U.S. offer of air or sea transportation or go into the matter of what ports to use, aside from the small village of Camarioca, or whether the International Red Cross could help the refugees on the Cuban end of the line.

Power of Persuasion. If and when Havana and Washington agree on a formula, the U.S. hopes to begin shuttling refugees from Cuba within ten days. Until then, the U.S. is doing its

best to keep Cuban exiles from grabbing every little outboard and runabout in Florida and dashing across the stormy, shark-infested Straits of Florida on rescue missions. All last week a dozen Coast Guard helicopters and patrol boats prowled the area with orders to use "every means of persuasion" to keep the exiles from taking things into their own hands. The U.S. even threatened them with civil or criminal prosecution (up to \$2,000 fine and five years in jail), if they brought in "undocumented aliens." But the U.S. has not yet had the heart to force anyone back or take legal action.

Actually, by week's end only a few boats—23 in all, carrying some 495 refugees—had put into Florida since Castro first opened the door two weeks before. Most of them were their own best proof of the need for a well-organized evacuation plan. After gusty squalls whipped the Straits last week, the U.S. Coast Guard picked up half a dozen floundering exile craft with scores aboard.

A Castro Circus. Those returning from Cuba told stories of a typical Castro Circus at Camarioca, the "international port" that Castro created 65 miles east of Havana for use by refugees. Among the first U.S. newsmen to visit was TIME Correspondent Richard Duncan. The port's main feature is a fenced-off compound sprawling across some four acres along the narrow Camarioca River. At the dock, an "immigration official" introduced himself ("just call me Roberto") and motioned toward 300 Cubans milling around across the river. "When a boat arrives for them," he said, "we will notify them and admit them here for processing." The people waited late into the night, visible only by the glow of their cigarettes.

The Camarioca compound proved to be a sort of Cuban Potemkin village. The government was working around the clock to landscape the area with flowers and shrubs, build cottages, ad-

ministration buildings and new dock facilities. For the refugees inside, there was free lodging and three meals a day, the kind of meals Cubans only dream about—chicken, lobster, steak. "I'm astonished," said one exile, who was returning for his brother. "They gave me free gasoline for my boat and even fixed my water pump free."

Inventories & G-2. What didn't show on the surface was the way the refugees were treated before they got to Camarioca, the *gusanos'* (worms') paradise, as Castroites contemptuously call it. Refugee Manuel Candelaria, his wife and parents lost their home in Havana, their store and an apartment building they owned. "Somebody came to the house last week and said a boat was coming for us," said Manuel's wife Zoraida. "They inventoried everything. Then a few nights later at 2 a.m., they came and said our boat had come and we must go. We had to leave everything." Others were too nervous to talk. "The G-2 is everywhere," whispered one Cuban.

The whole refugee affair—Camarioca, the food, the smiling courtesy—seems an attempt to polish Castro's tarnished image, as Moscow has been urging. There is even some suspicion that Castro may hope to use the refugees as an opening gambit in a campaign to establish a sort of Moscow-style peaceful coexistence with the U.S. But that was hardly borne out by Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa's haranguing U.N. speech last week, in which he announced plans for an Afro-Asian-Latin American conference in Havana next January to discuss joint action against "Yanqui Imperialism."

Whatever the game is, the U.S. is willing to indulge the bearded dictator for the time being. Miami's Cuban Refugee Emergency Center has already passed out 70,000 forms to exiles who hope to get relatives off the island. Such figures bring groans from Miami civic officials, who already have their hands full trying to assimilate 100,000 of the

...for missing days drained the patience.

300,000 exiles living in the U.S. But there is no choice. As one housewife confided in Camarioca: "I'm afraid of the boat ride, but I'll leave any way I can. I'm desperate. I'll go if I have to walk."