

CUBA

Excalibur interviewed a Canadian woman who has lived the last few years in Cuba. All the opinions and facts printed here are hers, and not Excalibur's.

Not that many people speak enthusiastically about Cuba. Her words contained an excitement as she spoke of her life in the fastly developing Cuba. The lean to houses that existed with such monotonous regularity before the Revolution are quickly disappearing. Community houses take their place, all of which are free for the poor people of the land.

Rationing exists. You are allowed two pairs of shoes a year. Eggs, milk, rice, beans, are rationed. Chicken and fish are not. You are allowed $\frac{3}{4}$ lbs. of meat per week per person. I asked if one did not feel limited under conditions such as these. I was told that this feeling of confinement does not come into play when one realizes what the conditions were like before the Revolution. Everybody eats now. There is no starvation. Private enterprise is gone, save for the small one man operations. They have been bought by the Castro government, and the former owners can get up to \$600.00 a month for the rest of their lives in payment for their businesses.

The only industry Cuba had ten years ago was the sugar industry. This was only in the exporting of raw sugar. They would then have to buy back from America the processed sugar, and the larger profits were made by you know who. This has been stopped. Cuba now processes its own.

It seems strange that this island never had a fishing industry, but that has been the case until now. This trade has grown tremendously in the last few years. What has also come from the ocean, against all American geologists' theories, is oil. This is very important for Cuba and the constructions needed to get this oil out of the sea have been started.

It is the upper middle class that has suffered since the Revolution. One cannot get a car with great ease, but for the majority of the populace it has been a change for the better. For every four blocks in the city, there is a clinic. There are heavy building projects under way to relieve the tight housing situation. Where before there was a 70 illiteracy rate, there is now compulsory education to grade six. A child gets free clothes, food, shoes from grade seven upwards, and with the poorer cases, the child may even get a small allowance.

Besides the compulsory 45 days per year that each member of the community must volunteer for field work, there are also an

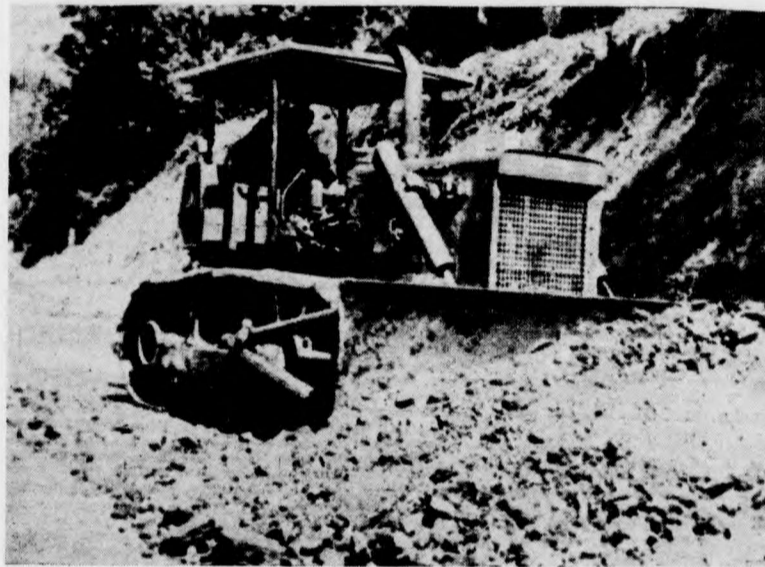


They've fought...

additional two years in which the young Cuban must work to further his country's economic situation. On the Isle of Pines, now re-named the Isle of Youth, the average age is 23 or 24. It is directed and run by them, and it is dedicated to the project of building up a citric fruit industry. They also work on dams, develop fertilizers, and generally form an ideal work community with its object, the future stability of the Cuban economy, the Cuban way of life. Both sexes work together, from all walks of life. The scholarship student works with the labourer. Yet not once does the girl lose her prestige. Her femininity is not lost during the task of the day.

There is virtually no dope smoked, swallowed or injected by Cuban kids. Booze is monstrously difficult to get anyways, and last March, Castro closed all the bars and night clubs because of their negative influences on the young people. The "rebel without a cause" type of adolescent does not exist, because of course a cause does exist. It is the mutual desire to build a better future that discourages wasted energies.

The Cuban people have a tre-



...and now they build.

mendous appetite for any type of cultural involvement. Everyone has money, even if it may not be that much by our standards, but then concerts and operas are free. Cuba gets the ballet from England, and the top price may be 75 cts. or 50 cts. The Moscow Circus for example cost 75 cents for admission. Books are inexpensive, and when a book shop is packed, it can very easily be empty within a short space of time.

Apart from other Communist countries, there is a great freedom of artistic expression in Cuba. Even Czechoslovakia didn't show the film Doctor Zhivago, which Cuba did. No artist is persecuted in the primary sense of the word. He is allowed to present his work, but if critics believe that he does not reflect the revolutionary tendency of the country, then he is not considered a mature and great artist. The people then look upon him as a person who has not integrated into the proper feeling of the country. The "Casa de Cultura" will say that a certain artist has to integrate, and there will develop social pressures on him to do so. His friends and colleagues will persuade him to follow the proper path.

Cuba had a Cultural Congress where every country was represented. It included many young people and one of the issues raised was the fundamental question, "What is art?" A group from Paris executed a collective mural on the street. Of major concern was the question of how the revolution is reflected in the arts. What is the position of culture in the new revolution?

There is a progressive move-

After his capture, the two priests who hid him were expelled from the island and he was placed before the people.

One of Castro's commandante's was discovered to be plotting against him, after having accepted a bribe from the C.I.A. for a fantastic amount of money, and was also put on public trial. But Castro made a speech on his behalf, emphasizing his work during the Revolution and that he was unduly tempted by the C.I.A., and so his life was spared. He is now working on a farm and may soon be released.

Fidel Castro himself is somewhat of a slob, whose beard constantly needs trimming and whose shirt is usually supporting the ashes of his cigars. He is a playful chap, a charmer, yet if you're making an idiot of yourself, he'd let you know. He was raised by Jesuits, and has kept a good relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in the country. He is seen to be a dedicated man, who the United States was unable to bribe after his takeover ten years ago. He has always been Marxist, regardless of what he claimed previously. In 1953 he was on trial for his revolutionary tactics, and in his speech, "History Will Absolve Me", his socialist beliefs were not in the political language in which they would normally have been dressed, and he did not realize their Marxist inclinations until later.

Cuba has made an attempt at a better future. It has the advantage, regardless of what it tries, that it can start fresh, with proven solutions for its many problems. It doesn't have to build over a weak base, because there has never been anything before, and it can commence with new alternatives to its diverse needs. At times mistakes are made, often costly ones, but that's a part of growing up. Its bureaucracy has not been eliminated. In government offices, red tape abounds, and the South American temperament of putting things off till the next day still persists. And so Cuba stands, with its mixture of answers for ages of distress.

ment to aid the physically handicapped. The blind and the deaf are taught to be part of the community; they are brought into society, and with the help of good technicians they integrate successfully into the stream of development. There are no prisons, except for hardened criminals. Men work on farms during the week, but may go home to their families on the weekend. The families are either moved to the vicinity of the farm, or the man is placed on a farm near his home. Some can get an education on these farms and are taught to adjust more successfully to their environment. One detention centre even had a fine theatre group which toured the country. The centres compete with each other in sports, the most favourite of which is baseball.

Trials are usually public, and broadcast on radio and television. One trial that got a big play was of a man who tried to hijack a plane from Cuba to Miami. (Yeah, it's a popular game there too). The pilot landed in Havana rather than Miami, and was subsequently shot by the hijacker. He escaped and sought sanctuary in a Roman Catholic Church.