

cuba



—Cuban gov't photo

DR. FIDEL CASTRO SPEAKS TO MOB ... "we are the first free territory of the Americas"

Irene McRae, arts 3, is the arts representative on students' council.

Last spring the Cuban government asked the Canadian Union of Students to select twenty Canadian students to come to Cuba as guests of the Cuban government "to see for themselves the nature and results of the Cuban revolution".

Irene was the only applicant from the prairie provinces selected to make the trip.

The following article contains the highlight impressions of her trip.

By IRENE McRAE

Cuba, a luxurious green island resting in the turquoise Caribbean has enchanted wanderers since Columbus.

Cuba, the island of dictators and blood, and the Bay of Pigs, and rum, and the Spanish and the Norte Americanos, and gambling cassinos and poverty stricken people.

Cuba, the idyllic paradise turned sour.

Cuba, the land where the Communist revolution is seeking to bring heaven to earth once more.

Mexican officials make travel to Cuba difficult. Passports are taken at the airport and stamped with the country of destination. In most nations passports are only checked as one enters a country, not at departure. Mexican officials then take pictures of everyone who goes to Cuba. It is rumoured these pictures find their way to the United States border, where American immigration officials question those who have visited Cuba.

We were guests of the Cuban government and received special treatment during the trip. Our hosts and guides were members of the Instituto Cubano de Ami-

stand Con Los Pueblos (Cuban Institute for Friendship with all the Peoples).

Home for the next few weeks was the Habana Libre—formerly the Havana Hilton.

Shortly after our arrival, we attended our first official celebration on the island. July 26 commemorates the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada garrison.

THOUSANDS LISTEN

Fidel Castro spoke to the thousands of Cubans who waited for hours in blazing sun at Havana's Revolution Square. His speech lasted nearly four hours.

"The idea of a revolution against the army, against the armed forces, against the system, seemed an absurd idea to many; it seemed an insane idea to all the leading bourgeois politicians of this country.

"To them besides, a revolution against all those forces practically without a single arms depot; even more not only without a cent to buy weapons, those who might have believed in it were very few.

"Only men of the people, men from the most humble sectors of the people, honest men—without personal ambition, could have that faith to believe in the possibility of carrying out a struggle in such difficult conditions, because you can't make a revolution against the army, and second you can't maintain a government against the opposition of the U.S. government.

"Today we can say: You see, you see, we were right! Now you see that a revolution can be made against the army and more important still: Now you see how a revolution could succeed against the most open hostility of Yankee imperialism!

SAME CONVICTIONS

"This is why we believe that many others, if they had the same convictions, could have done as well as we did or better.

"There is no better teacher of the masses than the Revolution itself."

Castro stressed that other re-

volutionary fighters in Latin America should rise.

He supported the Vietnamese. We will send volunteers if they are requested, he said.

The question of Viet Nam is a current issue in Cuba. Similar descriptions to those read at home are given of the conflict—only the roles of the good and bad guys are reversed.

There is an extremely anti-American sentiment in the country, but Canadians have a great deal of respect and prestige. Canada and Mexico are the only American nations who have not broken diplomatic relations with Cuba.

NON CANADINENSE

Canadians sell medicine and breeding cattle to the Cubans.

As the Russians and Czechs are the major caucasions found in

Cuba, we were often recognized as foreigners and asked if we come from these countries.

When we proudly answered, "non, canadense", smiles were frequent. Most of the common people were extremely hospitable throughout the visit.

The Cuban Revolution began July 26, 1953 when Castro and a group of young revolutionaries assaulted the Moncada Barracks, an army fortress in Santiago de Cuba. Many of the group were captured.

Castro pleaded his own defence, in a famous address, "History Will Absolve Me."

Castro fled to Mexico, organized his revolutionaries and continued to fight.

Finally, on January 1, 1959, Batista fled to the United States. Castro took over the government in a few weeks.

At the time, Castro was not a Communist, but he was a radical advocating sweeping reforms in the redistribution of land and social welfare. Both of these reforms have been effected to a large degree.

The reforms conflicted with American business interests and it would have taken outstanding statemanship on the part of both Cuba and the United States to maintain good relations without a conflict.

DIPLOMACY FAILED

But diplomacy failed and Cuban-American relations deteriorated steadily until 1960, when the United States suspended all purchases of Cuban sugar (the island's major product) and boycotted the petrol companies.

The Soviet Union stepped in and bought most of the sugar crop. Continual negative American pressure and Soviet encouragement finally made Castro announce the socialist nature of the Revolution

in 1961 and adopt the name "Communist Party of Cuba" in 1965.

Cuban-American relations reached a climax with the attempted Bay of Pigs invasion made possible by American aid in the spring of 1961. Another clash occurred in October 1962 when American ships blockaded the shipment of missiles from the U.S.S.R.

There have been no significant attempts by Cuban refugees in the United States to reinstate the island, but Cuba stands ready to repulse any attacks.

FEMALE MILITIA

The refugees have made frequent attempts at sabotage and now every entrance to a building is guarded by a member of the militia, often a woman. Most of the revolutionaries are young.

The government has been working to eliminate the problems

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sheila ballard

and

helene chomiak

which existed under Batista's dictatorship.

An intensive program to eliminate illiteracy was launched in 1961. Formal education was suspended that year and most of the students went to the rural areas to teach the peasants to read and write.

One of the older ICAP guides told me about his twelve-year-old son, who came home one day saying he was going to the mountains to teach people to read and write. The guide said that although he and his wife were anxious, for this was a large responsibility for such a young child, they did not stop him because this was the normal



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CUBAN SOLDIERS WITH RIFLES, PART OF GYMNASIC DISPLAY ... message reads 'Vietnam is the cemetery of imperialism'