

was crowded with earnest-looking Communist technicians and somewhat less-earnest but more lecherous-looking Cubans. The paint was peeling here and there and had been covered up with encouraging Communist slogans such as "Long live the death of imperialism!" One elevator was kaput, and the two elevator men were now running the other one together and said there was not a hope of getting the first one going until the Yanquis ended their blockade. Similar troubles beset the water pumps and try as they might the management couldn't seem to get more than nine inches of water into the rooftop swimming pool.

But the biggest surprise awaited me next morning when I gave up seriously trying room service and came down for breakfast. "Well you're in luck", said the waiter cheerfully, "I can let you have some beets with your red beans and rice". I thought this was a new and interesting idea for breakfast, until I was a little late for lunch and missed out on the beets, but got the rice and beans, and then was more than ten minutes late for dinner and missed the beans as well, and got nothing but a plate of rice. It probably would have been good for me if I'd had all my meals in the hotel restaurant, but I found out there were others about which are given more variety of food, to pass out at incredible prices to soak up the extra purchasing power now that all luxuries have vanished from the official market. In particular there's one restaurant thirty floors up or so in a huge apartment building, called La Torre, which is reserved for diplomatic staff and other people who might go home if they lost weight, where one can still get a meal almost the equal of yesteryear's if one has ten or fifteen dollars to spare. I even took six guests there once and watching my centavos managed to get by with a bill for \$92, plus tip.

Diplomats have other privileges to help them preserve their "wastelines"; too — for example, we are allowed to import our own food, and when Gaby Warren, our new Third Secretary, arrived, he brought with him what looked like a grocery shop he'd won in a crap game, some \$800 worth of red-blooded Canadian food. I moved in with Gaby...

Communications are erratic in Cuba, and one of my more agreeable jobs there was to look up Canadians in odd places to make sure they were all right and see if there was anything we could do to help them. Fortunately, although the Cubans limit journalists to the city of Havana itself, they haven't yet restricted the journeys of Embassy people, and I was able to travel from one end of the island to the other without much danger...

Cubans as a rule are the friendliest and most gregarious of characters. The main difficulties travelling were once again more likely to be food and lodging. A really bad drought, something I for one had never associated with Cuba, hit the island this year and water supplies all over the country went dry. Most city houses were limited to a bucket of water a day from a truck which might or might not arrive. Hotels in provincial towns, if they'd accept you at all, would ration you to a tumbler of water a day for everything, including plumbing. But since most hotels had long since been nationalised there wasn't much profit in an extra guest for the hotelkeeper anyway, so like as not they'd tell you they were simply full up. If some kind-hearted Cuban along the way didn't take you in, you spent the night in the car, which is, however, no great hardship in so warm a country. I recall one evening finding a quiet field in the country and going to sleep stretched out on the front seat of the car with my legs stuck out in space. I'd no sooner dozed off that I was awakened by what at first I thought was someone giving me a hot-foot. It turned out to be only a cow licking the soles of my feet, presumably for the salt. I would have liked to let her continue, since it was the first wash they'd had in days, but her tongue was about as caressing as sandpaper...

This letter is fast approaching perpetuum mobile: Cuba deserves thirty pages more of more professional reportage to do it justice. But if a bill-collector should ask you, I'd better bring you up-to-date: I was ushered to the Cuban door towards the end of July, spent a brief interlude in Mexico and another in B.C., and arrived in Ottawa in August to take up the strands of the missing Japan desk officer...

George Cowley