



Cuba today: A 6-story billboard of Che marks the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana.

Anger toward U. S. lingers

Cuba—the past is still present

By William Bowe

FOR THOSE few Americans invited to Cuba these days for not-so-subtle propagandizing, getting there is not necessarily half the fun. The Cubana Airlines DC-8 that was to take me from Kingston, Jamaica, to Havana was blown up, apparently by Cuban exiles, shortly before I was to board it. Seventy-three lives were lost.

The incident says a lot about the changes in Cuba since the late 1940s and 1950s when Mafia-financed gambling casinos in Havana lured thousands of American tourists to the first overseas investment of the American underworld.

The revolution Fidel Castro led in 1959 did away with both the casinos and the tourists. It focused instead on defending the revolution against internal enemies ["gusanos" or worms] and foreign opponents [Cuban exiles and the CIA].

WHILE I was prepared for government officials to complain about the effects of the American economic embargo of Cuba, I was not prepared for the bitter and often emotional outbursts I encountered from Cubans of all walks of life concerning the CIA. The Cubans I talked to were convinced that the CIA had blown up the airliner and was still involved in an attempt to crush the revolution through support of Cuban exile terrorist activities.

As one justice on the Cuban Supreme Court put it, "Of course, the CIA was behind the crash. You don't think you can buy explosives in a hardware store, do you?"

The explosion that sent 73 travelers to their watery graves produced shock waves in Cuba that echoed back over the last 17 years—to the CIA-supported invasion at the Bay of Pigs and to the missile crisis that tested John Kennedy. Cubans are simply not prepared to believe that the CIA has been out of the business of financing and directing Cuban exile activity for over a decade.

The past is still present in Cuba. When congressional investigations last year revealed that the CIA had enlisted the assistance of the Mafia to assassinate Castro, Americans cringed at what the government had done in our name. For the Cubans, it wasn't a question of bureaucratic excess. It was a question of the U. S. government attempting to murder "Fidel," the symbolic focal

point of all Cuban society.

Needless to say, Castro himself and the government-controlled press find it in their interest to raise the specter of a current external threat from the U. S. People can be motivated that way and it draws attention away from the regime's shortcomings. Crocodile tears are a likelihood on the part of many officials. But the issue runs deeper.

Cecilia Argudin, a 29-year-old black woman who is head of the U. S. Desk of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, talked about the issue in the most human terms possible. She tearfully read from the newspaper the names and ages of the young members of the Cuban fencing team who had died in the crash. "You must understand how our people feel about this. I myself lost a brother at the Bay of Pigs."

Before Castro announced he was abrogating the anti-hijacking treaty with the United States, he said he could feel a "growing indignation" among the Cuban people over the sabotage. Cynical had rips for the CIA or not, much of the indignation and anger I heard was real.

Thus, when Jimmy Carter's foreign policy advisers turn their attention to whether there should be a change in U. S. policy toward Cuba, they will have to consider the human element in the equation, as well as political and economic considerations.

U. S. POLICY was first based on the idea that hurting Cuba economically would temper Cuba's politics. But now it is doubtful that another decade of the embargo would be as fruitful in achieving our political goals as shifting to a policy of detente.

First, the embargo is leaking like a sieve. From August 1975 to July 1976, Cuba did about \$300 million worth of business with foreign subsidiaries of U. S. firms. While Havana still looks like a scene from "American Graffiti," with its vintage '50s Buicks and DeSotos, there are now a scattering of new Fords and Chevrolets manufactured, not in Detroit, but in Argentina. Cuba has established commercial relations with 21 countries and 44 per cent of this trade is with capitalist nations, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain, Brazil, and Japan.

The Cubans want to end the embargo because it acts as a drag on their economy. It makes certain imported goods expensive and hard to get, and increases freight charges enormously. It is clear, however, that the embargo no longer threatens the revolution's exist-



Election biographies on display.

ence, if in fact it ever did. If the U. S. doesn't do business with Cuba, others will.

Second, a case might be made that present U. S. policy is a failure because when the chips are down it doesn't produce the political result we would like to see. Whatever leverage the embargo produces was not sufficient to prevent introduction of more than 10,000 combat troops into the Angolan civil war. It can also be argued that the policy has the further effect of keeping Cuba totally dependent on the largesse of the Soviet Union. Cuba barter its sugar at favorable prices to the Soviet Union for all of its oil imports.

While Cuban educators and foreign trade specialists I talked to were adamant in proclaiming Cuba's independence from the Soviet Union, a visitor still comes away with the feeling that, just as during the 1962 missile crisis, when Moscow says "Jump," Havana says "How high?"

Third, an easing of trade barriers between the U. S. and Cuba would mean jobs for American workers and farmers and profits for American business. Cuba is a logical market for American grain, foodstuffs, medical and hospital supplies, fertilizers and pesticides, among other things. The U. S. in turn is a logical marketplace for Cuban tobacco, nickel, and sugar. Two Chicago area companies recently sent executives to Cuba to explore possible markets once relations are re-established. The motive wasn't altruism, it was profits.

Finally, there are hints that an end to the embargo would ameliorate Cuba's strident anti-U. S. diplomacy. Detente with Cuba would likely follow the pattern of detente with the Soviet Union. Cuba and the U. S. will hardly become soulmates, but Cuba may evolve into a more prudent, cautious, and respectful adversary.

One quid pro quo for an end to the embargo would clearly be an opening of discussions on the \$1.6 billion in U. S. claims for expropriated property. I heard the party line on this point mouthed by the head of Cuba's Chamber of Commerce. "Fidel has said that negotiations can start to deal with all of the trouble between the United States and Cuba, but such negotiations must be carried out upon an equal and not superior basis." (Read: "You've got to end the embargo first.")

Needless to say, present U. S. policy has not led to payment of the first dollar of compensation for expropriated property.

There also are signs that Cuba may become tired of beating the dead horse of independence for Puerto Rico. It's hard to imagine this continuing to be a major issue in Havana when it has never been a major issue in San Juan. Supporters of independence received less than 5 per cent of the vote in Puerto Rico in recent elections.

Angola is a different matter. The Cuban expeditionary force is ideologically and physically tied down, waging an interethnic African conflict. One answer here would be to let them stew in their own juices, just as the U. S. did in Viet Nam. Realistically, however, any warming of relations may finally hinge on Cuban policy in Africa.

THE U. S. HAS now gone without diplomatic relations with Cuba for about as long as it did with the Soviet Union after its revolution. Change may be in the offing. In the second presidential debate, Jimmy Carter [speaking of the Soviet Union] said he did not favor embargoes as instruments of U. S. foreign policy. Castro, on his part, as said he would be willing to discuss his intended abrogation of the anti-hijacking treaty with a new administration in Washington.

The day may not be far off when American policymakers decide that it's in U. S. interest to speed the maturation of the Cuban revolution by ending the embargo. Whether it comes sooner, or later, ending the embargo will be a significant step toward encouraging the people of both countries to look to the future instead of to the past.

William Bowe, a Chicago attorney, recently returned from a trip to Cuba.