

Cuba's Poor Gain Lands

(The author of the following article, associate editor of the Times-Review, weekly paper of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wis., recently completed a two-week fact-finding tour of Cuba.)

By PATRICK J. WHELAN
(N.C.W.C. News Service)

"The Agrarian Reform Law is essential to the future prosperity of Cuba," a prominent businessman of Havana asserted.

"Just think — 33 families own most of the land in Oriente province, the most fertile area of Cuba. In a population of over 1.5 million there, most of the people live in huts with palm-leaf roofs," he said.

"All a Cuban wants is some land to call his own. That will give him a sense of responsibility. On that basis we can build a new Cuba, just as Puerto Rico has done," he concluded.

"Fidel Castro's ideas are right," a landowner said. "But I just can't figure out how the land reform is going to help the campesino (peon). . . . Unless we can find the capital to diversify agriculture and to introduce new industries, I don't believe we can help the campesino much."

Premier Castro is trying to do in one year what should have been done gradually since the 1920's, a noted businessman said. He went on: "Yet, he's got to do it."

"He's somewhat in the position of Abraham Lincoln, who had to free the slaves in a single step, instead of doing it gradually," he said.

"Almost from the beginning," he continued, "the republican government has been corrupt, and the ruling groups enriched themselves at the expense of the nation."

"Now Fidel has to beat an entirely new path. Drastic action is needed, even though some of us who are rich are going to suffer by it," he said.

An economist sees the problem in a slightly different light:

"It's not so much financial loans that Cuban agriculture needs, as good planning and implementation," said Dr. Jose Artega, chief economic advisor in the department of economic development of the Ministry of Economy.

"Agriculture is Cuba's principal industry," he said.

"Yet we import nearly 30 per cent of our food — rice, beans, onions, garlic, wheat, peanuto, potatoes—all products we could produce ourselves if we planned our economy differently," he said.

"We also need irrigation projects, rural roads, rural electrification, and refrigeration facilities—all of which require central planning, appropriation of funds, and controlled development," he said.

DR. ARTEAGA said the land reform law, designed to bring about a rational agricultural development, is not the work of any one man.

"Many persons contributed to its formulation," he said, scotching the story that it is the brainchild of Red party-liner Ernesto (Che) Guevara.

Dr. Artega, who specializes in agricultural economics, had a share in writing some provisions of the agricultural reform law.

The law, promulgated last May, has three principal features in its 67 sections and three temporary articles:

• It limits future farms to a maximum of 3,000 acres (except

less than three times this area, but has 10 times the number of people.

Nearly 80 per cent of Cuban land is in farms, but only 60 per cent of the country is flat or rolling. The other 40 per cent is mountainous or hilly.

And yet 8 per cent of the farms account for nearly 75 per cent of the farm land. And one-half of 1 per cent of the farms control more than one-third of the land.

On the other hand, 85 per cent of the farms have only 20 per cent of the land.

THE NEED FOR land redistribution to the people who work it is beyond dispute from the viewpoint of social justice.

The land reform law provides for payments to former landowners according to their own estimates of the market value of their land, as stated in their annual tax returns.

Payment will be made in 20-year negotiable public bonds at four and one-half per cent interest, backed by the value of the land and by the honor of the Cuban government.

Some critics object that no landowner in Cuba ever used market value as a basis for paying taxes—that they always understated their land value.

Even granting that objection—and overlooking the cheating involved—most of the land-owning companies bought at extremely low prices in the early 1900's. United Fruit Company, for example, owns over 123,000 acres in one section of Oriente, which cost only \$100 in 1905. It gained title to the land when it absorbed the Nipe Bay Company.

During the years since purchase, landowning companies amassed vast fortunes in profits, very little of which were reinvested in the country, except to build sugar mills which brought even more profits.

José Ignacio Lasaga, in a study published by the Cuban Catholic review, La Quincena, argued: "In general, the declared value of the land in tax returns has always been the prevailing norm for fixing land values."

Among the countries which Cuba copies in its system of bond payments for expropriated lands are Japan (whose law was passed under General MacArthur's administration), Italy, Egypt, Turkey and Bolivia.

Dr. Lasaga notes that communist regimes, like those of Russia and Poland, made no payment whatever, or only a token payment, for lands confiscated.

THE CUBAN law sets a limit below which land cannot be divided. Its purpose is to prevent division of the land into parcels too small for efficient cultivation. Many countries have such provisions in their land laws.

Cuba's new cooperative farming setup is nothing new or startling. There is nothing communist in its essential makeup.

INRA officials stress the need for a long period of control and direction over the cooperative farms. The majority of Cuban land workers are illiterate, or at the most have only two or three years of primary instruction. They have no knowledge of farm management or of accounting.

The government-established

INRA will furnish crop advice, agricultural agents, overseers to train in operating and repairing machinery. It will provide dams and irrigation where needed. It will provide seed and machinery loans, and credits for needed construction. And it will administer a system of primary education for children and adults.

Gradually, according to the government's own promise, the cooperatives will become independent.

Dr. Lasaga writes in La Quincena:

"If INRA controls the cooperatives as a means to educate the people, so that they can manage by themselves instead of depending on state paternalism, then—even should there be a controlled economy—then the present state control will continue to diminish until Cuba develops a properly-owning class based on the land (as in France or Costa Rica) which may be our best defense against communism."

Some social science specialists told me they are pessimistic about the future of the cooperatives. They fear the leftist tendencies of some of the INRA leadership—men who may seek to change the cooperatives into communist-type collectives.

But others, equally expert—like Father Ignacio Blain, editor of La Quincena—are optimistic about the outcome of the land reform program.

One young Catholic official of the Department of Agriculture said, in substance:

"We know that the communists would like to take credit for our land reform. They make more noise than their real numbers warrant. But we are equally determined that the new Cuba will develop in freedom, and that the peon class will become part of the new property-owning middle class which we need for future prosperity."

Father Angel Rivas, Catholic student director in the Archdiocese of Santiago and famous rebel chaplain, said the people know that the Reds never cooperated with the Revolution until victory was certain.

"They will never forget that," he said, "and they won't let the Reds rob them of their new freedom and dignity."

Justice Review

Louvia — (NC) — World Justice, new review of Louvain's Research Center for International Social Justice, has now come off the presses.

"THE DILAPIDATED BUILDING ON THE CORNER . . ."

In the Catholic Church. This was the description given of the parish church of St. Ann (West Fort, Trichur). It was at one time a testimony in stone to the faith and sacrifice of the people, but the heavy rains and high winds have taken their toll. The building is now a shambles. But it is more than a destroyed building, it is a challenge to the parishioners. Under the leadership of their bishop and their missionary priests these good people gathered together and provided the materials, the labor and the money. At the present moment they are but \$2,000 short of the total needed. Can you possibly help them in their trial?

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THE FEAST OF THE SEVEN DOLORS OF OUR BLESSED MOTHER (SEPTEMBER 18) brings to mind the difficulties and trials of the Blessed Mother while she was on earth. Her trials still continue, so close to her heart to every follower of Her Divine Son. PAUL and HEAC have thought and prayed over the sorrows of their Mother and they wish to help. It is their desire to become priests. They have done everything possible to attain their goal. At the present time each boy must have a sponsor who will be willing to pay his necessary expenses of \$100 a year for the six year seminary course. Would you like to have "a priest in the family?"

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"Little Black Madonna"

Monserrat—(RNS)—For 11 centuries Spanish Catholics have venerated this image of the Virgin and Child in the famous shrine of Our Lady of Monserrat located here in the mountain heights above Barcelona. Known as the "Little Black Madonna," the statue is in Monserrat's Benedictine Abbey, whose history also goes back many centuries. According to legend, the image was miraculously discovered among the rocks of Monserrat in the ninth century. It is 38 inches high and was fashioned of wood, now black with age.

Back Ties For Nikita

(Rochester area Catholic War Veterans voted this week to wear black ties during the Nikita Khrushchev visit to America.)

Manchester — (NC) — The Catholic War Veterans of New Hampshire have decided to wear black ties during the forthcoming visit of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to the United States.

The action was decided upon in a resolution adopted at a meeting of the CWV state board here, followed the adoption of a similar resolution at the national convention of the organization in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Washington

Deals Charged In Development

Washington — (RNS) — The National Conference of Catholic Charities sharply criticized here the agency responsible for making one of the most blighted slum areas in the nation's capital.

In a report prepared by the Rev. Robert G. Howes, a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Conference charged that the city's Redevelopment Land Agency and Webb and Knapp, a New York building firm, had made a "sub rosa" agreement to eliminate low-cost housing in the redevelopment area.

THE WELFARE group said that it was asking the Urban Renewal Commission and the Housing and Home Finance Agency to investigate the charges, which were denied by John A. Remon, chairman of the Redevelopment Land Agency.

The Redevelopment Land Agency is responsible for rebuilding the southwest section

Priest Heads Prison Officials

Miami Beach—(NC)—Father Geroyse Brinkman, O.P.M., a chaplain at the Illinois State Penitentiary at Stateville, Ill., has been elected president of the 4,000-member American Correctional Association.

The association members include wardens, psychiatrists, chaplains, probation officers and other officials of United States correctional institutions.

Subsidiary organizations such as the American Correctional Chaplains' Association and the American Catholic Correctional Chaplains' Association, of which Father Brinkman was an organizer and first president, met in conjunction with the main sessions, designated as the 80th annual Congress of Correction.

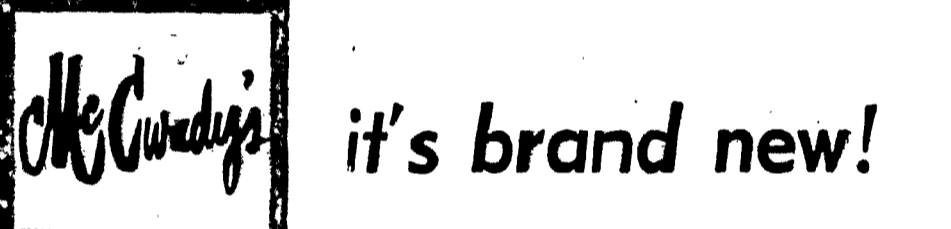
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