

Unions Find Freedom In New Cuba

(The author of the following article is assistant editor of the Times-Herald, weekly paper of the La Crosse diocese. He recently completed a two-week, fact-finding tour of Cuba.)

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

"Cuban labor is weak today because the unions were a tool of oppression in the previous regime."

This forthright admission was in answer to a question put to Miguel A. Gero, secretary-general of the Cuban Labor Federation (CTC) in Oriente Province.

"The truth is that we are trying to reorganize our unions from scratch," he said. "On one hand the Cuban worker is still suspicious of unions since Batista's overthrow. On the other, we want to build a free, voluntary labor movement free of government control."

Mr. Gero explained the background of the workingman's distrust and fear of unions as follows:

In Batista's time, there were no union members—there were only dues payers. The dues went into the pockets of Batista-appointed union officials.

Not only that, but in too many cases the workingman rarely received his full wage. Sometimes it was cut as much as 40 per cent. The remainder went in kickbacks to employers, or to various government officials, or to union bosses.

I asked Mr. Gero about communism in the labor movement. "Here's the picture," he answered. "Out of 35 separate unions in Oriente Province, only two have any Red tinge in the leadership."

"Of course, the Reds wanted to take over during recent elections. But they knew they did not have the numbers or strength to succeed. So they tried to infiltrate into office under a united front banner. But we of the July 26th Movement rejected that front. We defeated them by an overwhelming vote."

"Right after the revolution's triumph," he admitted, "some Reds did get into union posts by self-appointment. Others already had official positions because Batista had put them there."

"But in this area at least, not

many are freedom loving. Labor bosses are in prison with charges against them."

"I find that hard to believe," he said. "Anyone arrested today has the right of habeas corpus. Within 72 hours, either he is free under bond, or he is in jail without bail by order of the court. And our judges have a reputation for independence of the executive power."

One businessman expressed some fear of labor:

"The danger to Cuba may come from the labor unions," he said. "Before the Castro victory, almost every single labor leader could be bought. Now, of course, since union elections, new leaders are in power. But there is always the danger that some of the previous leaders may return to power."

No matter to whom I turned for information in Cuba, I found no one who believed that the communists have any possibility of real importance in the labor movement.

Both Mr. Gero and an employer said in substance the following:

"In one aspect the present government differs from previous regimes. It has not made any promises to workers of pay increases and low prices. Rather, it has promised sacrifice and urged the need for hard work during the next several years."

"An example of the new spirit of discipline among the working people is this: Fidel (Castro) told them to forget about the back wages due them, sometimes for several years. He said they would completely reorganize the precarious economy should they insist on their rights. The very next day workers withdrew their demands at the tribunals for their back pay."

The employer told this story: "At gasoline stations, workers received only \$80 a month and wanted higher pay. A former worker government would have lowered industry's taxes to make it possible, or would have squeezed the profits of the owners."

Castro told the workers and the Cuban people that he would use neither of these strategies. Instead he decreed a one cent increase in gasoline prices, the extra revenue to go to workers' pay."

What about the standard of living in Cuba? Through wire-tapping and asking questions I learned that prices of food, clothing and furniture were about the same as in the United States.

Yet, teachers' pay is only \$285 per month. The government recently raised the minimum wage of its employees to \$25 a month.

This situation helps to explain the lack of education and the poverty of most homes in Cuba's cities.

It is a situation that would challenge a government in a much stronger economic position than that of Fidel Castro. If the Castro regime achieves its aim of raising the people's economic lot, it will have performed a miracle of organization and hard work. It certainly did so without sympathy from the United States.

Is it possible, I asked, that the Reds may be gaining prestige and power in the unions? "They are losing prestige," was the answer. "The union leaders, who are all members of the July 26th Movement, have won wage raises and new collective contracts for their members. So the Reds can do nothing except make noise."

"Nor is it surprising," another man said, "that the CTC is a strong mainstay of the new government. That has been the history in all the previous governments too. But now this control is democratic, because it has the support of the majority of workers."

I called attention to a story that 25 to 30 anti-Batista ex-



Dr. Belaunde Honored In Absentia

New York — (RNS) — Dr. Victor A. Belaunde, newly-elected president of the United Nations General Assembly, was honored in absentia by the Third Order of Saint Francis in North America. Accepting the 1959 Saint Francis Peace Medal on behalf of the 75-year-old Peruvian, who was hospitalized earlier in the day, is Msgr. James J. Wilson of New York (second from right). Father John McGuirk, T.O.R., chairman of the order's executive board, makes the presentation. Looking on is Patrick F. Scanlan (left), editor of The Tablet, official weekly of the Brooklyn, N.Y., diocese, and Richard Reid, editor of The Catholic News, official weekly of the New York archdiocese. Dr. Belaunde, a daily communicant at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral, was cited for his "outstanding contribution to world peace."



A man in his cups who had been wandering around New York Times Square finally went down the subway at 42nd St.

A half hour later he emerged at 44th St., walking right into the arms of a friend who had been looking for him. "Where have you been all this time?" the friend demanded.

"Down in some guy's cellar," the tipsy one replied. "And boy, has he got a set of trains!"

A Czechoslovakian patriot had to depart hurriedly via the fire escape when the current police came knocking at the door. He raced down back alleys until he came to a small cafe where he was well known.

"I know it's late," he said to the astonished proprietor, "but do you suppose you could cache a small Czech?"

Cinematography Session New York — The 88th semi-annual convention of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, Oct. 5-9 at the Statler Hilton Hotel will include a session on cinematography.

Italians Study, Discuss Leisure Time Problem

Padua, Italy — (NC) — Discussions of increased leisure time as the result of automation have been sponsored by Catholics because the "problem is becoming an ever increasing one." His Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Siri, Archbishop of Genoa, told Italian journalists.

While Italy today has no great problem in the automation of industry, the Cardinal said, the discussions held during the 32nd national Social Week here are preparing the groundwork for meeting it when it becomes a reality.

CARDINAL SIRI who has been moderating the discussions in this northern Italian university town said that if "the So-

Each employer is required by law to give you receipts for the social security taxes he has deducted from your pay. These receipts will help you check on your social security account because they show the wages paid you."

Prelate Cites Liturgy Role In Missions

Vatican City — (NC) — Liturgy plays an important part in the lives of Catholics in missionary countries where the ceremonies and rituals of the Church help fuse and give a sense of unity to the Catholic minority, according to a mission official.

Msgr. Edoardo Pecorelli, an official of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, came to this conclusion in reviewing various findings of missionary priests. His opinion on the liturgy in mission territories is expressed in an article in L'Osservatore Romano, Vatican City daily.

Noting that the people of these countries enjoy ceremonies and that often pagan "liturgies" is performed in the homes, Msgr. Pecorelli stresses the need for introducing into homes "the liturgy in the form of prayers and blessings approved by the Church."

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