

Castro's Task, Train Peasants To Be Independent Farmers

(The writer of the following article is editor of *Noticias Católicas*, Spanish and Portuguese-language service of the N.W.C. News Service. He has returned from his third visit to Cuba since Fidel Castro came to power there in January, 1959.)

By JAIME FONSECA

Premier Fidel Castro's Cuban regime will stand or fall on its land-reform program.

The Cuban leader has said that 1960 is "the year of agrarian reform," thus giving the signal to push forward his ambitious move to break up the big plantations and cattle farms to establish farmers' cooperatives and to diversify agricultural production.

The project, however, is proving to be a two-edged sword.

In one sense it means redemption for millions of landless peasants.

At the same time the Reds are trying to use land reform for political purposes, to make the masses fully dependent on socialist leadership, the state.

"The way things are going, it won't be very long before we have to stand a broad line," a disillusioned import-exporter told me.

The land reform is to those lands of peasant families their only hope of leaving their miserable existence in which they have lived for decades and of securing a more human existence.

They do not want to continue to live from the sugar harvest alone.

"We are unhappy now," an elderly widow told me in Villalba, Oriente Province. She was one of the first few hundred peasant families to receive title to a parcel of land. Last year, "Now we can talk our own language," she said. "My son has killed for years for a man they have never seen."

There was a job which left them with 100 pounds of "dead wood" this period when the sugar mill sticks are smokeless.

This has been the tragedy for most of the three million "guajiro," the farmhands that constitute about 42 per cent of the island's population.

Without land, roads or markets, these men have known only privation, sickness, ignorance and hunger. They have seen their wives have children without medical attention, and their children grow up in disease and illiteracy.

Although Cuba grows some tobacco, coffee and bananas, sugar is the mainstay of its economy.

When the "guajiro" could not find work on the sugar plantations or in the mills, he would rent a piece of land from a big landholder—often \$50 to \$100 a year. But at the end of the season he had to return the landholder's store most of his take. Sugar barons were even paying their hands with paper slips redeemable only at their own shops.

SOME MEN could find jobs in the sugar industry for only 65 days a year, the luckiest ones for 105 days. In the last decade the general pay has been about \$45 a month. About 65,000 workers employed by the mills and plantations, a more permanent basis, made about \$450 a year, but the majority, about 450,000, could only earn from \$100 to \$200. When they had to support a family of five — at a \$225 annual rate — housed in a two-room cottage — houses at that level were with 50 cents a day or less.

Obviously industrial workers in cities were also affected by these rural conditions. For one thing, "exodus" immigration into cities cheapened labor. Also there were never enough consumers for domestic industry to thrive.

To the ranks of the unemployed each year came about 40,000 young Cubans seeking their first job.

The few privileged Cuban families that run the hair concerns were more interested — say some enterprising men — in having expensive homes, taking trips abroad and importing luxuries than in investing in new sources of work for the masses.

Dictatorship and corruption were basically encouraged by this economic and social situation.

As a result, the "guajiro" flooded to the side of these rebels when, three years ago, Fidel Castro and others launched their final push against dictator Fulgencio Batista, and promised them land and a better life. They formed about a third of the rebel army.

Today, the "guajiro" still holds fast to his home and family in all the rural towns and poorer sections of the countryside. This picture of Fidel Castro next to the picture of Our Lady of Charity, the Coche patroness of Cuba.

A few months ago the influential magazine, *Bombeira*, published a full page drawing of the Premier face with a Christ-like attitude. This picture hangs today in many humble homes.

In such a state of mind and heart, these people continue their support of the Castro re-

cooperatives, after the regime had taken over 452 big land holdings or opened new lands. Some 500 "people's stores" are functioning in towns and cooperative farms to sell food and goods at cost and buy some of the farmers' products. These stores, which are run by small independent merchants as well as profiteers, are improving the lot of the farmers. But they are also imposing on them a state monopoly.

"We cannot give the land to most of them. They are not ready." Premier Castro is reported to have told one of his inner circle meetings.

The government claims it may be three years before it can completely oppose by some 100,000,000 pesos the 4.8 million acres of now idle land. This figure, though, is about equal to the acreage in private production. Potatoes, rice, plantains and other foodstuffs are on the increase, thus saving millions of dollars used before in importing them.

Premier Castro has also started drainage projects at the vast Zapata swamp in an effort to increase rice lands. Men engaged in making charcoal are contributing to the agrarian reform fund.

In fact, in the beginning many large capitalist organizations in Cuba went along with the original law, recognizing the need for a long overdue reform. Big farmers and cattlemen even contributed to the agrarian reform fund.

But there are serious objections and reservations from quarters that cannot be brought up as reactions.

LAND REFORM in Cuba has been advocated since the last century and there were attempts in the last 15 years to implement it. The 1940 constitution abolished "feudalism" and called for redistribution of land and Premier Castro himself urged land reform since 1953. But there are definite Marxist imprints on the present efforts borrowed from communist moves in Red China, Bolivia and Guatemala.

In effect, INRA is showing Red tendencies in these ways:

- It gives the state control of land resources and marketing, which in any agriculture country means total control.
- It permits no recourse to established, impartial courts. Fidel Castro and a small group of men — including Reds like Waldo Medina, who heads the legal department, and Oscar Pino Santos, in charge of production — have the final say.

- The major provisions of the law first appeared in a communist pamphlet several weeks before Mr. Guevara and Mr. Nader drafted the law. Some of the drafters had made a visit to Russia and China.

- The land-reform propaganda, a minor but helpful item, follows the communist line, using phrases such as "liquidation of feudal lords," "feudal properties," "This land belongs to the people" or "Once State is the people's."

- While INRA boasts of having plenty of technicians, the manner in which it produces results in some parts of the country is in line with the communist tactic of disrupting the economy and bringing hunger to the masses.

- While INRA says it is a "democratic organization" bent only on supervising and helping, provisions to make its democratic are not even on paper. There are no uniform regulations, no land courts. Meanwhile, it runs the whole reform by "resolutions" made by Premier Castro and his aides without consulting the cabinet.



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Turkey, Vatican Tie Under Negotiation

Vatican City — (IN) — A Vatican official has confirmed reports that negotiations are again under way to establish diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Turkey.

In recent decades, since the founding of the Republic, the Turkish Republic was set up established itself, and the Vatican in 1923 there have been re-established, and the Vatican and Turkey have been difficult in its repeated calls for diplomatic ties were made by the Vatican in Turkey's Islamic clerical policy, which press and by leaders in the discriminated against both Moslems and Christians.

Following World War I Turkey, then President Kemal Ataturk, had ousted the sultans, then Archibishop Angelo Roraima, who in the 14th century had been serving as Apostolic Delegate to Turkey.

MODERN TURKEY, a nation by assuming the office of the a little larger than Texas, has independent caliphate a population of 28 million, 98% Muslim, and approximately 1.5 million Christians, number approximately 10 million and other religiously leader of all Moslems.

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