

WHITE HOUSE DIGEST

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA

Since Castro's coming to power, Soviet supported Cuba has been violating her neighbors' right to self determination by attempting to "spread the revolution" throughout Latin America -- recruiting Communist and other radical leftist insurgents and providing them funds, arms, advisors, and organization. The Cubans and their Soviet allies are attempting to subjugate the entire Caribbean basin into a second Eastern Europe.

Cuban intervention has helped establish a pro-Soviet/Cuban regime in Managua. Today, the Communist leaders of Nicaragua are threatening the fledgling democracy in El Salvador. Cuban agents have tried to destabilize Guatemala for two decades. To fully understand what Cuban aggression means to the people of the region, it is important to look at the Castro government's appalling record on human rights.

CLASSIC TOTALITARIANS

In over two decades, that record has shown no sign of improvement. Like other Communist countries, Cuba is a tightly controlled, highly centralized, totalitarian state. The government fiercely represses those it identifies as being "in opposition to the state," wantonly violating their human rights.

Over the years Castro has jailed thousands of Cubans who opposed or were suspected of opposing or criticizing Communist rule. Most sources place the current number of political prisoners at up to 1000, some of whom have been in jail since 1959, making them some of the longest-held political prisoners in the world.

Prisoners are treated brutally. In defiance, several hundred prisoners, known as "Plantados," have refused "reeducation" and refuse to wear uniforms that would identify them as common criminals. As punishment they have been denied food, medicine, and clothing.

TORTURE

Beatings are common. Prisoners are sometimes punished by being held, naked, in cold, dark isolation cells for long periods. According to reports received by Freedom House, the non-partisan human rights organization, the Cubans, like the Soviets, are using psychiatric hospitals as prisons.

Recently a long-time political prisoner, poet Armando Valladares, gave the world a chilling first hand account of Cuban treatment of political prisoners. In December 1982, Valladares, only lately released, testified in Congress that repression of Cuban political prisoners is "ferocious." According to Valladares, the Cuban police forced his mother to write a letter denouncing him. The letter was dictated by a Cuban secret

policeman holding a court order that would have sent Valladares' sister to jail had her mother refused to cooperate.

Valladares testified that the imprisoned include children and that physical and psychological torture is common. While in prison, he was brutally beaten and at one point was denied food for more than 40 days, losing the use of his legs as a result.

Amnesty International has transmitted a report that last year 29 prisoners were executed for political offenses.

CUBAN DISSIDENTS

Though Castro claims that Cubans are free to emigrate, and though some emigration, as in the Mariel exodus in 1980, is strongly encouraged, the Cuban government routinely refuses to allow citizens to leave the country. This restriction is applied especially, though not exclusively, to political opponents of the regime, and especially to opponents who have been imprisoned.

Cuban poet Angel Cuadra Landrove was released from Castro's prisons in April 1982. Though he holds several foreign visas, the Cuban government will not allow him to leave the country. Andres Vargas Gomez, a Cuban intellectual and diplomat, also served many years in Castro's political prisons. Now out of prison, he is still denied the exit permit required for emigration.

The case of Cuban Ambassador Gustavo Arcos Bergnes is especially instructive. Arcos fought and was wounded at Castro's side during the famous July 26, 1953 attack on Bastista's Moncada barracks. When Castro took power, Arcos was named Cuban Ambassador to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. But, in the mid-1960s, he was recalled and imprisoned for four years for his democratic beliefs.

In 1979, his son was gravely injured in a motorcycle accident in Florida. The U.S. Congress appealed to the Cuban government to allow Arcos to leave Cuba to visit his son. The appeal was refused. Months later, Arcos was charged with attempting to leave the island without the necessary papers and was given a seven year prison sentence.

The reverse policy, forced emigration, can be just as cruel. Suddenly, in 1980, the emigration gates were opened. During the rush that followed out of the port of Mariel, when 125,000 Cuban "boat people" fled to our shores, the Castro government shipped along many of Cuba's psychiatric patients. The American Psychiatric Association denounced this action on September 28, 1980, saying it was:

"deeply concerned about the plight of numerous recent refugees who have been identified as mentally ill. There is growing evidence that many of these Cuban citizens were bused from Cuban mental hospitals to the Freedom Flotilla to the United States. If this is the case, the transplantation of these patients constitutes a grossly inhumane act since it deprives the patients of their right to psychiatric treatment within the context of their culture and primary language."

DISAPPEARED

American citizenship has been no protection. Several dual-national Cuban Americans have been arrested while visiting relatives in Cuba. In eight cases the United States has not been given access to these Cuban Americans.

As in the Soviet Union, in Cuba opposition political parties, like all forms of dissent, are outlawed. There is no freedom of the press or of speech. All print and electronic media are owned and censored by the Ministry of Culture. Freedom of expression is further hampered by a widespread informer network, part of which is institutionalized in the neighborhood "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution."

"ARTISTIC" STANDARDS

Artists have been jailed for not conforming with the government's artistic guidelines. In 1977, for instance, journalist Amaro Gomez was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison for possessing his own unpublished and uncirculated poems and plays. Freedom House states that "writing or speaking against the system, even in private, is severely repressed." Though literacy is growing in Cuba, less and less can be written or read.

Those who practice religion are excluded from the Communist Party and thus from responsible positions in the government or the army. The religious also face discrimination in employment, housing, and schooling. Some believers have been prosecuted for their differences with the government. Others have lost their jobs or have been excluded from universities. All Catholic Church-run schools have been closed and the church is forbidden its traditional role in education.

JAILING WORKERS

Free trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are all forbidden. In the last year, over 200 workers have been prosecuted for trying to organize strikes in the sugar and construction industries. Five trade unionists were condemned to death. But, according to reports, their sentences were reduced to 30 years after their cases became public knowledge. The Cuban government, after at first denying the facts, has said the "terrorists" received severe sentences.

At the recent conference of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Prague, the Cubans defended the sentences, explaining they were necessary to block any possible attempts to set up a Solidarity-style organization.

Rather than permit citizens to join independent groups, the government enrolls people in mass organizations such as the five million member Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. These non-democratic groups are used to channel the people's energies toward party-approved goals and to isolate people from more fruitful, but to the Party, dangerous associations.

As a result of 24 years of Communist control, more than one million Cubans, more than 10 percent of the island's inhabitants, have fled their homeland. An estimated 200,000 more have applied to emigrate, even though those who apply are usually stripped of their jobs, their ration cards, and their housing, and their children are forbidden to attend school.

THE GREAT CUBAN "EXPERIMENT"

All-in-all the great Cuban "experiment" has developed into nothing more original than a tropical version of the Soviet Union, complete with political prisoners and total government control of human freedoms. And that is precisely what those who are trying to spread revolution to other Central American countries have in mind for the entire region.

It is no wonder then that in Nicaragua there is growing opposition to the Sandinista regime, nor that the people of El Salvador, 80 percent of whom voted in recent elections, are resisting the attempts of Communist terrorists to destroy democracy in that country.