

After 20 Years, Exiles Again See Friends, Family

FROM PAGE 1A

tears, hysterics and laughter, of names that can't be remembered or that are confused and children who don't quite comprehend the meaning of it all.

There are also scenes of despair reflected in the faces of relatives who wait endlessly around the airport for loved ones who do not come. There are people who visit the hotels day after day, hoping to meet a returning exile who may be able to deliver a letter to relatives or the verbal message "come."

Despite its almost two million people, Havana retains a small-town closeness and when a former resident returns, the mood in the *barrios* is joyous.

Ideology is put aside for fraternal embraces. Coffee, Cuba's most rationed item, is offered freely. It is a traditional display of goodwill that continues.

THE OLD-TIME RESIDENTS — the historians — immediately give the returning exile a rundown on who is gone and who has remained, who is with the government and who is marginal to the Revolution. In between, they reel off information on marriages, deaths and births.

"That's Havana, but in a small town when one of the townsfolk returns it is like a national holiday," said Luis Perez, a Santa Cruz del Norte resident whose relatives recently returned. "Sure, there are lots of tears everytime you remember how long it has taken for this to happen."

More than 150 former *Santacrucenses* have returned to this small coastal town about 35 miles from Havana since Castro opened the door Jan. 1.

"People pool together for food and drink, especially if the family has economic difficulties," Perez said. "And there is a great bash of a party the night before the person has to leave. Someone gets a *lechón*, someone else gets beans and before you know it the party is going."

BUT THE EMOTIONAL encounters have not always been easy. Returning exiles sometimes are shocked to be shaking hands with cousins or uncles who have become card-carrying Communists. And those who return for a chance to place flowers on the graves of the ones they could not comfort in their dying days find their grief has no solace.

For some, recriminations that had been put to rest



— HELGA SILVA / Miami Herald

Most Cars in Cuba, Like These in a Havana Suburb, Show Their Age
... individuals 'manufacture' their own parts to make needed repairs

in two decades have stirred anew.

Natalia, 31, a union representative in an automobile repair center, had felt abandoned by her family when they decided to leave. She had married a young revolutionary and made a commitment to build a life in the new country they were helping to make. Three days after she had given birth to her first child, her parents left. Her sisters, aunts and uncles had gone earlier.

WHEN THE Cuban government opened its doors to exiles Jan. 1, Natalia was torn between love and resentment.

"You have to understand that we raised our children alone," she said. "There was no one to give my husband a hand with the kids when I was sick. The ones who gave us a hand, who answered our questions, who worried about our kids were our neighbors."

"For the last five years I had virtually no communications with my parents. I had given up hope of ever seeing them again. I still felt hurt and I suppose I didn't want to suffer."

When Natalia's mother, a clerk in a large Fort Lauderdale firm, told her she was coming, the emotional wound was opened anew. "I was nervous, anxious, irritated, thinking again about all the years that had gone by."

"But seeing her, watching my children lovingly call her 'grandmother' was like a balm. It is wonderful to

let yourself love again."

IT TOOK Natalia's husband, an economist, awhile to accept the few gifts his mother-in-law had brought the family. They made no hoopla over the presents; it was several days before everything was unpacked.

They wanted her mother to share their life — with its limitations and its good times. There were no apologies made for old furniture, lack of silverware, worn sheets or the pipe that serves as a shower.

"She was wonderful," Natalia said. "There was never a complaint about not having every ingredient to cook with or about things she missed or thought I should have. She just made us feel that she blended right in."

Cubans who had no family abroad found it even more difficult to accept the exiles' return. Many had stereotyped views of the men and women who had left the country, views shaped by two decades of propaganda. Exiles, for some, were no better than scum.

"Fidel had to speak and speak clearly to the people because, frankly, it wasn't easy to understand," said Armando, 38, a Moscow-educated mechanical engineer. He hopes to become a member of the Communist Party.

FOR ARMANDO, who has no relatives abroad, Castro's speech on the exiles' return was reassuring. The revolution, Armando understood Castro to say, was consolidated and could withstand the homecoming of its former enemies, because they no longer posed a threat.

He admitted, however, that only Castro could have pulled the stunt of contradicting 20 years of propaganda in two hours.

Although he has no emotional strings to the new policy, Armando, like most Cubans, has been touched by the decision. His fiancée's mother and two sisters live in Miami. Marian, Armando's fiancée, is upset over the \$850 it costs an exile to visit the island.

Her mother, a cafeteria worker in Little Havana, doesn't have the savings to pay for the trip.

"That is what I don't understand; why the excessive cost?" said Marian, 36, an equipment parts purchaser for the Cuban government and a firm believer in Cuba's socialist system.

"IF IT'S TRULY family reunification that they want, then why charge my mother for a hotel room she will never use, for food she will never eat," Marian said. "If she could come, she would stay with me."

"I've never felt so hamstrung in my life. For the first time I'm in an economic position to help her out and there is nothing I can do," she said, looking around the comfortable second-floor apartment that she shares with her 10-year-old daughter in a Havana suburb.

"It makes my blood boil to think it costs \$850 to jump over 90 miles of water, the same as it costs for me to go from Havana to Moscow," she said. "I hope this is just an experimental stage and when things settle down prices will be readjusted."

Despite her unhappiness, Marian has benefited from the new policy. For Marian, as for other Cubans in key government positions whose jobs require travel outside the country, direct communication with relatives in the United States used to be frowned upon.

FOR MORE THAN seven years, Marian and her mother had not been in direct contact. Messages were relayed through relatives. In those letters, addressed to a sister, her mother never even mentioned Marian's name.

It was in the spirit of the new policy that the silence between the two women ended this year. Marian wrote her mother asking her to come.

If the thawing relations between government and exiles has softened the strain between the two communities, visiting exiles have created an odd kind of disruption in this austere society where people have learned to do without and make do the best they can.

The disruption is caused by a confrontation with overabundance. Returning exiles, by Cuban standards, have more clothing, underwear and shoes than most Cubans could ever hope of owning under the rationing system.

In a country where a laborer makes a basic salary of 85 pesos a month and an experienced engineer 400 pesos a month, exiles talk about earning as much money in a week. And with their job talk, the returning Cubans bring a new economic vocabulary — loans and credit cards — as distant to the island as the notion of free enterprise.

SOME EXILES — consciously or unconsciously — brag about their lifestyle. They mention air conditioners and the ownership of two cars, in a country where fans are a high-priority item, army *comandantes* ride on Havana's overcrowded buses, and 1940s and 1950s cars are cared for like precious jewels.

If the government was sure of the people's conviction, it was not ready for what came along with the visits. In the first four months of the year, about 30,000 exiles descended on the island, loaded with automatic rice-cookers, blenders, radios, television sets, tape recorders, watches, calculators, electric can openers and enough clothing and shoes to set up a small department store.

"This whole thing caught us by surprise," said a government employe involved with airport and tourist operations. "To begin with, we didn't expect people to be banging on our door by the thousands so soon. We thought it would take awhile for the ice to break."

BY APRIL, the initial grumble of discontent had become a roar. It was almost a slap in the face to many a "good revolutionary" that after 20 years of sacrifices, those with "connections" abroad should benefit from the first thaw in relations with the U.S.

From the standpoint of the economy, the introduction of hard-to-get consumer goods wasn't exactly what the government had in mind.

"It was disrupting our economy," said an officer in Cuba's Foreign Ministry. "These items are not freely purchased in Cuba," he said. Many of the goods, he said, were not even available on the island and those that were could only be purchased under rationing or the merit system that rewards deserving workers. The incoming goods threw the economic structure off balance.

What was truly disturbing to the economy was the black market that developed. Jeans were being sold for 120 pesos, a pair of men's leather shoes went for about 150 to 175 pesos, and tape players sold for 400 pesos and more. Even Communist professionals, including those in international brigades, found the temptation too great. To pass up finely crafted shoes or Levi's jeans just seemed a greater sacrifice than Marxist doctrine could demand.

THE OVER-ALL effect had been too much too soon.

On May 1, the government clamped down. Exiles no longer could bring in more than 44 pounds in personal belongings. It was the first directive indicating that the open-door policy had taken a course at variance with revolutionary ideals.

In Miami, there was resentment over the regulation. Exiles seeking to ease some of their relatives' living conditions were upset.

In Cuba, the reaction was different.

"I don't want my mother to feel obliged to bring me anything," Marian said. "I want to embrace her, not what she could bring."

For Marian, who waits, and for Natalia, who has seen her parents, only one thing is certain. The government may regulate the length of the exiles' visit; it may regulate what they may bring, or take out, of the country.

"But what they can't tell me is that this bridge is temporary," Natalia said. "They cannot tell me, now that I've seen my mother, that I might not be able to see her again. You don't play around with people's emotions."

Castro's new policy of reconciliation has become, for most of the Cubans it has touched, as irreversible as the Revolution.

MONDAY: Some political prisoners decline the opportunity to leave Cuba.

Returning Exiles Shop at 'Sears'

HAVANA — In Cuba, Sears is still where America shops.

The former Sears store in Havana — now called Intur — is a tourist shop run by the Cuban government for exiles returning with U.S. greenbacks.

It is stocked with canned food, liquor, shoes, clothing, refrigerators, paints, tires, fans, tape recorders right on down to plastic dinner plates.

The Japanese, Eastern European or Cuban-made products are tagged at pocket-book breaking prices. Entry to the store is limited to persons with foreign passports and a willingness to pay at the exchange rate of 60 centavos on the dollar — 13 per cent lower than the rate paid by the National Bank of Cuba which pays about 73 centavos on the dollar.

A can of tuna fish costs \$2.24, a two-pound can of coffee \$30.80, one gallon of exterior latex paint \$49, a Volkswagen tire \$205.80, a "melamine" plastic dinner service for eight \$210.00 and a small no-frost Sanyo refrigerator \$2,450.

The prices are meant to discourage exiles from buying in large quantities items that are not easily available in the Cuban economy and later scalped as an extra source of pesos.

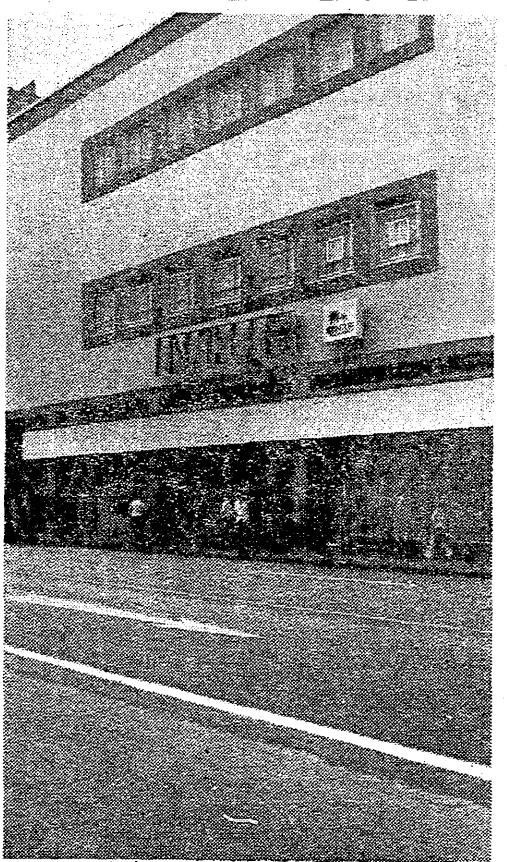
This was the Cuban government's answer to the black market racketeering that surged with incoming goods brought from abroad and those bought in Cuba by visiting exiles when prices were lower. On May 1, the government banned all exile "imports" and Intur went into full swing as the largest supplier of consumer goods for gift-giving exiles.

Prices are marked in pesos, but payment can only be made in foreign exchange.

The prices have become an irritant to visiting exiles.

"This is just a monumental rip-off," said a Cuban exile woman from New York who paid \$146 for 23 small cans of assorted foodstuffs.

— HELGA SILVA



Intur, Where Americans Must Shop
... before Revolution, it was Sears store

Cuba Willing to Open Doors To Artists Living Abroad

By NORMA NIURKA
Herald Staff Writer

HAVANA — The impact of the exile visits to Havana has opened another door barred until now: cultural exchange.

For the first time in 20 years, the Cuban government is willing to recognize the creative work of Cuban-born artists and intellectuals who live abroad.

A cultural rapprochement was proposed by Armando Hart, the Cuban minister of culture, during a series of conversations with a group of 35 Cuban-born intellectuals and artists, who visited their country in June.

"The revolutionary government is beginning to apply a cultural policy of better communication with the Cuban community abroad," Hart said during a three-hour interview.

"THE CULTURAL element is decisive for the development of relations between the two communities," he said.

A few years ago, the political and cultural atmosphere in Cuba made this type of an opening impossible. But unexpected changes in Cuban policy toward the exile community have snowballed. In only nine months 2,400 political prisoners have been released and more than 60,000 exiles have visited their homeland.

Exchange projects already have been scheduled before the end of the year: an art exhibition in Havana and the presentation of two Cuban plays in New York involving members of both "communities."

Also planned are the publication of special sections in Cuban magazines dedicated to exile poets, visits by Cuban professors to U.S. universities, and an exchange of literary materials.

The new cultural rapprochement will not, however, go so far as to allow anti-revolutionary material to be presented in Cuba. The rule set by Premier Fidel Castro in 1961 still applies: "Within the revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing."

REACTIONS to these rules are strong among many exile artists and writers, such as Ricardo Pau-Llosa, a poet and student in Gainesville, Fla.

"Such a condition is a limitation of freedom," he said. "That means it is a sort of political participation. If one cannot publish articles attacking the system, I'm against the interchange. It doesn't interest me in the least. And I would condemn people who participate."

Other Cuban exile artists and intellectuals are interested in either participating or knowing more about Cuban cultural life. Still others reject the proposed exchange, but some are expectant.

Siro del Castillo, a Miami artist, political activist and ex-political prisoner, is in favor of an exchange: "Anything that helps to break down communication blocks between them over there and us over here is favorable for the future of the Cuban nation, provided that mutual respect is shown."

ALTHOUGH skeptical toward implementation of the interchange, film-maker Jorge Gutierrez-Ulla, pro-

ducer of *The Worms* — a movie about the torture of counter-revolutionaries in Cuba — is drawn by the idea.

"I believe it's useless to be at war with an irreversible revolution. I would love to co-produce a film with Cuba. I have great respect for the films they are making, but I have no hopes."

Orlando Gonzalez-Esteve, a young Miami poet and singer, would be interested in having his work published but wouldn't want it to "become a small screw serving that system's propaganda." He voices the same question that many exile writers raise regarding the possibility of having his work published in Cuba: "How will that benefit me?"

For some exiled university professors the benefit is immediate — an exchange with Cuba is indispensable for their research.

Still others question the motives behind the "opening."

JUDGING BY what Cuban officials said, behind the rapprochement is an interest to spread the work of their artists and intellectuals in the United States, obtain technical literature and bring the "two communities" closer together.

Roberto Fernandez-Retamar, poet, essayist and president of *Casa de las Americas*, said: "We understand that Hispanic communities in the United States are a part of our community." He added, however, that "accidental circumstances" had placed some on different sides of the fence.

The government apparently had been preparing the groundwork for some time. In 1977, Hart, addressing Cuban writers said, "We have to be ready, *compañeros*, for the ideological confrontation resulting from peaceful coexistence and inevitable relations among states with different social systems existing in the world."

Now that the ideological struggle of the '60s is over "we can talk more calmly," he said.

HOWEVER, Vice Minister of Culture Alfredo Guevara warned the exile intellectuals: "We have to know one another, hoping that a love at first sight does not turn into disillusion."

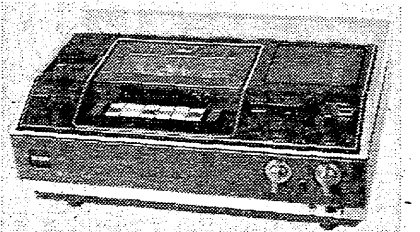
For some exiles there has to be some proof of that "love."

Leon Ichaso, of New York, director of *El Super* — the first successful Cuban exile movie — put a condition to his participation: "If *El Super* could help promote understanding, whether cultural or social, among exiles and islanders, I would be willing to show *El Super* in Havana. But first, the Cuban government must free poet Armando Valladares and other young artists who are still in prison."

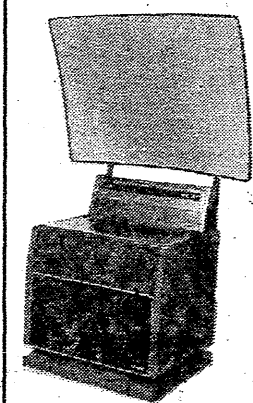
Teresa Maria Rojas, director of the Promethean Players, a bilingual theater group at Miami-Dade Community College, expresses a different opinion: "I would go to Cuba with Prometeo if I were free to present whatever play I wanted. And provided that the play is not presented before an elite, but open to all people in front of Havana's Cathedral."

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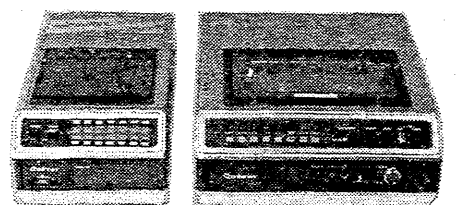
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