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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FJM-43: REPORT FROM A CUBAN PRISON XIII
On Political Prisoners in Cuba

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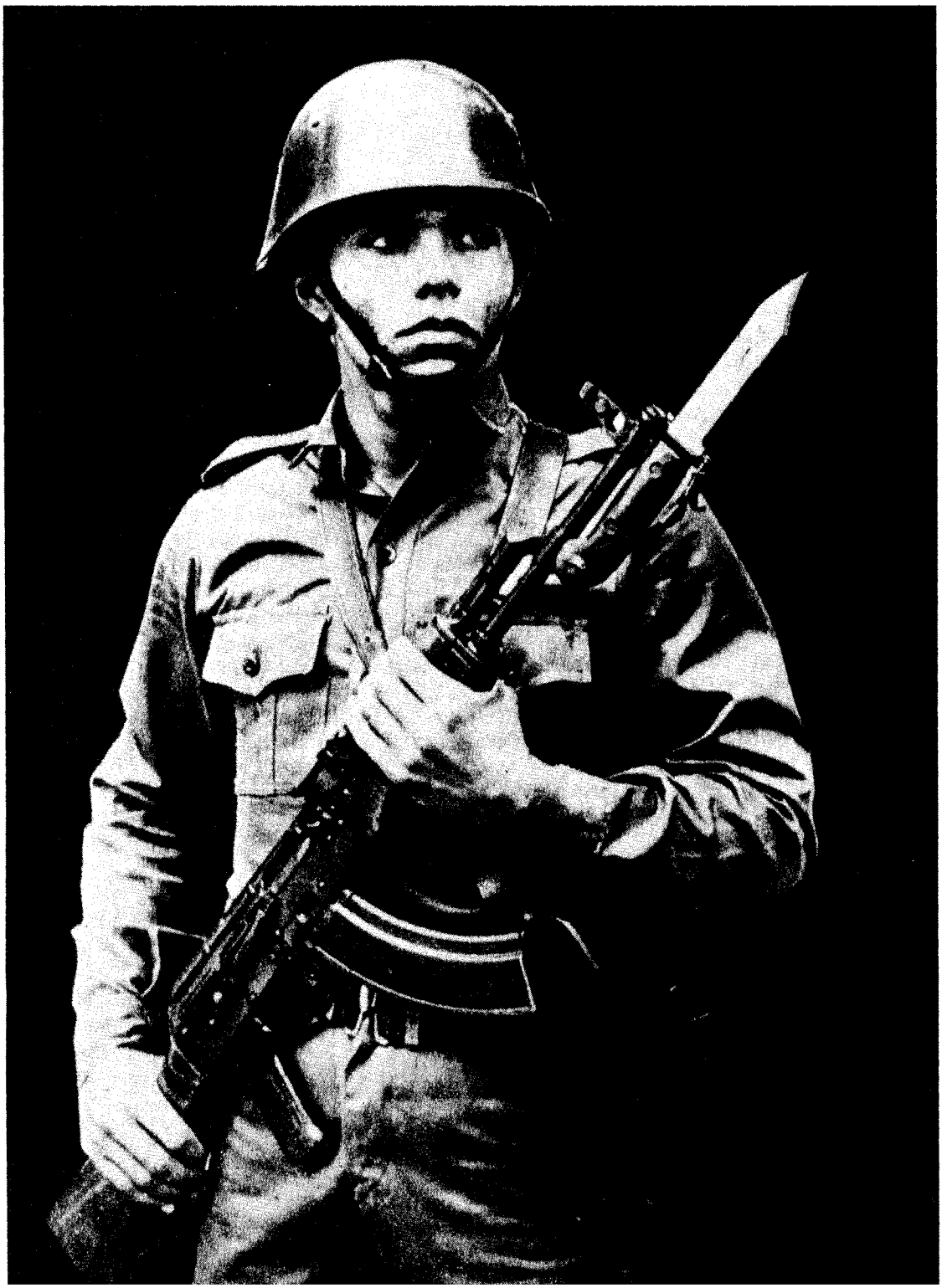

Lieutenant Diaz looked at his fist, then at me and laughed: "Beatings? . . . Here? Never! We don't beat and we don't torture. No,that's not at all what I meant when I said that we had a solution to your problem."

For a week Diaz and I had met in the same interrogation room. The sessions, usually lasting no more than an hour, begin each time the same way. A white helmet suddenly appears framed in the peephole. Dark brown eyes momentarily scan the cell, then me. A guard's voice shouts out a number: "Setenta-tre. . . Vamanos." Keys jangle, the door opens and once again we pass through the same deserted corridor with its sweet smell of disinfectant and formaldehyde, an odor I've always associated with hospitals or funeral homes. Indeed, like a funeral procession, the walk is routine, formal, professional, the pace--slow and deliberate--only a step quicker than a cortege behind a casket. Instead of a funeral dirge, however, the guard behind me emits a continuous high-pitched whistle that is supposed to be a warning to other guards that one of the prisoners is out in the corridor and on the move.

Lieutenant Diaz' disclaimer about beatings was in response to a remark I made at a particularly intense point in the questioning. Hunched forward with his elbows on the desk, Diaz had made a fist to enforce his point: "I can assure you that we have a solution to your problem if only you tell the truth. Tell the truth and everything will be better for you. Lie and it can only get worse." Seeing his clutched fist, I assumed he meant force. "A beating? Is that what you mean by solution?"

"Let me tell you," he said, "Revolutionaries do not beat. Revolutionaries do not torture. Nor do they lie. Those who say we do are themselves liars." Pausing for a moment, he pushed himself away from the desk and lit another cigarette. "Have you ever been brutalized here? Or beaten? Or even touched?" (I shook my head, no.) "Correct! Because we have strict regulations against anything like that here. No guard is ever allowed to even touch a prisoner. Not even touch!" (To emphasize the point, Diaz patted his chest with the flat of his open hand.)

I could not quarrel with that. My interrogations bore no resemblance to the methods identified with the Soviet KGB or the show trials that were conducted throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the early 1950s. In this respect, Castro's Cuba couldn't be compared to Rajk's Hungary, Slansky's Czechoslovakia, or Stalin's Russia. Moreover, I had not seen, nor heard or experienced anything that could be compared to the systems of physical torture being used today in Brazil, Greece, Uruguay, and the Dominican Republic. With Diaz there were no bright lights; no beatings; no electric wires; no rubber truncheons; no sleepless nights; no enforced walking for hours around my cell; no rotation of interrogators to break me down. On the contrary, while the sessions with Diaz were severe, they weren't torturous.

Nevertheless, as Diaz patted himself on the chest, I had no reason to verbally pat him on the back for the way he had conducted my investigation, or for that matter, the way political prisoners are treated generally in Cuba. Those the DSE accuses of being a threat to Cuban security are picked up and held incommunicado without right to counsel until just fifteen minutes before their trial. In total isolation and completely dependent upon the whims of the interrogator--who as supreme authority under revolutionary law, acts as prosecutor, defense lawyer, judge and jury in one--a prisoner's chance of being found innocent based on objectively presented evidence is minimal. As Diaz told me so often, his final decision about a case is, in effect, the final word. "The Revolution has placed me in charge of this problem and what I decide will be the critical factor in the end."

In practice, there is no limit on how long a detainee may be held incommunicado, even though in theory there is a specific section in the Legal Code that prohibits the police from isolating a prisoner for more than 35 days. But I have seen enough wall calendars representing hundreds of days in solitary, heard enough prisoners in the cell block shout out how long they had been held to know that in reality the judicial code, in this respect, is meaningless.

Considering this, I ventured to remind Diaz that the judicial system, particularly as it relates to political prisoners in Cuba, was hardly just. "It seems to me," I said, "that instead of being considered innocent until proven guilty, here a detainee is really guilty until proven innocent."

Diaz, who normally conducted himself with a cool precision, warmed to the statement. "But there is not the slightest doubt about your case. You are guilty! I have all

the proof I need. I am simply trying to help you be honest about it, that's all. Do you really think I would have prevented you from leaving Cuba, from taking that flight to Madrid, had I not sufficient evidence to keep you here for years? Believe me, you will stay in that cell for as long as it is necessary until I hear the truth. The streets will forever remain deprived of your presence. . . a pity. But before you leave here, you will realize that we respect the law. Our law. Revolutionary law. That we respect rights too. The people's rights, Revolutionary rights. I am not here to protect your rights, or any particular individual's rights when they conflict with the rights of the people. I am not a defender of the old rights. For the old law, I have no respect. We have changed that law and made new laws in the interest of the majority. As Fidel said last year. . . you heard him. . . 'Who has the right to modify law? The majority! And who is the majority? The Revolution!' You are here, because you have violated the rights of the majority, the rights of the Revolution. Consequently, the Revolution has a right to defend itself."

To argue with Diaz about this point was a losing proposition. The only way was to be completely candid, to answer all his questions as fully as possible and then just hang on. Whether this policy would result in my freedom was something else again. Each fact, no matter how innocuous could be distorted and used against me, and even after Diaz had all the facts, there will still be some question in Diaz's mind about my guilt or innocence. As the prosecutor, might it not be safer to put me away just to make sure there won't be any mistake? Or worse, is Diaz a Stalinist, already convinced that I must be found guilty and imprisoned in order to "protect" the Revolution? Then there are his superiors, higher authority. What do they think and how will they evaluate the evidence Diaz presents to them. In their judgment, the needs of the Revolution may dictate a conviction. Perhaps they are looking for another Noel Field?* Or maybe they have decided to make an example of me because of all the trouble caused by other writers and journalists who have come and gone. The paranoia about the CIA can justify anything. And in that event, everything I say now will be used later as a basis for fabricating the prosecution's case.

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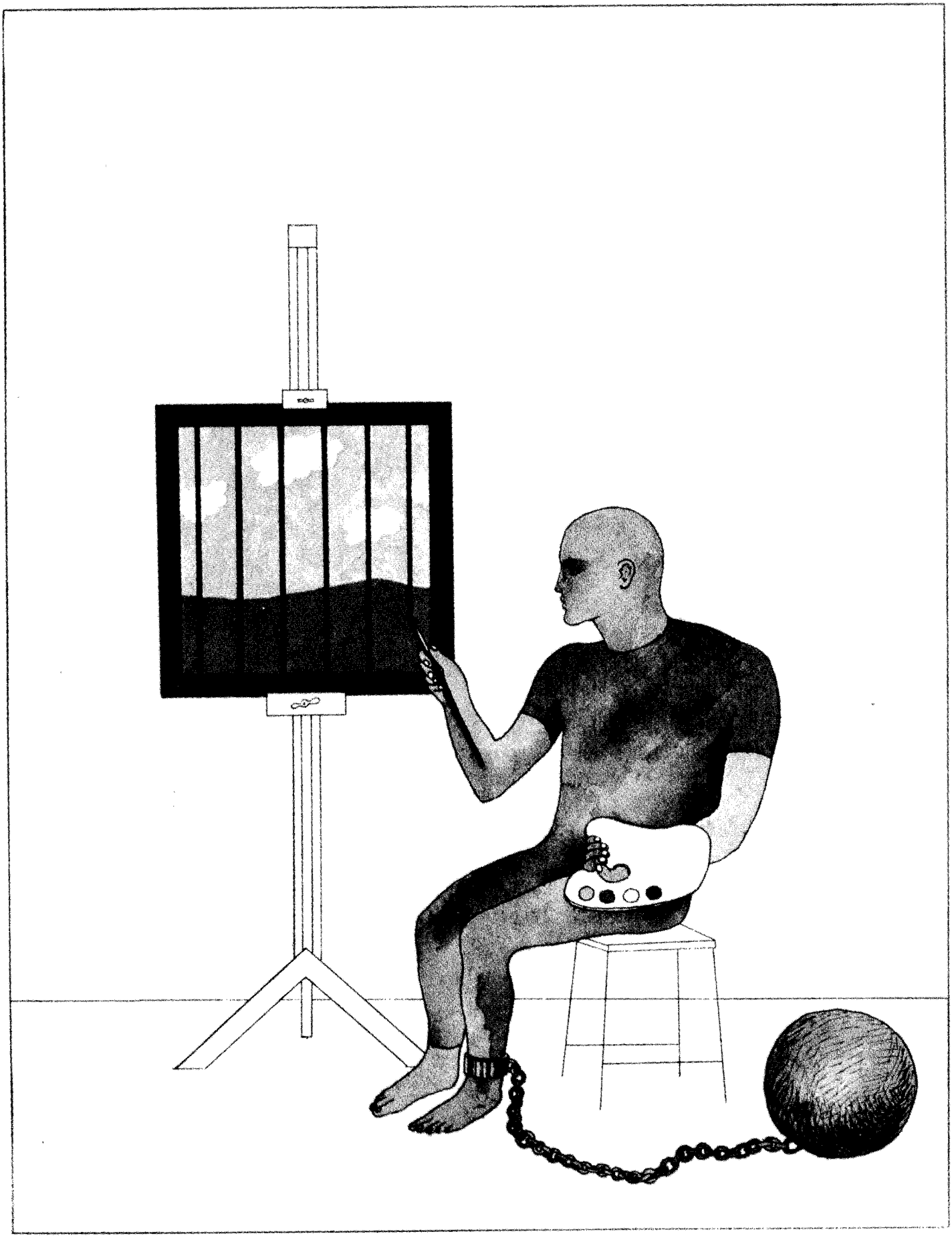
*Noel Field was an American arrested in 1950 in Prague by the Czechoslovakian Secret Police. He was accused of being an agent for the CIA, found guilty, and imprisoned. Subsequently Stalin used him to implicate and then liquidate hundreds of East European Communist Party leaders who either directly or indirectly had contact with him.

So like a game of blind man's bluff, the interrogation is conducted according to rules that prohibit me from knowing anything. Only Diaz knows and, as an expert practitioner of the art, he isn't telling. All I'm certain of is that he knows exactly what he is doing.

Indeed, having been groomed as an interrogator from a very early age, he should. In 1961, at the age of 15, he joined the newly established Ministry of Interior, and, as one of its first recruits, he was assigned to police work in the capital city, Havana. He then enrolled at the University of Havana, graduating four years later with a degree in law. Finally, he was selected to go to Moscow for a year where he was trained in counter intelligence work with the KGB.

Essentially, Diaz's approach is psychological, alternating long and painful periods of solitary with short but intense interrogation sessions. The effect of the two is like a psychic whiplash that produces very quick, effective results. During interrogation, Diaz uses the old but very effective stick and carrot routine. The first day or two, he was cold and distant, even hostile. "Confess" . . . . "Tell the truth" . . . . "Confess." Then he had only complete disdain for anything I said in my own defense. Thereafter, however, his repertoire began to vary: "I have a solution to your problem. . . . Perhaps I can help you." Then there was a touch of benevolence: "Let me give you some advice. . . we have a solution to your problem." A day later, however, he becomes bored and is indifferent again to whatever I say. He yawns, shifts in his chair and says: "Why don't you waste your own time, . . . I haven't the time to sit here and listen to you continue this facade. . . . Maybe next time you'll have something more interesting to say." Back then again before him, Diaz suddenly starts shouting, demanding to know the truth. There are further threats: "No one cares about you. . . . You're here all alone. . . . No one is going to come and help you but me. . . . This prison is going to be your home for years and years and years." Then just as I'm about ready to fold, anticipating the worst yet, the final judgment, I catch signs of mellowing. Diaz even evidences a sense of humor and jokes about himself. He can even be generous! "Don't you trust me?. . . Do you need a blanket. . . Aren't you going to thank me for that shave the barber gave you yesterday. . . . Tell the truth and I can help you. . . . Trust me."

After a week of this, I'm so confused and so manipulated that I need every waking hour to stabilize my reactions. Now the only thing I ever count on is that Diaz will never call me at night. Other than that I never know the day or hour we shall meet. The times always change. And each time I confront him, he appears different to me. Even my visual perceptions of him vary depending upon what attitude he presents on that particular



day. I know my chair is always in the same spot, in front of his desk; but whenever I review the sessions afterward I have the strangest impression that the interrogator is shifting from side to side, that the angle from which I view him today is different from the one I saw him from yesterday. Like a dream, everything becomes blurred, moving in and out of focus.

Late in the afternoon of the eighth day, in what is a typical Diaz-like gesture, a guard suddenly opened the peephole and without a sign of any emotion, handed me a copy of Granma dated January 3, 1972. Looking at the headline, I knew at once why he'd sent it to me. In response to our conversation about human rights and justice in Cuba, Diaz had arranged for me to receive a copy of Fidel's last speech on justice which, incidentally, had been delivered on December 22, 1971, a week prior to my arrest.

As a result I didn't even have to read it (although I did--and many times) for I'd seen him deliver it personally with Delia, my guide. We had watched him on television in the lobby of the Riviera Hotel.

As usual, Fidel spoke without a note, his fingers bobbing up and down to enforce the points. I would never have believed that I would be reading the same speech two weeks later, myself a prisoner. It created a terrifying sense of "deja vu."

> "Therefore, we will follow the normal procedures that have always been used in our courts of justice which everybody knows act in accordance with the law. I think our justice is sufficiently well known for its great objectivity. Nobody here could ever say the charges were invented against somebody; that somebody was unjustly condemned. We could make human errors, but never the deliberate policy of injustice or arbitrariness. . . . So it is the clear and definite position of the Revolution that we will commit no injustice toward anyone! We will invent no charges against anyone! . . . We don't need lawyers here because we are the first defenders of any innocent person. We are the guarantee of all those persons, not the lawyers. . . . No lawyer in the world, not even the best laywer in the world can do more to guarantee equity in justice than the Revolution itself has done. The policy we follow with respect to the citizens of other countries, including United States citizens is a principle policy. Any U.S. citizen who is innocent is given full guarantees here. We aren't going to give him discriminatory treatment

for being a United States citizen. It isn't Nixon who will defend him in this case, nor the Pentagon, nor their maneuvers, nor threats of force. The Cuban Revolution's principled policy will provide the guarantees, the spirit of equity and justice that has always characterized this Revolution, independent of the policies of the United States government. Moreover, our country acts out of a spirit of equity and justice. On principle, it never lies, it never even makes an imputation without having the greatest certainty. This is history and it is well known everywhere. The Revolution has never said things it cannot prove."

Relevant to our discussions too, was a speech I heard the first week I arrived in Cuba, a discourse Fidel delivered to the Cuban people on the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Ministry of Interior. As I paced the cell, having read Granma, I remembered the substance of that speech, particularly those passagesrelating to the Revolution's views on torture.*

"We can say that, in the face of the reactionaries, in the face of the Imperialists and their mercenary agents, our fighters from the Ministry of Interior have done a tremendous job. They have written brilliant pages in intelligence work with their self-sacrificing efforts. That is, there have been victories of courage and victories of intelligence. And the merit of these victories is that our fighters are true to the best traditions of the Sierra Maestra fighters, always upholding those ethical and revolutionary principles. Never, not in any case, have our revolutionary fighters ever used physical violence; never have our revolutionary fighters applied torture. No army was more generous, no army took more care or was more careful than our Rebel Army in the treatment of prisoners and in interrogations. And that principle has never been violated. This honorable and noble tradition of never using physical violence and torture was inherited by our revolutionary fighters, by our fighters from the Ministry of the Interior. We can say unhesitatingly that our victories against the enemy have been victories of intelligence, of political and moral capacity on the part of our fighters. They have always been on the side of right, courage and morality. That is why, on a day like today, we would like to express our indignant repudiation of those miserable elements that, on the international scene, have said that the self-critical statement of a writer who held a counter-revolutionary position came as the result of physical

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*July 6, 1971, at the commemorating ceremonies on the tenth Anniversary of the founding of MININT.

torture.* Many slanderous accusations have been made against the Revolution by the imperialist enemy, but there are truths which are so clear, so universally known and recognized, that we consider the charge that a single citizen of this country could be a victim of physical torture to be one of the most repugnant, base slanders ever made against the Revolution. The history of this Revolution must be worth something; the traditions of our Rebel Army must be worth something; the noble exemplary conduct of our fighters who have waged this brutal struggle--yes! brutal on the part of the enemy--a brutal struggle in which the imperialist enemy used every possible weapon against the Revolution--must be worth something. This is why this Revolution can never forgive those miserable elements that insinuate that our Revolution could use physical torture to obtain any objective. We think that, on a day like today, it is only just that this be clearly stated, because such slanders must necessarily hurt us as revolutionaries. But, of course, no one should confuse acts in keeping with revolutionary norms with any kind of weakness. The Revolution has had, and will always have, the courage to face up to its responsibilities. The Revolution has never murdered anyone! No! And it will never use such methods! The Revolution has its severe laws. There is no hypocrisy of any kind, and it courageously proclaims its measures and responsibilities. Tribunals exist, and they are the ones to judge and impose penalties, and, when necessary, the penalties are severe--but with no hypocrisy or lies of any kind, with no cowardice of any kind!

As far as I know, what Fidel expressed in both those speeches was the truth, even though that didn't make me any more confident of being freed. It just reinforced my conviction that the Revolution won't use physical torture to elicit a confession from me; although given the psychic stress of solitary and the severity of the interrogations,it probably won't need to.

Still, the physical conditions of imprisonment, while difficult, are not so bad. The food is good and adequate, and medical care is available on demand. Meanwhile the conduct of the guards, while not necessarily benevolent, is correct and professional. I have never heard nor had reason to believe that any prisoner in the cell block was ever beaten or abused. Though

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*A reference to the charge that the Revolution used torture to elicit an auto-criticism from arrested poet, Herbert Padilla.

there have been complaints shouted out from time to time, mostly about the cold, lack of blankets and the long separations from family and friends; if anything, the expressed dissatisfactions verify what I at least have experienced, that no other prisoners are being physically abused. If they have been, the whole cellblock would surely know about it.

Moreover, I have never heard a guard verbally abuse or insult a prisoner, a fact that often surprises me. On the contrary, if anything, the guards maintain not only a physical but emotional distance from the prisoners, even to the point of ignoring shouts or emotional outbursts.

My experience, however, remains my own. What Cuban prisons are like outside of the DSE's interrogation center, I don't know. Reports* from several Cubans who were political prisoners--some for as long as nine years if their statements are true--tell of maltreatment, beatings and the deprivation of proper medical treatment, especially for those political prisoners who refuse "rehabilitation."

Yara Borges, for example, was 22 years old when she was arrested in 1961. Middle class and then (1961) admittedly anti-communist, she was picked up by the DSE for possession of explosives and for allowing counter-revolutionaries the use of her home. Tried and found guilty, she spent nine years in three different prisons. Her account, apparently sincere and precise in detail, records 18 months of solitary confinement; very spotty medical care; a meager diet (hot sugar water at 6 a.m., boiled beans, plain macaroni and bread at 11 a.m. and once again at 5 p.m.); anemia among most of the female prisoners she lived with; and numerous beatings.

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*The reports that follow come from Cubans now living in Miami or New York. They were interviewed subsequent to my return to the United States and represent other points of view. Each I have personally interviewed. And while I have no way of verifying the authenticity of what they say, or what they have experienced, they appear to be sincere and precise in response to my questions. Two of them claim to have been granted permission to leave Cuba in 1971, exiting aboard the normal air refugee flights to Miami. The third, Sylvia, has been in the U.S. since 1969. Unfortunately, there is no way to check on the statements since the Red Cross and other international organizations have all been refused access to the Revolution's penal institutions. Such scenes as these Cuban exiles report no journalist nor Red Cross official has yet observed. Says Robert Martin, International Relations Director of the American Red Cross: "We are of course concerned by the number of reports received from Cubans regarding their conditions in prison, but we never even received a reply from the Cuban government to our requests for access to the prisons."

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DIRECCION PROVINCIAL

DE ESTABLECIMIENTOS PENITENCIARIOS

ESTABLECIMIENTO PENITENCIARIO
Unidad América Libre

Fecha 26 de **Marzo** de 19 **71**

SE HACE CONSTAR:

Que el ciudadano: **(a) CAROLA YARA BORGES GUZMAN**

que se encontraba guardando prisión desde el día..... 10

de **Marzo** .....de 19**61**....., sujeto a la Causa No **102/61**

del Tribunal: **Rev. 1ist. Habana** ..... ha sido puesto en libertad el día **26**

de **Marzo** de 19 **71**

Y para dejar constancia, extiendo y firmo la presente.

PATRIA O MUERTE
¡Venceremos!

Benilde Martínez Aguilar
DIRECTOR

03-149-160
22-3-71

Copy of an official document that Yara gave me showing her term of imprisonment in Cuba.

Showing me a scar over her right eye, she told me of being beaten twice by guards, the first time in 1962 and then again in 1969. She also witnessed at least 50 other beatings, usually with the flat side of a machete on the back or sides of a prisoner's body. "Every tour of inspection ended with somebody getting a beating. We called them requisas. In my prison, for example, the inspection teams were composed of two men and two women who would come around on their tours and just beat us for bad attitude or for having extra clothing, anything they could find as an excuse." Asked if ever the prisoners complained to an official about the soldiers' conduct or if ever the guards were reprimanded, Yara only smiled and said: "The only ones who get promoted are the ones who beat you."

A chronological accounting of some of the events that took place as related to me by Yara follow:

"May 20, 1961. On Mother's Day, we were 100 women prisoners in the Guanabacoa Prison and they wanted to transfer us to Guanajay where conditions were unbearable. We refused to accept. They took twenty of the women and put them in an empty cell and later sixty guards came to take them into the paddy wagons by force and started to beat them. They dragged the women by the hair and kicked them into the paddy wagons. When they finally took away those twenty women, they surrounded the little courtyard where we, the remaining eighty, were. The militiamen were armed with rifles and fire water hoses. They began to hose us down with a pressure of 200 to 300 pounds which threw us to the floor and if the hose was pointed down towards us it would make us roll over the floor with water force. Following that, more men came in and started to beat us.

"July 4, 1962. A new system of iron discipline was enforced. Punishments were constant without any reason. Over half the inmates were deprived of visits. At noon on the 4th of July, they called four women to the office under false pretenses; they were pulled into a completely closed in truck marked 'Furniture' to be transferred. One of the women was able to free herself and ran into the courtyard shouting about the transfer. Immediately, four or five men grabbed her and started to beat her. Some 150 armed men and women came in to the courtyard. They went into the wards, where we were locked in. "Engaleradas" is a term they use when referring to being locked inside the cells while unable to go into the hallway. They called the names of 25 women and said 'Transfer.' The courtyard then turned into a free for all. Screams, curses, blows, insults, beatings, the sound of broken skulls, blood. Inside the wards many of us were still locked in. There

was nothing else we could do but scream in despair. A Negro girl, Juana Drake, was dragged out of the cell and beaten all the way out while the militiamen yelled at her "Walk, you Negro scum. . . ." This girl, after serving a three year sentence, was resentenced to three more among the 'criminal' inmates, for writing on the wall in Spanish, English and French a sign reading, 'We have the right to be free.'

"July, 1963. While we were still engaleradas, one night we had the visit of the chief of prisons, Manolo Martinez. We knew he always tried to create problems because he was an obvious mental case. Since our punishment was almost over (January to July), we agreed not to do anything that would provoke him and so we remained silent. When he noticed the silence he got hysterical and started to send women to the 'tapiadas' (walled-in cells with steel planks over windows and doors and no sanitary facilities at all but a hole in the ground). He called out our names indiscriminately, at random. He called out 40 women. These remained in the tapiadas for 40 days, completely in the dark, without ventilation, without a bed or water to wash, wearing only one uniform for those 40 days. They ate corn meal (boiled) and had only two small glasses of water a day. Several of the women were bitten by the spiders and the rats. When they were taken out, for days they could not open their eyes to the light.

"January, 1965. Every ten to sixteen months we were taken in for questioning--regarding what we thought about God, the Revolution, Cuba, the United States, the rehabilitation programs, and what we would like to do if we were free. It was a yearly checkup on our minds. On this particular occasion, sixty of the women called in refused to endure that repeated mental torture and they were dragged down the stairs, each by two or three men who would bend their arms backwards and force them to walk 250 meters from the 'tapiadas' to the office.

"November,1965 to April,1967. We stayed engaleradas exactly 17 months. On April 18, we were removed from Guanajay because they needed more space to bring in men that were overcrowding other prisons. Before taking us to the America Libre camp they kept us again at the Guanabacoa Prison. We were some 400 women, at approximately 45 women per cell, with barely enough space to move, locked in for a whole month. At the America Libre camp (kind of a weekend country home confiscated from its legal owners) discipline, labor and punishment were intensified. There were two long

halls converted into cell rows. In one (50 by 70 feet) they kept 350 women; in the other (12 by 34 feet), the remaining 50. They set up a 'court' for trials with a jury formed by three or four militiamen who punished us for almost anything, cancelling our visits, mail and food packages. Court was held every Monday, always with an average of 25 punished. They deprived me of mail, visits, and packages from home for three months. They did this because I took a mangoe which was on the grass, fallen from the tree. One girl whose parents were scheduled to leave the country and who took exceptional care in behaving very well so that they would not cancel their last visit, was accused of looking at a militiawoman with hate, and she was punished for six months. Another was punished for three months for not going to work on a day when she had a serious asthma attack and could hardly breathe. We had no warm clothes at all, only two denim uniforms and two pieces of underwear and one sheet to cover ourselves. We tried to get shreds of newspapers to put them between our flesh and the clothes and inside our socks. After two months of cold winter, they gave one quilted undershirt to the women over 60 years of age. By then I had already contracted a gallbladder infection and when I went long periods without eating I would get very acute pains. I still had the hepatitis and my nervous system accounted for serious weight loss. I came down to 102 pounds from 140. After that, they gave me three consecutive IV's and for two days they fed me vegetable broth. That was enough attention. The following day I went back to the Russian meat (canned hash with a tremendous amount of fat) and the boiled eggs which I could not even taste by then. They were doing the utmost to make us yield into the rehabilitation plan.

"October, 1969. On a day that was one of my companions' birthday, we wanted to have a party on her behalf and started to sing and dance to her. The militiamen did not like it, and all of a sudden decided to make a tour of inspection. They busted in breaking everything in their path and hitting us with sticks as well as machetes. I saw four men and two women throw one of my friends to the ground and when they were going to kick her I tried to help her and they gave me three blows with the side of the machete blade. I still have one of the scars. That day left a balance of many broken arms, a head wound with fourteen stitches, three with broken ribs, everyone with bruises from the beating."

Jose Luis Prado, a tall well-built Cuban now living in Miami is forty years of age. He was captured in 1961, while

Jose Luis Prado

DIRECCION PROVINCIAL
DE ESTABLECIMIENTOS PENITENCIARIOS

Establecimiento Penitenciario
LA CABAÑA.

Fecha 6 de Enero de 1970

SE HACE CONSTAR:

Que el ciudadano: JOSE LUIS PRADO RODRIGUEZ
Vec. de 14 No. 217 apto. 8, Miramar, Hab.

que se encontraba guardando prisión desde el día 7 (SIETE) (61)
de ENERO de 61, sujeto a la Causa No 461-64
del Tribunal: REVOLUCIONARIO NO. 1. HABANA.
ha sido puesto en libertad, el día 6 de ENERO de 1970

Y para constancia, extiendo y firmo la presente

Patria o Muerte
Venceremos

José F. Prado

TTE. AGUSTIN B. ALEMAN PERUCHENA
DIRECTOR

fighting against the Revolutionary Armed Forces in the Escambray Mountains. Sentenced to eight years, he spent five of them in a prison on the Isle of Pines, then ten months in Cinco y Media Prison in Pinar del Rio. The last two and a half yearsof his sentence he was in the Cabaña, a 400 year old castle that overlooks the Bay of Havana. According to his account, Jose did two stretches in solitary; the first, a three month stint in a cold cell in the Isle of Pines; the second was ten months isolation at Cinco y Media. "During the second term of solitary, I was left completely naked because I refused to wear the blue uniform the guards gave me. It was the uniform of the rehabilitated prisoners and I had refused rehabilitation. On another occasion (March through December 1967) ten of us were confined in a single cell. All of us were completely naked and forced to take two hour shifts sleeping in a six by twelve foot space. We had only two beds for all of us. Once we went 72 days without washing at all. This was all at Cinco y Media where I was being punished for not accepting 'rehabilitation.'

Had he ever been beaten? "Oh yes, many times. If you mean being hit during inspections, during the requisas. Everyone was. But if you mean systematically, so that I was really almost unconscious, in a chair say, then only eight times. Once, for example, four guards beat me for refusing to tell them where the prisoners had a small radio hidden in the prison. Another time, soldiers who were judo experts beat me until I was forced to put on the blue uniform. After that I was sent to solitary for ten months. That's when Francisco was murdered. His liver was splattered all over the walls of the cellblock. It was for nothing. He told me he had thought he was going to see his sick mother when they came for him. He was allowed to shower, dress and leave his cell. But then they led him to the dungeon where I was. That's when he told me he was to see his mother. He didn't know why he was in the dungeon. After an hour, a guard came, opened the cell and started to go at him with a baseball bat. Francisco tried to break out of the cell, away from the guard. But he didn't know another guard who was concealed behind the door outside was waiting for him. When Francisco ran out, he was shot in the side, point blank, by the hidden guard. His sides went all over the place."

From Cinco y Media, Jose says he was moved to the Cabaña in Havana where the prisoners, about 100 in dormitory-like cells, are held underground. "The walls of the cellblock sweat from the humidity in the summer months. It is very hot then. In the winter though, they are wet with chill. We wore nothing but our undershorts because the guards refused to allow us to wear the khaki uniform. They insisted we wear the blue uniform for rehabilitated prisoners. Finally we went on a 35 day hunger strike and they allowed us better conditions."

Sylvia, now living in Union City, New Jersey, served six years in Guanajay Prison before it was changed to a prison for men. There she says, she spent a total of a year in a special form of solitary called the 'tapadias.' These are small airless cells sealed with steel plates over the door and windows. Only a small slit through the door is available for a plate of food. The food is not handed to the prisoner, however, usually it falls onto the floor. "I may look normal to you now," Sylvia told me, "but inside I'll never really be all right. I hate so much. I became like an animal,crawling on my hands and knees, eating the food they dropped into me off of the ground. I had nothing but a ripped old rag to wear and was never allowed to wash. Never once during the period I was in the tapiadas did I have a shower."

Depending upon whom you rely for the figures, there are 20,000 to 50,000 political prisoners confined in some 22 major Cuban prisons today.*

A majority of the political prisoners in Cuba, however, may not suffer like Yara, Jose Luis and Sylvia did, simply because most have accepted "the plan." The Plan is a rehabilitation program, that for economic and political reasons the Revolution's leadership introduced in 1961.** As one Cuban

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*In one published interview with Lee Lockwood, Fidel Castro said (1967) that there were then 20,000 political prisoners in Cuba. According to the State Department there are about 25,000 political prisoners. Cuban exile groups put the figure at something between 50,000 and 60,000.

**In an interview with Lee Lockwood, Fidel Castro verified the existence of such a Plan.

"There are two kinds of rehabilitation. One is for those who live in ruralareas and who collaborated with the counter-revolutionary bands which were operating in theEscambray Mountains. These cases were not sent to prison. They were transferred to agricultural work for a period of one to two years on state farms. During this time the Revolution took care of the needs of their families. The other type of rehabilitation has to do with cases of persons under sentence for offenses against the people during the time of Batista's tyranny, as well as with those sentenced for counter-revolutionary offenses from 1959 onward. Their rehabilitation has three stages: First, the participation of the sentenced person in agricultural work, study and other activities; the second stage in which the prisoner is allowed to visit his family periodically; and a third stage when he is parolled. Unfortunately, we are going to have prisoners for counter-

official from the Ministry of Interior explained to me during an interview prior to my arrest, "The goal of the plan is not to create Communists out of counter-revolutionaries, although if it happens that's all to the good. It's really our aim to neutralize counter-revolutionaries to a point where, at least, they won't want to resume the activities for which they were arrested. Economically, of course, it's also advantageous to have a man producing in liberty rather than consuming in confinement."

So, "passing into the plan," is the dividing line between what the Revolution considers the hard-core opposition and the redeemable. For those who demonstrate a change of attitude, for those who express a willingness to be integrated into the Revolution, prison is not so bad. A friend of mine, Tulio, is an example. Tulio was arrested by the DSE in November, 1971. The same day, he was taken before 200 of his co-workers and accused of treason without a chance to defend himself. "To the

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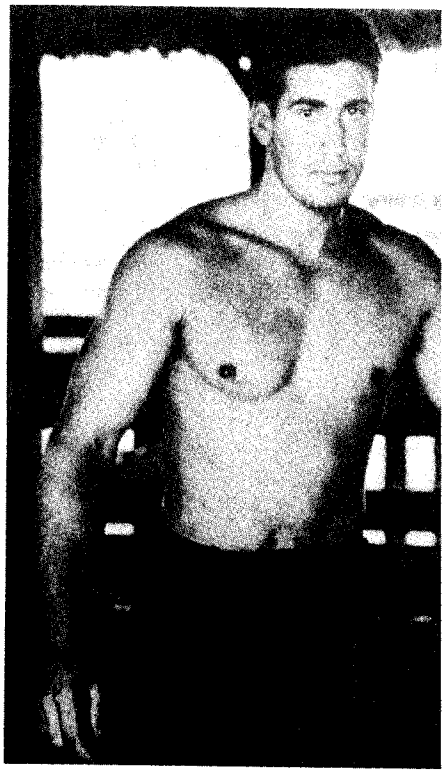
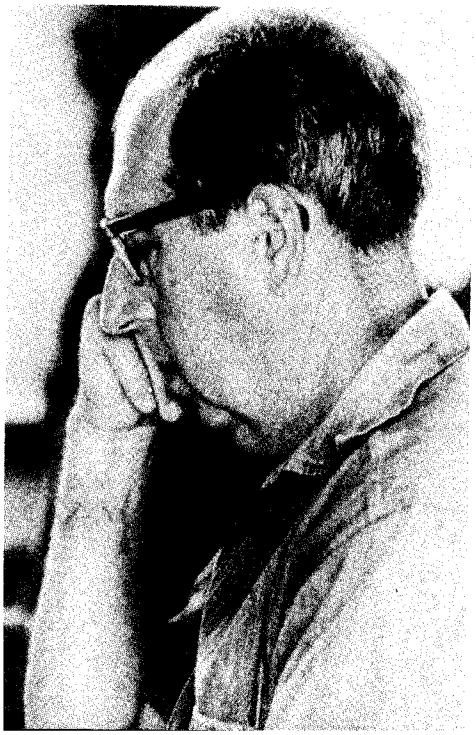
revolutionary reasons for many years to come. This is not easy to understand unless social and historical events are analyzed with scientific rigor and above all unless the widespread support which the Revolution has among the people is kept in mind. In a revolutionary process, there are no neutrals. There are only partisans of the Revolution or enemies of it. In every great revolutionary process it has happened like this; in the French Revolution, in the Russian Revolution, in our Revolution. I'm not speaking of uprisings, but of processes in which great social changes take place, great class struggles involving millions of persons. We are in the middle of such a struggle. While it lasts, while the counter-revolution exists and is supported by the United States; while that country organizes groups for espionage and sabotage, tries to form bands, infiltrates hundreds of people into our territory, sends bombs, explosives and arms; while the counter-revolution has that support--even though its force will grow weaker and weaker--the Revolutionary Tribunals will have to exist in order to punish those who undertake such activities against the Revolution. It would be a good thing if the citizens of the United States would think about the great responsibility which the CIA and the United States government bear toward these prisoners."



Photos of Political Prisoners in Cuba two of which were taken by Lee Lockwood (top right and bottom left) when he was permitted to visit the prisons. The other two photos are reproduced from Cuba Internacional



The Isle of Pines prison before it was made into a school. Below: Photo (Lockwood) of Political Prisoners at work.

wall, to the wall," his former colleagues shouted at him. Then he was interrogated, though after six weeks of close questioning State Security found him innocent of treason. He was brought before a Tribunal, however and sentenced to four years for "political indiscretions."

Unlike Yara or Jose Luis, Tulio did not remain bitter (I spoke with a close friend of his who has been in touch with him since his arrest). He is committed to the Revolution and accepts its basic tenets. As a former member of the Communist Party he even hopes to regain his lost membership. Consequently, Tulio has passed into The Plan, and like most other prisoners follows the prescribed route to full rehabilitation. He accepts the discipline of the prison, works hard at the job assigned to him (agricultural labor); and attends classes in Marxist Leninism at night. His diet and medical care are adequate. And he may receive mail and visits from his family. Every 45 days, he is allowed home for a three day weekend, and he will probably be parolled before the expiration of his four year sentence.

The Ministry of Interior's Plan was initiated in September, 1961, on the Isle of Pines when forty re-educators went to work. One of those early "re-educators," Penalver, describes his work from his point of view: "It's true that not all men can be changed. Their interests and backgrounds are varied. However, I'll wager that most men don't feel the way they used to. Ideas aren't stagnant. You either go forward or backward, that's all. Our cause is just because it represents the interest of the majority. In the long run, power lies with the just, we're stronger. We're able to destroy the Big Lie."*

Granma gives further details in a document published by the Ministry of Interior in 1965:

> "The re-education plan is divided into three phases. The first phase begins when the prisoner has given sufficient proof that he is willing to break the bonds which join him to hard core elements and ideological concepts of the counter revolution; when morally disarmed, he shows the first signs of demoralization and repentence for his past conduct. When the impact of the sentences and the severity of prison life has taught him his first lesson,

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*Granma, July 2, 1966.

and he begins to understand that the 'cause' which landed him in prison is not worth the sacrifice of being deprived of his freedom; when the contradictions between prisoners approach a crisis; when he shows signs of recognizing that his crimes were committed against the people and no longer shows hatred or a feeling of revenge against the Revolution. That is, when the prisoner himself begins to show a desire to enroll in the education plan; when he begins to give some observable proof of standing up to the pressures and influence of the most ruthless and negative elements in the prison; when it is clear thattheir threats and deceptions, based on the empty hope that the Yanquis will invade and overthrow the Revolution, no longer have a hold on him. When the prisoner so requests, he is interviewed by officials of the re-education plan.

"Once a prisoner is accepted into The Plan, he is transferred to the Selection Building where he is informed of the rules and regulations to be observed. He is assigned to one of the various productive activities in keeping with his skills and his state of health. The prisoner is tested to determine his educational level and is then placed in the corresponding classes. The re-education plan also includes recreational and sports activities.

"Stage two begins when the prisoner is transferred to one of the farms operated by the Ministry of Interior, either in one of the provinces or on the Isle of Pines itself. The prisoner sheds his khaki color prison uniform and dons a blue outfit. Prisoners sent to farms are those who have shown the greatest progress; who have advanced the most in settling their ideological confusions and modifying attitudes contrary to the interests of the new society. In recognition of good attitudes toward study as well as general progress, prisoners are granted regular leave to visit relatives. The names of model prisoners are posted on bulletin boards and their accomplishments are made public at periodic meetings.

"In accordance with the rules established by the Re-education Plan, prisoners employed in productive work are not paid for their services. On the other hand, any relatives facing financial difficulty will receive aid in diverse forms. In many instances, the administration has obtained scholarships for prisoners' children. In other cases it has aided in finding employmentfor relatives, and in a good many instances it has provided direct financial aid. When a prisoner in the re-education plan has reached the second stage, has served at least one-fourth of his prison term, and is considered as no longer dangerous, he is entitled

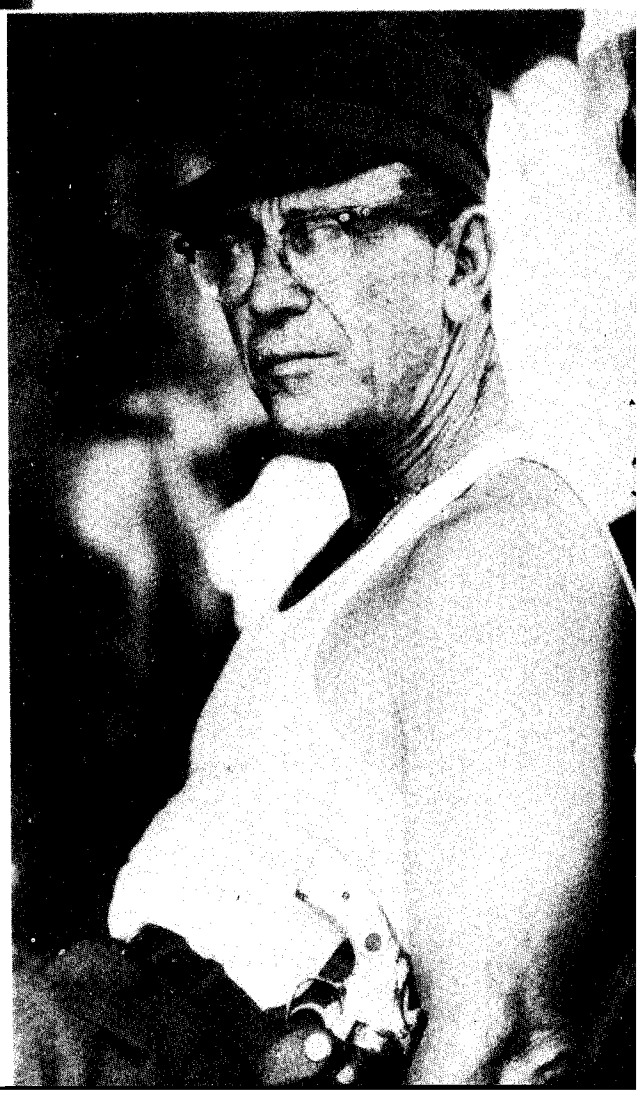
to the benefits of conditional release. Less than one percent of the men enjoying 'conditional release' ever backslide. This is proof of the plan's effectiveness."

But what of those who reject rehabilitation, the reported ten percent of the prison population who, for ideological reasons, refuse to pass into the Plan? Yara, Sylvia and Jose Luis were among this group and say they paid for it. Of the 3,000 women that Yara estimates have at some point since 1961 been political prisoners, most have been rehabilitated. As evidence, she reports that in her prison, America Libre, she left almost 180 fellow inmates, of which 150 had started the plan. "Only 34 refused to join," she says. Those who did refuse, however, insist on keeping their identity separate from the others who, they consider "common criminals or communists." A symbol of that resistance is the khaki uniform political prisoners wear, unlike the denim blue worn by the "Re-educados." The Plan, therefore, as well as the uniform, serve as focal points of resistance by the anti-Castroites within the prison system, a resistance the Revolutionary leadership apparently will not tolerate. Hence the beatings, the solitary confinement in steel enclosed cells, poor food and non-existent medical care that the non-rehabilitated prisoners report they suffer.

My personal experience with the guards, on the contrary, was nothing like what Yara, Sylvia or Jose Luis experienced. The longer I was in prison, the friendlier the guards became. The first few days, for example, they tended to be cautious, especially when the door was opened for meals. After a few weeks, however, their faces became familiar to me and we even exchanged a few words in passing. Favorite topics were baseball (Cubans are the best baseball players in the world), complaints about the weather (too cold, even jackets are being worn) and the latest news about the 1972 sugar harvest (uneasy comments about low yields due to drought). Apart from these gestures, however, from what I saw and heard, the attitude in evidence most was boredom. Indeed, boredom permeated the prison, imbuing the atmosphere of the place with a lifelessness that numbed everyone, the guards as well as the guarded. Most of the soldiers assigned duty in the prison were young, in their twenties, and one could easily sense the dissatisfaction they felt for the work. Apart from walking the cell blocks' cold and antiseptic corridor day after day, there was little else to do. No prisoner was going to escape, though no doubt every one of us prisoners spent hours dreaming about it.

For the guards though, there was only the daily newspaper, Granma, to read; a few cell doors to open and close; a new prisoner to watch and make sure he wasn't going mad with fear or depression; some meal trays to pass out and collect;

Left: Minister of the Interior, Major Sergio del Valle



the corridor to mop; and a few prisoners to be conducted to an interrogation. Not much of a job. Particularly for men who have been doing it for six or seven years.

I was surprised to learn the length of time some of the guards had served in the prison. According to one who had been assigned penal duty for seven years, security was the problem. "Everyone working here now has to be screened. Moreover, each of us must be either a member of the Party or in the Union of Young Communists. All of us were in the Ministry of Interior, before being given special training for penal duty."

There were some guards, however, more content than others. Pedro, for example, was enthusiastic about his six years' service with the Department of State Security. He pleasantly surprised me one afternoon by introducing himself by name and asking what nationality I was. When I told him I was a "Nortamericano," he told me he loved baseball and that he played second base for the Ministry of Interior before being forced to quit because of a broken leg. "I was hurt sliding into third base on a triple. By the way, have you seen the new baseball stadium built by the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution?" Conversations like this one never went very far, though, since I was unable to assert my journalistic curiosity and the guards were obviously cautioned not to get too personal with the prisoners.

One of the more verbose guards I met was nicknamed "Commandante" because he liked to shout so much. He was the sort I'd seen in the Marine Corps, a gung-ho official, the walk-talk-fast type. But he had the saving grace of not taking himself too seriously. He just liked to hear himself, especially when he had an opportunity to say something in English. Like the night he was passing out salt crackers to the prisoners. He overheard an American hi-jacker who was detained in a cell nearby tell his friend in another cell that he'd been cheated. "Commandante" had given him only four instead of the regulation six crackers entitled to each man. A few seconds later, the hi-jacker's peephole door opened and the guard handed him a half dozen more crackers, telling the hi-jacker to "shut up." I just wondered if you could really count," Commandante roared.

My favorite guard, however, was a quiet, conscientious Black Cuban who was a member of the Party. He had been responsible for requesting a blanket from Diaz on my behalf. I'd been freezing the first week in January and my numerous requests for a blanket had been ignored. Finally, depressed and frustrated, I decided to ask the guard who seemed more receptive than the others. He said that he would see what he could do. A day later,

he returned with a white woolen blanket that became my most precious possession. Like Linus, I slept with it at night and wore it as a shawl during the day.

Consequently, whenever I needed another bar of soap, toothpaste, or an appointment with the medico, this was the guard I always asked. If he couldn't get the requested item he never failed to return and tell me so. This quality--of returning and explaining the situation--was a special one under the circumstances. All of us appreciated the consideration of an answer, even if it was a negative one. And nothing was more maddening than simply to be ignored. In solitary, isolation and dependency made such consideration all the more important. Once I told the guard this, and expressed my thanks. I used the word "conseciencia," something that most Party members are supposed to have and cultivate to the highest degree. The guard just smiled and shrugged. "It's nothing," he said. "It's my duty, the sort of thing any Revolutionary would do."

Frank McDonald

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