The New Machado in Cuba

By CARLETON BEALS

EIGHTEEN months ago, one balmy Cuban twilight in winter, Colonel Fulgencio Batista—then "the First Chief of the Revolution," now the dictator of Cuba—told me to the annual San Lázaro festival in El Rincón. The roads were filled with careening auto buses and jammed with folk on foot—a river of them, women in bright dresses, men in white—a strange conglomerate of races: Spanish, Negro, Chinese, West and East Indian. The air was filled with the long murmur of gabbling people, the reports of exploding rockets, the faint strains of distant music.

Some blocks away from the little church, we descended from the car and walked unattended through the dense crowds. The first to recognize Batista was a one-legged peddler, who suddenly uttered a shriek of delight, hopped frantically toward us, spilling his tray of cigarettes, and threw his arms around him. "My Colonel!" he shouted in joyous excitement. Next, an aged Negress, her white hair in curl papers, flung her arms about him. Everybody surged in upon us, from beggars to well-dressed folk; all wished to embrace him, shake his hand, at least touch his sleeve. "Viva Batista!" echoed along the atrium. "At last we shall have justice!"

Batista arrived at the church portals disheveled, laughing, his black eyes shining. The priest hurried forward to greet him. Through a side exit we escaped to the San Lázaro leper hospital. The nuns came fluttering into the parlors with expressions of surprise and curiosity. Over the wine and cake, one of them, frankly enthusiastic for the new revolutionary Gau government, told how during the odious Machado regime she had smuggled propaganda under her skirts to the hospital inmates and had collected money to overthrow the tyranny.

A great throng of people waited for us at the hospital door. Batista's guard, now on hand to open a lane for us, unceremoniously pushed aside a poor guitarist and his little girl of about thirteen, who were singing _coplas_. Batista reprimanded them sharply. She was a pert little creature, beautiful despite her rags, and had a melodious voice. She improvised verses about Batista:

> The man who smokes a big cigar...
> He came to El Rincón
> On the day of San Lázaro
> Because he loves the poor.

For fully twenty minutes Batista remained listening. Several times his aides reminded him it was late. Impatiently he motioned them to be silent. Perhaps he was thinking of his own struggle for success; how at about the age of this little girl, he had been cast, an orphan, out on the streets to earn his bread. All the way back during the hour and half ride to Havana, he was silent and became animated again only briefly before he left me at my hotel on the Plaza Central at nine-thirty.

Batista's rise to power has been meteoric. Twenty-five years ago he was a day worker in the cane fields, receiving a mere pittance. He has worked at every type of menial labor on the island; port-worker, railway hand, tailor's assistant, mechanic, what not. Five years ago he was court-martial stenographer with the rank of sergeant. Until less than two years ago, he took orders in that capacity; today he gives orders to the whole country.

Batista is no longer the "First Chief of the Revolution," but more than ever he is the first chief of the army, head of the largest, best-equipped, best-paid military machine in the history of Cuba, with absolute power over every phase of Cuba's life. He is now the maker and breaker of presidents.

I have spent days and nights with him. I have seen him beside his cannon and in drawing-rooms; I have heard him harangue his soldiers in mess-halls and speak smiling meaningless formulae at diplomatic gatherings. By his side I have struggled through adoring mobs of people, and I have talked with him quietly in his home and office. With sub-machine guns, I have shot coconuts off trees with him. At 4 a.m. Christmas morning, 1933, he borrowed my fountain pen to sign the release of more than 300 political and military prisoners. I have been with him at jolly parties and once was present at Sans Souci when the society folk of Havana snubbed him and his wife by leaving en masse; and I saw the grim hate behind his smile, suaver than usual. Today, eighteen months later, those who took him to Sans Souci are in jail or in hiding and the good society folk are fawning at his feet.

One would have to travel to the Far East to find a similar combination of oily courtesy, intellectual keenness, insight into men, devious astuteness, ruthless purposefulness, and extreme cruelty. Recently I talked with him in his new castle-like residence in Camp Colombia on the outskirts of Havana. As he leaned back luxuriously in his leather-carved chair behind his desk in a room lined with finely bound unread books, while his glance roamed restlessly out the open French window to the sunlight bathing his garden, I analyzed the features of this man who had come up from the dregs to impose his will and now seeks to surround himself with gentility.

He is a racial blend (not a mixture) of all that is Cuban—white, Negro, Indian, and Oriental. It is impossible to tell exactly where one race ends and the other begins, they are so completely fused. He has the stocky build, broad features, and high cheek-bones of the Indian. His black straight smooth hair gives him a hawk-like quality. His skin has the yellowish tinge of the Oriental; he has the flat nose and dextrous, white-palmed hands of the Negro; but the carriage and bearing of the white. His glance is unique. It has the naive but dominating boldness of the Nordic, the craftiness and sinuosity of the Oriental, the liquid gentleness of the Indian, and the soft fantasy and cringing servility of the Negro slave. Yet his glance is
also complete in itself—unified—that of the perfect breed, of a man master of himself and others, with no warring inner complexes, no regrets, no compulsions. In all the varied situations in which I have seen him, he was always the same whatever: his superficial manners—quick-witted, good-humored, exquisitely courteous the same whatever certainties to insure, also government which Sumner Welles was bent the proper thing. 

But in 1933 Batista was supporting the Gral San Martin government which Sumner Welles was bent on destroying and did destroy.

Batista took me over the camp and, in the enlisted men's club, showed me where the sergeants' conspiracy had been hatched that culminated in the coup d'état of September 4, 1933, which overthrew Welles's puppet De Cedespedes government, eliminated the Machado officers Welles had protected, and seated the Grau government in power.

On that occasion Batista assumed control without shedding a drop of blood. Two weeks earlier in the original overthrow of Machado, he had not moved or risked anything. Now he merely took advantage of subsequent uncertainties to insure, not to Cuba as a whole but to the army, the proper benefits. He was promptly hailed as "the Savior" of Cuba. I wrote an article about him then—and tore it up. I had a presentiment he would betray the hopes of Cuba.

Soon after the installation of the Grau government, I sat at Batista's right at a luncheon under the garden trees at the home of Sergio Carbó, a newspaperman and liberator, now hiding from his wrath. This was Batista's first relaxation from purely official duties during nearly four months of stress. He had worked on occasions twenty-eight hours at a stretch. But he revealed not the slightest signs of fatigue. During this period, he had formed a government and dislodged the former revolting Machado officers from the National Hotel, the first bombardment of a skyscraper in history; he had suppressed the Attorney Castle revolt, though all Havana police stations had been seized by the rebels and Camp Colombia and the palace were both bombarded by airplanes; he suppressed two serious rebellions in the interior and dislodged workers' soviet from hundreds of sugar estates, mines, and factories, in some cases after prolonged battle. He had to suppress conspiracy in his own forces. He acted as arbiter in many strikes, often sitting through all-night sessions. Besides multiple political duties he had to reorganize the whole army.

Batista has gotten where he has through no lack of energy, audacity, and ability. But the strain has at last told. When I saw him several months ago, he remarked, "I have been ill, seriously ill. The freshness is gone. When I wake in the mornings now, I can scarcely drag myself from bed." But he is a man whose will is still greater than any physical debility.

Despite the almost accidental aspect of the blow of September 4, Batista declared it had tremendous national significance as a continuation of Cuba's uncompleted struggle for independence. The Grau government, he averred, was the first government of truly Cuban origin in Cuba's history.

"We demand the right to run our own affairs, the right of every free nation. We are not communists, we are hardly socialists, we merely want to liberate Cuba from foreign control. We do not wish to frighten capital, we need capital."

"Cuba has had more American capital than any other country in the world except Canada." I remarked. "Yet it has brought only misery to your people."

"Yes, we must raise living standards," he replied. "That will also benefit the United States. Cuba was once one of America's best customers."

But Batista is no economist, no sociologist. He shows himself completely naive about modern social tendencies. Armored in the military psychology, despite his long years of poverty he is utterly vague about the manner in which the rights of the people, of which he constantly talks, are to be established and maintained. For a time he reveled in popular admiration. He seemed to like the common touch. He addressed great mass-meetings stretching from the palace clear to the harbor Malecón. But presently he called all this "dangerous demagogy." He drew into his shell. Now he talks only to the army and scarcely leaves Camp Colombia, and then, under heavy guard, only to visit Ambassador Caffery or give a machine-gun banquet in the National Hotel to American financial potentates. Such as these helped him to betray the Grau government, and his own efforts to become a popular leader were frozen. Having done nothing to gain further popular support, having betrayed what support he did have and the government he had sworn to uphold, having bowed completely to the behests of Welles and Caffery, he has ended by using his power to destroy all rights.

Batista's type, that of the Latin American caudillo or military chieftain, who leaps from the dregs to whip up a powerful personal and military following to conquer the state, has long commanded the curious attention of novelists and psychologists, but of few sociologists. The Batistas are a sociological phenomenon resulting from militarism, political corruption, race and cultural conflicts, feudal colonialism, imperialism. Depending for victory on desperate rebellion rather than prior mass organization, such ambitious types, however noble their expressed purposes, have invariably failed because the day after their success, not having the wit, ability, or patience to create mass following, they have found their only sure support in machine-guns. The gulf between literate and illiterate, between countryside and urban life, is so vast that popular leaders have usually soon been weaned away from dangerous alliances with the people they promised to help and promptly have become the petty tools of feudal aristocrats, foreign capitalists, and American pro-consuls, thus rapidly converting themselves into hated tyrants against whom new revolutions inevitably have been started. This is what has happened to Batista, except that owing to the gravity of the economic crisis in Cuba, he has forsaken his liberating role more quickly and ruthlessly than is customary.

If today he is idolized by much of the army, otherwise he is the most hated man in Cuba next to Caffery. The Mendieta government, resulting from his treachery, which was set up as a government acceptable to the United States if not to the Cuban people, is today the narrowest, most unpopular clique that has ever governed Cuba, narrower by far than that of Machado. Every political expression of Young Cuba has been routed, the leaders jailed, exiled, murdered.
Antonio Guiteras, the one truly noble figure in all these struggles, went down before Batista's machine-guns on the lonely Matanzas coast.

The Batista-Mendieta government, drained by mounting military costs, has moved on from arbitrary decree to more arbitrary decree, from brutality to greater brutality. Cuba is ruled by the firing squad, by drum-head courts-martial; it is estimated that more than 4,000 persons are crowded in ancient castle prisons, swept by epidemics. To be a member of any but a few pseudo-company unions is punishable by two years imprisonment; to strike is punishable by death. Education has gone by the boards. Over half the working population of the island has been unemployed for years. In March 500,000 persons, representing two-thirds of the population, swept into a general mass strike of protest, which was suppressed by force.

Batista still insists that he believes in democracy, but "vile politics" makes only dictatorship—good dictatorship—possible. And so he rides the storm from day to day, while Sumner Welles periodically brands American journalists who tell the truth as unprincipled and tells the American public (usually on the eve of some new scandal) that all is well in the cemetery known as Cuba.

Batista conceives himself as the strong man, the man of destiny. He is merely a symbol of betrayal, of the tragic weakness of the Cuban people, who are worse off than their forebears under Spanish rule, a symbol of the hypocrisy of Roosevelt's New Deal in Latin America.

The Busy Utility Companies

By FRED WOLTMAN

The Associated Gas and Electric Company showed a genius for propaganda technique long before the Senate Lobby Investigating Committee caught it the other day destroying records of its fight against the "death sentence" in the holding-company bill.

The Federal Trade Commission's files contain a mass of provocative (and often amusing) private correspondence illustrating its methods. There was, for instance, the Dushore, Pennsylvania, editor who ran a boiler-plate editorial attacking former Governor Pinchot's anti-utility stand. Apparently he never edited it, for following the editorial he printed the informative line, "From Associated Gas and Electric system, Publicity Department, Johnstown, Pa."

Warren Partridge, management executive of Associated, wrote a sharp note to the Johnstown representative. "Will you please let me know why this note appears on this clipping? It appears to me to be rather questionable policy in view of the agitation against utility-company propaganda."

"This editorial," the explanation said, "was furnished to about sixty-three newspapers in our territory and this is the only one that published by whom furnished. This is the first time any of the papers have added to our news items or publications the fact that it was received from our company."

Instructions were given not to send any more editorials for the present.

Again, the Associated Gas and Electric's securities division published a suspicious advertisement in Pennsylvania papers. The purpose, according to the commission's examiner, was to induce debenture holders to exchange their bonds for other securities, a frequent practice of Associated.

"Associated operating companies in New York State," it warned, "alone have had their rates reduced by $1,300,000 this year. Reduced rates mean reduced income. Demand for emergency rate reductions is widespread."

Forthwith, H. C. Hopson, directing genius of A.G.E., was notified that the Pennsylvania operating companies were worried by "the prominence given to the large amount of rate reduction in New York alone."

"The Pennsylvania operators believe that this statement will tend to spur on the efforts to reduce rates in Pennsylvania and perhaps have some effect upon the Public Service Commission itself when it is publicly stated that such a very large reduction has been made in one of the neighboring states."

"Please look into this," Mr. Hopson wrote Dr. Daniel Starch, his brother-in-law, former Harvard professor and head of Associated's advertising agency.

"We will be careful not to mention the large amount of rate reductions in New York State" in future Pennsylvania advertising, Dr. Starch was assured after he looked into it.

An inter-office memo from S. J. Magee, vice president, on proposed bills in the New York legislature, said:

There are certain of these bills that to my mind are very bad and we should do all we can to prevent their passage. . . .

In connection with IX this takes in our Long Island Water Corporation and Mr. Atkin, I think, has discussed this fully with you and the advisability of employing a local attorney to help in getting this bill killed.

III is a very foolish bill, and I cannot conceive of it being passed. Inasmuch as it covers subway and elevated companies, no doubt they will see to it that this bill is defeated.

VIII is a very foolish and unnecessary bill and we should do all we can to kill it. A bill of this kind has been in the legislature practically every year for many years and has never got anywhere.

I do not think we are interested in X at all. XI is a bad bill but I assume the large railway operating companies will see that it gets nowhere.

XII, putting omnibus companies under the Public Service Commission, seems to me would be a good bill. Mr. Stephens, who introduced it in the Assembly, lives in our Brewster area and I know him quite well.

XIII, bringing water companies under the P. S. C., might not be so bad if we had a good commision but under the present one I feel we should oppose this bill.

J. H. Pardee, president of the Utility Management Corporation, Associated management affiliate, wrote Dr. Starch concerning a visit with Alexander Dow of the Detroit Edison Company:

Mr. Dow told me that his letters carried in the press
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