

THE EXILE COMMUNITY

Prior to the Revolution, middle-class Cubans, most of whom lived in cities, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of Cubans, lived comfortably. Their children were not forced to work in the fields, shine shoes, or do other odd jobs at all times of the day or night. If the public schools were not adequate because of the lack of teachers, books, materials, or buildings, middle-class parents sent their children to private schools. Most middle-class women did not work outside the home. Though the lower-income levels of the middle class undoubtedly struggled to maintain their status, it did not compare with those living in the slums of Havana or in the small huts of the typical rural dweller.

Despite their comfortable lifestyles, this small category of Cubans were experiencing economic difficulties in the later fifties because of the low price of sugar. Combined with the political crisis, this made middle- and upper-class Cubans open to the sirens of revolution in 1958. It must not be forgotten that this small, relatively affluent sector of the society lived in a different world from that of the majority of Cuban citizens. It was what they saw as the destruction of their world after the "honeymoon" period of the revolution that helped move them into opposition to the revolutionary government. Economic factors helped create fertile soil for support of the revolution. These same factors also provided the basis for a negative reaction to what were considered radical revolutionary programs threatening the lifestyles and status of middle- and upper-class Cubans.

These considerations, along with their ideological opposition to their children being taught atheism in school and to the disappearance of a multiparty democratic system, resulted in many people deciding to leave their homeland, at least temporarily. It was not an easy decision, but once gone, they discovered that going back was almost impossible, because their homes and property had been nationalized when they departed. Their homes were made available to government uses or given to people who did not have housing. Often, what had been a one-family house was used by several families. Land was nationalized or given to landless farmers. Since adequate housing was in short supply, the immigration helped the government in the sense that the number of people in relation to the availability of housing was reduced. The question of property rights is one of the issues that maintains tensions in the exile community and which the U.S. government uses to justify the continued opposition to the revolutionary regime.

EDUCATION BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

As the following table shows, the difference in schooling between those living in the countryside and those in urban settings was significant. This difference was reflected in the standard of living of persons across the island.

Even though Cuba did not compare well with the U.S., Cuban national school attendance statistics were better than those of most of their Latin and Caribbean neighbors. For example, it was estimated that 20 percent of the Cuban pop-