

RAHN - CUBA

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(Reprint of a Radio Program entitled "Update on Cuba" -  
Commentary by Ronald Reagan.)

Last October the Castro regime in Cuba invited seven members of the Ripon Society to tour their country. Now, the Ripon Society is a liberal Republican organization whose membership might be a little less skeptical of the glories of Castroism than the ordinary Republican — or at least that's what the Cuban government must have thought. And, frankly it's what I would have thought. I'm delighted to find I was wrong. The report of the Ripon excursion has appeared, authored by Richard W. Rahn, and I'm afraid the Cubans have discovered their pesos were misspent. The Ripon visitors were, to be sure, appreciative of the hospitality shown them. But their reports of life in this socialist paradise are not very flattering for Castro's image.

To begin with, author Rahn inspected his first class hotel accomodation in Havana. There was plenty of hot water — boiling hot. There just wasn't any cold water. The toilet bowl gave off steam and it was impossible to use the shower.

The group dined well in several excellent restaurants. These restaurants were also used by the toiling masses, explained the Castro guides. But the Americans found that every time they dined in a restaurant, they were virtually the only diners present. Cuban citizens must have ration coupons to buy almost any necessity, the group learned. There are so few goods to go around that the average worker can only get enough coupons for two short sleeved shirts a year. With governmentally-fixed wages much higher than what can be consumed, due to the rationing, Cuban workers are forced into very high rates of savings. The government encourages savings accounts in the Bank of Cuba. The accounts, however, bear no interest.

At the University of Havana the American group was treated to a lengthy lecture by the vice minister of higher education. From him they learned that in Cuba "minorities have no rights whatsoever" only the proletariat majority have any rights." Cuba held its first national election since the Castro takeover during the Ripon visit. Local Communist party committees nominated four candidates for each post on the equivalent of our county boards and city councils. Candidates were not allowed to campaign, the visitors learned, because under previous regimes candidates had not been truthful in their campaign statements. Therefore, in order to prevent exaggerations, candidates were forbidden to say anything. Voters made their choice solely by reading the candidates' biographies, posted near the polling place.

With a depressed market for sugar, Cuba's principal export, Cuba is staying aloft only because the Soviet Union is buying 45 % of the crop — at triple the world price. The conclusion of author Rahn was the U. S. should be very slow to "normalize" relations with Castro, especially since Castro needs better relations far more than we do. Any such agreement, Rahn says, should require an end to Cuban intervention in Latin America, compensation for the expropriation of some 1.8 billion dollars of property owned by Americans, and freedom to emigrate for political prisoners. I hope the State Department is listening and I'm glad I was.