

Visitor sees life in Cuba less than idyllic

By DON BOWERMAN

A GRADUATE of Wayne State University and a retired teacher and librarian, she is active in a number of organizations, including the League of Women Voters and ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training). Curious to see for herself what Cuba is like under Castro, Ms. Robbins took the first opportunity to travel there. Although she has read widely about the island, the study group trip was her first.

She found Cubans quite friendly to Americans and was told: "When we put out propaganda against America, we mean the government, we love your people."

On the other hand, she found the Cubans do not like the Russians, who are everywhere. Bluntly, they put it: "Rooky smells - smells," they taunt, or, "Hey, Rooky, deodorant is off the rationed list."

For Cubans, rationing is an everyday way of life. Ms. Robbins said, "Cuba has what might be called a que (line) system."

"The sight of Cubans lined up waiting to make purchases depressed me. Life (there) is very difficult."

The stores shocked her. They were

dank, oppressive, ill-stocked, and "so primitive I was surprised."

Diet is inadequate and housing scarce in Cuba, although the slums that used to be everywhere behind the facade of prosperity prior to the Castro takeover are gone.

"THE FIRST thing Castro did was burn down and raze the slums," she said. Now, housing construction is a priority item, and often workers are pulled off other jobs to build apartments.

"In spite of all the building, housing is tight and people crowd together, whole families - uncles, aunts and grown children," she said.

"This creates the problem of 'where are the kids going to make love?'" Ms. Robbins said.

"The Cubans meet this problem head-on, in a very realistic fashion. They built these motel-like buildings that rent by the hour. On Saturday night, you see people waiting in lines, waiting unabashedly for a little privacy."

One of the less attractive things about Cuba she says for Ms. Robbins are the Committees for the Defense of the

Revolution to be found on every city block.

"How would you like to have your building supervised by a neighbor who would know your business every hour of the day or night?" she asked.

The committees are something of a spy system, she found. "There's no escaping them."

Although they siphon all information back to the party, they also do good things such as administering polio vaccine and collecting blood.

Committee persons also guard their blocks during nighttime hours.

"They brag you can go anywhere in Havana between midnight and 6 a.m. and nothing will happen to you," she said.

ONE NIGHT, venturing out late herself, Ms. Robbins was startled to see a man standing in the otherwise deserted street in front of her hotel. She went back to her room but learned later, the man was probably a committee member.

Ms. Robbins learned that of Cuba's 10 million population, just 200,000 belong to the Communist Party.

"It's the most prestigious organization, so people aspire to it," she said.

Children aim at getting into the Young Communist League, but no one who goes to church can be a Young Communist.

A few years ago, she was told, the government postponed the celebration of Christmas until July. "In July, no one remembered," she said.

She learned that only about 400 Jews remain in Havana, but although there is not overt anti-Semitism, the schools equate Zionism with racism.

"Everything taught about Israel is negative," she said.

The Havana Jewish congregation cannot afford a rabbi, and Jewish children don't get a classic Hebrew education. Ms. Robbins said a gentle woman who learned Hebrew now teaches it to the children.

"If there's any favored group in Cuba, it's the children," she said. "More schools are being built than anything else."

Children go to school half days and work, usually in gardens, the rest of the day. Technically-gifted children attend special schools learning about radios, electronics and other subjects to prepare for technical and scientific careers.

EVEN AT the university level, 50 percent of student time is spent outside the classroom performing work useful to the state.

Ms. Robbins was told that illiteracy has been reduced from 25 percent of the population to 3 percent. The young taught the old with such success that the method used is being copied in Nicaragua.

In Cuba, education is free. "To carry a briefcase is a badge of distinction," she said. Medical services are also free, although she found medical practice "primitive."

The Cuban economy is propped by the infusion of \$3 billion a year into the economy.

"The country would come apart at the seams without Russia," she said. "Everywhere you go you see the Russian presence."

Ms. Robbins said "Castro is smart enough to funnel off discontent" and did just that with the recent refugee exodus.

Warning against Cuban influence in Latin America, she said the United States can maintain influence there "only if we act fast."

club circuit

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA WOMEN'S CLUB meets at noon Friday, Jan. 9, in the home of Mrs. Harold Nelson, 3357 Bonnet Hill, Farmington Hills. Mrs. Nelson's co-hostesses for the day are Mrs. John Costello and Mrs. Noel Haberkost, both of Bloomfield Hills. Mrs. Charles Dean of Birmingham, and Mrs. Richard Starkweather of Franklin.

Membership in the club is open to any woman graduate or former woman student of any of the divisions or branches of the university, and wives, sisters, mothers and daughters of former University of Minnesota students.

Membership inquiries will be taken by calling Mrs. Abe Bohn at 435-0919.

THE AUXILIARY TO THE SALVATION ARMY OF DETROIT meets at 11 a.m. Monday, Jan. 12, in Salvation Army headquarters, 3015 N. Main, Royal Oak.

The meeting is open to guests, who are asked to bring their own sandwich for lunch. Dessert and beverage will be furnished.

Speaker for the afternoon is Jane Shada, whose topic is "How to Put a Handle on Stress."

Guests are asked to call Enid Gee at 642-5145 for a reservation.

DETROIT NORTH SUBURBAN ALUMNI CLUB OF ALPHA GAMMA DELTA joins with members of Alpha

Pi chapter of the sorority at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, to watch a taping of the "Kelly at Night" television program. The show is seen Saturdays on Channel 7. The taping takes place at the station's studios in Southfield.

Since the taping starts at 8 p.m., the audience must be seated well in advance. Those who wish information on group rates at the Birmingham area, starting at 7 p.m., are invited to call Kathleen Fitzgerald, after 6 p.m., at 852-9427.

WELCOME WAGON CLUB OF FARMINGTON meets at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, in Farmington Community Library on Liberty.

All meetings and special events planned by the group are open to all persons who have lived in Farmington or Farmington Hills for less than a year.

Guest speaker for the evening is Lawrence Friedman, superintendent of instruction and curriculum for Farmington Public Schools. Friedman has been an educator-administrator in

Farmington since 1960 and is prepared to speak and answer questions on all facets of the school district.

At 10 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 15, the club hosts its monthly coffee for all area newcomers to introduce them to the club and its activities.

Persons wishing to attend the coffee are asked to call Kathy Grigoriou at 476-8976.

FARMINGTON AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14 in Room 101-G, Farmington High School, 32000 Shawwassee Road. The meeting is open to all persons interested in amateur radio.

FARMINGTON ARTISTS CLUB meets at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14 in the downstairs room of Farmington Hills Community Library on 12 Mile Road.

Non-members will be asked a small fee at the door.

ALONE-TOGETHER, a social group for widows and widowers, meets at

7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14, in Church of St. Edith, 15089 Newburgh, Livonia.

The evening program will be square dancing and group dancing led by instructor and caller Norm Seay.

A \$3 fee will be asked at the door. The event is open to widows and widowers only.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS, Farmington Hills Chapter 2088, meets at 1:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 16, in the downstairs room of Farmington Hills Community Library on 12 Mile Road.

The afternoon's entertainment will be furnished by artist Louis Kaminsky, who will give an art-craft lecture and demonstration.

Membership is open to all persons over the age of 55, whether retired or not.

All club news and announcements for this column are to be addressed to Club Circuit, Farmington Observer, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024, and must arrive on the Monday prior to Thursday publication.

Teepee icers top tournament

The Southfield Teepees, a recreation hockey team, won the Mite (6-8 year old) championship at the Novi Christmas Tournament last week. The Southfield team, coached by Ken Berke, won four tourney games and tied one.

Berke had two hat tricks (three goals in a game) during the tournament, and Cohen received two playmaker awards.

Marc Cohen and Erik Houser each had one. In earlier tourney games, Southfield beat the Farmington Leafs (4-1), the Farmington North Stars (3-2), the Westland Islanders (4-2), and battled the Farmington Flyers to an 8-1 tie. Berke had two hat tricks (three goals in a game) during the tournament, and Cohen received two playmaker awards.

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