



Cuba's controversial President Grau San Martin, shown here with his family, is trying to save his nation from Communism with a kind of Spanish-language New Deal

Economic chaos was the thing which gave Communism its start in Cuba. Things are better now and the Red growth has slowed. If chaos comes again, Communism may not be very far behind

OF ALL the presidents of those twenty bogus and bona-fide republics south of the Rio Grande, none has a tougher job than the tall and Latinly handsome Doctor Ramon Grau San Martin of Cuba. He's trying to build a recognizably democratic house on the rotten stumps of 400 years of Spanish imperialism and nearly 50 years of graft, nepotism and rubber-hose and tommy-gun rule of a succession of dictators.

With his long, narrow, Spanish hidalgo's head, dark eyes, graying black hair brushed slickly back from a high forehead and Ronald Colman mustache, Grau is one of the most photogenic men in Latin American politics. He is also remarkable for his unimpeachable honesty and for the fact that he was elected in June of last year in the only unfettered election in his country's history.

Upon taking office, Grau swore out a list of his personal property and vowed that when he quits he won't be a centavo wealthier than the million dollars worth of real estate and cash he itemized. Grau inherited some of the million from his substantial, upper middle-class parents. Some he earned in the mortgage and loan business in his spare time, and the rest he made as one of Cuba's best physicians. Grau will need to be every bit as good a politician as he was a doctor, however, if he's to cure Cuba's social, political and economic ills. At the elections, 1,000,000 Cubans voted confidence in his ability to do so, and 800,000 signified that they thought he couldn't.

Grau's friends see in him the architect of a new Cuban society in which the economic underdogs of the feudalism that was inherited from Spain will get a square deal. His enemies damn him as a labor-loving pinko who's fostering class war, undermining free enterprise and flirting with the Kremlin. Jobless soreheads kill Grau's officials, intimidate members of his family, try to overthrow his government and otherwise keep Cuba on the razor edge of revolution.

Whether Grau succeeds or fails in making a brave new Cuba is of paramount importance not only to about 4,700,000 Cubans but also to the United States, which has a larger financial stake in this republic than it has anywhere else in the world. American investments total \$1,500,000,000 to \$2,000,000,000, and only those in Germany before the war

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were bigger. The heftiest chunk of that money, some \$785,000,000, is in sugar which to you may be merely a currently scarce commodity to stir into the morning coffee, but to Cubans low and high, it is the marrow in their economic bones.

Most of Grau's troubles originate directly and indirectly in sugar. Probably nowhere else in the world are politics and economics visibly so intimately related. To a larger extent than any other nation, Cuba is a one-crop country.

Sugar—Cuba's Staff of Life

The sugar industry accounts for 82 per cent of the national wealth of Cuba, employs three and possibly four of every five able-bodied Cubans and sprawls over 7,500,000 of Cuba's 10,000,000 arable acres. Cubans prosper or panhandle, almost literally live or die, depending on whether sugar is up or down. When the stuff's scarce in the world market and the price is high, the country knows prosperity and political peace. When sugar overflows the world's bowls and the price drops, Cubans experience depression and political chaos.

The sensitive relationship between sugar and politics is one of the things Grau must keep uppermost in mind in his unenviable job. Exploitation of sugar workers in less enlightened times, for instance, generated at least two major revolutions, the most recent of which overthrew the Fascist Gerardo Machado. The same malpractices stimulated one of the best organized and most progressive labor movements in Latin America.

But the disease, poverty and hunger among the cane cutters and peasants who were obliged to work under Machado for 20 and 30 cents a day while planters and mill-owners counted their profits in millions, provided a fertile field for Communism. Cuba's Communists call themselves members of the Partido Socialista Popular, but they're Communists just the same. They constitute a political minority but are well organized and ably led.

They press hard for the eventual expulsion of all foreigners—including Americans—from Cuba's economic life. They frankly admit that they hope ultimately to achieve government control and ownership of major industries and public utilities. For the moment, however, they espouse a program of "Cuba for the Cubans"—a cry reaching into every corner of the island's 44,164 square miles.

Even without socialization, which the leftists admit is "still a distant objective and will be realized only if socialism makes worldwide progress," the nationalistic "Cuba for the Cubans" program would accomplish the disappropriation or outright expropriation of foreign interests. These extend beyond sugar into tobacco, the mining industry, railroads, trolley lines, banking, insurance, textile manufacturing and amusements. The hardest hit, if such a program were realized, would be the sugar people. Of these the Americans are the most numerous and most important.

Of the 7,500,000 acres devoted to cane-farming, Americans own at least 4,000,000, operate 66 out of 175 grinding mills and account for 56 per cent of Cuba's entire sugar production. Cubans own only 57 mills, most of them much smaller than the American ones, and produce 22 per cent of Cuba's sugar. Spanish, Canadian, British, French and Dutch firms operate the remaining 51 sugar plants and account for the other 22 per cent of production. Foreigners, in short, own and control 78 per cent of Cuba's basic industry, and the "Cuba for the Cubans" slogan has a pleasing sound to all Cubans,

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both left and right wingers.

One of Grau's most difficult tasks is to try to steer a politically safe course between the leftists of the Partido Socialista Popular, who are all strong for retrieving Cuba from the foreigners, and the rightists of the Partido Republicano and others who speak for the threatened sugar and tobacco people. Grau's course is squally and overcast, and on practically every tack he meets trouble. When he accedes to demands for more wages from the left, the right wingers howl, and when he makes a political deal with the Republicanos to push a piece of legislation through the Congress, the PSP boys yelp.

Most of his troubles, however, are generated by the conservatives, because they have the most to lose and they also realize that Cuba can never again be what's known as a "low cost" country. The law which established the 44-hour week and required pay for 48 hours increased all pay rolls by nearly 10 per cent. Another law requiring employers to give workers a month's vacation a year added still another 10 per cent to the cost sheets. Grau has raised wages by nearly 30 per cent since his inauguration, and operating costs in all industries have risen by at least that much.

The pressure on Grau from both sides has become acute. But the worst (members of his government admit) is yet to come. For the next two or three years, Grau ought to have fairly easy sailing. But when sugar again becomes abundant, as it will when the Philippines, Sumatra and Java are back in production, and beet and cane production in the U. S. is stepped up, the bottom will drop out of the Cuban market. Grau will then face unemployment and widespread distress. The same conditions which have produced revolutions in the past may do so again.

Grau, however, is a more durable character than his long, fine surgeon's hands and his mild manner would indicate. He is the product of a tough school—the political underground which has produced men like Stalin and Tito. He is well versed in the defensive tactics of survival which the hunted learn in the underground. During the Machado regime, Grau, whose home was a meeting place for the revolutionary plotters of Havana University, lived in constant danger of his life and at one point, in 1931, was arrested and exiled.

A Revolutionary Leader

As early as 1927, only three years after Machado came to power, Grau was one of the leaders of the revolution which ultimately overthrew the dictator in August, 1933. Grau's survival of the Machado regime is, in fact, one of the small mysteries of Cuban politics. It can be explained only by the facts that he wasn't a Communist and he had such a large following that Machado didn't dare make a martyr of him for fear that the revolution would burst in his face just when he was trying to prove to the United States his ability to maintain law and order. At least 1,200 political opponents of Machado were rubbed out in one way or another in the less than nine years of his regime.

The movement to overthrow Machado began in Havana University where Grau was professor of physiology. At first Grau was the spokesman for the liberal student groups which opposed Machado's press censorship, political terrorism and suppression of civil liberties. Eventually he became their leader, and by 1927 an underground had been formed which included nearly all of Cuba's students, professors, intellectuals, middle-class businessmen, white-collar workers and

a considerable number of other, less radical workers.

Grau received neither help nor encouragement from the big neighbor to the north. On the contrary. Calvin Coolidge went down to Havana in February, 1928, and made a speech at the Pan-American Congress lauding the "independent, free, prosperous and peaceful" nation in which Cubans enjoyed "the advantages of self-government."

Coolidge either had been grossly misinformed by our then ambassador in Havana or he was unnecessarily diplomatic. Machado had already shown his dictatorial hand. He had tried to force a law through the congress to extend his term from four to six years, and Armando André, editor of the opposition paper, *El Via*, was murdered by the *porristas*—his secret police organization, which was about on a par with Hitler's SS or Mussolini's castor-oil gang. Machado had restored the medieval garrote and named an official executioner. He had caused the assassination of some 140 workers and union organizers.

The Communists, favored by the economic chaos which prevailed at the time, made their debut. By 1929, Cuba had already known four years of depression, unemployment and hunger. Sugar was at a new low after the 23-cents-a-pound peak of 1920. The price had sunk to 1½ cents a pound, and the pain in Cuban stomachs was acute.

Communism wasn't native to the warm, independent character of the Cubans, and professional Russian and Spanish proselytizers had difficulty making converts at first. But they offered action against Machado's oppressions, where Grau made speeches and issued manifestos. They offered hungry *guajiros* (peasants) a plan for getting food into aching stomachs, and promised security at a time when insecurity was every man's nightmare.

Shouting "Rights must be seized and not begged," the Communists went into the streets and battled the *porristas* with homemade bombs and whatever pistols, sawed-off shotguns and rifles they could buy or steal. Their example was followed by such secret political societies as the ABC (its full name) and by some of the clandestine labor organizations. The Communists became the shock troops of the revolution.

Grau, however, was not connected in any way with the Communists except that his immediate purpose—overthrowing Machado—was the same. His Autenticos were far more moderate in method and objective than the Reds, and his following was the largest of the anti-Machado groups. Following a general strike in which the Communists played a leading part, the revolution broke, and some of the bloodiest fighting in the bloody history of Latin American revolutions forced Machado and his gang to resign and flee Cuba—with whatever cash they could scoop out of the Treasury.

No Support from the U.S.

In its final stages, the Cuban revolution apparently became as ideologically confusing to Washington as did its subsequent counterpart in Spain. A junta of five revolutionary leaders chose Grau as president in September, 1933. He was installed in the baroque Presidential Palace with the armed assistance of Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, stage manager of the army coup which had finally convinced Machado that the dictatorial jig was up. But Grau was considered too Red for the U.S. State Department's taste. Grau fought the Communists, put down several radical-stirred strikes and tried to canalize labor's energies into moderate democratic channels. But Washington wouldn't recognize his regime.

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Lacking our support, Grau fell in January, 1934, and the seeds of a Red harvest were sown. Since then, Communism has made progress in Cuba, and today the man we shunned in 1933 is president of the Republic. He doesn't fight the Communists any more. He's their friend and they are his. This in itself is no cause for alarm in big and powerful America. The establishment of a socialized state in Cuba wouldn't jar the political foundations of the United States, but it would put the United States into an embarrassing position.

Cuba lies athwart the eastern approaches to the Panama Canal. America might be forced to intervene physically, and if it did, complications would be many and swift. Cuba is one of the show windows of our Good Neighbor policy. Every country between the Rio Grande and Tierra del Fuego watches what we do in Cuba. If we were obliged to go in there and rough up a few Cubans, there'd be an unholy howl of "*Yanqui Imperialismo.*"

If and when the Cubans decide to kick out American financial interests, Uncle Sam will have an important decision to make. Is \$1,500,000,000 or \$2,000,000,000 a big enough stake to warrant wrecking the Good Neighbor policy and with it the economic and political good will of Latin America? Some diplomats believe that it is, and advocate a strong policy toward Cuba and other nations where the leftward swing threatens American money interests. Others say that unless our naval and military position is affected we should bow to the trend of the times and accept the fact of Latin America's social development.

What's happened in Cuba has also occurred in Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay. The Communists are strong in all these countries. A few influential members of the State Department, including Undersecretary Nelson Rockefeller, former chief of the Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs, see in this the possible creation of an anti-American bloc favorable to Russia and therefore more disposed to trade with the Soviets than with us.

They see the sprouting of the Communist crop in these nations as an ideological invasion of this hemisphere by the USSR.

There is some evidence that the growth of Communism in Latin America wasn't spontaneous or wholly due to existing deplorable social and economic conditions, but was imported and later directed, however circuitously, by the Soviets. When Communist parties everywhere, for instance, decided to change their names, they did so with suspicious unanimity. Within six months of the dissolution of the Comintern, the Cuban Communist Party became the Partido Socialista Popular, the Communist Party in Costa Rica changed its name to Vanguardia Popular, and in Venezuela it became the Partido Socialista. Similarly the parties were given more palatable names in Mexico, Colombia, Australia and the United States.

Fear of Russia's Influence

Suspicion of Russia's motives is particularly strong in Cuba. Rich Cubans and influential members of the American Chamber of Commerce openly accuse Moscow of directing the activities of the Partido Socialista Popular and through it of the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), the all-inclusive Cuban labor organization roughly similar to the C.I.O.

Because of Grau's friendliness toward labor he, in turn, is accused of being a tool of the Kremlin. They speak of the government

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as a plaything of the Communists and of themselves as living under a "tyranny" of labor. They complain that they can't make an honest dollar any more because the Reds are pushing wages up out of sight. The minimum wage law calls for \$1.60 a day.

Grau's more vicious enemies say he doesn't run the country. The real ruler, they insist, is one Lazaro Pina, a handsome, lithe and admittedly able 34-year-old Negro who heads the CTC. The CTC includes 1,592 unions and boasts at least 500,000 members—nearly all of Cuba's adult labor force—and is, potentially, the largest single political force in the country. If Pina, a self-educated former tobacco-field worker, molds it into a political party, he might someday become president of Cuba. The possibility scares the aristocratic meringue of Cuba's social and racial pie nearly out of its pleasure-addled wits.

A fierce Jim Crowism complicates an already complex Cuban society. Cuba's population is preponderantly mulatto and Negro, and is so mixed that it's difficult to say who is truly white. Until only a few years ago, the *rumba* couldn't be played in respectable society because of its Afro-Cuban origin. Even now all first-class restaurants hold licenses as "clubs," and this permits them to exclude colored folk. So the white elite look obliquely on Pina and quip bitterly about how you must "clear it with Pina if you want anything done up at the Capitol." Grau doesn't share their animosity. He welcomes Pina's support, for the black man can deliver half a million votes on any issue in which labor is involved.

As Grau's government stands now, it's a coalition of his own Autenticos and the Republicanos who joined him to defeat the hand-picked candidate of Batista and the so-called Democratic Party. The Republicanos, however, are hanging back on Grau's reforms, and the president is leaning toward the left for support despite the fact that the PSP opposed him in the election. He'd like to have the PSP's 140,000 votes in the next election in 1948, and to be sure of the CTC's 500,000 votes.

Proof of Grau's political intentions came last May Day when the CTC staged a mass demonstration of some 60,000 workers in Havana. The demonstrators paraded under the blue-canopied balcony of the Presidential Palace holding up banners demanding wage increases, old-age pensions, sick benefits, a \$774,000 grant to build a Labor Palace, and everything else from social security for busboys to rupture of diplomatic relations with General Francisco Franco's Spain. Altogether, there were some 140 separate demands. These were typed out and bound in leather covers.

A Blank Check for Labor

Standing beside Pina, Grau held the volume up before the crowd at the conclusion of the parade and said, "I haven't had time to read these demands, but you may be sure they'll be included in the government's program." It was a blank check to labor, a victory for the CTC and a personal triumph for Pina, its leader. To the owners of sugar mills, textile and tobacco factories, hotels, mines, railroads, trolley lines and bus companies, Grau's words meant higher operating costs and lower profits.

At the American Club on the laurel-shaded Prado, the owners and representatives of U. S. firms gathered late that afternoon to play *Carabina*—with five poker dice and a leather cup—for drinks and to gripe about labor's growing power. Several had justifiable complaints. At least one, a big cotton-textile mill owner, said he was operating on such a narrow profit margin that any further wage increase would drive him out of business. And some of the CTC's demands were

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frankly absurd. One was from a union of 200 garage mechanics for the exclusion of all automobile bodies not made in Cuba. Only American cars and trucks are imported by Cuba. The country hasn't any auto-body building industry and probably never will have.

The agents of U.S. firms rolled their dice and laughed at the absurdities of Cuban labor, and Pina's pretensions. They blamed their troubles on the Communists. One of them prominent in the American Chamber of Commerce confided that Uncle Joe "is putting the screws on American free enterprise in the Western Hemisphere" and in Cuba particularly. He named the late Constantine Oumansky, Soviet ambassador to Mexico City until he was killed recently in an airplane crash, as the Kremlin's "front man in this hemisphere."

Until Oumansky's death, he said, Mexico City was the "nerve center" of Soviet propaganda and political action, but now the headquarters has been moved to Havana, and Oumansky's job has been taken over by Russian Chargé d'Affaires Dmitri Zaikin, who has a legation "staffed with fifty people and he's even got a press attaché." This American and others at the club seriously talked of Russia as an "imperial competitor" in this hemisphere, and Stalin was "the enemy." To the Cuban people, Franco is "the enemy." In the May Day parade, at least every fifth banner called for a break with his government.

Those who felt most "threatened" by the CTC's growth were the representatives of U.S. absentee sugar landlords and mill owners. They were loudest in denouncing the CTC as Communist and as loudly blamed Moscow for their present and possible future troubles. But the Chamber of Commerce man and others in Cuba who seemed to have an inferiority complex about Communism and who talked as though democracy offers nothing to compete with it in all Latin-America couldn't make their charges stand up.

Zaikin, for example, doesn't have a staff of fifty. He claims to have only five accredited diplomats in the legation, and with all the code clerks, servants, ushers and translators thrown in, he has barely twenty. The total is a small decimal of the staff of our own huge embassy in Havana. As for the ominous significance attached to the fact that the Soviets have a press attaché—presumably he feeds propaganda to left-wing newspapers such as *Hoy*—well, we have a press attaché, too, although he isn't officially called that.

Nowhere, either in newspapers or books, in radio programs or the English-language Havana Post, is there any substantial evidence that the vast amounts Washington spends for propaganda are providing food for democratic thought. Cubans read what they can get, and a lot of it is Marxist literature. Maybe they merely like it, and maybe it was made available to them, but we don't offer anything to combat it.

Even some of our hardest-to-convince diplomats have reached the conclusion that papers like *Hoy* can get all the Soviet propaganda they need by picking up the editorials of Pravda, Izvestia and Red Star, and from the communiqués and speeches of Marshal Stalin from the normal American wire services like AP and UP.

Cubans' respect and admiration for Soviet Russia, as distinct from whatever fascination Communism holds for them, began with the USSR's intervention in Spain in 1936. It was something Cubans who'd fought Machado understood. Since then the success of the Red Army has further impressed those whom professional Reds call "the masses," with the advantage of Communism.

But while American businessmen and

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upper-crust Cubans raise a hullabaloo about spreading "Russian influence" in Cuba and Latin America, nothing is said and little is done about the admirers of Franco.

The upper stratum of Cuban society is composed of about 300,000 pure-blooded Spaniards. A small but powerful minority among them, including those 1,000 families who own everything in Cuba not already nailed down by foreigners, are Falangist sympathizers, antilabor and anti-Negro. They monopolize the import-export trade and have strong sugar and tobacco, banking, insurance and shipping interests. They are the socially "nice people" of Cuba and the ones whom the Americans meet at the clubs, the Oriental Park race track, the Gran Casino Nacional and the better restaurants, and they influence the attitude toward the rest of Cuban society of our flattered commercial agents.

Mouthpiece of the Falangist element is the well-edited *Diario de la Marina* (circulation about 20,000), owned by the late José (Pepin) Rivero. He was a Franco supporter who was decorated by Hitler and Mussolini, who once prayed that God might grant Der Fuehrer a long life, and editorially predicted that the Axis would win the war.

But most of the Spanish element, like most Cubans, were anti-Franco during the war, and one of the things they can't understand about us is why we don't break with Franco. If there are good reasons for our failure to do so, they haven't been made clear to the bulk of Cubans, who unfortunately believe that the downfall of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany has been brought about by the Russians, the British and the Americans in that order.

An analysis of the political color composition of the CTC provides, perhaps, the best clue to how rich the Red harvest in Cuba might be. Of the 500,000 CTC members, 100,000, at the most, are Popular Socialist Party members and therefore open to suspicion of being Communists. The other four fifths are mostly political followers, although not necessarily members of Grau's Autenticos.

There's no question about Pina's personal political power in labor circles. His easy manner and forceful persuasiveness are reminiscent of John L. Lewis in his prime. He has the knack of talking the language of college professors or iron miners, cigar rollers or cane cutters. His voice is rough, throaty and warm. He is not only secretary general of the CTC but a high-ranking leader of the PSP as well. His power, however, like that of the Reds, is directly proportionate to how much misery there is in the land.

As for the Communists themselves, the best indication of the extent of their actual voting strength, as opposed to their ideological power, came in the 1944 elections. The PSP has 120,000 members but it polled only 140,000 votes for its presidential candidate. Its greatest strength lies in the sheer incorruptibility of its leaders and party discipline. Such is their discipline that Pina, who earns \$600 a month as a member of the House of Representatives, turns in \$500 to the party and lives on the rest plus an expense account from the party, which never exceeds, I was told, \$120.

Grau likes Pina and the leaders of the left not only because he finds their six votes in the House and three in the Senate useful when he wishes to sidestep his Republican allies, but because they never ask him for jobs. They don't shoot up his cabinet ministers, either.

Sensible Cubans willing to guess about Cuba's future—and among them was one of the country's biggest and most progressive sugar planters—say it's possible for Grau to absorb the PSP and mitigate or even lay the

Red menace simply by reducing or removing the reasons for its existence. These are unemployment and distress during the *tiempo muerto* or dead season between sugar crops, including poverty, disease, hunger, ignorance.

The average Cuban sugar worker, for example, eats only 915 calories a day, which is considerably lower than the "desperate malnutrition" standards established by recognized dietitians, who say a working man must have 3,000 for good health. In Havana, which is a health resort compared to other Cuban towns and cities, three times as many people die of tuberculosis per 100,000 population as in New York. Only half the people are really literate, despite claims that illiteracy has been reduced to only 25 per cent.

Danger in Hands-Off Policy

To accomplish even a small part of his program for eliminating the causes of social unrest and the breeders of Communism, Grau will need a lot of help—financial, technical, moral and political. Some financial assistance in the form of loans might come from the U.S., but our rigid official policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of other nations probably precludes any other forms of help. This hands-off policy of ours leaves the field to outside powers, and we have no one but ourselves to blame if things go haywire south of the Rio Grande.

Cuba's revolution of 1933 didn't end with Machado's flight from Havana. It continues and could be a democratic one. But unless the greatest democracy on earth helps Cuba to move along democratic paths, the Communists will surely see to it that it develops according to their own social, political and economic ideas.

The test is bound to come in Cuba when the sugar market crashes. It might come sooner. Next year's crop, due to a seven months drought which hit the island last October, will be at least 30 per cent smaller than the 1945 harvest. This may mean that you'll get one third less sugar in your ration. To the *guajiros* in Cuba it'll most certainly mean one third less money with which to buy rice and beans for supper, and a proportionately higher interest in any kind of economic and political formula that'll help fill the increased emptiness of their bellies. Grau, in any case, has his work cut out for him.

Collier's for August 4, 1945