

Travel Ban

Student Cites Cuban Progress

By RICHARD WOODLEY

Martin Nicolaus, one of the 58 students who violated the State Department's travel ban to visit Cuba last summer, gave a large crowd of carefully listening Wesleyan students last night his version of the present condition of a progressive, happy, popularly unified, but politically unsettled Cuba.

He talked of progress in literacy, health and welfare, economics, and racial integration; problems with an inadequate press and inefficient management; and un-
of government into which Cuba will evolve, laws, and a successor to Castro.

He called Premier Castro's regime "the most popular government I've ever seen," though maintaining that his intention was to portray not Cuba "as a paradise or Cuba for everybody, but Cuba for Cubans and America for Americans."

Another Trip?

Another trip is in the of-
fing, Nicolaus said, "as far as I know," and by spring there should be details on that.

But before getting to the
rest of his talk, the crisp-
speaking Wesleyan graduate
vented some ire and sarcasm
on the State Department's
Cuban travel ban, on alleged
police brutality at the recent
hearing with the students in
Washington, and on the na-
tional press coverage of the
current situation of Cuba.

"You travel to France and
nobody calls you a Gaullist;
go to Italy and nobody calls
you a papacist; go to Spain
and nobody calls you a fasc-
ist; go to England and no-
body calls you a monarch-
ist."

Then, to the delight of the
entire audience, added in
lowered tones:

"Try to go to Cuba some-
time."

Describes Hearing

He described the students'
return to the United States
and the State Department's
letter that the passports were
to be invalidated. Then he
launched into what one stu-
dent termed, following the
2½ hour lecture, "a kind of
doubtful account" of the way
the Washington police han-
dled the crowd at the sub-
sequent congressional hear-
ing.

"... and then threw him
down two flights of marble
stairs."

But Nicolaus was careful to
point out that he was not pres-
ent and was repeating what he
had been told by those who
were in attendance.

He said the travel ban is
unconstitutional, and that a
hearing on the passport ques-
tion will come up soon.

"All this is what happened
when we travelled to Cuba
with no more evil intentions
than if we had gone to Spain or
anywhere else," he said. "It
is a fear based on what we don't
know about Cuba."

He said news service report-
ers in Cuba admitted pre-
convictions that the revolution
"should be eradicated."

Organized Ignorance

"These were private efforts
on behalf of the newspapers un-
til 1961 when Cuba was put on
the travel ban. Now we have
organized ignorance. It is igno-
rance as a national policy. If
this didn't exist, I wouldn't be
speaking here. There would be
no reason for anyone to listen to
me."

He said it was necessary "for
somebody to protest the travel
ban."

"The travel ban is somewhat
like the wall across East Ber-
lin," he said.

Having protested, Nicolaus
proceeded with his summary of
today's progress in Cuba.

SCHOOLS: He said the Catho-
lic Church has figures which
show the illiteracy rate was 40
per cent before the Castro revo-
lution. Now, official govern-
ment statistics show the rate at
25 per cent.

"I don't know if this is so,"
he said. But he described scenes
of workmen busily reading
newspapers during lunch hours
and other evidence of people
interested in reading in free
moments. He said there is now
education up to secondary
school, and that there are fa-
cilities for "every child in
Cuba" to study that far.

Use Old Mansions

The old mansions and estates
in the suburbs of Cuba, he said,
have been vacated by the own-
ers (most of whom left Cuba)
and now are used for scholar-
ship students' classes and hous-
ing.

"And there are primitive
school rooms everywhere" in
the outer districts of the island.

HEALTH AND WELFARE:
He cited the volume of hospi-
tal construction and the major
education campaign to elimi-
nate gastroenteritis, a disease
he said was the major killer of
children in Cuba.

"The most important thing
is that there is free medical
care for everyone."

There was a shortage of doc-
tors and facilities, he said, be-
cause more people were mak-
ing use of them than ever be-
fore.

ECONOMICS: Elimination of
employment is now "virtual"
but not "total," Nicolaus said.
He said work is being provided
through diversification of agri-
culture and construction, such
as for housing.

"You may be surprised," he
said, "but I count the rationing
system as progress."

Peasants Get Share

Under Batista, he said, the
wealthy got most of the good
food. Now the poor peasants
get an equal share.

"And nobody gets good
food," muttered one student in
the audience.

Nicolaus said that though he
felt the rationing system was
progress, "I hope that soon
they will be able to abandon
it."

INTEGRATION: "I don't
know exactly how bad it was
before, but I know for certain
there were certain places
Negros could not go, and I
know for certain there were
jobs Negros couldn't get."

He cited the example of a
Negro bus driver he talked to
who said he had applied for
that job several times before
the revolution but was always
turned down for various minor
reasons. After the revolution he
applied and was given the job
immediately.

"I am quoting people more
sensitive to the problem (Ne-
groes) when I say that there is
no racial discrimination any
more," Nicolaus said.

He said that private instances
of discrimination were "severe-
ly punished" and that there
were "very rigidly enforced
laws." He said even a "slight
on the street was a mis-
demeanor."

He then turned to phase two
of his talk, Cuba's problems.

Press All the Same

PRESS: He didn't like the
Cuban press. He said all four
newspapers were similar, ex-
cept for minor differences, "and
I find them dull: they are load-
ed with production figures and
such things. I miss feature
stories."

He said: "I don't think a
solution has been found as yet
for a free press under Castro
or socialism. They haven't
found a way out yet."

BUREAUCRACY: "... The
Cubans haven't got the mana-
gerial ability... and they're
making mistakes all over the
place. This is a big area of com-
plaint."

He said letters to the editors
of newspapers reflected such
complaints.

ATTITUDES: One of Cas-
tro's problems, he said, is that
the "people don't think critical-
ly."

"This attitude is from before
the revolution. The peasants
don't realize—that this is the
time to speak out. They have
an attitude of servility. Offi-
cials of Cuba, he said, agree
that there is too little "critical
spirit."

"The problem is to get them
to be full-fledged citizens."

Phase three of his lecture in-
volved areas he said were still
in a state of flux. "I can't eval-
uate them, and nobody should
evaluate them at this time."

What Direction?

POLITICAL STRUCTURE: He said he didn't know what kind of government the revolution would evolve into. It could be a democracy, or a dictatorship, or something else. Now it is called a "dictatorship for the proletariat," that is, the poor over the rich.

Castro's omnipresence in all corners of the dictatorship, he said, now give Cuba "a government which runs indirectly from the bottom up" because Castro always takes into advisement what the peasants are saying.

"I would say that 80-85 per cent are behind the revolution."

"I never saw anything more democratic" than the workshop nominations for party membership.

SUCCESSOR: This is an "unsettled" issue, he said. Nobody seems to know who might follow Castro.

LAWS: Due to the lack of legal precedents in the revolution, it is unclear how many of the laws will work. He said the legal situation was "very, very corrupt" under Batista, and that "the Valachi gang was very much involved in Cuba in the 30's."

PRISONS: "We saw a couple of bad prisons, many good prisons." He talked of the rehabilitation farms where inmates had "loaded guns" in their possession to guard themselves.

"It's a very bold experiment based entirely on trust."

He said there were even political rehabilitation farms on which there were many former Batista-followers.

Showed Slides

Nicolaus showed a long series

of photographic slides showing many facets of Cuba which have not generally been shown. There were happy faces, healthy children, beautiful buildings.

The character of the revolution — or part of it — was graphically shown with the contrasts of the ritzy pre-revolution hotels and apartment buildings now populated by lower classes. Children played and swam in the modern facilities where the rich had exercised up to 10 years ago.

He had photographed Castro playing ping-pong with some of the students. It was a smiling Castro, and as the games progressed, a shirtless Castro.

(It was a surprisingly flabby Castro without the denim shirt.)

For an hour, Nicolaus answered questions from the audience. He tended toward sarcasm on many of the more critical questions, but answered most of them briskly.

Question Period

One student, after a prelude of criticism of Nicolaus for assuming "a great deal of naivete on the part of the audience," asked if the speaker felt "you have taught us anything tonight."

"There will be a test right after the meeting," Nicolaus answered.

Nicolaus restricted the questions to Cuba, and most of the questions were simply for further clarification of what he had said.

Questioned about the presence of "secondary economies" such as a national lottery, Nicolaus said there was a national lottery with houses as prizes.

He said nobody loses any way because the money you bet on the lottery is put aside to be used as a down-payment on a house as soon as there are houses available for everybody."

Students leaving Theatre '92 where the talk was given gave widely varied reactions.

Doubted Objectivity

Most said they doubted Nicolaus was objective in his talk, but most said the talk was informative. Many students expressed the feeling that the nation's press was so slanted "the other way" that it was necessary to hear from someone like Nicolaus "who is slanted his way."

Many students agreed with Nicolaus that diplomatic and trade relations should be reestablished with Cuba.

Several mentioned they were surprised at the number of happy faces shown in Nicolaus' photographs.

A Wesleyan University economist said he felt the talk was excellent, but wished Nicolaus had stressed "even more" that there are "other ways than private enterprise for a successful economy." He said he believed Cuba had shown great progress in solving the unemployment problem. And he was impressed "with the happiness and ebullience shown in the faces."

Stirred Thoughts

One student said he didn't think anybody's mind was changed by the talk, but that "it stirred up the mud in my mind."

"It's good to be stirred up once in a while," he said.

Several students said they were irritated by the attitude of Nicolaus.

"He's an egotistical and arrogant . . ." said one, "but interesting. This was a good character study of him, anyway."

Nicolaus, who graduated magna cum laude from Wesleyan last spring, is currently studying for a master's degree in the history of great ideas at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass.

In '92 Speech

Nicolaus Says Cuban Reforms Should Be Seen By Students

by Edward M. Rudd

A personal account of the American student trip into Cuba this summer was given by Martin Nicolaus '63, in the '92 Theater last night. The speech, accompanied by slides, was sponsored by the Wesleyan political forum.

Nicolaus emphasized in the opening of his speech his personal distaste for the State Department's ban on American travel in Cuba. Stressing the difficulty of American travel in Cuba, Nicolaus dared the audience to "go to Cuba sometime." He then related the problems encountered in the actual travel to Cuba, in returning to the United States and in the House Un-American Activities committee hearings held in Washington after readmittance to the United States.

Nicolaus referred to State Department indecision and inefficiency in readmittance procedures in Madrid where the American students were forced to re-enter the U.S. He commented also on the current indecision in the government's action against the illegal trip into Cuba. Nicolaus then described police handling of the students during the Washington hearings as vicious and prejudiced towards bearded and sandeiled students. He mentioned the use of paralyzing clamps and beatings resulting in cracked ribs.

Public Ignorance

Nicolaus stated that American public ignorance of the real Cuban economic and political situation caused the unfavorable public reaction to the trip. He said this ignorance had two sources: the dearth of full and accurate national news coverage of the Cuban situation and the U.S. travel ban to Cuba. Nicolaus said that if everyone were allowed to travel to Cuba there would not be the "hullabaloo, hue and cry" over the trip.

Nicolaus explained the reason the trip was made by students by expounding the special role of students

as seekers after truth. He stated that students, whose business is to find out truth, must protest the U.S. travel ban as a "contribution to ignorance."

Social Progress

Nicolaus gave a tripartite outline of social progress in Cuba mentioning progress in education, health welfare and general economy. He lauded a reduction of an unofficial 40% illiteracy rate to 3.9% in two years and also the increased facilities for education for all ages in Cuba. He described former hotels reconverted into "scholarship cities." He pointed to increased medical facilities and free medical care for all Cubans. He described the economic gains from a diversion of agricultural crops and increased industry and home building.

Nicolaus then concerned himself with the severe problems he noticed in Cuba. He saw dullness and repetition among the Cuban newspapers and problems in the bureaucratic administration in business. He noticed in the Cuban people themselves a "slave-suffe in their thought," and a lack of "critical spirit." He pointed out the ill effects of managing a government respondent to experiment and public opinion.

Nicolaus stated that he was unclear as to the problem of succession of political leadership in Cuba. He also could not foretell the future of Cuba's legal system which has little legitimate legal precedence. He did mention however that he witnessed a trial which was "as fair as could be."

Slides followed the prepared speech. These slides concentrated on the urban parts of the trip, showing scenes from Havana and Santiago. The July 26 Independence Day political rally was covered, with emphasis on reaction in people's faces. Photographs appeared of Fidel Castro playing ping-pong with the American students.

Suggestions for future U.S.-Cuban policy were stated by Nicolaus during the question period following the slides. Other than lifting the travel ban, he suggested the U.S. re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, remove the black list of foreign ships serving Cuban ports, lift the embargo of Cuba and renegotiate trade agreements.