

jailed several Egyptian citizens amid angry press charges that they had plotted to "undermine and overthrow the government of Egypt . . . by spreading irreverent jests."

Perhaps because this sort of accusation between two sovereign nations sounded like a fine joke in itself, the only observer to comment on it turned out to be humorist Art Buchwald. His column speculated hilariously on what might happen if the CIA *did* try to influence events around the world by scattering loaded gags. What neither Buchwald nor anyone else appears to have realized is that in sober, workaday reality, our intelligence services actually do conduct and export jokes as a highly valued psychological warfare tactic.

Whether the excitable President Nasser complained with good reason is uncertain; PARADE's own investigation has failed to turn up any anti-Egyptian comedy plots. But there is a good deal of evidence that Soviet bloc countries have long been under an unremitting barrage of buffoons from the ban-not-firing Bondmen of the CIA.

One of the latest outbreaks of laugh warfare was in Cuba. Premier Fidel Castro purged an army group commander, a police chief and the son of the foreign minister in punishment for these offenses:

High living, party-going among foreigners and circulating counter-revolutionary jokes.

There was much rejoicing by a small group of Cuban exiles in Miami who publish anti-Castro jokes in the humor magazine *Zig-Zag* and airdrop copies into Cuba. They felt Castro's angry reaction proved their barbs had hit their target. And they went to work on new gags based on the purge. One of them goes like this:

A Cuban revolutionary leader attending an embassy reception refused a drink. "No thanks," he said, "I've had one." A tray of canapés was passed his way. "No thanks," he said, "I've already eaten." One diplomat told a joke and everyone roared—except the Cuban.

"What's the matter, didn't you like it?" asked the diplomat.

"Thanks," answered the Cuban, "but I've already laughed."

One of *Zig-Zag's* latest describes a Castro government drive to round up a huge volunteer labor force to harvest desperately needed crops. Two truckloads of workers escorted by a militia detail arrive at a sugarcane field. The officer in charge of the detail announces to the field boss:

"In these trucks I bring you 57 patriotic volunteer cane cutters of the

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Anti-Castro exile Silvio Fontanillas, whose cartoons Cubans have loved for years, drew this one especially

for PARADE. His comic barbs are key weapons in the "war of wits" against Communist regimes.

# THE WAR OF WITS

by ANDREW ST. GEORGE



The Cuban satirist Silvio: "We cartoonists are like sharpshooters, snipers."

**W**hy was Khrushchev suddenly removed from power, just as Russia was beginning to eat better?

Having brought all that farm produce from the U.S., he was caught pocketing the green stamps.

How come a Soviet cosmonaut stepped out of his capsule in orbit before any American space pilot did?

The Russian had to—as usual, his indoor plumbing wouldn't work.

Why did the recent reorganization of the Hungarian police result in three-man patrols?

Well, it was decided every patrol needed at least one officer who could write, one officer who could read—and, of course, one to keep an eye on two such intellectual types.

These irreverent explanations are by no means the flippant witticisms they might seem. They represent, in a special way, the official comment of the U.S. government. For the little-known fact is that telling jokes has long been one of Washington's favorite ways of making known its view on the activities of other governments—particularly Communist governments with stuffy, sober-sided, humorless rulers.

Although insiders have long known and enjoyed Washington's secret war of wits against uncooperative, self-important international competitors, the procedure came under formal diplomatic fire only recently, when Egyptian strongman Gamal Abdel Nasser revealed himself a poor sport. His police expelled two American diplomats and

## U.S. GOVERNMENT LISTENS CLOSELY TO RED-BLOC FOLK HUMOR

Havana Red Star Revolutionary Vanguard Workers Brigade: Remember, when you've checked them in, I want the rope back."

Another new one:

When China recently announced it was cutting its rice shipments to Cuba to one-third of what they had been, Castro frantically cabled Moscow:

"Chinese cutting shipments; please send rice soonest."

The Soviet government replied:

"Can't send rice. Suggest tighten belts."

Castro cabled back just as frantically:

"Send belts!"

Some of Washington's most scholarly intelligence analysts consider popular humor a key gauge of political conditions behind the Iron Curtain. Most of the secret intelligence memos put out by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and by the CIA pay close attention to such clues. The government's interagency bulletin on the monthly status of ideological warfare always contains an up-to-date sampling of humorous folklore, and the best ones occasionally find their way into President Johnson's daily intelligence digest, a top-secret compendium of world events.

The President is said to have got a chuckle recently on reading that in Cuba people refer to the Soviet engineering authority as "Professor Reguspatoff"—a wry revelation that despite the much-touted Soviet "mechanization drive," Cuba still depends on U.S. machinery and spare parts to keep its industry rolling. ("Reg. U.S. Patent Office" used to be the identifying mark of American imports.)

To make sure that the well of witticisms never runs dry, the CIA has been writing, producing and exporting gags almost since it came into being as an independent agency in 1948. By 1950, pointed political humor had become the spearhead of our psychological warfare attacks on every Eastern front.

At the height of Stalinist terror, for example, antigovernment jokes were highly prized but just as highly dangerous—capitalistic jokers risked capital punishment. Infiltration measures worthy of spy fiction had to be devised to slip jokes under the Iron Curtain.

To start with, the front and back covers of such official Communist humor weeklies as the Czech *Dikobraz* and the Hungarian *Ludas Matyi* were photographed and carefully reproduced. It was necessary to disguise not just the distributors and the readers but also the jokebooks themselves. And in-

side the Communist covers were eight or 10 pages of the pointiest, peppiest anti-Communist jokes, to be relished and repeated in whispers as a heaven-sent antidote to Stalinist brainwashing.

Printed in secret, closely guarded European plants, these highly explosive publications had next to be smuggled across the frontier by special teams of night-runners. Once behind the Iron Curtain, they were mailed in plain envelopes or wrappers bearing false imprints.

Washington's covert comedy exports who came to work with this material soon found themselves running the same risks as Broadway gag writers. Some jokes were hits; some laid bombs.

"We've had a joke enter the Soviet orbit at Potsdam and circulate all the way to Sofia in a month, where an intelligence survey of ours picked it up as an established local folk humorism," says a former Austrian theater critic who is now an earnestly anonymous civil servant in Counter-Subversion and Psy-War Operations. "Then, when it got to Cuba, it bombed out. Why? Well, take this ancient classic. Two small sparrows find themselves on a tree branch overlooking the innermost courtyard of the Kremlin. 'Say, isn't that Stalin standing right below us?' asks one. 'Yep, it's him,' chirps the other. 'Well,' demands the first sparrow, 'what are we waiting for?' Now don't ask me why people find such simplicities irresistible—they just do. It knocked a little hole in Stalin's insufferable halo, so to speak. That is, it did wherever sparrows are a traditional, unhousebroken nuisance. But in Cuba, where street birds are scarce, it flopped."

## BOX OFFICE GAGS

Other simple gags proved box office knockouts in Castrolandia. "Is it possible to build real socialism in Cuba? Never—the country is too small for such an enormous calamity."

And so it goes. Perhaps inevitably, Cuba is currently the priority target for our teleguided sidesplitters. Among short-lived exile publications, *Zig-Zag*, the famous old Havana humor magazine, is the only one that has continued to prosper; for every weekly print run of approximately 30,000 copies, it prints a subsidized miniature edition of 50,000 copies, specially designed to be mailed or airdropped into Cuba.

Written and drawn by Cuban exiles, *Zig-Zag* pokes knowing fun at every sore spot of the Castro regime, from ideology. ("You may have Marx in Cuba, but we have the capital here in



The anti-Communist humor magazine *Zig-Zag* is produced in Miami by Cuban exiles.

the U.S.") and food-shortage recipes. ("Lightly salt a properly aged pigskin belt and brown it in the rendered grease of six well-worn playing cards...") to Fidel Castro's notions of personal cleanliness.

*Zig-Zag* is put together every week in a modest store front headquarters on Miami's famous Flagler Street by José Manuel Rosenada, probably the most savvy humor editor of Spanish-language journalism anywhere. Rosenada's shop boasts several first-rate jokesmiths and caricaturists, most prominently perhaps his steady cover artist, the legendary Silvio—shy, stocky, pipe-smoking Silvio Fontanillas, who has been Havana's favorite editorial cartoonist for 30 of his 53 years.

"Cartoons, keep in mind, are different from any other kind of propaganda," Silvio explained in a recent interview. "Writers and broadcasters are cannoners, machinegunners; we cartoonists are sharpshooters, snipers. We must be able to work behind the frontlines, so to speak, right where the people live, and make every shot count. Writers tend to tell the reader how things are and what to think about them. We, on the other hand, must find out how the common man feels about things, what people are thinking when they are thinking to themselves—and then express it as pungently as possible. The writer can shout; the car-

toonist must echo. And it must be a true echo. You know, when we drop in at the Refugee Center to interview new arrivals from Cuba, the reporters concentrate on judges, engineers, professors; I prefer to talk to fishermen, truckdrivers, canecutters. My work grows at the grassroots—in the deepest subsoil of folk feeling."

## SILVIO'S IMPACT

Perhaps as a result of this approach, Silvio's work has astonishing popular impact in censor-muffled Cuba. "Silvio's aim is so true," says editor Rosenada, "his wit spreads so quickly by word of mouth, it mushrooms so widely into ubiquitous folk humor, that our biggest problem is feedback. New refugees from Cuba keep calling to tell us the best Havana curbside jokes, 'Listen,' they say, 'here's the latest... and it turns out to be one of Silvio's cover puns from last December.'"

Cubans—like all regimented peoples—find huge enjoyment in swapping anti-authoritarian stingers. "They really help protect your sanity and sense of proportion under totalitarianism," a Havana refugee recently told CIA interviewers in Miami. "So long as you can laugh, you can last. Of course, this is not exactly the air support we had been hoping for on critical occasions. But for the time being it's better than nothing. And funnier."