



Fair in Port-au-Prince

Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti and currently the scene of a rather extraordinary Bicentennial Exposition, lies at a point on the coastline midway between Cap-Haitien, ancient capital of the French, in the north, and the virtually unexplored stretches of the long peninsula pointing southeast toward Jamaica. Its harbor is the finest on the island; its spectacular setting yields nothing to Naples or Rio. Deep waters and coral reefs provide alternating depths of blue. Verdant hillsides and, to the north, a range of eroded mountains over whose wrinkled hide the clouds hang like bats, produce similarly varying shades of green.

The man responsible for the current exploitation of this dramatic setting is President Dumarsais Estimé, the first "black" ruler of Haiti since the U. S. occupation ended in 1933. Unlike many previous rulers of Haiti, Estimé has not had to resort to tyranny to carry through his pet project—cost: eight million dollars to date, in a country with a fifteen-million-dollar annual budget. Waste, mistakes, delay, and the normal complement of political chicanery—all of these have been accepted because the exposition is a symbol of Haitians. This particular symbol bespeaks Haiti's modernization, its will to compete for the lucrative Caribbean tourist trade, its desire to change.

The site of the exposition, lying in the crook of the harbor, is as spectacular in its way as its backdrop. It is the waterfront of a busy metropolis, not long ago a malarial slum, today a park with white "modernistic" buildings on broad, palm-lined avenues. In the immediate background is the old city, sprawling into the foothills. The old city, with the ramshackle charm of jigsaw eaves and cuckoo-clock towers, bead-curtains and jalousies, belongs to French Haiti. African Haiti begins where the streets develop ruts, well within the city limits, and stretches beyond into the mountains.

The American tourists who have so far visited the exposition may be divided into three types. There are the ones who read the big Hilton or Hamilton Wright ads in the New York newspapers about a "\$26,000,000 plant," replete with bathing beaches, golf courses, and the like, and who, once here, ask bitingly: "Where are the beaches? Where are the golf courses? What the hell are we supposed to do?"

Then there are the one-day customers, like the sailors from the flotilla of U.S. destroyers that recently stopped briefly, or occasional passengers from the cruise ships that bob in and out. The passenger rushes to the swank Casino Nationale, where gambling is wide-



open, twenty-five imported croupiers make twenty-five dollars a night, and sums running into four figures are made and lost at roulette or "21." The sailor plays the slot machines, takes in the strip-tease or freak show in the exposition's carnival, and kills the rest of the day beside the swimming pool at Thorland in nearby Bizoton.

Finally there are those who find Haiti an experience not to be duplicated anywhere. These tourists, more sensitive and reflective than the others, have sharply noted the extreme contrasts of natural beauty and primitive squalor, of creative vigor and national poverty. For them the somewhat pathetic bravura of the exposition has become transparent. They see that it is above all Haiti's first big protest against dirt floors, disease, and undernourishment.

The Haitian himself is proud of the exposition. I have met members of the élite—once a parasitical caste, predominantly mulatto, tending to look down elegant French noses at the "black" peasant, but of recent years busier, less provincial, and far less color-conscious—who have not visited the exposition "yet." There are some who openly regard the whole business as a golden opportunity to make a killing, and who have made killings—contractors, concessionaires, politicians, even artists. The average member of the élite is perhaps a little cynical about the government's chances of recovering what it has spent for a symbol, but he is as proud of what the symbol stands for as the man in the street is.

So far very few of the three million peasants in this republic of 11,069 square miles have come to the fair. Not that they wouldn't like to—if they know about it at all. But how is the Haitian peasant to get there? And, since not very many peasants have annual cash incomes of more than twenty dollars, what would they have to spend, even if they could leave their bean patches? There was some talk of free bus service to and from remote parts of the island, but the fact of the matter is that Haitian peasants need expositions less than they need shoes, clothing, education, higher incomes, and a little leisure—and they stand little chance of getting these before the republic builds irrigation projects, roads, and bridges, develops mass education, and broadens

the franchise. The present government insists it can do nothing in this direction unless it can get big foreign loans (which it can't) or attract a great influx of tourists to a "progressive" Haiti. Hence the exposition.

Meanwhile, to be sure, thousands of city folk and even some peasants can and do visit the exposition. They may be seen on holiday nights when the general entrance fee is lifted, swarming through the free agricultural implement exhibit or the ethnological and art displays, or spending an average of ten cents a night on the ferris wheel or in the penny-gambling booths of the Ross Manning carnival imported from the United States. Thirty-five thousand Haitians jam the tents on Saturday nights, most of them "just looking." They make the tents sway with their shoving and laughter, and even the native police join the fun.

On a November day over two years ago, I had occasion to visit what is now precisely the center of the exposition grounds. The waterfront area was at that time the most densely crowded slum in Haiti, a stinking, undrained swamp covered with jerry-built palm-thatched *cailles*, and known as *Trou Cochon*. Rats, scrawny chickens, and pigs shared the hovels with diseased adults and undernourished children. And in the middle of it, holding court in king's robe and jewelled crown, lived Hector Hyppolite, the voodoo priest whose painting has since become famous in Paris and New York.

Hyppolite was throwing a *bamboche* (party) that day to celebrate the completion of a home-made fishing-smack. Inside, in the *tonnelle* of his "temple," a guitar, a saxophone, and a banjo provided polite jazz for Hyppolite's bourgeois friends. Outside, between the hut and the fantastic boat held together with bits of string, some really hot *rada* drums and some even hotter native rum were providing inspiration for a native woman in process of tearing her clothes off under the spell of Hyppolite's favorite *loa*, *Maître la Sirène*, goddess of the sea.

A year ago August Schmiedigan, a central-European architect-engineer, emerged as impresario extraordinary of the exposition. By then considerable money must already have been spent. Schmiedigan himself cost still more money. A man with a passion for po-

litical intrigue, he made up in charm and imagination for his weakness in administrative efficiency. His imagination, for example, led him to foresee the profits to be made by becoming the agent for big construction and electrical-equipment companies abroad that were later given contracts for exposition work.

So the exposition, originally planned for a budget of four million, has now cost almost double that figure, and the final cost is not known. Possibly this fact lies behind Schmiedigan's recent, sudden, and unexplained flight to the United States. While he was here, at any rate, Schmiedigan did his job, and Haiti is grateful. What he lacked in taste, he made up in bravura. It was a foregone conclusion that he would not make any extensive use of the world-famous talent of the *Centre d'Art*, but murals by Castera Bazile, Wilson Bigaud, and Dieudonné Cedor were finally accepted for the *Palais du Tourisme* after President Estimé himself intervened.

Whether by choice or necessity, Schmiedigan's happiest move was his selection of a young Haitian architect, Albert Mangonès, to plan the amusement section. Mangonès, who had traveled in Europe, and won prizes and scholarships at Cornell, was under something of a cloud in his native land as an alleged political extremist, but Schmiedigan backed his imaginative conceptions to the limit. Since Schmiedigan's departure, Mangonès has been in virtual charge.

Having prevailed on the authorities to leave intact a magnificent stand of densely planted fifty-foot royal palms, Mangonès proceeded to direct the drainage of the area into a serpentine reflecting-basin, and against this backdrop erected an open-air theater. Here, several times weekly, one may see a really inspired troupe of native ex-voodoo dancers, expertly selected and



directed by Jean Léon Destiné, Haiti's foremost choreographer and dancer.

Farther down the waterfront, Mangonès built a cockfight arena. Planned as a series of non-concentric ellipses, with cantilevered half-roofs, this structure employed, perhaps for the first time, all the native materials of Haiti in a thoroughly modern ensemble—woven-mat curtains, sisal-rope ceilings, piers of naked coconut-palm trunks set at angles, and green bamboo packed tightly in rows to form partitions.

The *Palais des Beaux Arts*, with its superbly mounted loan collection of ethnological pieces and a representative hanging of primitive art, is the joint work of Henri Rivière, French museum expert, and Jean Chenet, assistant director of the *Centre d'Art*.

Mangonès has managed to give the exposition some co-ordination and Haitian flavor, but the ghost of Schmiedigan presides over the rows of rather empty tunnel-like buildings, as well as over the drying up of funds with which his successor is plagued. The palm garden has perforce been converted into a night club, and the cockfight arena has been let out to concessionaires, who have sublet stands to vendors.

A greater dignity presides over the northern extremity of the exposition, where various nations friendly to Haiti have erected pavilions. Some of these, like the graceful Venezuelan building, on which that oil-happy republic has lavished more than three hundred thousand dollars, will later serve as embassies. The United States pavilion is still a-building. In fact, so are most of the structures in this section, though it was scheduled to open officially on February 12.

So far bookings at the new hotels have been disappointing, and the big cruise ships haven't altered their itineraries to stop at Haiti, but the Haitians are still proud of the fair. They think of it as their own accomplishment and they stand by it. The foreigner has turned up his nose at their "backwardness" or condescended to be charmed by their "picturesqueness"; this will show him. The Haitians are grateful to President Estimé for having conceived and carried out so spectacular a showpiece of modernism. They regard it—as he does himself—as the visible proof of what Haiti expects to do with itself from here on out. —SELDEN RODMAN

Books

Terrifying Success Story



STALIN: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY. By Isaac Deutscher. 570 pp. New York: Oxford University Press. \$5.

Mr. Deutscher's is a difficult book to put down once you have started reading it. You may think the author has missed a point here and there, or surmise that he does some moderately tall guessing when evidence is unavailable or inconclusive, or that he sometimes displays a naive confidence in statistics. But in the main the greatest success story of current history is related with a detachment and scholarly acumen which, in the nature of things, writers like Trotsky or Souvarine could not muster.

To be sure, the story may still end with a macabre bang, since ours is a trigger-happy world which can load its pistols with plutonium bombs or even, possibly, hydrogen bombs. At the moment, however, the seventy-one-year-old heir to the throne of Ivan the Terrible is riding higher than Caesar Augustus or Frederick II. By comparison with his imperialistic exploits, those of Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan look like minor-league performances. He has pushed Russia westward past the Elbe and southeastward to the fringe of Burma. Eliciting from slave intellectual labor more eulogies than have been collected by all the prima donnas of all time, he is revered by untold thousands, even in the free western world, as the man who will oust the mighty from their seats and exalt those of low degree.

The blasphemy which, speaking in terms of Jewish-Christian civilization, is implicit in this attitude has been a

source of wonderment to many. How is it that an admittedly brutal dictator, who has turned scores of old cronies over to the firing squad, and shipped millions of innocent men and women to concentration camps, can nevertheless persuade intellectuals in countries like the United States, Britain, and France to commit high treason against their own governments? One may argue that the explanation is the persistent lure of the Communist myth, and the fact that many have not yet caught up with Stalin's deviations from the pattern of the mass dream.

This explanation accounts for some of the exaltation of Stalin, but by no means for all of it. A few years ago, Stalin was doing business with three unusually astute men: Churchill, Hitler, and Roosevelt. Winston Churchill may be removed from the list because by the time matters became really critical Britain had been reduced to the status of a beleaguered island. It was Hitler who puzzled, intrigued, and finally hardened Stalin's soul. At first the Kremlin was unable to take Nazism seriously. Stalin looked upon it as a temporary road block thrown across the route of a forward-marching proletariat; but he slowly came to feel that it would teach him some useful things about disposing of hated western democracy. The story of the deal between the Russian and the Austro-German, as told by Deutscher on the basis of the evidence so far made available, would be unbelievable if it were not true.

Then came the war. Up to a certain