

tion—which only fueled interest in Cuban literary and artistic circles. The reason: Alberto, 45, the son of a famous poet, spent his career on the inside, as an editor of state-published magazines and a writer in the state-financed film industry. He knew plenty of intellectuals who defied the rules. But Alberto played the game—among other things, filing reports on friends and family. “He is the first one to include himself as part of the tragedy,” says Jesús Díaz, editor of *Encuentro*, where the excerpt appeared. “He is not writing as a judge—which is what makes the book so extraordinary and so disturbing.”



The book represents a major failure of the Cuban policy of coddling intellectuals to keep them from defecting. Alberto moved to Mexico City in 1991, one of the first beneficiaries of the “velvet exile” system. It allows loyal artists who are tired of shortages and police-

state life to move abroad while keeping ties to Cuba. Alberto had no ambitions as a literary dissident. Then an editor friend solicited an essay on emotion. “A valve opened up in me,” he says. Among the memories that poured out was the late-1980s tale of an art historian whom Interior Ministry officials took by night to Havana’s historic cemetery. The officials, worried that Soviet largesse was nearing an end, ordered the historian to appraise prerevolutionary carvings and sculpture, which were subsequently sold to diplomats and tourists in hard-currency stores. And there is a Cuba’s-eye view of the Soviet collapse, with Fidel Castro blaming it on Mikhail Gorbachev. But Castro is not the center of Alberto’s book. For one thing, none of the Cubans he shows struggling to survive have any time for obsessing over the *comandante*. “The literature of post-Castroism has now begun,” says exiled Cuban journalist Wilfredo Cancio.

The writers-union attack aside, criticism of Alberto’s book has been surprisingly mild. From Havana, one Cuban intellectual who differs with Alberto saluted him in a letter to *Encuentro*. “His article has started more than one person thinking. For that alone, it’s worth reading.” Some say that such responses reflect a new era of Cuban pluralism and tolerance. Alberto isn’t convinced. For one thing, he has traded velvet exile for the traditional kind. “I could go back to Cuba,” Alberto says. “The problem would be getting out.” Spoken like someone with an appreciation for socialist realism. ■

KENNETH KAUNDA SHOT IN ZAMBIA

Reports from Zambia last week said that police there shot and wounded former president Kenneth Kaunda, 73, during a political rally in the town of Kabwe. Kaunda’s life apparently was not in danger. An aide said police fired at a car in which Kaunda and several political allies were riding after paramilitary forces prevented Kaunda from addressing an opposition meeting. An official version of events was not immediately available. Kaunda, one of Africa’s elder statesmen, led Zambia from independence in 1963 until 1991, when he was voted out of office in the country’s first free elections.

THE POPE BRAVES THE HEAT IN PARIS

Making his first visit to Paris since 1980, Pope John Paul II arrived in the French capital last week for a four-day rendezvous with hundreds of thousands of young people attending World Youth Day events. The 77-year-old pontiff braved a scorching summer sun to greet cheering followers on an esplanade near the Eiffel Tower, and in a ceremony in Notre Dame cathedral he beatified Frederic Ozanam, a 19th-century French Roman Catholic layman who founded the charitable St. Vincent de Paul Society. But French Socialists publicly rebuked him for praying at the grave of Jerome Lejeune—a geneticist and leading anti-abortionist—saying that he could encourage anti-abortion forces in France.

JAMAICA’S DEADLY PRISON RIOTS

Hoping to stem an alarming rise in HIV infection in Jamaica’s overcrowded prisons, authorities there proposed last week to distribute condoms to all inmates. But the plan went tragically wrong. Prison guards complained they were being made the object of homosexual jokes. Then the anti-condom rebellion escalated violently. At two maximum-security prisons, inmates with knives, ice picks and torches attacked other prisoners they accused of being homosexuals. Seven inmates died and 19 others were badly injured in the rioting.

AN ATTACK IN THE NIGHT IN RWANDA

It was one of the most lethal attacks in months in the refugee-packed border area between Rwanda and Congo (the former Zaire). In western Rwanda last week, assailants concealed in the predawn darkness burst into a camp housing 8,000 Tutsi refugees. According to U.N. officials, the attackers, believed to be Hutu, shot and hacked to death nearly 120 people—some as they slept—and set fire to their tents. Frantic refugees called for help from the Rwandan Army, but soldiers didn’t arrive until after daybreak—much too late.



How to hit a nerve: Alberto and his book

CUBA

A ‘Coward’ Speaks Out

The island’s hot read is a pitiless memoir

BY PETER KATEL

TALK ABOUT AN ANTIHERO. CUBA’S latest literary sensation is a writer whose memoir recounts how he was offended by government orders to spy on his own family—but was too scared to say no. He waxes nostalgic over the Cuba of the ’60s and ’70s, yet acknowledges that he and his friends stood by while the state persecuted homosexuals and longhairs. He describes his eagerness to move abroad while keeping his ties to the island—as long as he kept his mouth shut (which he did for several years). The harshest self-criticism in the book was to include this observation from a friend still in Cuba: “I can’t help but notice that in your previous books you never touched on the political problem. You had a healthy reputation for cowardice.”

In a nation of conformists, Eliseo Alberto’s “Report Against Myself” has hit a nerve. Smuggled copies have been circulating hand to hand since its publication earlier this year. After a Madrid magazine ran an excerpt from “Report,” the state-controlled writers-union magazine published a scathing denuncia-