

ers,” Batista did an end run around them, forming an alliance with, and legalizing, the Communist Party. (Following the Comintern’s lead, the party was then in its “popular front” period.) Batista also offered a Three Year Plan, promising a host of social reforms to benefit farm workers and others, courted labor (after years of obstructing union organization), and on a visit to Mexico, even spoke about nationalizing the Cuban sugar industry.

His revolutionary credentials may have been suspect, but Batista did supervise Cuba’s transition from a military dictatorship in 1934 to a nominal constitutional

democracy, says Whitney. The new constitution of 1940 “proclaimed political democracy, the rights of urban and rural labor, limitations on the size of sugar plantations and the need for systematic state intervention in the economy, while preserving the supreme role of private property. Ironically, many of the demands of the failed revolution of 1933 became the constitutional edicts of 1940.” The promises would not be kept, Whitney says, but at least they were made. Henceforth, Cubans “from all social classes” would expect the state to act in their behalf—and feel betrayed when it didn’t.

The African Connection

“Making the Connection: Africa and the Internet” by Mike Jensen, in *Current History* (May 2000), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

To Americans, it may seem as if the whole world is wired. It isn’t, as the case of Africa shows. But, as the same case also shows, it seems to be slowly getting there.

Only 11 of Africa’s 54 countries had local Internet access at the end of 1996, but by last February all 54 did, at least in their capital cities, reports Jensen, an independent consultant based in Port St. Johns, South Africa.

With an estimated population of 780 million, Africa now has some 25,000 computers permanently connected to the Internet and about 1.5 million Internet users. One million of these wired folk are in South Africa, leaving only about 500,000 among the 734 million people on the rest of the continent—a ratio of about one Internet user for every 1,500 people. In North America and Europe, the average is about one Internet user for every four people, and the worldwide average is about one for every 38. Though Internet use is less common in Africa than in much of the rest of the developing world (Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, have one user for every 125 people), Africa is ahead of South Asia, which has one user for every 2,500 inhabitants.

“Universities were initially at the vanguard of Internet developments in Africa, and most provide e-mail services,” says Jensen. But, as of early last year, “only about 20 countries had universities with full

Internet connectivity”; even in those, he says, access was usually limited to staff (and often graduate students), and was not available to the general student population.

But government ministries and businesses have begun to use the Web to promote foreign tourism and investment, he says. In Egypt, Senegal, and some other countries, governments have set up official Web sites. In Zambia, the State House established a site for its press releases, after the local opposition newspaper, *The Post*, set up a Web site. More than 120 African newspapers and newsmagazines are now available on the Internet. But outside South Africa, Jensen says, opposition groups generally make little use of the Web, which has yet to reach many of their potential supporters.

“Africa now has about 26 countries with 1,000 or more dial-up [Internet] subscribers,” he reports, “but only about nine countries with 5,000 or more: Egypt, Morocco, Kenya, Ghana, Mozambique, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.” The average cost of using a local dial-up Internet account for five hours a month is about \$60—vastly more than affluent Americans pay.

The infrastructure for the Internet, satellite TV, and cellular phones “has improved dramatically in Africa in the past five years,” Jensen says. But there is much more to do.