

Mr. President:

I know that you saw the original report and therefore you are aware of the burden of my message. But I wanted to see you personally, to impress upon you how strongly I feel that Fidel's alliance with the Communists is a precarious one and that despite his trip to Russia; his and Chairman Khrushchev's joint declaration of mutual loyalty... the Order of Lenin and all the rest... I don't think Castro trusts Khrushchev or feels relaxed within the alliance. And furthermore, I do think, as James Reston pointed out in his Sunday column, that we might profitably fish in those troubled waters.

I genuinely believe that Dr. Castro is now ready to discuss everything: the withdrawal of the troops; an end to the exporting of his revolution to other nations throughout the hemisphere... everything. And not just ready, Sir, but positively eager.

As you know, I talked to Fidel for eight hours and, incidentally, if I call him Fidel it is not because of any special familiarity but simply because that is what everyone calls him. The lowliest peasants in the fields, his own ministers, everyone calls him Fidel. Now, as I was saying, we talked for eight hours. What did we talk about? Not the glories of Marxism, I can assure you of that. We talked about

the Bill of Rights, about the writings of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, about democracy and about the failures of the revolution. We talked a great deal about the writings of Camus, particularly about Camus' extraordinary perception and sensitivity toward human suffering. Never, never have I found a Communist interested in the sentiments of Albert Camus. As you know, the Communist broke with Camus around 1955 over Algeria. And I certainly have not found dedicated Communists anxious to discuss the merits of our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. But Fidel enjoyed the conversation immensely.

I believe that he is quite unhappy with the course of the revolution. I explained that I was a progressive, and that I had supported his revolution, and that I had been very much against Batista. He believed me, and so I guess he trusted me, and was willing to listen when I explained that the progressive community of the Western world feels and believes that he has betrayed the revolution. This disturbed him to a great degree. He wanted to know why. Why? Why did I say this? Why did they feel the revolution had been betrayed? The question was somewhat disingenuous and the reasons are obvious, but I stated them to him politely.

(I told him that I thought the best system of government was the system wherein there was the least terror. He asked me if I thought there was terror on the island. I said that I had to answer yes, there was. And I deplored the civilian militia

and the police state apparatus. He said that he, too, disliked those aspects of the revolution, but that since the revolution they had been under conditions of war. I said further that nothing justified the more abusive and oppressive aspects of the militia, poking and prying into everyone's private affairs. Again he came back to the question of terror. Where is the terror, he asked. I spoke of the middle class, and I told him incidents of conversations I had with a number of middle class families and how desperately unhappy they were and, yes, terrorized by what the militia and secret police might do to them, and he said "This saddens me very much. I guess it is true that sometimes we have been so concerned about one aspect of the revolution that we have not looked at the entire picture, and so we have made many mistakes." He explained at length that he would not want terror on the island and would like to find a way to stop it, if it were true that some of his people felt terrorized. "But you see," he said, "my concern has always been for the poor, the rich could take care of themselves, but my heart has been full of the pains of the poor." And I said "Fidel, I'm younger than you are, but I suspect I'm more mature. I grew up just as filled with social protest as you and finally I came to realize that the rich bleed and feel pain and despair just as the poor do. They are also members of the human family and you can't ignore one whole group." "Perhaps you are right," he said, "I don't know, I honestly don't know." But my words about the terror on the island disturbed him very deeply.)

Over and over again he revealed to me a man not pleased with the way he had played things. A number of things he said, I think, are significant. I said to him "But as far as Communism is concerned, the progressive community of the Western world has looked down that road and turned back in horror," ... that we were against Communism, not because of its socialistic aspects, but because of the police state apparatus, the terror, the restraints on descent... and all the rest. He looked at me and said "I won't try to convert you to Marxism." I answered "That wouldn't be possible." Not once did he try to convince me of the superiority of Marxism - not once. If he were such a fervent advocate himself, surely he would feel compelled to defend his creed.

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary things he said to me was: "What do you think of Khrushchev?" Imagine, Sir, he asked me in all sincerity what I thought of Khrushchev. I said "Khrushchev is a sly old fox. And if he did not need you for whatever purposes he needs you, he would cut you off like a twig," and I snapped my fingers. "Just like that" I said. He did not try to argue this either. He just looked at me, again rather sadly, and I sensed a wounded note, and he looked straight into my eyes and nodded his head up and down. Then he made a curious, somewhat enigmatic statement. "Well," he said, "we did pretty well in October."

He was most interested in you, Mr. President. He kept saying to me "What is President Kennedy like, what does he want, what does he say about me privately? What does he want of us?" I said "All your attacks against the United States, this haranguing of the President, are not doing you any good, and only serve to feed the enemies of Kennedy who are your worst enemies." He seemed to understand this completely. I said that Kennedy's enemies are still brooding over the fact that air coverage was not provided for the invasion and that certain elements would like to invade Cuba today, and I added "Why do you want to push Kennedy into an abyss, he is not your worst enemy." Then the most extraordinary thing happened. That night at Havana University Fidel made a speech, and he quoted, almost verbatim, what I had said to him that afternoon about you. He said "Kennedy's enemies want to push him into an abyss." And then he went on to praise the steps, as he termed it, that you have taken toward peace... trying to put an end to the piratical attacks and all the rest.

Another note of significance that I think bears out my theory that the alliance between Fidel and the old line - hard line Communists inside Cuba is a precarious one. (I learned from the technicians that just before the interview Fidel said "Now this girl has been working very hard, pushing very hard for this interview, so let's try to help her now, and let's do the very best job we can for her.") After the interview Fidel turned to the technicians and said "Don't spoil that film,

now do a good job with it, and the minute it's finished, you turn it over to her." Quite obviously, Fidel was pleased with the interview. Yet, when the film was completed at one o'clock in the morning, on the ninth floor of C.M.Q., the technicians did not obey instructions and would not give me the film. I stayed with the film in the lab until it was finished, and the moment it was finished I said "Give me the film, you know that is an order from Fidel." They knew it was an order, because most of them had been in the room when Fidel issued it. But two gentlemen were there, whom I had not seen before, and obviously, they were members of the party apparatus. They said that the film would be turned over to me, but someone wanted to look at it. They told me to go back to my hotel, and the film would be delivered to me within an hour. From 1:30 until 7 in the morning I sat by my door waiting for the film. Of course, it never arrived, nor did they have any intentions of delivering it to me within an hour. It is a long, harrowing story, and I won't go into all the details, but it took me three days to get my film back, and I had to move heaven and earth to achieve that. I even had to send a cablegram to Fidel in Moscow. I learned later that the film was in the hands of the Communists who were not particularly anxious to let the film out of the country. The film, as you know, discussed rapprochement and a desire for better relations with the United States.

Just before I left Havana, I saw Che Guevara. I suspected that he had seen the film, so I simply asked him how he liked the interview. "Well," he said, "I thought your questions were very hostile, but I thought Fidel handled himself very well." He then said "I wouldn't give you an interview. Your questions are too hard." I said "Why, you are a brilliant man, you could answer any questions I could possibly pose." And he said "You think you are very clever, don't you." He didn't like me at all. Then I said to him "I think you're a much better Communist than Fidel," and he said "Oh no, Fidel is the best Communist, because he is the best man" and I said "I think Khrushchev would disagree." He looked at me knowingly, and we understood each other completely. My point here is that Fidel is one kind of man, and the men around him are another breed.

Another interesting point: I was told that Dr. Roa, the Foreign Minister, is an old socialist but not a Communist, and something happened that bore out that assessment. I had a chat with Dr. Roa at a party before I left. He, too, had seen the interview and liked it very much. We had a conversation about the revolution. I told him, as I had told Fidel, that I felt the course of the revolution had been a tragic one, and how wonderful it would be if a way could be found for Cuba to have normal relations once again with the United States... and then I described in some detail my reasons for being critical of the revolution... and I said I hoped Fidel would cease

exacerbating tensions. He thought all this over for a moment and said to me "I hope you told all this to Fidel."

Now, maybe we can destroy Fidel with a blockade, and perhaps it is not necessary to negotiate with him on any level. That, of course, is something that you know and I don't. But I do know that countries have lived along for decades without kleenex and tooth paste and shampoo and lipstick - and perhaps Cuba can, too. But if it is a question of getting along with a chastened Fidel... I think there is nothing he wants more. Above all, as I said earlier, I think he does not trust Khrushchev, I think he is not certain of his position with Khrushchev. I suppose Khrushchev does not trust him either, and Khrushchev is right, because a man who is so desperately concerned about his place in history... about what the progressive community of the Western world thinks of him... is clearly not a trustworthy Marxist ally.

I suppose you have read Fidel's statement at his trial in 1952. "History will absolve me." Well, he worries as to whether or not history will absolve him. The men around him, Che, Raoul, Blas Roca, Armando Hart, Carlos Rodriguez, these are tough, hard-nosed, down-the-line Communists. They don't have doubts about the validity of Marxist theory. But Fidel is full of doubts and uncertainties. He is vulnerable and sensitive and troubled. I think he knows that history will

absolve him only if he can change the course of the revolution, and he knows that he cannot change the course of the revolution without our assistance.

(I know it's very difficult, if not impossible, Sir, for obvious political reasons, for you to sit down and negotiate with Fidel, but if you could, I think you could get about everything you want from him. The glory and recognition that he would receive by sitting down with you would mean more than anything to him. He has committed terrible crimes, and he has unquestionably betrayed the revolution... but I do not think anyone is more conscious of all that than he is.) If you cannot talk to him, just bear in mind that he desperately wants to talk to some responsible official of our government. And I believe such conversations would reveal that Fidel Castro is now willing to concede almost anything to realize an end to the blockade and a resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States.

The End.

P.S.

A couple of points that might amuse you. He said to me "Is Kennedy well? He seems to have aged a lot. Is anything wrong with him?" Obviously, he follows you very closely. I said jokingly "Well, you didn't help much." He laughed and said "No, I guess I didn't." He even wanted to talk about Jackie. I asked him what he thought of Jackie, and his answer did not appear to be in line with the Marxist dialectic. He said "Well, I think she is very elegant."

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