

Don't Talk to Castro

By Benjamin C. Bradlee

FIDEL CASTRO talks about Jimmy Carter these days with mixtures of respect and outrage, sympathy and frustration, impatience and understanding.

It is strange to listen to Castro, sitting in a hotel room chair — a pistol in his hip holster over the green fatigues that he usually wears — and talking in simple language, almost apologetically, about how much more experienced he is in foreign affairs than Carter. And strange that it should seem strange.

Castro says he likes Carter, and not only because he disliked Richard Nixon so much. (Cuban papers spelled Nixon's name with a swastika in place of the "x".) He speaks admiringly of Carter's devotion to principle. He identifies with Carter's family background, parents who were poor but landed. He respects the fight Carter made to win the presidency. He believes Carter is a moral man.

But five American presidents have made mistakes about Cuba, according to the Cuban leader, and he is concerned that Carter will make it six.

Castro spoke — for seven and a half hours, in two separate conversations, in the Presidential Palace and next day in a suite on the 19th floor of the Riviera Hotel in Havana — about everything from barracuda (poisonous if caught on the north side of the island country, but a delicacy if caught on the south side) and baseball (a Havana team in Triple A ball is not an impossibility) to crocodiles (Cuba raises them for their leather) and cooking (his specialty is spaghetti and shrimps).

And always the conversation came back to the United States and the CIA.

Neither conversation was recorded. No notes were taken by either participant.

Two days before he left for a trip to Libya and Algeria, Castro's interest in President Carter and his hopes for a new U.S. policy toward Cuba were flagging.

Castro and Cuban diplomats generally are appalled at the American President's remarks, made on two separate occasions last month, to the effect that lifting of the

U.S. embargo or the re-establishment of relations depended on greater Cuban attention to human rights and a reduction (or removal) of Cuban troops in Angola.

The suggestions outrage Castro, and if one single message came ringing loud and clear through these conversations with Castro, it was this: Don't talk to Fidel Castro about human rights; he truly believes he has nothing to learn from the United States on this particular subject.

What does Cuba have to learn about human rights, he asks, from the country that mounted an invasion of Cuba and has relentlessly tried to assassinate Cuba's leader for almost 20 years? These attempts are no longer speculative, but fully documented by the Church Committee, he notes.

What does Cuba have to learn about human rights, he asks, from the country that waged a reckless war in Vietnam which cost hundreds of thousands of lives?

What does Cuba have to learn about human rights, he asks, from a country where racial prejudice has existed for centuries, a country whose businessmen regularly bribe the public officials of other countries and a country whose leaders produced Watergate? (Castro is fascinated by Watergate — more than most Americans. He has read every book written about Watergate, his associates claim.)

And finally, he asks, what does Cuba have to learn about human rights from a country which has supported every totalitarian regime in Latin America? He cites Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, as well as Mobutu, Diem and Park in Africa and Asia.

As far as Cuban troops in Angola are concerned; Castro states that they are there pursuant to a treaty at the request of the Angolan government, in exactly the same way U.S. troops are in other countries. And he cites the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Greece and West Germany.

Castro says he has no intention of making enemies out of his friends, just to make a friend out of an enemy. He has no intention of alienating those (Communist) countries which were there when Cuba needed their support, just to cut a new deal with the United States, which has tried to assassinate him, invade him and blockade him.

Bradlee, executive editor of The Washington Post, visited Cuba for a week at the end of February.

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About Human Rights



By David Suter for The Washington Post

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CASTRO says repeatedly that Americans should start looking at things from Cuba's point of view; everything would look different.

A dramatic example of this difference occurred between the two conversations. On Saturday, Feb. 26, Castro asked for an explanation of why Secretary of State Cyrus Vance had agreed to meet with a delegation of Cuban emigres, and in fact had done so the preceding day.

The delegation was headed by Carlos Prio Socarras*, president of Cuba from 1948 to 1952. The story rated six paragraphs on page A-11 in The Washington Post of the next day, 10 paragraphs on page 3 in The New York Times, and said simply that Prio and others had protested to Vance that the U.S. embargo must not be lifted.

In Havana, the story was getting a remarkably different interpretation, and Castro was steaming. Castro went out of his way to say that he had heard only good things about Secretary Vance (the North Vietnamese had told him Vance was "serious," meaning straight and moral, and no hawk during the Paris peace talks), but this meeting was absurd.

Prio and the others were all infamous, Castro said, known by Cubans to personify everything that was corrupt in pre-Castro Cuba or involved in the Bay of Pigs invasion. Castro said he could not imagine the names of three Americans whose consultation with the Cuban minister of foreign affairs would be comparably absurd.

If the Cuban people knew about Vance meeting with such a Cuban delegation, Castro said, they would be utterly baffled. (But it should be noted that the Cuban people have learned nothing about this meeting, nor any-

1. During one moment in 1956, Castro says, the revolution almost died aborning for lack of funds. Castro and his fellow revolutionaries had promised that they would never go looking for funds from people they considered to be enemies, but he received word in Mexico that Prio in America might be willing to contribute money to anyone who was trying to bring about Batista's downfall. Castro says he swallowed his pride, sneaked illegally into the United States — by horse and by foot across the Rio Bravo into Texas. There he met Prio, and received what he now remembers to have been \$50,000 from the former Cuban president. He walked back through the U.S. Customs and Immigration office, since no documents were then needed to enter Mexico from the United States. The money was used as a down payment on a house and yacht which were being sold together. The yacht became the "Granma," which landed in Cuba with Castro in December, 1956, the beginning of the Castro revolution.



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thing about President Carter's recent remarks about Cuba, from the Cuban press or from Cuban radio or television. Not a word appeared anywhere. The press in Castro's Cuba is viewed only and completely as an instrument of the revolution.)

Eager for Trade

WHAT SINGLE THING could President Carter now do to assure the beginning of a new era in Cuban-American relations?

Lift the embargo, President Castro replies.

What would Castro do in return?

Nothing specific, and specifically no renewal of the hijack treaty and no fishing treaty, at least at first, Castro says.

What's in it, then, for the United States to lift the embargo?

A tremendous outpouring of good will toward the United States in Europe, in the Third World and in Cuba. (In a short and admittedly sheltered stay in Cuba, this American was impressed by the reservoir of good will that now exists for Americans, measurably more than seems to exist for Canadians . . . and Russians.) And of course, trade.

Cuba needs everything, Castro says, from tomato seeds to spare parts for the beat-up Chevys and Plymouths of the vintage early '50s that can be seen all over the country. Eventually, Cuba can get any specific merchandise, he says (we rode all around in a new Ford Falcon — made in Argentina), but the embargo makes the process markedly more difficult and more time-consuming.

Castro lowers his voice almost in awe when he talks about trade resumed with America. The United States is the most advanced country in the world in technology and science; Cuba could benefit from everything America has, he says. The embargo makes measurably more difficult the establishment of those very human rights that the United States is talking about, Castro feels. He sees the embargo as a petty, unworthy and unmoral action. He seems unable to comprehend why the United States would bother with the embargo; it gives Cuba more importance than it has in fact.

Castro feels he can pinpoint the actual moment when U.S.-Cuba relations started to disintegrate: April 19, 1959, when he went up to Capitol Hill to visit Vice President Nixon after having appeared on "Meet the Press." He says he thought the conversation interesting; Nixon had listened politely, even sympathetically.

They talked for two hours and 20 minutes, and after the meeting the two emerged and Nixon said, "We will work with you."

But Castro is convinced that after the visit Nixon wrote a long memo bitterly critical of Castro and Cuba, and recommending what later became the Bay of Pigs invasion. He blames Nixon and Eisenhower for that ill-fated invasion, far more than he blames President Kennedy, who executed it.

Watching the CIA

CASTRO'S perceived enemy in America, however, remains the Central Intelligence Agency. He still talks about his first trip out of Cuba after the revolution,

when a machine gun was discovered inside the television camera of someone who had ostensibly been filming his trip. Castro has no doubt that the CIA was behind the plot. Why wasn't he killed? Because at least in this instance, Castro says, he was dealing with mercenaries, not fanatics; mercenaries don't risk death to commit murder. Fanatics do.

Castro feels more secure now, especially in Cuba, even though he is often in the middle of crowds of hundreds of thousands. The country is so completely organized, Castro explains, with 80 per cent of the men members of security forces of some kind, and 80 per cent of the women members of the Cuban Federation of Women. All counter-revolutionary groups in Cuba have been infiltrated by Castro's loyalists.

Where does Castro get his information about the CIA? Much of his information has now been documented by the Church Committee, he says, but he offers an anecdote as an additional answer.

On Feb. 15, 1976, one of the CIA agents in Havana received a cable from the CIA asking for the most precise information on the itinerary of some upcoming Castro voyage. The trouble was that the CIA's man in Havana was also Castro's man in Havana, and Castro got a copy of the cable. Eight months later, when a Cuban DC-8 exploded in mid-air near Barbados, Castro was outraged, and certain that the explosion had been caused by persons trained by the CIA. To convince his countrymen of the CIA's active involvement in Cuba, Castro decided to go public with the existence of the double agent and told an audience of 1,250,000 mourners about him, even

though it cost Cuba a valuable intelligence source. (Two days later, Castro says with a grin, the same agent received another cable from the CIA.)

Once the Bay of Pigs failed, and there was no longer any realistic hope of outside help, Castro says, information on CIA activities could be secured, and without torture.* Cuban prisoners soon became demoralized and, once they realized they would never be tortured, they came around, Castro says.

2. Castro speaks at great length about torture: Latin American countries have refined torture way beyond the Nazis, in manners hard to believe and hard to describe. He cites Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. He talks of babies being held by their feet high above the street in front of their mothers. He talks of women being raped in front of their husbands, hands being cut off with electric saws. The torturers were always secret police, trained by the CIA, he says; their models were always the South Vietnamese.

The fanatics in Miami, motivated by the CIA, are a special problem, according to Castro. He suspects there are fewer of them than are popularly supposed — in the hundreds, not thousands. Some Cuban diplomats think the toughest job after U.S.-Cuba relations are resumed might be that of the Cuban consul general in Miami. Not so, says Castro. Cuban delegations have visited Miami without incident. Cubans in Miami regularly talk to Cubans in Cuba on the telephone, and he feels relations between the two communities present no real dangers.

Fidel Castro is an America freak. He asks almost as many questions of visiting Americans as they ask of him. How much does a reporter make? How much taxes does he pay? What role did Vance play in Cyprus? Why did President Nixon tape record all his conversations? What are Woodward and Bernstein really like? He showed detailed knowledge of both "All the President's Men" and "The Final Days."

He says he got a particular kick out of the anecdote in "The Final Days" about President Nixon drinking wine from a \$30 bottle of Chateau Margaux, concealed in a white napkin, while his guests were drinking from \$6 bottles of California wine.

Much to his delight, he had occasion to tell the story to the head of the French Communist Party, Georges Marchais, when he visited Cuba recently and brought Castro as a special present a case of Chateau Margaux.