

Marathon Interview

Castro Willing to Wait To Get Guantanamo

By Julian Bates
Reuters

HAVANA, Feb. 24—Prime Minister Castro says that while Cuba wants Guantanamo Naval Base back from the United States someday, "it is not an urgent question to make us feel impatient in any way."

But he added in a 6½-hour interview that before there could be any improvement in the U.S.-Cuban situation, Washington would have to end what he called "subversive activities in Cuba and the training of counterrevolutionary elements."

Other points made by the 37-year-old Premier in the interview were:

- The Sino-Soviet ideological split: "It is the preoccupation of all Marxist parties . . . We do not know what will be the results of these efforts (to resolve the differences) but the worst of all would be for us to feel "pessimistic."

- Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos' suggestion that

U.S.-Cuban differences be considered in the United Nations: "I think it is just. The spirit of the declaration is good, the intention is good."

- Cuba's 1964 sugar crop: He would not give an estimate, but emphasized that Cuba will fulfill its international sugar commitments this year. He predicted a sugar crop of 10 million tons by 1970.

- Trade with non-Communist countries in light of the recent British buses deal and agreements with France, Spain and Japan: "Now Cuba can offer magnificent trading conditions to any country and at the same time buy from them."

- U.S. suspension of military aid to some countries trading with Cuba: "I could not conceive of anything more absurd."

- President Johnson's

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policy toward Cuba: "We are very carefully watching the steps being taken." Castro added that it was difficult to judge Mr. Johnson's intentions in an election year.

- Relations with Latin America: Castro said Cuba is ready to establish relations with any government in Latin America willing to do so and added that all Latin-American nations have common interests and problems.

Asked if Cuba insisted on a change in the status of the U.S.-leased Guantanamo Naval Base before discussing ways to improve the situation with the United States, Castro said: "The U.S. Government

would have to desire such discussions. I don't think it would be practical to establish any pre-conditions such as the case of Guantanamo Bay. In our opinion the United States is occupying the base by virtue of a treaty imposed by force. Legally the position of the United States is very weak.

"The base can be used for counterrevolutionary activities and is in all ways a beachhead from which we are menaced.

"It is logical that we aspire that this piece of land will be returned to our country someday. On the other hand it is not an urgent question to make us feel impatient in any way.

"So long as that base is not used to carry out aggression against Cuba, it is not fundamental for the revolution if it takes years, more or less, to return it to Cuba.

"It is the declared policy of the Cuban government never to use military force to try to recover it. We shall always go through diplomatic means and international organs."

Castro also said the Cuban government has spontaneously offered to begin discussions with the Shell Oil Co. on indemnification for its sequestered refinery in Cuba.

He said: "A solution is possible if Shell comes to discuss the matter—we agree to negotiate on the basis of payments of indemnification over a period of years."

Castro said the offer was conveyed through the British Embassy in Havana after a \$10-million agreement for the supply of British buses to Cuba was signed early in January.

"I made it sincerely in the interests of strengthening Cuba's international credit position," he said, adding he did not as yet have any reaction from London.

The Cuban government seized the British-controlled Shell de Cuba refinery as well

as the American-controlled Esso refinery on July 1, 1960, after they refused to refine Russian oil which Cuba had received in exchange for sugar.

Later other American oil installations were nationalized.

Castro said in the interview that before there could be any general improvement in the U.S.-Cuban situation, "I think that first of all there has to be suspension of subversive activities in Cuba, infiltration of agents and arms and the training of counterrevolutionary elements to carry on a policy of aggression and hostility."

From a practical point of view, ending these activities would be a good way for the United States to begin," Castro added.

"Other important points include an end to violations of our air space and an end to the economic blockade."

Castro said Cuba was concentrating on bilateral trade following recent agreements with Britain and other non-Communist countries.

Before the revolution, Castro said, Cuba sold sugar to European countries but did not buy anything from them because all Cuba's dollars were spent in the United States.

"Now Cuba can offer magnificent trading conditions to any country and at the same time buy from them," he said.

No other nation, he said, could compare with Cuba now in sugar production and good quality cigars. In future Cuba also will export manufactured goods which it will be in a position to make more cheaply than other countries.

Asked to comment on the U.S. action in halting military aid to countries which had traded with Cuba, Castro replied: "Both for reasons of the dignity of these countries and for their economic interests, I could not conceive of anything more absurd."

"This is such an erroneous policy with evident damage to the prestige of the United States.

"And if I analyze it purely from an objective point of

view, then I think sometimes that President Johnson took these measures, not because he thought they would be useful, but to lessen the irritation of his political adversaries in the United States; because the Republicans were demanding such measures, and I think there is no better way to lessen the prestige of that policy than to apply it."

Commenting on President Johnson, Castro said: "We are very carefully watching the steps he takes."

"It is not easy to judge or analyze the workings of a U.S. Administration when it is so close to an election. That is why it is so difficult to judge President Johnson's intentions or tactics."

Castro said restoring the water supply to Guantanamo base depends on the United States requesting it. Water was cut off from the base when four Cuban fishing boats were arrested on charges of entering Florida waters.

"There is no special reason now that the fishermen have been released to keep the Guantanamo water cut off," Castro said.

"It depends on the United States. They have not yet stated their definite decision on whether the water supply should be restored. Anyhow, we consider it a positive thing that the United States has offered to return the Cuban flags taken from the fishing boats.

"It corresponds on the other hand to our attitude in returning the plane forcibly taken from the United States, the boat taken from Florida and in saving the life of the crashed American pilot, Trevor Burns.

"We will always be ready to answer any steps of a positive character and will always be ready to answer in a similar vein."