

Castro Dictates a Book

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4/22/67

UNITED STATES AUTHORS, like the Government, have very little to do with Fidel Castro these days. There is not one satisfactory book on the man who cut Cuba loose from the United States and kept it afloat.

This shortage of contemporary biography doubtless offended Castro's sense of history. Two years ago he did his bit to fill the gap. Befitting a man given to eight-hour speeches, Castro dictated a book.

The tape recorder belonged to Lee Lockwood, an American writer-photographer who became a friend of Castro during several visits to Cuba since the 1959 triumph of the revolution. (One of the incidental benefits of Lockwood's latest stay in Cuba was a visa to North Vietnam, which he visited recently, coming back with pictures and a story for Life magazine.)

To what is essentially Castro's book, Lockwood contributes Life-like photos, some description and a chapter of conclusions, but his most effective role is as unobtrusive interlocutor to Castro.

The resulting book is as unconventional as a premier who wears fatigues. The distillate of the seven-day interview contains a higher ratio of insight to cant than do Castro's speeches.

Lockwood's book is aimed at the audience who would read regular informed newspaper reports on Cuba, if they were available. Among Castro's thoughts:

- After a long interchange with Lockwood on the distorted reportage each country applies to the other, the Premier declared that "someday—which I do not at all believe will be immediate, but rather a great deal of time will pass—it will have to happen that better relations exist between our two peoples." Lockwood suggested the time ought to be shortened as much as possible, and Castro replied, "I think that is reasonable."

- Lockwood asked Castro to autograph a piece of revolutionary scrip that the reporter had bought for a dollar in 1958. "Don't show this to anyone when you get back to the States—they're liable to accuse you of having given money to support a Communist revolution," said Castro. "But I didn't know that it was going to turn out to be a Communist revolution when I bought it," said Lockwood. Castro's reply: "You know something? Neither did I."

- "In leading the people, have I acted in a unimpersonal manner? Never! All the decisions that have been made . . . Have been discussed among the principal leaders of the Revolution. Never would I have felt satisfied with a single measure if it had been the result of a personal decision."

The last postulation is the least credible.

Book Review

'Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel'

By Lee Lockwood (Macmillan, 288 pp., \$9.95).

In a recent visit to the Cuban countryside, I encountered numerous projects that began, ended, or galloped off in a new direction after on-the-spot decisions from Fidel.

In Lockwood's eight analytical pages at book's end, he mentions the "dangerous lack of criticism and debate" around Castro. The people closest to him "are without exception those who adore him or, at the least, defer to him completely."

Among Havana's few independent observers, this is the main preoccupation for the future. Though Castro frequently talks of spreading the power of decision, the decisions remain with him. Either he cannot find or will not endure forceful advisers, let alone executives.

It is not that he is so often wrong in his decisions; it is just that Cuba's economic squeeze is so tight that the island can scarcely afford any wrong judgments at all.

Yet Fidel the mountain climber and can-cutter is so popular that the people will tolerate no dilution of his authority and it seems that Castro will not either.

This, of course, is also a reason for the paucity of printed studies of the man. With the assistance of the United States, Castro has isolated himself and his government from normal contacts with academicians.

It is only in this Sahara that Lockwood's book takes on importance. The interview took place in May, 1965, but it is still quite topical. A large portion of it was published earlier, in Playboy. Castro reportedly was delighted to send the CIA and State Department Cuban experts running out to buy a girlie magazine to supplement their U-2 sources of information.

The Playboy text, expurgated of footnotes added by the magazine's editors, is handed about avidly in official Havana.

Well it might be. It paints a picture, inadequate but among the best available, of one of the hemisphere's extraordinary men. He has led a revolution under which, as Lockwood puts it, "the people of Cuba have transformed themselves from a political, superficial people, fond of frivolity, into a nation of proud, dedicated, and militant revolutionaries, capable of extraordinary sacrifice."