

CUBA:

The Grief of a Foe

"It was about 1:30 p.m. Cuban time. We were having lunch in the living room of the stark country home that Fidel Castro keeps in Varadero, 75 miles from Havana. For at least the tenth time I was trying to get the Cuban leader to give me precise details on last year's negotiations with the Russians to install missiles in Cuba. The phone rang: a secretary in guerrilla uniform announced that President Dorticos urgently wanted to talk to the Premier. Fidel took the receiver and I heard him say: 'What! An assassination?' Then he told us that Kennedy had just been shot in Dallas. Castro went back to the phone and exclaimed: 'Wounded! Very badly?' He sat down again and repeated three times: 'It's bad news.'"

As reported last week by Jean Daniel, correspondent for Paris's *L'Express* and one of France's foremost journalists, this was the way Fidel Castro learned of President Kennedy's assassination. Daniel was on the last leg of a marathon four-day interview with the Cuban Premier when the news reached Cuba; and the moment had a high historical irony, for Castro had just finished a long evaluation of the U.S.'s problems in Latin America, saying that for the sake of hemispheric peace, the U.S. must have a leader capable of understanding Latin America's explosive reality and adapting himself to it. "That man," Castro had said, "may yet be Kennedy. He has all the possibilities of becoming, in the eyes of history, the greatest President of the U.S.—the one who might at last understand that there can be coexistence among capitalists and socialists, even in the American zone. He would then be a President superior to Lincoln."

'He's Re-elected': Knowing that Daniel, during a long interview with President Kennedy a month before, had been requested to come back to the White House after seeing Castro, the Cuban quipped: "If you see Kennedy again, you can tell him that if it will assure his re-election, I am ready to declare that Goldwater is my friend."

After Dorticos' telephone call, however, there were no more quips, no more jokes. Castro waited sadly, somberly. Who could do such a thing, he asked aloud, and answered himself: a madman? A Ku Kluxer? The phone rang again. President Kennedy was alive, Castro was told. With obvious pleasure, Castro cried: "Then, he's re-elected!"

But a few minutes later, the news was official: the President was dead. "Everything is changed," Castro lamented. "The U.S. occupies such a position in the world that the death of a President of that country affects millions

of people in every corner of the globe. The cold war, relations with Russia, Latin America, Cuba, the Negro problem, everything has to be thought out anew. Kennedy was an enemy to whom we had become accustomed. This is a very grave matter, very grave."

U.S. Anthem: For the next fifteen minutes, Castro was silent, listening to NBC from Miami on his radio. Suddenly, "The Star-Spangled Banner" came over the airwaves. Daniel says: "It gave me a strange feeling to hear that hymn echo through the home of Fidel Castro, in the midst of worried faces." It was ironic, Castro murmured when the music stopped, that Cubans must deplore the assassination. "After all, there are perhaps people in the world who are glad

ban Premier was furious. "Propaganda," he shouted. "It's terrible." But soon, he calmed down. "There are too many competing police forces in the U.S. for the intentions of one to be imposed for very long on all of them."

To Cubans over radio and TV next day, Castro declared: "The news of the murder of the President of the United States is serious and bad news . . . We Cubans, as conscious revolutionaries, should not confuse men with systems . . . We hate the imperialist system, we hate the capitalist system, but this does not mean that we hate men." Daniel's last impression: "In this seductive city of Havana to which we returned after dark, while neon signs glowed with the Marxist slogans that have replaced



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Castro: 'In the eyes of history, the greatest U.S. President'

about it, the South Vietnam guerrillas, for example, and also, in fact, now that I think of it, Madame Nhu."

Musingly, Castro continued: "When we were in the Sierra, there were people who wanted to kill Batista. They thought we could finish the regime by decapitating it. Me, I have always been furiously hostile to these methods. First, because had we killed Batista, he would have been replaced by a military man who would have pretended to avenge the martyred dictator with revolutionaries' blood. But also because this kind of assassination is abhorrent to me."

Then, over the radio, an announcer said that a man believed to be the killer had been arrested, and he was thought to be "a Russian spy." "Now! That's it!" Castro thundered. "It'll be my turn next." And when Lee Harvey Oswald was labeled pro-Castro, the Cu-

Coca-Cola and toothpaste ads, amidst Soviet exhibits and Czech trucks, there vibrated in the air a certain emotion made up of resentment, shock, anxiety, but also of some barely perceptible fraternity with the U.S."