

JFK Probers Hear Castro Tape

Washington

In an extraordinary tape recording played before the House assassinations committee yesterday, Cuban President Fidel Castro denied any complicity in the assassination on President Kennedy and insisted that a warning he issued 2½ months before the murder had been widely misunderstood.

His voice echoing through

the Cannon Building caucus room, followed phrase for phrase by a Spanish interpreter, Castro said he had simply been trying to warn United States officials that he was aware of CIA-sponsored plots against his own life.

"So, I said something like those plots start to set a very bad precedent, a very serious one — (and) that that could become a

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boomerang against the authors of those actions," Castro said. "But I did not mean to threaten by that... I did not mean by that that we were going to take measures — similar measures — like a retaliation for that."

Castro had made his seemingly ominous remarks to an Associated Press reporter he had called aside on Sept. 7, 1963, during a reception at the Brazilian embassy in Havana. "United States leaders," he warned at the time, "should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

The committee members and staff who interviewed Castro for more than four hours in Havana last April 3 neglected to ask what prompted his remarks that day or why he chose the Brazilian embassy for his forum.

It was reportedly in September, 1963, however, that a long-time confidant of Castro, Rolando Cubela, met with CIA case officers in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and said he would be willing to attempt Castro's assassination if the U.S. would support him.

According to Edward J. Epstein's recent book, "Legend: The

Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald," Cubela's startling offer was communicated to CIA headquarters on Saturday, Sept. 7, 1963.

The interview with Castro was played as the House committee reached what appears to be a dead-end in its efforts to resolve the question of possible foreign entanglements in the president's assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

The Soviet Union has already refused the committee's request for various documents, including the KGB's voluminous surveillance files on Oswald during his 2½-year stay in Russia. Yesterday, chief committee counsel G. Robert Blakey reported that the panel has been "largely frustrated in its attempts to investigate the nature of Lee Harvey Oswald's activities and possible associations in Mexico City" in late September and early October 1963.

Among those loose strings:

- A man employed at the Cuban embassy when Oswald went there on Sept. 27, 1963, abruptly left Mexico City the day of a prearranged interview and finally refused to speak with House investigators when they reached him, by happenstance, over the telephone. The committee refused to make the man's name or even his nationality

public. Blakey refused to comment when asked if the individual might have been a CIA informant.

- Long-ignored reports that Oswald and two other Americans attended a party in Mexico City in October, 1963, where Cuban consul Eusebio Azcue was also an invited guest have foundered on the committee's inability to secure the testimony of Mexican author Elena Garro de Paz. She first told the story to the late American foreign service officer Charles Thomas in October, 1964. Now retired, Azcue, who testified before the committee last Wednesday, hotly denied ever attending such a party and called the story "incredible." Blakey described it as "interesting" but said that attempts to get Garro, now in some other foreign country, to testify "have been unsuccessful."

- The committee has apparently been unable thus far to get the CIA to concede publicly that it maintained photographic surveillance of individuals visiting the Cuban consulate in September, 1963 — despite the fact that the Cuban government has provided the committee with photographs of the alleged CIA photographic surveillance site. The CIA failed to take Oswald's picture although he visited the consulate on three separate occasions.

- Reports that Castro had heard that Oswald might kill Kennedy, ostensibly because of remarks Oswald made at the consulate, remain unresolved.

The committee's questioning of Castro on this and other points was gentle and far from thorough despite the length of the interview. The Cuban president denounced rumors that he had advanced warning of Oswald's intentions as "absurd." The committee put the question to him only indirectly, by showing him a melodramatic account of the allegation in *The National Enquirer*.

"I would never have given a journalist an interview in a pizzeria," Castro declared after reading the *Enquirer* article. "It has been invented from beginning to end."

"Who here could have operated and planned something so delicate as the death of the United States President?" he asked rhetorically. "That was insane. From the

ideological point of view it was insane. And from the political point of view, it was a tremendous insanity. The leaders of the Cuban revolution have never made that kind of insanity, and that I may assure you."

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