

Reporter's Notebook: Castro Readies Himself for Negotiations With U.S.

By JAMES RESTON

Special to The New York Times

HAVANA, Aug. 22—Fidel Castro is obviously getting ready for diplomatic talks with the United States. He has done his homework on the United States claims for the American property he took over here, and he is marshaling counterarguments and counterclaims.

He knows that the United States Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, established in 1964, has said that Cuba owes private American citizens and companies like International Telephone & Telegraph, Hilton Hotel enterprises and oil companies a total of \$1.8-billion, plus \$160-million owed to the United States Government for expropriated property. That is more than the total of United States claims against all other Communist countries since World War II.

But compared with the cost to Cuba of 15 years of the American trade embargo and blockade against her, Premier Castro says, it is a modest amount. If the expropriation bill is presented by Washington, he will have a blockade bill of his own, he says. He says this very quietly, as if he were talking about an exchange of laundry bills, and he adds that he may also suggest payment for the United States occupation of Cuban territory at the Guantanamo Naval Base.

Mr. Castro has turned the grounds of the old Havana Country Club, on the edge of the fashionable Miramar section of the city, into an opulent and secure place for foreign visitors to stay. He comes here on business in his new Soviet-made, limousine, a sleek but heavy vehicle resembling the Continental.

No one seems to know where Premier Castro lives or where he hangs his hat. He seems to move from apartment to apartment and from city to village, but the old country club, with its magnificent trees and lakes and spacious Frank Lloyd Wright houses, is where he puts up his visitors and gives his receptions.

They are some receptions! Usually they are held in Guest House 5, formerly owned by a rich merchant named Gómez Mena, a cool and spacious structure of restrained elegance with marble floors and toilets that aer like monuments, and a magnificent sloping garden, with a swimming pool and marble maidens both curving. Austerity

is the rule elsewhere in Havana, even for Mr. Castro, but on a guest night for foreign visitors, this surpasses even the Havana Country Club in the Batista era.

Across the street from Guest House 5, where he held a news conference yesterday with President Luis Echeverría Alvarez of Mexico, there is another guest house. Mr. Castro suggests that maybe this is a better place for a private interview.

He is not easy to interview. Like all shrewd politicians, he is always on display or on guard in the presence of reporters, and he knows that the best defense against questions is to question his questioners.

He asks about the American economy. Will it get better before the Presidential election next year? He asks about Congressional investigations of the Central Intelligence Agency, and without waiting for an answer, says he thinks these investigations are a good thing—the C.I.A., he observes, was getting out of control. A great nation has to have a secret service, he says, and so the C.I.A. will go on, but maybe, he suggests, it will be under better control.

Perhaps it is a defensive technique, but he seems genuinely hungry for news and gossip of Washington. Does Secretary Kissinger really want an accommodation with Cuba, as he did with Moscow and Peking? And what about Senator Edward M. Kennedy? Is he actually running? It was hard to get Mr. Castro off the subject of the Kennedys.

Premier Castro recalled the day that President John F. Kennedy was killed. A French correspondent, Jean Daniel of L'Express, had interviewed President Kennedy before coming to Cuba to see Mr. Castro, the Premier said, and Mr. Kennedy asked him to tell Mr. Castro that he would like to work out some kind of reconciliation between the United States and Cuba. "And Daniel was in my office delivering this message on the day Kennedy was killed," Premier Castro said.

Mr. Castro added that, after the 1962 missile crisis with Cuba, he thought Mr. Kennedy would have worked out some kind of reconciliation. Anyway, he added, he is glad Mr. Kennedy won the 1960 Presidential election, for if Richard M. Nixon had won then, a Nixon administration would probably have landed the United States Marines in

Cuba during the Bay of Pigs crisis, and there would have been a vicious guerrilla war.

At night in Cuba, after the usual evening electrical storms with their torrential rains, anyone who wants to get the news on the Havana radio can also get the news from Miami on the same set. If he is interested, and one gathers that many Cubans are, he can hear how the Miami Dolphins football team is faring without last year's stars, and where Henry Kissinger is, and what it costs in the Florida supermarkets to buy things that are not available in Havana.

This is a big island, the largest in the West Indies, stretching 745 miles from west to east, with 1,600 adjacent keys and islands and a coastline of almost 2,500 miles. It lives in a different political world, but it is not isolated from the geography or the news of the American continent or the separated Cuban community in Florida.

In fact, there are now really two Cubas, living under different political systems, but within easy listening distance of each other.

"Will this not cause trouble in the future?" Mr. Castro was asked. "No," he replied, "you will absorb them into the culture of the United States as you have so many other peoples, and we will go our different ways."

Still, this island is isolated and life here, for most of its inhabitants, is different from that in the United States. Mr. Castro seems an increasingly solemn man, but he has not stamped out entertainment in Havana. The Tropiana nightclub goes on, and the formerly fashionable restaurants, now a little shabby, serve ordinary food at extraordinarily high prices.

The only joke heard during a short visit here—a variation of a story told about totalitarian regimes elsewhere—concerned a Cuban who escaped to Mexico. He dog explained that he had been well fed in Havana, had been treated well and had comfortable little house of his own. Why then did he leave? he was asked. "I le to bark," he replied.