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BRITISH EMBASSY

No. 18

HAVANA

1055/63

July 18, 1963

My Lord,

As already reported by telegram (no. 513 of the 11th of July) Dr. Fidel Castro spent nearly five hours over luncheon in the British Embassy Residence on the 10th of July. He was accompanied by the Foreign Minister, Dr. Roa, and by Commandant Vallejo, who is a constant companion in his joint capacities of private secretary, medical adviser and personal friend. Very few security precautions were taken both Dr. Roa and Dr. Castro, who arrived separately, were accompanied by an extra car with three or four men but only one guard was posted outside the house. The other guests were the heads of the three other Commonwealth missions in Havana, the Canadian Ambassador and the Charges d'Affaires of India and Ghana. The diplomatic staff of this Embassy were also present.

2. I now have the honour to enclose a summary record of the conversation, or more properly, monologue. Dr. Castro listened politely to any points made to him but since he replied to each with an uninterrupted flow of half an hour or so, any conversation in the ordinary sense was impossible. This is the technique which Dr. Castro uses in television interviews when his interviewers are confined to two or three sentences in the course of a programme of three or four hours. At the end of this marathon lunch, Dr. Castro was still as energetic and loquacious as ever,

/although

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Home, K.T.,

etc., etc., etc.,

Foreign Office.

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although he had eaten and drunk heartily and it was a hot and oppressive afternoon. It was his audience who were exhausted.

3. Dr. Castro wasted little time on social smalltalk, although on such subjects as dogs and fishing, he displayed the same fluency and wealth of ideas, as well as the same verbosity, as he does over the more serious matters. Most of his discourse was a reasoned and detailed expose of the new attitude and policy to which he has gradually been moving during the last few months, which seems to have been consolidated during his visit to the Soviet Union and which found its most complete public exposition so far in his television interview of the 4th of June. (Telegram no. 17. Saving of the 6th of June.) This starts from the premise that the Cuban Revolution is now secure internally and can rely externally on the complete support of the Soviet Union. It therefore can and should devote itself to internal economic development, at the same time reducing the international temperature by holding out an offer for negotiation with the United States and playing down the active promotion of revolution throughout Latin America. Much of Dr. Castro's conversation on these points repeated what he has already said in his public speeches, although he used rather more unguarded language and revealed a few incidental facts which were new to us. On this theme, he was calm, rational and persuasive and made many telling points about conditions in Latin America and the effects of the United States policy /towards

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towards Cuba. He lost a grip of reality only in his uncritical adulation of the Soviet Union expressed in terms almost of religious awe. He was so carried away by this that he continued for another forty minutes or so, even after the Ambassador had sought to bring the proceedings to an end at 5 p.m. by expressing his thanks for Dr. Castro's visit and the detailed exposition of his views.

4. There were, however, several new points of some interest. He made explicit his desire for better relations with the West and with the United Kingdom in particular which has been implicit in the attitude of the Cuban Government towards us for some months, although not previously expressed in so many words. He said that he was ready to negotiate compensation for expropriated British property and that he was anxious to see increased trade with us. On relations with the United States, he expressed, at greater length and in more detail than he has done publicly, the reasons why he believes their policy to be self-defeating and the grounds for his confidence that some form of co-existence will eventually be achieved, even if it takes years.

5. He admitted the possibility of peaceful change in at least some countries of Latin America, an idea which he rejected with sarcasm as recently as the 15th of January this year. (Telegram No. 1 Saving of the 17th of January.) His analysis of social and economic conditions in Latin America was not unlike that on which the Alliance for Progress itself is based. In spite of a number of leading questions, he was careful to avoid any hint that Cuba intended to play an

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active part in the promotion of revolution in Latin America. On internal matters, he explained at length a new policy of concentrating on the development of the sugar industry and devoting the major part of new investment to it. If Dr. Castro meant what he said, this is an important change from the policy described by Sr. Guevara last December when he said that it was the intention of the Government to reduce the relative importance of the sugar industry in the economy, not by curtailing it but by developing industry and other branches of agriculture at a greater rate. (Mr. Clube's letter 1162/63 of the 28th of December to Mr. Brown.)

6. On military questions, Dr. Castro was not unnaturally rather less specific than on others, but even so, he made one or two significant remarks which were perhaps indiscretions. (By this time he had drunk four or five glasses of Cointreau after lunch.) In a television appearance on the 1st of November last year, Dr. Castro had revealed that the Soviet Union had cancelled a debt for arms supplied to Cuba but he excluded from this the "strategic arms" (or in other words, the missiles) which remained in Soviet ownership (telegram no. 517 of the 2nd of November). In his speech of the 2nd of January, he had announced that some surface-to-air and coastal missiles were being handed over to the Cuban army for training. At the lunch party he said that anti-aircraft missiles, land-to-sea missiles and land missiles (presumably FROGS) were now in Cuban ownership and that this "modern equipment" had recently been delivered. It is possible, therefore, that he was referring not only to a change in the /status

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status of the existing missile sites but to a handover of at least part of the equipment of the four Soviet armoured groups. Also, during the Ambassador's farewell call on the 26th of June, Dr. Castro had said that new equipment and methods made him confident that he could frustrate attempts at infiltration by air or sea. He made this point again at the lunch but went further and said that measures had now been developed to obtain information of troop movements and preparations which would give warning of any move towards a major attack on Cuba. One can only suppose that this is an allusion to espionage in the United States or perhaps to radio traffic interception carried out in Cuba; in either case, presumably organized by the Russians.

7. This lunch, although unthinkable even a month ago, is now only one of a series of efforts by Dr. Castro to cultivate the Western missions in Havana. Until recently, contact with him was confined to chance encounters and his occasional intervention in practical matters as with the Swiss and Canadian Ambassadors over the arrangements for the exchange of American medical supplies for the Playa Giron prisoners. Something of a new precedent was set in March when he received farewell calls from the retiring Norwegian Ambassador and Israeli Minister. (Sir Horbert Marchant's letter 1011/63 of the 25th of March to Mr. Slater.) Since his return from the Soviet Union at the beginning of June, however, Dr. Castro has been assiduous in his attentions to the Western missions. He received Sir Herbert Marchant for a farewell call on the 26th of June.

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(Havana telegram no. 469), spent the afternoon at a lunch party given by the Netherlands Ambassador on the 28th of June, some three hours at a reception on the 30th of June in the Papal Nunciatura to celebrate the coronation of the new Pope, another two hours on a social call on the Canadian Ambassador in his Residence on the 3rd of July, and again two hours at the French National Day on the 15th of July. (Sir Herbert Marchant's telegram no. 484 of the 1st of July and letter 1011/63 of the 3rd of July to Mr. Slater.) Social contact with Dr. Castro is therefore becoming for us something of a commonplace instead of an extreme rarity.

8. We may naturally have reservations about how far we can take Dr. Castro's remarks at their face value. Even so from the extent to which he has gone in cultivating Western missions, there is little room for doubt that he genuinely wants better relations with us. He may be ready to pay a price for this in the form of the payment of compensation, if not more. There are narrow limits on the extent to which we can take advantage of his overtures as long as American policy remains as it is at present. It may also be true that Dr. Castro's only motive is to undermine the American attempts to isolate Cuba. But since his campaign of friendly overtures to the Western missions followed his visit to the Soviet Union, it seems reasonable to suppose that it forms part of a policy discussed and agreed, or even promoted, by the Russians. (This is a view which the State Department

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seem to share (Washington telegram no. 1998 of the 29th of June to the Foreign Office). It may therefore form part of a much wider move towards a general détente with the West. If it is rebuffed, the consequences may equally be very much wider than the effects on Cuba alone.

9. I am copying this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at all Latin American posts, Washington, Moscow, the United Kingdom Delegation to NATO, Paris, to the Governor of the Bahamas and to the British High Commissioners at Kingston and Port of Spain.

I have the honour to be,  
with the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

(P. H. Scott)

H. M. Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

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