

March 28, 1966
New York, N.Y.

To National Committee Members of the Majority

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed for your information, are copies of correspondence between Comrades Cannon and J. Hansen on some matters of international significance.

Comradely,

Ed Shaw

Ed Shaw

Los Angeles, Calif.
March 7, 1966

New York

Dear Joe,

I was glad to see the U.S. statement on the Castro affair given full play in the current issue of the Militant. The statement, excellent in every respect, is another proof of the value of international collaboration re-established by the unification. On the whole, I think we have handled our end of this turn of events quite well so far. But, as I see it, our troubles there have just started.

The Cuban affair, coming like a bolt from the blue, and what it may intimate in other fields, is the international development of primary concern at this moment.

Two questions call for further probing and consideration: What impelled Castro to slander us and denounce the Chinese at this particular time, on the occasion of the Tri-Continental Conference? And why did he include Gilly and the Monthly Review in his condemnation? The Monthly Review has been more than friendly to the Cuban Revolution; and in my opinion, Gilly's booklet "Inside The Cuban Revolution," published by the Monthly Review, is the best exposition and defense of the revolution written by anyone, anywhere, up to date.

Your report and the remarks of others at the plenum attribute Castro's monstrous action to Soviet pressure arising from the Sino-Soviet fight. That seems to be a logical deduction. But I have been wondering lately, with the greatest apprehension, whether things haven't gone far beyond "pressure." I am inclined more and more to the theory that the Kremlin bosses gave Castro a blunt and flat ultimatum: Denounce the Trotskyists and the Chinese right away -- or else! And this, in turn, could easily be connected with secret negotiations for a new brazen betrayal of the revolutionary forces on the international field.

It would be a serious mistake to regard the turn of events on three continents during the past year or so as mere set-backs. America's aggression in Vietnam, mounting steadily into a full-scale war, almost seems to indicate a confidence that the Kremlin will confine itself to well-mannered diplomatic remonstrances and token assistance to the Vietnamese. The turn-overs in one country after another, from Brazil to Algeria, and now Ghana, are defeats for the colonial revolution, and by the same token, victories for

March 16, 1966

Dear Jim,

The central problem for us in relation to Cuba is, of course, to determine exactly what is occurring there and how this may affect our overall estimate of the present stage of the Cuban Revolution and our attitude toward the regime. We have no inside track as to the current thinking and policy decisions of the top circle. And I don't think anyone else has either. Naturally this is not decisive since sooner or later a clear pattern will emerge from Castro's line of action and what is decisive for us is that pattern. In determining that, however, we are under a further handicap in not being able to have our own observers visit Cuba. This is a difficulty shared by the other radical groups in the U.S. outside of the Stalinists (who aren't talking when they aren't lying). Nevertheless, our international connections are so much superior to those of the others that we generally find ourselves better informed; and we have noticed that there is a tendency of some of them to turn in our direction for information. In the process we of course pick up an occasional interesting bit which we then try to fit into the general picture.

One of the worst difficulties currently is the contradictory nature of the information coming from what have been our best sources. Take the very important question of the fate of Guevara, for instance. What really happened to him? Is he dead or alive? The answer would obviously indicate some pretty decisive conclusion concerning Castro and his present course.

One of our sources -- generally very reliable -- has become increasingly convinced that Guevara is dead. No hard evidence is submitted for this; it is a deduction based on many intangibles, including the impression that among the Cuban people there is deep-seated anxiety over his fate, the implication being that the masses think Castro is lying to them about Guevara.

In direct contradiction, a close friend of Guevara's, who is also close to Castro and who was at the Tricontinental Conference, told one of our people that Guevara will quite likely make a public appearance before the end of the year. Also some evidence was presented to our comrade that would indicate that Guevara is indeed alive. Such information, it should be explained, cannot be publicized or even circulated, since the source would at once become evident if we were to indicate any of the substantiating details. Moreover, the information was given under a pledge not to utilize it.

To me, the strange business is Guevara's silence if he is alive. What is the reason? It doesn't seem to make sense, unless Guevara has differences with Castro and chose to follow the course of remaining silent and withdrawing from the scene rather than bringing them out. On the other hand, from a completely different source, another friend of Guevara's said that in the top leadership Guevara had only one supporter on the issue of his stand concerning "incentives"; this one person was Castro.

It is quite striking that the capitalist press is not at all pursuing the question of what happened to Guevara. The New York Times, I note, accepted the official version from the very beginning, with the recent variant that Guevara may be in a sanatorium in Russia, China or Mexico. This is a plausible version, since -- as some of our comrades had occasion to observe -- Guevara suffered from acute attacks of asthma (which may have been a symptom of something worse). At the time of Castro's announcement of Guevara's taking "another assignment," a Cuban official in position to get considerable inside information expressed surprise to one of our comrades over the hullabaloo, saying, "He's in a sanatorium."

Under the circumstances it would seem hazardous to settle on a political attitude toward Castro on the basis of conclusions concerning Guevara's unknown fate or whereabouts that are not yet subject to verification. Yet the importance of the question cannot be denied.

Similar puzzling contradictions are evident in relation to the Tricontinental Conference, which was a very important gathering. First of all, the conference itself was carefully screened, with the CP evidently having a major say. (It must be borne in mind, however, that the present Cuban CP is not at all the same as the old one in either composition or leadership.) Yet among the delegates who were seated, were representatives from a number of guerrilla fronts. Moreover they were given the spotlight and they set the militant tone and atmosphere of the conference which was summed up in resolutions, speeches and statements insisting on "armed struggle" as the only road to power. At the same time the conference passed a resolution that contained a paragraph supporting "peaceful coexistence." The result of this was that Peking claimed its line carried; Moscow made the same claim; while Castro has insisted, as he did in his speech last Sunday: "All the participants, including the Chinese representatives, know that the conference was a victory for the revolutionary movements, not the big ones but the little ones."

On the basis of the documents, there is no doubt that the line of "armed struggle" was predominant, whatever concessions were made in an unprincipled way in contradiction to this theme. We must await proof, however, from what actually occurs. As has happened since the beginning of this revolution, it is necessary to discount the statements of the leaders to a certain degree and pay special attention to what they do. At the moment we may get some indication from the events in Chile as to the real policy -- the line of action -- of the Cubans and those whom they are trying to influence in Latin America.

As to political policy inside Cuba, the Cubela trial may be of considerable significance. I am particularly desirous to know if it has any political connection with the case of Marcos Rodriguez a year and a half or two years ago. This case was extremely damaging at the time to the CP since it involved a high CP figure screening a provocateur whom the CP had sent into the Revolutionary Directorate in Batista's time and who betrayed several heroes in the underground struggle to the police. The repercussions were such, when all this came to light, that Castro intervened in the trial, appearing as a witness, with the aim in part, it is clear, of cushioning the blow to the CP. The prestige of the Revolutionary Directorate -- the surviving leaders being Faure Chaumon and Rolando Cubela -- rose accordingly. The trial that just ended will certainly redress the balance, if not more.

Something else about the trial, however, is much more important. Judging from the scanty dispatches that appeared in the press here and in Paris, the Cubela trial was reminiscent of the show trials put on by Stalin. If this turns out to be more than just a surface resemblance, it will certainly be of ominous significance and a sign of degeneration in the leadership.

Castro's ventures into factional politics, compelled by Cuba's incapacity to straddle indefinitely in the Sino-Soviet conflict, have not been very impressive. This is obviously not one of Castro's strong sides and he has floundered considerably, to say the least. The Maoists have not helped matters.

In Castro's attack on the Trotskyist movement, it is not clear to me how much he had in mind domestic political needs as he judged them, the Guatemalan situation and others like it, and pressure from the Kremlin. On the latter, it is noteworthy that Soviet News, in reporting the closing of the Tricontinental Conference and Castro's final speech said nothing whatsoever about either the theme of "armed struggle" or the attack against Trotskyism --not a word. The main point, according to this source,

was that the "conference came out in favour of peaceful co-existence and called for military bases on foreign territories to be dismantled." Both the Italian and French CP's, I have heard, failed to play up the attack on Trotskyism, if they mentioned it at all.

We sent Cedric Belfrage all the material relating to the attack (including the article I wrote last fall on Guevara's "new assignment"). His reply was delayed because of a heart attack. He has just written as follows on this point: "I think you make your point conclusively about Fidel's misinformation. It surprised me greatly as I have always regarded him as one who quotes carefully to make points. I wonder if I'll live to see the day when left wing groups will stop fighting each other and concentrate on the common enemy. With regard to Fidel I remain hopeful that it's a temporary aberration."

I suppose that reflects the feeling in National Guardian circles -- part of them at least -- and perhaps farther out in the periphery. It can be considered to be one of many indications that it is no longer as easy as it once was to engage in Trotsky-baiting and to get away with it. It may even turn out that Castro himself will decide it was a mistake -- one of our sources indicates this. (Naturally we are proceeding on the assumption that this "best variant" will not occur. After taking a stand like that it is not easy to back down. Even the most adroit politicians, I have observed, find it difficult to admit a mistake, however much they talk about the need to do it.)

Actually in Cuba itself, attacks of this kind against Trotskyism are by no means new. The Cuban CP has waged them persistently, one occurring while Farrell and I were in Havana in 1960. The main vehicle for these attacks (before it was recently merged) was Hoy, the CP daily; the straw man was Posadas. In the Militant a few years ago I answered one of their series on this very same theme. Even the Guatemalan angle is not new. The Guatemalan CP has a strong delegation in Cuba where they regularly beam a radio program to Guatemala. They have been on the anti-Trotskyist pitch for some time. Last summer we received material of theirs on this topic. At the time I proposed that it be analyzed and answered by the United Secretariat, but it got pushed aside. What is new is Castro's repeating it. This, of course, is qualitatively different. In Cuba itself, however, it is not something tremendously novel, since it has appeared in the Stalinist-edited press repeatedly. It is necessary to know this in order to better weigh how much Castro's move may be a response to direct and specific pressure applied by the Kremlin at the present moment. (As an additional bit of information, the current attack was launched by Turcios,

the Guatemalan guerrilla leader, in an interview published in the January 5 Granma, ten days before Castro's speech.)

On the mood of the masses in Cuba, a number of impressions have been relayed to us indicating that things are bad. However, the explanation passed to us along with these reports is "lack of intellectual freedom." This would seem to hold more for the intellectual circles than the masses and it may reflect the mood of some of our sources of information -- another source thinks that things are going well. It is to be noted that the masses continue to mobilize in huge rallies to hear Castro and there are no indications of unrest on the job, at least in overt form, that I have heard of. Actually, despite the rationing, the lower layers of the masses are much better off today than in Batista's time -- which must still be fresh in memory. Perhaps there may be a relative decline in enthusiasm, a phenomenon that would show up in relation to volunteer work particularly in harvesting sugar cane.

We are following the situation as closely as is possible in view of all the limitations on accurate information, piecing together the facts with such patience as we still retain from jigsaw-puzzle days. It should not take too long, in my opinion, for the basic broad pattern of developments to emerge rather clearly.

Fraternally,

Joe