

MAJOR DIAZ

And The Press

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■ By now, many Americans are quite aware to what great extent the American Press helped Fidel Castro take power in Cuba. They know that Castro was not only portrayed by our reporters as the "George Washington of Cuba" but that his "revolution" was characterized as a great "democratic" movement. The public, unfortunately, was in no position to know that behind the newsprint facade a ruthless Communist dictator had been catapulted to power in Cuba.

The process of consolidating that Communist victory was started the moment Castro reached Havana in January of 1959. There were few in Cuba who realized what was happening as early as that date. One of the few, however, was Major Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, the Chief of Cuba's Air Force, who had fought as a revolutionary and was Castro's personal pilot. Although Major Diaz was tempted to resign as soon as the barbaric stadium trials began, he decided to stay longer until he had gathered

sufficient evidence concerning the Communist complexion of Castro's regime.

The moment of his resignation came on June 30, 1959, and was reported on Page one of the *New York Times* on July 1, 1959, as follows:

Cuban Air Chief Resigns Charging Red Influence

Havana, June 30—The chief of Cuba's Air Force resigned today, charging there was Communist influence in the armed forces and Government. It was the first open break in the unity of the revolutionary armed forces.

Maj. Pedro L. Diaz Lanz, who transported arms to Premier Fidel Castro's 26th of July forces during the two-year rebellion against the Batista regime and fought with the rebels, sent his resignation to President Manuel Urrutia Lleo. . . .

Major Diaz was denounced tonight as a "traitor of the revolution" by Maj. Juan Almeida of the air force. . . .

Dr. Castro has repeatedly denied that the Cuban revolution is Communist.

Major Diaz's resignation meant that the Communists had to work fast. There is nothing the Communists fear more than a premature exposure of their plans. The Castro regime immediately started a search for the Major. But Major Diaz, knowing his enemy, had already left the island. The first act of the Castro regime was to stage a general

crackdown on opposition forces, resulting in a great many arrests throughout Cuba. Then the propaganda machines started operating. All of this was reported in a dispatch by Ruby Hart Phillips in the *New York Times* of July 2, 1959. It read:

Former Air Chief Hunted by Cubans

Havana, July 1—The Cuban revolutionary armed forces are searching for the former chief of the air force, Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz. . . .

President Manuel Urrutia Lleo, to whom Major Diaz presented his letter of resignation, branded the major a "deserter" who wishes to "prejudice the revolutionary Government."

Premier Fidel Castro's younger brother Raul also assailed Major Diaz. . . .

The underlying issue of Communist influence in the revolutionary Government has been brought to the surface by Major Diaz's resignation.

By July 4, 1959, the whereabouts of Major Diaz were still unknown. However, the *New York Times* reported Castro's first major attack on the Major on that date, as follows:

In his television interview, Dr. Castro declared that the recent resignation of Cuba's chief of Air Force, Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, was part of a plan to accuse Cuba of communism at the same time this accusation was made by Generalissimo Trujillo.

While stating that Major Diaz had rendered good service to the revolution, the Premier termed the young major a "traitor" and a "deserter" who had been bought by former President Fulgencio Batista. . . .

Dr. Castro rejected all accusations of communism made by the former chief of the Cuban air force.

Major Diaz's whereabouts were finally revealed in a dispatch in the July 9, 1959, edition of the *New York Times*. The Major and his wife had reached Miami in a small private boat on July first. In the meantime, the American Press had stood by and watched the Diaz-Castro struggle from the sidelines. You can be sure, however, that behind the scenes preparations were being made to counteract Major Diaz's charges. It wasn't until the Major had testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, in closed session on July eleventh, that the American Press got busy on the Major.

First, on Monday, July 13, 1959, the *New York Times* published a major attack by Castro on the Senate Committee, which was accused by Castro of interfering with Cuban affairs. Then Castro accused Major Diaz of being Cuba's "Benedict Arnold," saying that the Major's defection was a result of an "international plot against the revolution."

Second, on the very same day, there appeared an article by Herbert L. Matthews on Page one of the *Times*, singing the praises of the Cuban revolution. The article, datelined Santiago de Cuba, told about how ecstatic everyone was with the revolution in that city. As for Communism, wrote Matthews, "Few in Santiago believe that there is Communist influence in Oriente Province."

On July 14, 1959, Major Diaz testified before the Senate Subcommittee at a public Hearing open to the Press. The testimony, which provided a wealth of detailed information about the Communist takeover of Cuba, received only the scantiest coverage. No newspapers published any substantial excerpts from Major Diaz's testimony. The *New York Herald Tribune*, for example, published a story of over one hundred lines about the Hearing, eighteen lines of which were devoted to the actual substance of the testimony. The *New York Times*

story, written by Allen Drury and printed on July 15, 1959, read as follows:

Ex-Aide Calls Castro a Red At Hearing of Senate Unit

Washington, July 14 — The former head of the Cuban Air Force testified today that Premier Fidel Castro was the chief Communist in Cuba and a member of the international Communist conspiracy. . . .

Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz told the Senate Internal Security subcommittee he was convinced that Dr. Castro was determined to impose an all-out Communist regime upon his country. . . .

In response to questions by the counsel, J. G. Sourwine, and subcommittee members, the major testified that a number of leading figures in the Castro Government, including Dr. Castro's brother Raul, Commander in chief of the Armed Forces, were Communists. . . .

Major Diaz expressed the view that Premier Castro was trying to turn Cuba into a base for communism in the Caribbean area. . . .

What was the reaction of President Eisenhower to Major Diaz's shocking testimony? Did he call a meeting of the National Security Council? Did he confer with Secretary of State Christian Herter? No. Quite the contrary. At a press conference held the day after the Senate Hearing, the President was asked by David Sentner of the Hearst chain to give his reaction to Major Diaz's testimony that "Premier Castro was a willing tool of international communism." The President's answer was as follows:

Well, of course, he says that, there is no question that's what his testimony said.

Now such things are charged, and they are not always easy to prove,



Major Pedro Diaz Lanz

and the United States has made no such charges. The United States is watching the whole area, the Caribbean area is in a state of unrest. The O.A.S. has moved into—to the extent of asking for a meeting of the foreign ministers to go all through this situation and see what should be done. The United States expects to cooperate with the O.A.S., and that's our stand.

The President had passed the buck to the Organization of American States, and that's all that was needed from the White House to undercut the entire testimony of Major Diaz. If the President wasn't excited over the Major's revelations, why should anyone else be? Secretary of State Herter didn't say anything either. He was in Geneva, busily conferring with Gromyko over world disarmament while the Soviet Union was quietly invading the Western Hemisphere.

In addition, the statement made by President Eisenhower at the news con-

ference was further bolstered by a second Herbert L. Matthews article which appeared in the *Times* on July 16, 1959, the very day the Eisenhower statement was given maximum coverage by the Press. Matthews threw the following authoritative light on the Diaz testimony to settle the Communism issue once and for all:

This is not a Communist revolution in any sense of the word and there are no Communists in positions of control. . . .

The accusations of the former head of the Cuban Air Force, Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, before the United States Senate Internal Security subcommittee yesterday are rejected by virtually all Cubans. It is stated here that before his resignation Major Diaz was removed from his high post for incompetence, extravagance and nepotism. . . .

Premier Castro and his followers have made it clear that, as Cuban patriots working for Cuba and the Cuban people, they are against communism since the Reds have entirely different aims and loyalties. Moreover, Cubans agree that in the present circumstances Dr. Castro is not going to share his power with anyone or any other movement. . . .

The Matthews article was enough to cast grave doubts on Major Diaz in the minds of all of those who believe everything they read in the *New York Times*. Then, on the following day, July 17, 1959, the *Times* printed one of its masterful two-faced editorials, setting the final State Department tone for the Diaz incident:

The ill feeling that has developed between the United States and Cuba is disturbing and even dangerous. It was helpful that President Eisenhower, when questioned about the

charges of Major Diaz Lanz that Premier Fidel Castro and his Government are Communist, should have said: "The United States has made no such charges."

Then the editorial went on to explain, as if to reassure the Castro regime, that a Senate Committee was by no means the Government of the United States and could not initiate a change in policy. The editorial ended with the usual meaningless plea for "sympathy and understanding."

Apparently the Castro Government got the message, for the next day's *Times* carried an *Associated Press* dispatch from Havana in which the Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa absolved the U.S. State Department of having anything to do with the plot against Castro. The plot, according to the Cuban Foreign Minister, was really the work of Senators Eastland, Ellender, and Capehart in league with Major Diaz and General Trujillo. Then the dispatch added this revealing line:

Dr. Roa said President Eisenhower's comments on Major Diaz's charges against Dr. Castro "opened the way to a better understanding between us." President Eisenhower said at his news conference Wednesday that "the United States has made no such charges (of Cuban communism) — such things are charged, and they are not always easy to prove."

In the meanwhile, Major Diaz's defection had set off an inevitable chain of events in Cuba, making it necessary for the Communists to accelerate their consolidation of power. There were numerous arrests, the agrarian reform program was speeded up, and a set of new severe laws against counter-revolutionary activities was enacted. Then, to top it all off, President Urrutia was

kicked out by Castro and replaced by a hard-core revolutionary, Osvaldo Dorticos. The *New York Times* of July 18, 1959, reported it thus:

Dr. Castro accused Senor Urrutia of joining Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz in an "elaborate plan" to defame the revolutionary Government. . . .

The attitude of the President has become more hostile every day, Dr. Castro said. He was particularly incensed over the failure of President Urrutia to sign recent regulations that provided death penalties for counter-revolutionary activities.

Although the sudden changes in Havana rated front-page coverage in the *New York Times* of July 19, 1959, Major Diaz's comments about them were relegated to Page three where they could do the least amount of harm to Fidel. The *Associated Press* reported as follows:

Major Diaz said today that the resignation of President Urrutia "means that communism will have complete control of the country."

"This is exactly what I thought would happen," he added. . . .

He said the President's resignation was a planned move by Dr. Castro and that "it will lead to a stepped-up fight in Cuba by Castro and his supporters against anti-communists."

The *Times* editorial of the same day was a peculiar performance, no doubt intended to obscure the real significance of what had happened. It was more of an apology for Castro than an editorial. Here are its most interesting lines:

One should not let the reality of what has happened be obscured by the sensational method used. A top figure of the Cuban revolution, President Manuel Urrutia Lleó, has been removed because he stood in the way

of important aspects of the revolutionary program. . . .

Since President Urrutia obviously did not want to resign Dr. Castro sought a method of driving him out. He did it with a ruthlessness that was breathtaking. . . .

Only the *New York Times* would find ruthlessness "breathtaking."

It was left to Walter Lippmann, however, to have the definitive say on the Major Diaz "incident." In his column of July 23, 1959, which appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Mr. Lippmann commented with his usual sagacity on how important it was for the United States to have an Ambassador in Havana who was in total sympathy with the "revolution." Then, he added:

. . . But, of course, he (the Ambassador) has no chance whatever of succeeding if Congress is going to roughhouse our relations with Cuba, as did the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate just the other day. This was when it provided a platform and loudspeakers for a disaffected Cuban adventurer to denounce the Cuban revolutionists as Communists. This country, as the President was quick to point out, "has made no such charges." But the damage done by the Sub-Committee's meddling may not be repaired easily or quickly.

. . . The wiser course and the more practical one is to be patient and relaxed—to remember that Cuba is our near neighbor and is far beyond the reach of the Soviet Union. Remembering this, we can rely ultimately on the high improbability that Cuba will drift or be pushed and pulled into the Soviet orbit.

If any Rightwing commentator or columnist had been so disastrously wrong, the country would have been reminded

of his error eternally and relentlessly. But Walter Lippmann leads a charmed life. Honored and heralded is he by a country he has worked so hard to deceive for so many years.

Another "Liberal" pundit who never seems to pay for his mistakes is Ralph McGill, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. McGill was in Cuba during July, 1959, sending back glowing and sympathetic reports about the revolution. In his column of July 7, 1959, he joined the smear campaign against Major Diaz by writing the single most vicious attack on the Major's integrity. McGill's authority on the Major was none other than Felipe Pazos, President of the Bank of Cuba, who characterized Major Diaz as a disgruntled soldier of fortune, "flying in arms for profit" during earlier days, later involved in "clandestine money-making activities" in Havana. As for Communism, McGill quoted Pazos as saying that the charges of Communist infiltration were "greatly exaggerated."

The reader will be interested to know that on November 27, 1959, four months after smearing Diaz Lanz, Felipe Pazos lost his own job as head of the National Bank of Cuba to Che Guevara. One year after that, on November 7, 1960, Pazos joined a Leftwing group of Cubans in exile and signed a "manifesto" calling for the overthrow of Castro. You can be sure that neither Senor Pazos nor Ralph McGill ever bothered to apologize to Major Diaz for casting doubts on his character and integrity.

The readers of the *Atlanta Constitution* had the good fortune of having not only the opinions of Ralph McGill to misinform them but also those of Herbert L. Matthews, whose article claiming that Castro was not a Red appeared in the *Constitution* on July 16, 1959. The *Constitution's* editorial page reflected the combined wisdom of both McGill and Matthews on July 18, 1959, when it offered these authoritative views to its

readers:

The best information from persons of responsible positions in Cuba is that there is no communism in the government and that certainly Communists are not in control. . . .

The *Washington Post* was another "great newspaper" which criticized the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee for having the gall to concern itself with Communism in Cuba. Concerning Major Diaz's testimony, the *Post* editorialist wrote on July 16, 1959:

As to the charges made by Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, the most significant and surprising was his assertion that Prime Minister Fidel Castro was himself a dedicated Communist. Major Diaz has been termed a traitor by the Cuban government and is understandably angry. But it is worth noting that President Eisenhower told his news conference "that the United States has made no such charges." The controversy is indeed serious and it is a pity that it is being so irresponsibly exploited by a Subcommittee which may turn up next week—who knows?—investigating un-Monagasque activities in Monaco.

Such was the treason of the Press when Major Diaz risked his life to warn Americans of what was to come. Messrs. Lippmann, Matthews, and McGill still draw their high salaries and lead their charmed lives. We wonder who it is behind them willing to pay so much for wrong information.

The result of this wrong information, of course, was that the American people continued to be deceived by Castro for another year, thus providing the Cuban dictator with enough time to complete his enslavement of the Cuban people. By the time the Cubans recognized the regime as Communist, it was

already too late for them to throw it off.

Despite Major Diaz's warning and the mounting evidence to corroborate it, there were still many "Liberals" in the United States who persisted in thinking of Castro as a noble "agrarian reformer," not a Communist. Finally, however, in December 1961, all pretense came to an end when Castro himself confessed that he was a Communist, had been one for many years, and had deliberately deceived the Cuban people. The response of the "responsible" American Press to this unprecedented and sensational confession was quite interesting.

The *New York Times*, which had done so much to promote Castro and discredit Major Diaz, was caught somewhat unprepared. The first inkling of the confession appeared in its edition of December 2, 1961, in a small item on Page three. The main story—an *Associated Press* dispatch—about the confession, however, appeared on Page one of the following day, Sunday, December 3, 1961, with a somewhat misleading headline. It read:

Castro is Setting Up Party in the Communist Pattern

Havana, Dec. 2—Premier Castro said today that he was forming a "united party of Cuba's Socialist revolution," a monolithic organization like the Soviet Communist party with restricted membership.

The Premier made this announcement in a five-hour television speech in which he also acknowledged that he was a Marxist-Leninist and said that he was taking Cuba down the path to communism. He maintained that the world, too, "is on the road toward communism." . . .

"I am a Marxist-Leninist and will be one until the day I die," Dr. Castro declared in a nation-wide television speech that began about mid-

night. . . .

On Page four, the *Times* published the *UPI* dispatch covering the same event with a more explicit headline:

Castro Says He Hid Belief

Havana, Dec. 2 (UPI)—Premier Castro explained in his speech today that he had hidden his belief in communism from the Cuban people and from his American friends for years "because otherwise we might have alienated the bourgeoisie and other forces which we knew we would eventually have to fight." . . .

Referring to his policy of keeping secret his belief in Marxism during the early days of the revolution, he said:

"If it were known then that the men who led the guerrilla fighting had radical ideas, well, all those who are making war against us now would have started it right then."

He said that the "first thing for revolutionaries to do, right after winning out, is to smash the machinery of the old regime as I learned by reading Lenin's book, 'State and Revolution.'"

With such a sensational turn of events, one would have expected certain sections of the Press to first apologize to Major Diaz for having scoffed at his testimony two and a half years before. In addition, one would have expected a deluge of editorials clamoring for the hide of Allen W. Dulles, Director of "our" Central Intelligence Agency, whose Deputy Director, General C. P. Cabell, had testified as late as November of 1959 before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee that Castro was not a Communist. What kind of an intelligence agency did we have which failed to inform our leaders of a growing national peril and contradicted men like Major Diaz who tried to inform

us? But no such reaction came from the Press, except in mild form from an isolated conservative columnist.

Ralph McGill and Walter Lippmann, both of whom had smeared and insulted Major Diaz, simply wrote nothing at all about Castro's confession. And, of course, there was no series of articles by Herbert L. Matthews to help remold the public's opinion of Castro. Obviously embarrassed, the *Times* didn't even report what its own famous editorialist had said at a dinner at the Overseas Press Club several days after the Castro speech. One had to read the *New York Herald Tribune* of December 7, 1961, to find out:

Castro Says He's a Marxist— Matthews Doubts It

Cuban Premier Fidel Castro may say he's a Marxist-Leninist but not really mean it, Herbert L. Matthews, author of the newly published "The Cuban Story" said last night.

"I don't believe anything he says," Mr. Matthews told an audience of journalists at the Overseas Press Club, 54 W. 40th St. "He's fantastic, incredible."

"Today Castro may believe he's a Communist, but tomorrow he may believe something else. I don't think you can give him a label. He's too wild, too disorganized."

Mr. Matthews, who four years ago interviewed Castro and pictured him as dedicated to "liberty, democracy and social justice," also admitted that "he may have made some slips" in his book, published in October.

"I was obviously wrong about Negroes not holding high positions before Castro," Mr. Matthews admitted on questioning by Dr. Portell Villa, a former member of the University of Havana faculty and now a Voice of America broadcaster in Washington. . . .

Dr. Villa charged that Mr. Mat-

thews, an editorial writer for the New York Times, lacked the necessary depth to discuss Cuban history, social structure and geography. . . .

The *New York Times* did not fire Matthews for his poor judgment and bad reporting, although such reporting had helped enslave four million Cubans and place our own nation in grave nuclear peril.

As for President Kennedy's reaction to the Castro confession, there was none at all. John F. Kennedy was too busy supporting the U.N.'s bombing of anti-Communist Katanga and visiting Communist Romulo Betancourt in Venezuela. Of course, let us not forget that it was President Eisenhower who did the most to nullify the warning given by Major Diaz. However, in the case of President Kennedy, the nation had to wait until the press conference of January 15, 1962, before some word about Castro was given. The *Times* of January 16, 1962, reported the President's words as follows:

Well—I think it is the consensus of the hemisphere that communism is a threat; that it is sustained and supported by alien forces; that it has no place in the Inter-American system; and that we are against the dictatorships of the right and left. And now that the Dominican Republic is moving from a dictatorship of the right, we are hopeful that there will be—that the voice of the hemisphere will speak against dictatorship of the left which are sustained and supported from outside the hemisphere. I think that we will get that consensus.

With such great thinking emanating from the White House, the *New York Times*, and the Central Intelligence Agency, is there any wonder we are now where we are? ■ ■