At the closing function of the 2nd International Havana Cigar Festival, at PABEXPO

Autor:

- Granma

Journalist.- How have you found the event in general? Exciting?

Fidel Castro.- Interesting.

Last year I participated but at the moment we are caught up in a difficult struggle and I did not want to appear at the auction because it could seem somewhat frivolous. Not everyone understands that what is important here is that all the money raised at this festival is pledged to medicine for children, the same as last year. That is the purpose of it.

This year I did not want to attend dinner, or last year either. Last year, I became directly involved with the auction but I did not want to this time.

Journalist.- However, this time there was an important element involved, the demand for the return of Elián.

Fidel Castro.- Well, that was something additional.

Journalist.- It is additional.

Fidel Castro.- Our idea is that the auction is important for promoting exports in this line. I came with that in mind. On the other hand, you cannot fail to make an effort when it could mean several hundreds of thousands of dollars for medicine for children. That is why I came, but I did not want to make a speech. I asked Lage to do it.

It was also very moving because Pupi, the person he mentioned who contributed 50,000 US dollars, is a Palestinian representative in major international activities.

Journalist.- Yes, of course.

Fidel Castro.- It was something very meaningful, and totally spontaneous on his part. The same is true for the Spanish-French company. I believe they merged and then they proposed to contribute whatever was needed to exceed the amount raised last year.

Last year the total was over 700,000 US dollars, and this year, thanks to their initiative, it reached 800,000 US dollars. And there are a lot of things that can be acquired with that. We can buy the raw materials for medications and turn that figure into millions of dollars because when we import the raw materials and produce the medicine ourselves, we multiply the worth of the money raised.

Journalist.- In practice, it is a blow against the blockade.

Fidel Castro.- Yes, it is.

Actually, if we buy the raw materials we can turn it into two or three million dollars. It is less than that if we need to import manufactured medicines. But we always manage to multiply its worth in one way or another.

Because we have been caught up in this struggle and have had to deal with it every day, all this time, I have not showed up at any rally, nor has it been necessary. There are new faces. An infinite number of young and very talented people have spoken. I have not addressed any of these rallies.

Of course, the Revolution, through its more experienced leaders, provides the young communists and students with strategic guidance given the complexity, importance and significance of this struggle. But the young people are in charge of the organization and direction of these actions, with full support from the mass and social organizations and the corresponding state agencies.

Journalist.- There are thousands of new voices.

Fidel Castro.- And there will be many more. This is only the beginning of a new era because this struggle will not end, as reflected in the Oath of Baraguá. It would be useless to simply have the child returned and then be faced with similar or worse cases in the future.

Look, in the last few days two Cubans died. It was about four days ago, there were six on a boat, I believe, and two of them died. This is due to the Cuban Adjustment Act.

This morning I read in a wire story that 15 men, three women and two little girls had arrived on the U.S. coasts on a flimsy boat. It could have sunk but they encourage these things. We are denouncing them for encouraging this illegal migration and we will continue to wage this battle as long as the Cuban Adjustment Act remains in force. I do not need to say more because the Oath of Baraguá states this point and all the others. Just that the battle will go on for as long as there is a Torricelli Act, a Helms-Burton Act, a blockade, an economic war, subversion, and all the conspiracies against the Revolution. This will not end here, I can tell you that much.

There is no need for me to speak at the rallies. Of course, this responsibility falls on everyone, on the whole country. This is a responsibility of the Revolutionary leadership and we have fully taken it on. But, it is almost a miracle the way that countless speakers have sprung up everywhere, and all the things that have been done!

Journalist.- From Baracoa to Guane.

Fidel Castro.- The United States has been dragged by the mob into committing three major errors: one, keeping the child; two, concocting an espionage story. We do not blame the U.S. government for this conspiracy was really organized in Miami by the so-called Cuban-American annexionist organization, with the complicity of the FBI local station chief. We are not even blaming the FBI leadership but rather those who devised this perfidious trap. They framed Faget, a senior Immigration official, who was given bogus information when they told him that Imperatori, the Cuban vice consul, would defect and that he had to prepare some paperwork for him.

The vice consul had seen Faget only once, as part of his work. I have spoken with Imperatori in more detail. He saw Faget only once, in October; I do not remember the exact date right now. In July he had taken over from the former vice consul, who had met Faget on two occasions in Miami. He usually met and spoke with many people in that city, just as the head of the diplomatic delegation and the other officials there speak with lawmakers and their assistants, journalists and public figures, in general. What I am saying is that this tale of espionage is a sham from top to bottom.

It may be that they were seeking revenge against Faget for some reason. Whenever one of our vice consuls arrives at an airport –-and this is true everywhere, everyone knows it–- there must be at least three agencies there. The CIA and the FBI are certainly there but there must be three or four services

monitoring everything they do, and they do not visit mysterious apartments or other places to speak with anyone. Sometimes they stay at a hotel, or a friend's house, and when they speak with someone they do it publicly; there is no conspiracy of any kind involved. The content of the brief conversations that Molina and Imperatori had with Mr. Faget in Miami is insignificant, really. There were three meetings in 14 months.

This is all so untrue that vice consul José Imperatori, who spoke with Faget only once, called him up on October 1999 to say hello because the former vice consul had mentioned him since July. An INS senior official is someone that any vice consul would want to talk to, since over 100,000 Cubans living in the United States travel to Cuba and back every year while another 20,000 leave Cuba for the United States with residence visas. Then, of course, every now and then a hijacked boat arrives there.

There was even a case, not very long ago, in which two individuals from Pakistan and one from India hijacked a boat, and in doing so, kidnapped two people and almost killed them. They were overjoyed when they saw the lights of the U.S. coastline. Do you know why? Because they had heard about this law, which says that anyone arriving in the United States from Cuba has the right to residence there; no one had explained to them that this only applies to people who are actually from Cuba. This led to violence, and they almost killed two Cuban workers. There is also the matter of smuggling: they are doing nothing to fight the smuggling of illegal emigrants; we are the ones fighting against alien smuggling.

We have around 60 Miami residents in prison here. These are people who have come from Florida with boats to pick up illegal emigrants and have been arrested. We have enforced stricter laws against emigrant smuggling, which can now be punished with a life sentence. They carry 10-year-sentences there but they do not even dare to apply them. Of all the people we have arrested for this reason, we have only tried and sentenced two or three, because there was an accident here and lives were lost. As for the others, they were caught when they reached Cuban waters or coasts, either because something went wrong or because of the preventive measures we have adopted, and they are still awaiting trial.

These people live in Miami, they get paid in Miami, the boats are registered in Miami and we have told them: the main crime was committed there, not here. We have been asking for a response for months. When are they going to take these individuals to stand trial there? But they do not want to do it. Do you know why? Oh! Because they are afraid. No judge would dare to try one of their own residents.

Journalist.- In that case, Commander, would we try them here?

Fidel Castro.- Well, that still has to be decided. The individuals are here waiting to be taken away. Doing otherwise would be helping them to solve a problem. Doing otherwise would be to contribute to their cowardice and we are not prepared to contribute to cowardice.

So, they are left here frozen with us. The proper thing would be for them to take these people and try them there but they do not dare. They have not convicted anyone there for alien smuggling. They have only issued a few warnings, nothing else. There is not a judge there who would dare to do it. They have changed judges about four times, state and federal. A judge from there must try them. But, they do not want to make them stand trial, and so they are being kept here frozen.

We are the only ones fighting alien smuggling. They have done nothing. They continue to enforce the Cuban Adjustment Act to which they have added other prerogatives, and even greater encouragement. Also, the radio stations there continue encouraging illegal migration and it was on the rise.

We are the only ones who have adopted measures to control this problem from within. We have passed a law that carefully regulates everything related to those who own or build boats. Cooperation with the public has also been reinforced to hinder illegal migration, and it has been reduced but we are the ones who reduced it. The Cuban Adjustment Act must simply be repealed because it represents a deliberate crime. As I was telling you, there was a news report today about one of these boats, with two little girls

and several women on board, which managed to reach a small key helped by the sea currents. And so, through this law they are promoting crime and the death of women and children.

Journalist.- There is an interesting element, Commander, and that is the international support for Cuba in Elián's case.

Fidel Castro.- Yes, in Elián's case.

But the Cuban Adjustment Act is a death factory that they have established and that must be removed. We will not give in on this point. Our stance is more encompassing still: we will keep on fighting until an end is brought not only to the Cuban Adjustment Act, but also the Torricelli Act, the Helms-Burton Act, the blockade and all the conspiracies against our country, which have now lasted over 40 years. This is, frankly speaking, our stance.

Actually, we are not blaming the Clinton administration for the delicate problem created although it showed some weakness because they should have returned this child. But they are used to such atrocities because a large number of parents have lost their parental rights. Sometimes, when the parents are divorced, it is the father who takes the child leaving the mother behind or the mother who takes the child leaving the father here. There are thousands of such cases.

We do not prevent people from leaving the country. Twenty thousand people who receive U.S. visas are leaving every year. Do they want more? Then issue more visas. As for us, we have respected parental rights. It hurts us to see children taken out of their schools having to adapt to a new environment, losing their identity; they are just children, innocent creatures. But, we respect the rights of parents who want to take their children with them. We respect this right as steadfastly as we are defending the rights of this father, who stayed here, who asked for our support in his fight to get his son back. But thousands of children leave the country and the same thing happens to them, they are completely uprooted. This is painful but we have been respectful of parental rights. There many be one, two, three children in a family and it hurts us when they are taken out of school and lose their identity but we respect this right, with no exceptions.

It should be said that at the beginning of the Revolution they smuggled 14,000 children out of the country. First, they fabricated an infamous, false, apocryphal decree that they signed as if it were the bill for a genuine decree. This was at the time of the land reform law, the urban reform law and others, and in that context and that atmosphere they fabricated and spread word of a law to strike terror into the people.

They fabricated something that I later found in a novel by Sholokhov. I remember that when I read this novel, The Quiet Don, by Sholokhov, or another novel by this writer who later won the Nobel Prize, I learned that even way back in that era, this fabrication about parental rights had been used against the Russian Revolution; it was not a new trick. They used it here and it was very successful, many people were frightened.

A book will be coming out soon about this episode, the story of this massive kidnapping, in this case with the parents' support because they were deceived. It was an operation hatched there by the U.S. intelligence agencies.

Journalist.- But many of those children, who are now adults, have spoken out and are defending...

Fidel Castro.- Now they are speaking out, and are among the ones most loudly protesting. There is that lawyer, who has taken a strong stance, and others. They were among those children and they still feel the pain of having been taken away. And what happened? The Missile Crisis came along and travel between the two countries was suspended, therefore, many of those children were left alone there and their parents here.

We have never prohibited legal migration, never! We have allowed free migration, they have set the limits. On more than one occasion, when families have been separated, we have been the ones to pressure for their reunification. In other words, we have fully and absolutely respected parental rights.

Well, I have told you what they did, something truly heinous: 14,000 children were snatched away. Many of them have realized what was done to them. There is a lawyer, José Pertierra, who is one of the individuals who has spoken out most clearly in opposition to the kidnapping of Elián; he is one of those children and there are many more.

We have shown full respect for parental rights but they have not. And our hearts ache every time we see a child taken out of school here where there is a much better educational system than in the United States, much better health care for children, lower infant mortality than in the United States, no drugs, and no danger of one child murdering another.

Just yesterday there was a news report about a seven-year-old boy who killed a six-year-old girl at school, right in front of the teacher; he came to school with a gun and killed her in front of the teacher. Because, on top of everything else, the extreme right opposes gun control.

We do not hold the government as the main responsible although the government is partly at fault, I will not deny it, but it is anarchy that rules there. The judges in Florida do whatever they please. They have had to change judges, as I said, four times; it is outrageous. The first federal court judge was contested. They appointed another one who is said to be a fair man, but then they made him sick. No one knows if this is a genuine illness or if this man was fed something but the fact of the matter is that they say he had a serious health problem. Out he goes, because he cannot do it; another judge, and then the March 6 hearing is postponed until March 9. It is a complete mess, chaos, a disgrace that does not exist in any other civilized country in the world.

But, there is something else, which is contained in Imperatori’s denunciation and that is the background of that character, the great-uncle. We did not want to discuss this matter and we simply have not done it, but this character’s background is sinister. Mark my word: sinister! It is not because he got drunk and crashed his car two or three times there, or because he is an alcoholic. It is something more serious and Imperatori mentioned it in his message to the Canadian people. That great-uncle is a corrupted and twisted man with a dirty mind.

The fact is that he was a physical education teacher at two schools –-we are still verifying more details–-or perhaps even three schools known as EIDEs, or Sports Initiation Schools; it was actually journalists from the United States who heard many rumors there and unearthed the first clues about his worst flaws. We knew quite a few things about his personal conduct but we had reserved this information, we had not used it. Later on, testimonies appeared about something even more serious: that this man, while working as a teacher of physical education and sports, to put it bluntly, had sexually abused his students. He had become a degenerate child molester and this is the sinister character who was given Elián’s custody in the United States.

Imperatori, who risked everything, even his life, to defend the truth and expose the conspiracy said it clearly in his message to the Canadian people. Granma had only reported that: "It is still unknown what kind of person has been given custody of the child." The U.S. public is facing a very serious problem. I believe that one of the things that is most repugnant to the U.S. public is sexual abuse of children and adolescents.

The only thing published in the press here was the aforementioned comment, so that it would not seem like we were making things up or resorting to certain background details. It was not we; quite a few journalists know the story. But this is such a sensitive issue that nobody has wanted to publish it, not until now. Our former vice consul, who left Canada with great moral integrity and dignity, left a message there where he stated these facts because the child’s issue was the reason for this conspiracy and the reason for the tragedy and the risks he faced. He took on the necessary risks and stayed in the United

States, where he began a hunger strike.

This is an extremely serious problem, which they will have to carefully consider because we have lots of evidence. I would like to know what it is that they will do on March 9 since they have allowed enough time for appeals to be filed. The proper thing to do, were it not for all the campaigning and politicking that get in the way, would have been to immediately proceed to return the child, through administrative channels, once the INS Commissioner recognized the father's rights. But they provided the opportunity for all of these lawsuits and a thousand more. Of course, keeping the child there indefinitely has brought terrible damage to him and terrible suffering to his family and all the people in Cuba. Eleven million people oppose this, even the enemies of the Revolution.

Now there will be a hearing on March 9, provided the judge does not get sick, or they do not kill him. That mob is even capable of killing judges; they have already killed quite a number of people.

I do not know if you saw the round table discussion today about all the terrorist actions committed by the mob there. When a rapprochement was underway between the émigré community and their home country, they killed a number of people and they know it over there because those criminals are their pupils, specialists in killing techniques that they trained in the course of many years. This is the truth, the same old story.

I am not going to blame Clinton for what happened before, but he should have been a bit firmer, frankly speaking. He has taken a correct stance on this matter, in the sense that the Attorney General supported Mrs. Meissner and the President supported the Attorney General; even the Secretary of State supported her.

Now they have fabricated a case of espionage that they brought to light four days before the trial. They fabricated it on February 11; it was on February 11 that they set the trap for this senior official, this alleged spy. And they have no proof because they could not possibly have any! I can tell you this because I have spoken with Molina, and now with Imperatori, and we know everything, we know every word that was spoken. They did not so much as ask this man a single question, or make a single suggestion also because to do so would have been a grave breach of discipline. That is why we have said: Show us that this is true, and we ourselves would be prepared to bring them to trial, because this would have been a grave and compromising breach of discipline, and something that has never happened in 22 years.

They have nothing, nothing! They have absolutely zero evidence to back this claim; they have made a big mistake. The mob has dragged the U.S. government into making three mistakes. I have already mentioned two of them. They set the trap for the INS official, but nobody can be convicted after being tricked into committing an indiscretion with a close friend.

This official was unquestionably a very close friend and business partner of a businessman named Font, known as a millionaire. They say that 15 minutes after they spoke to Faget, that he called Font; they tricked him into telling his friend what they had told him. It was Mr. Font who had introduced this official to the Head of our Interests Section at a businessman meeting in Connecticut, and there were numerous businessmen at this meeting, including a Colombian. Font, who arranged the meeting, had invited this official who was one of his business partners. The people participating in the meeting exchanged cards.

Molina spoke with Faget twice after this. Molina personally told me all the details that he remembers and with quite a high degree of precision. But written documents have better memories than people do and since, as a rule, whenever someone takes part in some sort of function over there, he makes notes and reports on it, these documents have a better memory than the very people who write them.

I spoke with Molina when the espionage tale first erupted. I wanted to know what happened, all the details, what time it was, what the man was like, what kind of personality he has. Life is a good psychology teacher and then you have a clear picture of things. Now, I have spoken with the man who

took over from him, José Imperatori, that is why I can say that they do not have even a shred of evidence. It is all a sham and they are stuck. The administration was led into a major mistake with this case.

First, they made the correct decision with regard to the child but instead of complying with it and sending him back to Cuba immediately –-the conflict was already underway–- they waited three or four days, which gave the others all the time in the world to undertake every possible maneuver and court appeal.

Second, Héctor Pesquera, the FBI station chief in Miami, together with another agent from the same office, Paul Mallet, who was in charge of the case -– because apparently they had become suspicious probably since they had seen INS official Faget with the vice consul once or twice–- decided that Mallet should follow his trail. According to what they have said, they kept watching Faget for a whole year. But what a coincidence: 11 days before the trial they set the trap, and then come out with a hasty and scandalous accusation four days before the trial. If the FBI station chief in Miami, the fifth largest FBI station in the country, sends his superiors a report with a tape of telephone conversation between Faget and his partner Font, and tape recordings, photographs and video footage of Faget with Molina or of Font talking with any of the Cuban vice consuls, they would be inclined to believe it. So, they actually did fall for this blatant trick and on that basis they took action.

When this reached the higher echelons the decision was made to declare Imperatori persona non grata, but in my opinion they were tricked into it. Because you can imagine what would happen if a FBI station chief says: "Look, listen to this conversation, look at this photograph, this guy is a spy, he is providing this and that information." Perhaps it was excerpts from the conversations, since they later specifically referred to excerpts. They should be asked to publish everything, everything, and so that they cannot take a single word out of context. What this man was doing, really, was defending the interests of the INS and expressing his concerns about illegal immigration.

He practically accused Cuba when he told the vice consul: "There are corrupt individuals at the airport there who have allowed undocumented people get on some of the planes that regularly fly between Havana and Miami." This can happen, if someone is bribed.

I had never heard of this, I assure you, until this problem came up and I immediately asked for these cases to be looked into since nobody knew anything about them here. Because anyone can get on a regular flight and when they land there, all they have to say is, "I am in U.S. territory, there is a Cuban Adjustment Act , and I want to benefit from it." And there is nothing they can do about it.

This is why I say we are not blaming the government, or the State Department, or the Attorney General’s Office, and I mean it. I know what their weaknesses are, they should not have given the mob four or five days to start up these endless legal tangles. All the presidential candidates get caught up in the usual pre-electoral demagoguery, saying things to please those people over there in Florida, even though the mob does not actually decide the elections; that is a myth. All the candidates supporting this insanity and the President supporting the Attorney General’s Office but saying at the same time that the courts should decide. But, why did they give these people four or five days to file appeals? There is a great deal of cowardice involved.

I have already told you that with regard to alien smuggling, they have not put anyone on trial. We have them here, we are offering to send them there, but they have not put anyone on trial in Miami, they do not dare. The mob owns Miami, and they bribe judges and everyone else. They are terrorists and are even capable of killing. It is quite possible that the people who killed Kennedy were from this mob.

Journalist.- So March 9 is a key date, Commander ?

Fidel Castro.- Well, any day is a key date, and every day that passes is even more serious, because they are working on this child’s mind, they are torturing him. What they would like is to keep him there for

six months.

The U.S. government is an accomplice to all of this. Let them interpret the laws; I think that a government that declares wars without asking anyone’s permission, that drops bombs and missiles and does many other things, should be able to interpret its powers properly and courageously. Moreover, this is a case in which the U.S. courts have no jurisdiction; the decision corresponds to the courts in the country where the child is from. Anyway, let us see what this judge does.

If this judge does not rule in favor of returning the child, and I do not see how he can rule against it, the prestige of the United States will reach rock bottom. He may rule in favor of the Attorney General and the INS, and then the others can take recourse to the Court of Appeals in Atlanta; the government has the powers to speed up the process. This period could be drawn out for a few more weeks, perhaps, but the country’s prestige could not withstand it, and then they would not be able to come up with the idea of going to the Supreme Court.

According to Yankee law, presumably when a case is undergoing a second appeal, in Atlanta, it is decided there, and the final verdict tends to be what the judge decides.

Journalist.- If they ratify it...

Fidel Castro.- Well, they will be sunk, who knows how far down they will sink with all of this; but it is their own fault.

We know for a fact -–and not because they have told us, but because we have seen it, we have perceived it, we see it, because you do not have to be a mind-reader, you learn throughout the years–-that they want the child to be returned, but they are scared. They wanted the problem solved, but they are scared. Now, even if the court rules in favor of returning the child, they will not dare to go and get him from the house of the individual who has him. So, what we have is a sinister character with unthinkable background, who has been given custody of the child, and a government that does not even dare to take him away from there because the others are threatening to make a scandal. That is the real situation.

I am speaking about this matter, and I do not mean to offend or hurt the President, or the Attorney General, or even Mrs. Albright, because I am a witness to what I have seen and they obviously realize that this is utter insanity but, come on, do they really lack even the little bit of courage needed to dare to issue an ultimatum to this individual? Because with what they have, they know very well what they can say to him. If the FBI were to show up there, for example, and say, "Listen, you have to hand the child over, don’t make us use force," the man would be terrified, and his allies would be demoralized as well, because it really is unacceptable to allow this sinister individual to have the child.

They do not have the slightest proof to back the charges of espionage they have concocted. And then came their third mistake: they found themselves obliged, without the consent of our country –-and there are documents to prove it–to send Imperatori forcibly to another country, to deport him to Canada. And we are talking about an honorable man. Allow me to tell you that for the first two days, he did not even drink water; by the second day of the hunger strike, he had not even drunk water. As a result, on Sunday he was suffering from a high temperature, dehydration, and densely concentrated urine. Then, on Sunday, he began to take liquids but he had already spent over 30 hours without drinking any water. He had absolutely no reserves, he is even thinner than Don Quixote. It was as if Don Quixote were on a hunger strike, that was Imperatori and his great determination.

When he arrived in Montreal I talked to him because we did not even know where he was being taken. Once we found out that he was there, I spoke with the consul, the ambassador, and with him. I asked him, "How did they treat you on the plane?" And he said, "Well, with respect. They told me they knew I was on a hunger strike, and they asked me if I wanted something to drink, and I said no." And he immediately told me, "I want to inform you that I am going to continue the hunger strike." He went to

the Cuban embassy, and continued the strike, not against Canada, but rather against those who had forcibly taken him there, as he said in his message to the Canadian people. He had not asked to be taken there, he did not request it.

They even played a trick on him with his passport. He did not have his passport, his lawyers did. The authorities asked the lawyers for the passport, and they did not even tell them what they wanted it for; the lawyers were asked to turn over the passport, and they said, "Here it is." This was not a problem, because he was very identifiable, and when they want to expel someone, they expel him, with or without a passport. But he really did not know what was going on, he did not even have his passport. He arrived in Canada, and the first thing he said was that he was going to continue the hunger strike. He then went to the Cuban embassy in Ottawa.

The Canadian authorities treated him well. I have the impression that they thought they were helping to resolve a problem, but the problem was not resolved, because the man had declared a hunger strike. That first day, Saturday, he did not even have breakfast. At 11:00 a.m., he read a statement in which he declared himself on a hunger strike. At 8:35 p.m. or 8:33 p.m., the FBI showed up; we have to clarify the details, but within five minutes –according to what they have said– they told him to put on his coat. They asked him about his luggage. He said, "I don’t have any." Then they took him down to the basement.

It should be said that they treated him with respect, they did not handcuff him. He got into the car with great dignity and they took him to an airplane. It seems that they were held up for some time at the airport, and he arrived at approximately 12:00 midnight in Montreal. The Cuban consul received him there, and we spoke with him when he got to the consulate. As I said, I spoke with him, I said hello and asked him how he had been treated, everything, and I will repeat once again what he said: "I will continue the hunger strike." He had not been consulted about that journey and, as he explained to the Canadians in his farewell message, he had not asked to be sent there. He went to the embassy and continued the hunger strike; well, it is all explained in the Cuban government statement and I will not go on any further because all these things need to be handled with the highest degree of confidentiality.

I know that everyone, everywhere, wanted to know what was going on; but he explains everything in his letter. I know, for example, what the opinion of the United Nations was, because everyone at the United Nations received the message, and they said, "Now, we understand." Nobody understood why he was on a hunger strike in Canada, but it was because he had been taken there by force, and even he did not know about it.

The Canadians are not at fault here and I would say that the Canadians were dragged into this problem. We have absolutely nothing against Canada, no complaints against the Canadians, and I really think that they contributed to solving the problem. In fact, all sides contributed to finding a solution, the one that is outlined there, with honor and dignity. The solution was reached after midnight or around midnight, between Wednesday and Thursday, which is why those who flew there did not know about it in advance.

We had proposed that a group of people go there, that they would not have to get off the plane. We sent a group of representatives of those who have been fighting on behalf of the child, and Imperatori himself, the most outstanding individuals, plus a group of journalists and they all stayed on the plane. The members of his family, a group of eight doctors, 10 or 12 journalists and 40 comrades who have played an outstanding role in the struggle went there to receive him on the plane and accompany him back home. I think they are going to broadcast the entire footage of the trip, there and back, on Sunday; today they broadcast eight minutes.

It was all very moving, and he boarded the plane with impressive dignity. I was waiting here for him. We took him to a clinic, and tomorrow the doctors will issue a short note with their criteria. He lost 12 pounds in five days, which is far beyond the usual weight loss parameter for a slender man.

Journalist.- Commander, I asked you a question, and you have kindly granted us so much time that I think...

Fidel Castro.- I feel bad, because there are a number of people waiting for me.

Who do you work for?

Journalist.- Well, like I told you, I am from the Agencia de Información Nacional, and there are others from Radio Rebelde and Televisión Cubana.

Fidel Castro.- You can report everything I have said in full, and broadcast it tonight. Since I have been absolutely objective, I take responsibility for everything I have said. And I say that I cannot say anything further, because it is our duty to be discreet. We must not say one word too many; it was difficult to find a solution that was satisfactory to him and, as it says there, he has preserved the maximum possibilities that could be obtained for him to travel to the United States to take part in the proceedings. Actually, we were not asking for anything more, simply that possibility; you cannot say it is a total guarantee because they could not even offer that, there are a great many agencies involved. Still that is how we define it: the maximum possibilities that could be obtained. Of course, he stopped the hunger strike then because that was his demand. He had stayed there with no immunities whatsoever and placed himself in their hands.

But they are now faced with a very difficult situation, because they cannot prove anything whatsoever. They have found themselves with absolutely zero, because this is all a total and absolute sham. I am not saying that the government made it up, not from my point of view. There were three possibilities, and I asked myself, if might have been planning some sort of provocation for some time. Because our people have strict orders not to engage in any kind of intelligence work at our Interests Section. Those orders were given, as explained, 22 years ago. And I paid special attention to this because when the Interests Section were established under President Carter, I said: "They are going to fill this place up with CIA people and it would be best to maintain a high moral standard." Therefore, we gave our people categorical instructions against any kind of intelligence work from the Interests Section.

As you know, our country has been spied upon by many different services and we have much experience with these things, we have learned a lot about them.

I myself have reviewed the records of those who were being sent to work there, and they were experts, I will not deny it; the ones I reviewed were mainly people with a great deal of knowledge on these matters. I chose them and requested them, and there is not a single official whose record I did not review. Not all of them, of course, but the majority of the people sent there were highly prepared, trained and discipline. What a coincidence that a case like this should erupt four days before the child’s hearing! A devastating denunciation for the morale of the Attorney General and the INS. How much credibility would they have been left with for the trial?

If the man simply packed up and came back everyone would have said: "He is guilty." But this was unacceptable and not because an official was being kicked out but rather because, in our view, the fate of the child depended on it. They were destroying the prestige of the INS, demoralizing it by exposing one of its senior officials as a spy. What would everyone in the United States have thought? It was a blow designed against the INS, the Attorney General and even the President, we could say, and against Mrs. Albright because they had supported the INS decision. And suddenly, they themselves had no idea what to do, and we were perhaps the only ones who could prove that it was all a sham.

We are not even accusing the FBI national leadership. This was done by one of the Bureau’s largest stations whose chief happens to be a brother of the lawyer who, at the trial in Puerto Rico, defended one of the individuals charged in a plot to assassinate me at the Margarita Summit, with all the evidence needed. It was strange that although one of the two guns was registered to a certain Hernández, one of the main leaders of the Cuban-American National Foundation, this individual was not indicted. Of

course, this was due to the links between the FBI local station chief and his brother, a defense lawyer in that trial, and the Foundation, which generously covered the costs of the defense.

I will say it again: this man and the mob have led the FBI into making a major mistake. Now they will have to clear this up, and we will take it upon ourselves to remind them about it whenever necessary, and demand that they prove it.

Before, it was the Bay of Pigs invasion. This time they have landed right in the middle of the Zapata Swamp, that is, with regards to both Elián's case and the espionage charges and we will see to it that it is proved.

The people's reaction has been extraordinary. We have been waging a tremendous battle for three months now. But what good is it if Elián is sent back, and yet any day another child could die due to the tremendous encouragement given to irresponsible people who are not granted visas to depart legally? It is much more important to bring down a law that claims and has claimed who knows how many victims. This law must be removed and that is what we are fighting for. And we know how to fight, let nobody doubt it, we know how to fight.

Look how many new talents have emerged. And I read the surveys everyday.

Many people may wonder why I have not spoken, but I have not wanted to even walk up to the podium at the rallies because there has been no need for me to do so. Let the people speak up, let the young people speak up, let everyone speak up. We do not even intend to organize a celebration when the child comes back, we have already said this. We will receive him and he will be taken to a hospital, like Imperatori was, for a general medical check up and treatment.

The only thing I need to add is that I spoke with Imperatori today and with his doctors, too. They were concerned about his general health condition and they have carried out a number of the most urgent tests. A friendly doctor in Canada had taken some samples on Wednesday to run a few tests, and they immediately did the same tests here to compare results. Perhaps, he will be even healthier in the future because he smokes much too much.

Journalist.- Cigars?

Fidel Castro.- No, cigarettes. He smokes too much, really, and he inhales. On Sunday, in Canada, a slightly complicated situation emerged. He had not had any liquids in two days, he had not even drunk water, and he was supposed to be drinking some kind of liquid with vitamins and a few essential elements.

I think he will be sent home tomorrow afternoon, and they want him to rest for two weeks. That is all I can tell you.

Thank you. I have to go, because there are people waiting for me. Is that enough for you?

Journalist.- More than enough.

Fidel Castro.- You can report all of this in my name, and explain that I do not need to speak, because our people are educated and aware, capable of speaking for themselves, and capable of fighting, too. That is all.

See you later.

Lugar:

Pabexpo, Ciudad de La Habana

Fecha:

04/03/2000

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