

[Unpublished interview of Lisa Howard to Fidel Castro \(1964\): The US should live in peace with Cuba](#)

US journalist Lisa Howard interviewed Fidel on February 1964 for an BC documentary and the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution answer all the questions in English. The interview was translated for this forum by Esther Pérez and was published by the blog La Pupila Insomne.

Lisa Howard: I want to ask you say something about assassination, about assassination attempts because it was an issue the other week. We often read of reports about attempts on your life. Do you fear for your life?

Fidel Castro: For example, in the Soviet Union, nobody has read the news I have been killed because nobody wants me to be killed. In the United States there are many counterrevolutionaries, there are several people that would like to read the news that I have been killed. They confuse their wish, their illusions with reality. But until now I have lived five years among the people and nobody had open fire at me. I feel sure, I don't worry and this is my job. For example: You see there is a paradoxical situation. In the United States the President felt sure, absolutely sure. I am certain that the United States government takes much more measures for their personal security than I do. And the news that the United States President had been killed was a surprise. It was not good news for anyone here in Cuba. Because, honestly we could be political enemies but we do not wish the death of anybody.

In some way we felt like when you have an opponent and your opponent disappears, you don't feel satisfied. In a sense I felt that: An opponent who disappeared in a way that we cannot agree with. Well in that situation I think that many people wanted me to be killed. All of us, all men are called to die sooner or later. Is there anyone who doesn't know that we know that quite well. While we live, we work and do our job. We are satisfied we are happy. We are not worried about that.

Lisa Howard. If anything would happen to you. What would come next?

Fidel: My opinion?

Lisa Howard: If anything were to happen to you. What do you think would be the fate of the Revolution?

Fidel at the beginning my death would be a very strong blow to the Revolution. But not now. We have five years. We have an organization; we have several men we wonderful conditions to lead the country. I feel absolutely sure that n nothing will happen. Absolutely sure. I can give the Revolution my experience. All of us have learned over the years. I have some experience. I help the Revolution with my experience. But you can be sure as I am sure that nothing will happen. Of course we don't want to prove it. Sincerely we don't worry about that. A Revolution is not the job of a man. A Revolution is the matter and a job of a people. And the people unite in difficult situations, and choose a chief in difficult situations. No revolution has disappeared because their leader has disappeared.

I don't want to make a comparison. I am a leader of a small nation and a small revolution. But think about the Great Russian Revolution; Lenin ... in a difficult situation, in a much more difficult situation than ours, Lenin died and the Revolution continued. A revolution is not the job of a man; it is the job of a people.

Lisa Howard: Who would take over?

Fidel: This is not a monarchy and there is no line of succession. At the beginning when I understood that it was a danger for the Revolution that I could be killed, I spoke about Raul. But it is problem that is to be solved by the collective leadership of the Revolution. We have many me. And as you see we have a President, I am the Prime Minister. Mine is a political job and I provide strength to the ideas. I am the driving force behind many things. But we have a President, a Council of Ministers, a political party, we have the leadership of the political party. In that situation the national leadership of our party would appoint a Prime Minister to do the job that I do.

But, here in Cuba all the main problems, all the political problems are discussed in our leadership, all the important problems. I never take a personal decision. The way we do it is. I like to hear the opinions of the others and when we reach an agreement we make a decision.

Lisa Howard: Doctor Castro. Is there any possibility that this Revolution could go in another direction, that is, back to a democracy, to free elections, to many of the proclamations that you issued in the Sierra Maestra?

Fidel: It is not easy for a common citizen from the United States to understand these problems. You have your idea of democracy; we have our idea of democracy. There are many examples. For example, I can speak about the unemployed; I can speak about the Negroes in the United States. Yu can't speak about democracy to anyone of them, you can't speak about democracy to the people who live in the south. You can't speak about democracy to many poor people in the United States. To the people without a fortune, to all of them democracy is a formality.

You have two parties, both controlled by the oligarchy and you call that democracy. In Athens, in the ancient Greece they spoke about democracy and democracy, and there were thousands and thousands of slaves and they speak about democracy. The United States has many interests in the whole world. Your companies make millions of men work very hard in Latin America. And around the world. They have no rights, they have no standard of living, they don't have an education and they don't have medical care and you talk about your democracy. That is why. It is not easy but some day you will understand our idea of democracy.

Lisa Howard: Doctor Castro. All the people that we talk with who oppose you say they oppose you because they thought that you were going to make a democratic revolution and instead you made a communist revolution.

Fidel Castro: When they say democratic they speak about capitalist revolution, free Enterprise revolution, and monopoly influence in Cuba. They are thinking in their class interest. They are not thinking about the peasants, the laborers, the Negroes, the students, the intellectuals. They are thinking about their material interests. That is what they call democracy. Batista said he was a democrat. All those rich men, the owners of the lands, they were speaking about democracy. That is what they understand for democracy.

Lincoln said that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The Revolution too is the government which takes power with the people and takes measures for the people. Nobody can deny that our government is an honest government. We have banished all kinds of vices, all kinds of thefts, embezzlements. And here every rule is made to help the people. We have made many things for the people. One million people didn't know how to read or how to write and now they do. Everybody in Cuba has an education guaranteed. Everybody in Cuba has a job guaranteed and the possibility to study. Everybody, white Negro. The people feel it. So you have to analyze deeply the problems in Cuba to understand them. Now, we have not formalized several things. We need to give form. We need to institutionalize several things. We have had no time to do so many things in these five years.

Lisa Howard: Now of course about education since you mentioned that. We visited many of the schools and we found an extraordinary uniformity. The children seem to answer by wrought. There

seems to be a good deal of Marxist indoctrination. There seem to be very little independent thinking. Does that disturb you?

Fidel Castro: In your schools in the United States, what do you teach your students? You teach your point of view. You speak to them about free enterprise; you speak to them about bossiness about your industry, about your interest around the world. You speak about that to your youth.

The class which rules the United States tries to teach the students what they want. Here in Cuba the Revolution teaches and prepares the students for the Revolution.

Let me give you an example, my personal example: I studied in a religious school since my first years until I went to the university. What did they teach me? I didn't which school to go to. My parents decided the school. And they taught me all what they wanted. I didn't have the opportunity to choose. And in Cuba there were hundreds of religious schools where the sons of the reach class were educated. Now we educate our youngsters in revolutionary ideas, in our ideas.

We said to the people: "we will teach the people, we don't want ignorant people, we want people who learn to think" We don't say to the young "believe" we say to them "study, think". If we were afraid of the people studying and thinking, we wouldn't have developed education to the degree we have developed it. Because we are teaching everybody, we are educating everybody. And if you know how to read and write, then you are in better conditions to think and to analyze.

You can lie to an ignorant people; you can't cheat an educated people. And the Revolution has a real obsession about educating the people. So we are not afraid that the people think, analyze. We are sure about our future, we are sure about our young people, we are sure about our reason. You were revolutionary too at the beginning, when you made your independence war you had to fight. What did England think about you? You were liberal at the beginning, the English were monarchic. And the English did not agree with you, and they went to Canada and other places. And you in the United States began teaching your people about the constitutions, the Bill of Rights of the United States. So you talked to the people and the English said "[they are liberal]". Calling somebody liberal in 1776 was the same as calling someone socialist, Marxist, communist now. It is the same. To those who went away to hear about communism was to hear about evil. But when you made your revolution, when you were called liberal was like being called the devil. There was a time when you live that experience. In the future we will be proved to be right. I am sure of it. And we will not concede to you now, because you were liberal at the beginning but now you cannot call yourselves liberal. What happens in Vietnam? What happens in Latin America? You help dictatorships, you help military groups. You had very good relations with the oligarchy until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. If you are now beginning to worry about social reform in is because of the Cuban Revolution. Can you deny that?

Lisa Howard: Could that not be social consciousness on our own part and not because of the Cuba Revolution?

Fidel Castro: Well, but it very much coincides with Cuban Revolution. I suspect I have my doubts about that.

Lisa Howard: Two things Jruschov and DeGaulle. You spent a great deal of time with Premier Jruschov recently and on your first trip to Russia. What do you think of Mr. Jruschov as a man, as a leader?

Fidel Castro: I have an excellent opinion about. I have talked about that here in Cuba. I admire Jruschov, he is a very humane man, a very simple man in his relations with the people, with other leaders. He is a very intelligent man. He is a very clear man and very responsible. He is a man of peace too. He worries about world peace. I understand him very well and the more I know him, the better is the impression I have about him. Honestly, I have an excellent impression about him.

Lisa Howard: You are now buying busses from England, you were talking about buying ships from

Spain, and I understand you have an economic mission in Switzerland. Does this mean a radical change in your trade policy Mr. Castro?

Fidel Castro: No, not at all. What is the change? We have never refused to do business with the United States or any other nation. It was the United States policy the one to cut trade relations with the United States and all those countries you mentioned. It was not our policy. Our policy since the beginning has been to do business with all the nations and that is what we are doing. That is what we are doing successfully, that it what we are doing with a lot of success. And I think it is a big mistake by the United States to try to cut these relations because the United States cannot forget those nations have their own problems. They have3 financial problems, they need business, they need to sell to solve their problems.

All nations have economic problems. The economic blockade-you talked about being realistic- the blockade is not in any way a realistic policy. You Americans like to say that you are a practical people, that you are a realistic people. But I have seen many things in which you don't prove to be too realistic. And you call us naïve, you say we are dreamers and we are roving that our policies are more realistic that yours.

Lisa Howard: How do you regard President DeGaulle policy of recognizing red China?

Fidel Castro: I think it was a very wise policy. And that proves once more that your policy is not a realistic policy. That prove is another example of what I said to you. I think it is a wise policy.

One more thing; DeGaulle has played a very important role in modern France. Of course my socialist and political ideas are quite different from DeGaulles's but Degaulle has work very much for France. During the worse days of France, he played a very important role. And now France has a very important position in the international arena. And when he takes measures like that of recognizing China, we recognize is very wise. I know that you don't like that policy, but is a consequence of your mistakes, mistakes commented in many places. But I won't give any advice to you. I think you will learn with time. The English....

Lisa Howard: Wait a second, it's my turn now. What would you like to see the United States do as regards Cuba?

Fidel Castro: In regards to Cuba. If I can say in a few words. To live in peace with Cuba. It is the only thing. I think we wish that. I am sure is the only wise policy the United States can take. But I think that if I try to persuade you about that many people are going to believe that we are sinking. But we feel sure, we are happy. We can live without the United States very well. We need peace, the United States needs peace, and the world needs peace. Our policy is a peace policy. And I think it is a good policy for every nation and of course for the United States. And I think you began to understand part of the problem. I think you begin to understand and you will understand. I've heard a fisherman say a very intelligent thing, he said 'you have had a lot of thing for a long time and you don't appreciate simple things'' He is a fisherman that came to live here in Cuba, you see? One American who came to live in Cuba.

Well you will come to be wise with time. Just as the English, the French. The French had a lot of colonial problems in Vietnam, in Algeria. They made peace with Vietnam, they made peace with Algeria. Now they have good relations with Algeria and nobody doubts it is a better policy for France than a policy of war with Algeria. But then what happened? The French left a problem and now you the United States took the problem. And when a wise government leaves a problem, you who are not wise take the problem. That what is happening now. The English are wise people too.

Lisa Howard: But we feel we want to live in peace, but you are interested in exporting your revolution all over Latin America.

Fidel Castro: We have set clearly, very clear that we want to live in peace with all the nations. But we

need that all the nations live in peace with us too.

Lugar:

Estados Unidos

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