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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Padilla: Castro's Solzhenitsyn?

Secret

22 June 1971
No. 1711/71

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
22 June 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Padilla: Castro's Solzhenitsyn?

Summary

Intellectuals in Fidel Castro's Cuba have generally enjoyed a degree of freedom that is rare in a totalitarian state. As the Revolution progressed, those authors and artists who found the deteriorating economic situation and the increasing regimentation too distasteful to stomach were often permitted to live abroad with the regime's blessing. Even when poet Heberto Padilla overstepped the loosely defined limits of politico-literary propriety in 1968 and was censured by the more doctrinaire segment of the Cuban hierarchy, the collection of works for which he was criticized was published. Although his book of poems carried a prefatory note explaining its "political weaknesses," the fact it was published at all testified to Castro's willingness to allow limited controversy in order to retain the support of intellectuals both at home and abroad and to give his regime an aura of freedom.

Since 1968, however, the picture has changed radically. Well-intentioned but devastatingly accurate criticism of the regime's economic and administrative policies from such highly trusted European leftist intellectuals as Rene Dumont and K.S. Karol reached Cuba in early 1970, just as Castro was becoming aware that, despite an all-out mobilization, the premier goal of ten million tons of sugar would

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within CIA.

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not be realized in that year's harvest. Although Castro delivered an oblique but bitter attack on his unnamed critics "in Paris and Rome" on 22 April 1970, he in effect confirmed many of their charges on 26 July when he acknowledged in detail the serious plight of the economy. Even as he set about adopting measures to counter the weaknesses and deficiencies exposed by Karol and Dumont, he mounted a feeble and ill-conceived campaign to discredit them.

At this point, Padilla entered the picture. He was caught, according to his own admission, trying to smuggle out of Cuba a manuscript critical of the Revolution for publication in Europe. Castro,

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[REDACTED] ordered Padilla's arrest on 20 March 1971 and in a little more than two weeks had squeezed from him a farcical "self-criticism" in which Padilla identified both Karol and Dumont as "agents of the CIA." The "confession" was not released until three weeks later--perhaps to allow Padilla time to recover from the effects of his imprisonment. On 30 April Castro followed up Padilla's confession with a ringing denunciation of those who found fault with the poet's detention.

Padilla's arrest had caused a relatively mild protest from foreign intellectuals, who directed a letter to Castro calling for his release; the amateurish and degrading "self-criticism," however, provoked a scathing letter expressing the "shame, anger, and disillusionment" of 60 prominent intellectuals in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. The letter barely stopped short of accusing the Cubans of eliciting the confession by torture and said the circumstances surrounding the incident "recall the most sordid moment of the era of Stalinism with its prefabricated verdicts and its witch hunts."

Although a few of the foreign intellectuals have softened their attitudes, there is no sign that Castro also intends to moderate his position. Indeed,

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there is evidence that Havana is taking steps that can only further widen the gap. Castro may have whipped the local intellectuals into line, but he has done so at the expense of alienating, perhaps permanently, a significant segment of foreign intellectuals who have long given him their unqualified and frequently unsolicited support. More ominous is the suspicion that internal political pressures in the Cuban hierarchy forced Castro to pay a high price for what in effect is a minor victory. The Padilla affair coincides with the recent trend toward more repression in Cuba and seems to herald a period in which Cuba will be more exposed to the rigors of a Stalinist strain of Communism than to the heretofore more freewheeling brand of Fidel Castro.

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INTELLECTUALS' FIRST LETTER TO CASTRO

"The signers, who support the principles and objectives of the Cuban revolution, appeal to you to express their concern about the arrest of the poet and writer Heberto Padilla and request you be good enough to examine the situation created by such an arrest.

Inasmuch as the Cuban Government has not supplied any information up till now on this subject, we can fear the reappearance of a sectarian development stronger and more dangerous than the one you denounced in March 1962 and which Commander "Che" Guevara referred to several times, when he denounced the suppression of the right of criticism within the revolution.

At a time when the establishment of a Socialist Government in Chile and the new situation created in Peru and Bolivia are facilitating the collapse of the criminal blockade of Cuba by United States imperialism, the use of repressive measures against intellectuals and writers who have exercised the right of criticism in the revolution can only have profoundly negative effects on the anti-imperialistic forces of the entire world and more particularly in Latin America, for whom the Cuban revolution is a symbol and a flag.

In thanking you for the attention that you should be kind enough to give to this request, we reaffirm our solidarity with the principles which have guided the struggle in the Sierra Maestra and which the Cuban Government has expressed so many times in the words and actions of its Prime Minister, "Che" Guevara and so many other revolutionary leaders."

Signers:

Carlos Barral
Simone de Beauvoir
Italo Calvino
Jose Maria Castellet
Fernando Claudin
Julio Cortazar
Jean Daniel
Marguerite Duras
Hans Magnus Enzensberger
Jean-Pierre Faye
Carlos Franqui

Carlos Fuentes
Gabriel Garcia Marquez,
Juan Goytisolo
Luis Goytisolo
Alain Jouffroy
Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues
Joyce Mansour
Dionys Mascolo
Alberto Moravia
Maurice Nadeau
Helene Parmelin

Octavio Paz
Anne Philippe
Pignon
Jean Pronteau
Rebeyrolles
Rossana Rossanda
Francisco Rosi
Claude Roy
Jean-Paul Sartre
Jorge Semprun
Mario Vargas Llosa

Le Monde, Paris, 9 April 1971

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INTELLECTUALS' SECOND LETTER TO CASTRO

We hold that it is our duty to inform you of our shame and anger.

The deplorable text of the confession signed by Heberto Padilla can only have been obtained by means that amount to the negation of revolutionary legality and justice.

The contents of this confession, with its absurd accusations and delirious assertions, as well as the pitiable parody of self-criticism to which Heberto Padilla and Comrades Belkis Cuza, Diaz Martinez, Cesar Lopez and Pablo Armando Fernandez submitted to at the seat of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, recall the most sordid moments of the era of Stalinism, with its prefabricated verdicts and its witch hunts.

[It is] with the same vehemence that from the very first day was ours in defending the Cuban revolution, which seemed to us exemplary in its respect for the human being and in its struggle for liberation, that we exhort you to spare Cuba dogmatic obscurantism, cultural xenophobia and the repressive system imposed by Stalinism on the socialist countries and of which events similar to those now occurring in Cuba were flagrant manifestations.

The contempt for human dignity implied in the act of forcing a man into ludicrously accusing himself of the worst treasons and indignities does not alert us because it concerns a writer but because any Cuban comrade-peasant, worker, technician or intellectual-can also become the victim of similar violence and humiliations.

We would want the Cuban revolution to return to what made us consider it as a model in the realm of socialism.

Signers:

Le Monde, Paris, 21 May 1971

Claribel Alegria
Simone de Beauvoir
Fernando Benitez
Jacques-Laurent Bost
Italo Calvino
Jose-Maria Castellet
Fernando Claudin
Tamara Deutscher
Roger Dosse
Marguerite Duras
Giulio Einaudi
Hans Magnus Enzensberger
Francisco-Fernandez Santos
Darwin Flakoll
Jean-Michel Fossey

Carlos Franqui
Carlos Fuentes
Angel Gonzales
Adriano Gonzales Leon
Andre Gortz
Jose-Agustin Goytisolo
Juan Goytisolo
Luis Goytisolo
Rodolfo Hinezirosa
Mervin Jones
Monti Johnstone
Monique Lange
Michel Leiris
Mario Vargas Llosa
Lucio Magri

Joyce Mansour
Dacia Maraini
Juan Marse
Dionys Mascolo
Plinio Mendoza
Istvan Meszaris
Ray Miliban
Carlos Monsivais
Marco-Antonio Montes de Oca
Alberto Moravia
Maurice Nadeau
Jose-Ernilio Pacheco
Pier-Paolo Pasolini
Ricardo Porro
Jean Pronteau

Paul Rebeyrolles
Alain Resnais
Jose Revueltes
Rossana Rossanda
Vincente Roio
Claude Roy
Juan Rulfo
Nathalie Sarraute
Jean-Paul Sartre
Jorge Semprun
Jean Shuster
Susan Sontag
Lorenzo Tornabuoni
Jose-Miguel Ullan
Jose Angel Valente

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