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CASTRO SAYS VESCO IS LIVING IN CUBA

Fugitive American Financier Is Said to Be Getting Medical Treatment in Havana

By **JOSEPH B. TREASTER**

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HAVANA, Aug. 4 — President Fidel Castro acknowledged today for the first time that the fugitive American financier Robert L. Vesco had been living in Havana and receiving medical treatment. But in an angry response at a news conference this afternoon he denied the financier was being held under house arrest in Havana.

Mr. Castro charged that reports that Mr. Vesco was in Cuban custody were an attempt by United States intelligence services to divert attention from a five-day conference on the Latin American debt crisis that ended here early this morning.

In response to another question, Mr. Castro said he had to be "discreet" about announcing travel outside his country because "the C.I.A. is hunting me everywhere."

Mr. Castro said the Central Intelligence Agency had become especially intent upon his "physical elimination" since he had taken the lead in urging Latin American countries to refuse to pay their foreign debt, much of which is owed to United States banks and agencies.

Reports of Economic Counsel

Mr. Castro did not specify the nature of the medical problems of Mr. Vesco, who is being sought by United States authorities in connection with a \$224 million fraud case and who has often been reported to be providing economic counseling to the Castro Government.

Mr. Castro said he did not personally know Mr. Vesco, who left the United States more than 12 years ago. The Cuban leader said he and his Government have never had business dealings with Mr. Vesco.

For more than a year there have been persistent reports that Mr. Vesco was in Cuba. Until today, Mr. Castro had said he did not know if Mr. Vesco was on the island. Other Government officials have denied the financier was here.

At the news conference, Mr. Castro said of Mr. Vesco: "He came here to ask for medical care and since then, yes, he was authorized to receive this medical assistance. And if he wants to live here, let him live here."

Mr. Castro did not say when Mr. Vesco arrived in Cuba or whether he was on the island now. But other Gov-

ernment officials confirmed that Mr. Vesco was living in Havana. One official said Mr. Vesco had been here "a few months."

Linked to Debt Meeting

"We don't care what he did in the United States," Mr. Castro said. "We're not interested in the money he has. We don't care. But they want to create a blatant scandal, openly, with this, especially now that this meeting is taking place" on the debt crisis.

On Thursday, a crew from NBC News photographed a bearded man that was said to be Mr. Vesco in the walled yard of a house with a red tile roof in the Miramar section of Havana. After the film was shown on NBC's evening news program Friday, the Justice Department issued a statement saying Mr. Vesco was under house arrest.

"They have invented the theory that he is under house arrest," Mr. Castro said. "Actually this is the first news I have heard about this. I never heard of anything like that before. I think that he will probably have any restrictions that all foreigners might have. But there is no house arrest or anything like this. That is another legend."

Foreigners living here said that they were unaware of any specific restrictions on them and that they had always been able to move around Havana as they liked.

Reports of Vesco Travel

Western diplomats stationed here have reported seeing Mr. Vesco in Havana and at two beach resorts. In the initial reports, the diplomats said they believed Mr. Vesco had the use of at least three houses in Cuba and that he traveled to and from the island by private plane and yacht.

Some diplomats and officials in the United States said they believed Mr. Vesco might be providing information and business contacts that would enable Mr. Castro to find ways around the more than 20-year United States trade embargo against Cuba on technology and equipment.

Others said they believed Mr. Vesco was paying the Castro Government thousands of dollars a month in exchange for a comfortable refuge. Still others speculated that Mr. Vesco might be dealing in narcotics and sharing a percentage of the profit with the Castro Government. Mr. Castro has repeatedly denied that his country is in any way involved in drug trafficking.

United States officials said previously that they had not tried to extradite Mr. Vesco because they did not know precisely where to find him. They said they doubted that the Cuban Government would cooperate with any extradition efforts.

Mr. Castro said he knew "everything, every single detail of who the people were" on the NBC News crew.

He said a woman who was a member of the crew had rented a car. He said: "I know the plate, the car was checked. They saw him. They went in an automobile. They hid around some trees

near the home where it is said this man is living there. It is probable that the man is living there. I don't know. I don't know him. I don't know where the person lives."

"We know many more things than they might think," Mr. Castro said. "They got the information. They sent a plane. A woman journalist rented a car. The other four got into the car. They went to the garage of an empty home. They got out of the car. We even have all the cigarette butts that they smoked."