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March 10, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR

MR. BUNDY

SUBJECT: Mrs. Lisa Howard

I recently talked to Lisa Howard about her two week trip to Cuba for the filming of an ABC documentary; the documentary, "Cuba Today" will probably appear in early April.

1. Castro -- Mrs. Howard said that to understand Cuba, one must understand Castro - he is the undisputed boss; he is the decision-making process; he is the revolution. Castro loves power, is brilliant, ruthless, and a prodigious worker. At the same time he is extremely warm and human; he truly loves his people, and they truly love him back; he is a great pincher and patter.

There is in Castro a deep affinity for Western democratic tradition. He spoke of Paine and Jefferson. He asked Mrs. Howard to send him the best biography of Abraham Lincoln. He is extremely proud of his 1953 book, "History Will Absolve Me"; in this regard, one should note that, in the book, Castro uses examples from Western history, and not Russian history, when he argues in favor of the legitimacy of rebellion (see P. 74 of attached book). Mrs. Howard does not believe Castro is a Communist. At one point she remarked to Castro that "there is no light under Communism." He said nothing, but, with a gesture, thoughtfully indicated his agreement.

2. The General Pitch -- Mrs. Howard said that her general pitch throughout the visit was the tragedy of Cuba and Castro - i. e. (a) that the people loved Fidel, (b) that he loved the people, (c) that, nevertheless, he had betrayed the people by turning Cuba into a police state, and (d) that he could not be the man who wrote "History Will Absolve Me"; in fact, history would not absolve him. Mrs. Howard told Castro that she admired him greatly and, then, more in sorrow than in anger, asked how he could possibly do to his people what he had done.

Mrs. Howard said that this line of argument, especially when it comes from a "progressive" whom he likes, respects, and trusts, touches him

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deeply. A sensitive man with a good deal of "poetry" in him, he sees tragedy in Cuba, and suffers. He is deeply disturbed by the fact that he must keep people like Huber Matos in jail. At one point he said "Do you think I like political prisoners? Do you think this does not disturb me as much as it disturbs you? Let there be peace and there will be no more prisoners." Mrs. Howard said that while he never said it, Castro wants very much to be a great man and to be the man who wrote "History Will Absolve Me." Deep down, he suspects that, under present circumstances, he won't be a great man and that history won't absolve him.

3. Accommodation with the U.S. -- Mrs. Howard said that Fidel very much wants accommodation with the U.S. To get it, Mrs. Howard personally feels that he might be willing to stop his subversive efforts; she believes that subversion is a side-line for Castro and that he is more interested in the welfare of his island. It is even conceivable that he would kick the Russians out of Cuba if he thought that he could get assistance from us and a credible guarantee that we would not try to destroy him. Implicit in his present state of mind is the belief that the only alternative he has to the Russians is destruction. Mrs. Howard doubted that Castro would ever hold elections. While he told Mrs. Howard that he doesn't want to rule forever, she doesn't believe him.

Mrs. Howard said that Castro could make an about-face, throw the Russians out, and probably get away with it with the Cuban people. Terrifically charismatic, he hypnotizes the Cuban people. In this regard, she said we are dreaming if we think the people will desert him. If he ran for office today, he would poll 70% of the vote. His great support comes from the young people and the Negroes. Anti-Castroites tend to be the older people.

Top-level Cuban leaders would split on the issue. Vallejo and Roa would probably welcome accommodation and ejection of the Russians; Che and Raul would not. Mrs. Howard went on to note the close Castro/Vallejo relationship. Vallejo is with Fidel constantly - more than any other person. Fidel respects and likes Vallejo as a friend and as an intellect. He deeply trusts Vallejo.

Mrs. Howard admitted that Castro's close relationship with Khrushchey would hinder an ejection of the Russians. Castro is very fond of Khrushchey and expressed amazement and pleasure that Khrushchey spent so much time escorting him around during Castro's last visit to the USSR. Castro described Khrushchey as "a very wise man" with a fine mind.

4. Communicating with Castro -- Mrs. Howard feels strongly that we should be communicating with Castro. Among other things, if we can live with Fidel, we should tell him so. Mrs. Howard thinks that he does not believe this is the case and, essentially, assumes that we will not be content until we destroy him.

Quite expectedly, Mrs. Howard believes that she would be an effective emissary; as a matter of fact, she may be going to Cuba in May and would gladly deliver a message at that time. She spoke at great length about her close, intimate contact with Fidel and about the fact that Fidel has a high regard and respect for her as a progressive, intelligent woman who is on his wave-length. She has a rapport with Castro which a man will not easily duplicate. (I am not certain that there is a physical relationship between them, but regard it as likely.)

Mrs. Howard went on to describe the evidence of her close relationship and influence with Castro. First, they spent many hours together - probably between 20 and 30; on a couple occasions, they were together all night. Second, he got up at 5:00 A. M. on the morning of her departure so that he could talk to her before she caught an 8:00 A. M. plane. Third, he bore her intense needling about the police state aspects of Cuba. Fourth, in serious and somewhat melancholy moments (e. g. talks about the Cuban people), she has much rapport with him. At one point she suggested to Castro that she was the wiser of the two, and he agreed. At another point, he volunteered that she was dangerous for him. Fifth, she has a number of unposed photographs which show Fidel looking at her in a rather masculine, intense, and unbrotherly way; I have seen them.

I regard Mrs. Howard's motives as mixed. First, she is a newspaper-woman and probably knows she is sniffing at a highly readable story. Second, because of her influence with Fidel, she probably regards herself, somewhat romantically, as fated to play a historical role in helping to bring about an agreement between the U. S. and Cuba. Third, she probably is a sincere, anti-communist, libertarian democrat who regards the Cuban scene as a tragedy and who wants to see the island living in the Western tradition and at peace with the U. S. (To go out on a dangerous limb, my own estimate is that, as long as she can feel useful, the last two motives control the first.)

5. Fidel's Message to the President -- When I saw Mrs. Howard on March 7, Mrs. Howard stoutly insisted that she would not give her message to anyone but the President. All she would say was that the message

contains "certain specific points" and defended her action on the grounds that she would not be keeping faith with Fidel if she delivered her message to anyone but the President. I did not press hard, but, on parting, remarked gently that her reasoning seemed a bit faulty and that if Fidel wanted to say something to us, he had apparently not picked a very good messenger.

This may have done the trick; in any event, Mrs. Howard called me on March 8 to say that I already had the guts of the message to the President - i. e. a firm confirmation of Fidel's "eagerness to negotiate a settlement" for better relations; there was "nothing crucial" about the rest of the message. Mrs. Howard went on to say that while the message did not contain any terms of a rapprochement, Castro obviously had to be aware that negotiations implied a willingness on his part to give something up. In passing, she noted that Castro occasionally reflected a certain confidence that, sooner or later, the reality of the events would surely bring the U.S. to the negotiating table with Cuba.

Also during the phone call, Mrs. Howard said that she hoped I didn't think her presumptuous by suggesting that she could negotiate with Castro. She realized that she did not have experience as a negotiator; in view of her special relationship with Castro, however, she hoped she could be useful in some way.

6. Danger of Leaks and Further Information -- Mrs. Howard repeatedly stated her discretion and intention to be closed-mouth. In this regard, she noted that she had been instrumental in setting up the Lechuga/Attwood line and had breathed a word to no one. She added that Castro would also be tight-lipped about any U.S./Cuban talks. She has told him that, if he blabbed, she would deny everything.

I asked Mrs. Howard to send me a copy of the transcript of a long interview she had with Castro. Somewhat hesitantly, she agreed, but pleaded that it be held very close; NBC and CBS would obviously love to have it. I'm not sure we'll get it.

7. Miscellaneous -- Mrs. Howard commented on the following miscellaneous subjects:

(a) Mrs. Howard said that she was with Castro the day he cut the water off at Guantanamo. He told her that he regarded the "imprisonment"

of the fishermen as absurd and as a gross provokation. He had to do something - "But Lisa, there is honor." After he cut the water off, he worried. A couple of times he asked Mrs. Howard what she thought the U.S. would do. He seemed to be relieved when he finally did see our reaction.

(b) Mrs. Howard spoke of the attitude of the Cuban people towards Americans. The Cubans remain extremely fond of Americans. At the same time, they resent the isolation measures the U.S. has taken. Generally speaking, they do not seem to understand why we are doing what we are doing.

(c) Mrs. Howard said that Castro does not believe that the Alliance for Progress will ever work. The autocracies in Latin America will fight it all the way and defeat it.

(d) Mrs. Howard said that Che Guevera is cool, tough, and removed. He gave an interview to Mrs. Howard reluctantly, and only after Fidel twisted his arm.

Che told her that the isolation policy was a mixed bag. It helped politically in uniting the people against the U.S. On the other hand, it hurt economically. Mrs. Howard's estimate is that the isolation policy irritates Cuba but that it will never bring about an overthrow of the regime.

8. Essence of the Problem Facing the U.S. -- In my view, the next step boils down to whether or not we are prepared to inject the following thought, in one way or another, into the very tenuous and marginal U.S./Cuban dialogue: "Fidel, would you consider breaking the Bloc tie-line and stopping subversion if, on our part, we decided that we could live with you personally and assist Cuba economically?"

While weighing carefully the penalties involved in asking the question, we should also keep clearly in mind the penalties involved in not asking the question. Conceivably, in failing to provide Castro with an option, the U.S. could lose an opportunity (long-shot though it may be) to bring about, over time, one of the truly great victories of the 20th century - the ejection of the USSR from the W. Hemisphere after the penetration had been made.

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