

WHEN MAJOR DIAZ DEFECTED

by

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Many Americans are by now aware of how greatly the American press helped Castro take power in Cuba by telling the American public what a wonderful fellow he was. They know that Castro was not only portrayed as the "George Washington of Cuba" but that his "revolution" was characterized as a great "democratic" movement. The public, unfortunately, was in no position to know that behind the newsprint facade, a ruthless Communist dictator had been catapulted to power.

The process of consolidating that Communist victory was started the moment Castro reached Havana in January of 1959. There were few in Cuba who realized what was happening as early as that date. One of them, however, was Major Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, the Chief of Cuba's Air Force, who had fought as a revolutionary and was Castro's personal pilot. Although Maj. Diaz was tempted to resign as soon as the stadium trials began, he decided to stay longer until he had gathered sufficient evidence concerning the Communist complexion of Castro's regime.

The moment of his resignation came on June 30, 1959, and was reported on page one of The New York Times on July 1, 1959 as follows:

CUBAN AIR CHIEF RESIGNS CHARGING RED INFLUENCE

Havana, June 30--The chief of Cuba's Air Force resigned today,

charging there was Communist influence in the armed forces and Government. It was the first open break in the unity of the revolutionary armed forces.

Maj. Pedro L. Diaz Lanz, who transported arms to Premier Fidel Castro's 26th of July forces during the two-year rebellion against the Batista regime and fought with the rebels, sent his resignation to President Manuel Urrutia Lleo. . . .

Major Diaz was denounced tonight as a "traitor of the revolution" by Maj. Juan Almeida of the air force. . . .

Major Diaz attributed the decline in his authority to the long-standing opposition to the Communist infiltration in the armed forces and Government.

"I consider that all these actions against me are due solely and exclusively to the fact that I have always opposed the attitude which permits the Communists to occupy prominent positions within the rebel army and within the departments of the Government," he said.

"The Communist elements also have exerted pressure to carry out a certain plan of indoctrination" in an officers training school, he asserted. . . .

Dr. Castro has repeatedly denied that the Cuban revolution is Communist.

Maj. Diaz's resignation required that the Communists work fast. There is nothing the Communists fear more than a premature exposure of their plans. The Castro regime immediately started a search for the Major. But Maj. Diaz,

knowing his enemy, had already left the island. The first act of the Castro regime was to stage a general crackdown on opposition forces, with a great many arrests. Then the propaganda machines started operating. All of this was indicated in a dispatch by Ruby Hart Phillips in The New York Times of July 2, 1959. It read:

FORMER AIR CHIEF HUNTED BY CUBANS

Major Who Quit With Attack on Reds Called Deserter

Havana, July 1--The Cuban revolutionary armed forces are searching for the former chief of the air force, Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz. . . .

President Manuel Urrutia Lleo, to whom Major Diaz presented his letter of resignation, branded the major a "deserter" who wishes to "prejudice the revolutionary Government."

Premier Fidel Castro's younger brother Raul also assailed Major Diaz. . . .

The underlying issue of Communist influence in the revolutionary Government has been brought to the surface by Major Diaz's resignation. . . .

Premier Castro bitterly criticizes anyone who opposes his policy and terms any opposition "counter-revolutionary." He links critics to former President Fulgencio Batista, whom he accuses of attempting to organize invasions and start a counter-revolution in Cuba.

He has effectively silenced the majority of his critics with these tactics. Even the press, although there is no censorship, fails to express the normal opposition customary in a democratic country.

The first statement issued by President Urrutia on the case of

Major Diaz was hastily withdrawn shortly after it was sent out and another substituted. There was no explanation concerning this, but in the revised copy a statement by the President that he himself "absolutely rejects Communist ideology" was deleted.

By July 4, 1959, the whereabouts^A of Maj. Diaz were still unknown. However, The New York Times reported Castro's first major attack on the Major on that date, as follows:

In his television interview, Dr. Castro declared that the recent resignation of Cuba's chief of Air Force, Maj. Pedro Luis Diaz Lanz, was part of a plan to accuse Cuba of communism at the same time this accusation was made by Generalissimo Trujillo.

While stating that Major Diaz had rendered good service to the revolution, the Premier termed the young major a "traitor" and a "deserter" who had been bought by former President Fulgencio Batista. . . .

Dr. Castro rejected all accusations of communism made by the former chief of the Cuban air force.

Major Diaz's whereabouts were finally revealed in a dispatch in the July 9, 1959 edition of The New York Times. The Major and his wife had reached Miami in a small private boat on July 1st. In the meanwhile, the American press had stood by and watched the Diaz-Castro struggle from the sidelines. You can be sure, however, that, behind the scenes, preparations were being made to counteract Major Diaz's charges. It wasn't until the Major

had testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee in closed session on July 11th, that the American press got busy on the Major.

First, on Monday, July 13, 1959, The New York Times published a major attack by Castro on the Senate Committee, which was accused by Castro of interfering with Cuban affairs. Then Castro accused Major Diaz of being Cuba's "Benedict Arnold", saying that the Major's defection was a result of an "international plot against the revolution."

Second, ^{there} appeared an article by Herbert L. Matthews on page one of the Times, on the very same day, singing the praises of the Cuban revolution. The article, datelined Santiago de Cuba, told about how ecstatic everyone was with the revolution in that city. "There seems to be no happier, prouder or more enthusiastic city in all of Cuba," Matthews wrote. As for communism, wrote Matthews, "Few in Santiago believe that there is Communist influence in Oriente Province." In fact, Matthews assures us, it ~~is~~ isn't Communism which worries the people, but inefficiency.

On July 14, 1959 Maj. Diaz testified before the Senate subcommittee at a public hearing open to the press. The testimony, which provided a wealth of detailed information about the Communist takeover of Cuba and filled 32 pages of a Government Printing Office document, received only the scantiest coverage. No newspapers published any substantial excerpts from Major Diaz's testimony. The New York Herald-Tribune, for example, published a story of over 100 lines about the hearing, 18 lines of which were devoted to the actual substance of the testimony. The New York Times story, written by Allen Drury, and printed on July 15, 1959 read as follows: