

Bush promising communists a spot in post-Castro Cuban government

by Gretchen Small

Under the cover of sabre-rattling against the “last communist dictator” in the Americas, the Bush regime appears to have already initiated negotiations with Castro’s government. Under discussion is a “transitional government” which would attempt to prevent the total liquidation of the communist machine, as would necessarily occur if the looming anti-communist revolution in Cuba is allowed to proceed.

Even as the uprisings in the Soviet Union created the opportunity to bury communism worldwide once and for all, Washington sent a public message that it is still committed to bringing communists into power in *new* countries in Ibero-America. On Aug. 31, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador William Walker, accompanied by Col. Mark Hamilton, head of the U.S. military mission to that country, and an aide to Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.), met with 10 commanders of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) in the rebel stronghold of Santa Marta.

The FMLN guerrillas have long been the Castro regime’s strongest military allies in the Americas. The signal to Cuba was unmistakable: The U.S. still considers the communists viable negotiating partners.

They didn’t just meet. They sipped Johnny Walker Black scotch, discussed what “guarantees” the terrorists desired before they would agree to a cease-fire, and had photographs taken of their merry meeting. It wasn’t the first time Ambassador Walker had visited the FMLN in Santa Marta. In a July visit, he had brought along Rep. Joe Moakley (D-Mass.).

The Salvadoran government, which U.S. officials had not bothered to notify in advance of this negotiating session, demanded an explanation. None was given. Any idea that the U.S. was unaware of its ambassador’s doings was dispelled by a detailed report on the encounter which appeared in the *Washington Post* on Sept. 13, in which Walker defended his talks as “fruitful.” No protest was issued by the Bush administration.

A package deal

From the outset, the Bush administration treated Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador as a single package, negotiating the makeup of new governments with the Kremlin. Nicaragua was the test case. Washington demanded that the Sandin-

istas legitimize their rule through calling national elections; Moscow pressured the Sandinistas to accept. Washington fully expected the Sandinistas to win, so much so that the terms of a new Nicaraguan-U.S. rapprochement, including a defense agreement, had already been negotiated between Sandinista representatives and the Bush administration when the Nicaraguan electorate upset those plans on Feb. 25, 1990, by electing Violeta Chamorro, candidate of the National Opposition Union (UNO), as President.

Washington has ensured, however, that winning the election did not bring relief from Sandinista rule. Under the personal direction of Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez—an ally of President Bush who pays Henry Kissinger to advise his government—Chamorro set up a coalition government. The Sandinistas retained control of the defense and security apparatus; the International Monetary Fund ran economic policy. A year and half later, the UNO finds its political base eroded, and itself subject to blackmail by the Sandinistas, whose military and political machine remains intact.

Now the same form of “coalition government” is being prepared for El Salvador, where the communists have yet to win power themselves. Washington and Moscow agreed that the United Nations be empowered to run “peace” negotiations between the FMLN and the government. The FMLN’s primary demands are that its political and military machine be protected, while the national Army is savaged, before they will agree to a cease-fire. They even demand that FMLN forces be incorporated “at all levels” into the national military—i.e., be given command posts. When the government refused this demand, U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar took charge of the negotiations.

An article appearing in the Soviet daily *Pravda* on June 24 outlined the package deal which was expected to result. Bringing the FMLN into the government of El Salvador is viewed as a prior step for a Soviet-U.S. agreement over Cuba, *Pravda* wrote. “With the ending of the Salvadoran conflict, the chances of gradual normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations . . . will be sure to increase. . . . The White House has declared Havana’s traditional solidarity with Salvadoran partisans one of the chief obstacles in the way of setting up an official dialogue between the U.S. and Cuba.” That could

begin to bring the Soviet Union relief from "the very great cost of the anti-Cuban trade and economic blockade."

Wall of fear begins to crack

Now, it's Cuba's turn. Of all times to negotiate to save Castro, when his grip is weakening at an unpredictable rate!

The promise by Mikhail Gorbachov on Sept. 11 that Soviet military forces will be gradually withdrawn from Cuba was greeted with joy in the Cuban-American community. Even before the announcement, Cuban citizens had begun to protest over the phone to relatives in the U.S.—knowing full well that their calls are monitored by the dictatorship.

The Castro regime is so fearful of opposition even within its own ranks that it ordered the long-postponed Fourth Communist Party Congress, finally scheduled to begin on Oct. 10, be held behind closed doors. For the first time ever, all foreign delegations, journalists or diplomats, have been banned from attending.

Yet State Department officials are waiting for the congress, "looking for any clue that Castro or members of his inner circle are ready to take limited steps toward a market economy," London's *Financial Times* reported on Sept. 13. Last May, President Bush had used a Cuban Independence day address to outline conditions for improved U.S.-Cuba relations: that the Castro regime call elections, increase respect for human rights, and stop aid to insurgents in other American countries.

At the time, the Castro regime answered, "never," and filled its press with cries of "socialism or death." Has that line changed? The same *Financial Times* article reported that Raul Taladrid, vice president of Cuba's State Committee for Economic Cooperation, now states that Cuba will "negotiate with the devil" to survive, and welcomed foreigners to invest in tourism and industry.

Pérez says, 'Trust Fidel'

Reuters news service reported on Sept. 13 that Venezuela's President Pérez had sent his foreign minister to Cuba, to "attempt to woo [its] leaders with the promise of oil in return for reform." Pérez's biggest asset is the fact that he is, in addition to being a personal friend of Fidel Castro, as Reuters noted, "a key ally in Latin America of President George Bush." The other carrot offered by the Pérez regime is investments by the regime's primary moneybags, billionaire businessman Gustavo Cisneros. Cisneros offers the advantage of owning extensive U.S. business interests linked to the Rockefellers, and having family ties in the Castro regime.

Pérez has been pressing Castro for some time to initiate reforms at the October Communist Party Congress, thus to ensure for himself a role in whatever government comes next. "I am sure that [Cuba's] leaders, led by Fidel Castro, will be reflecting upon . . . the reform which is needed in their country. I have confidence in them. We should give them time," he told journalists on Aug. 25.

The Cuban-American National Foundation

Another negotiating track for the Bush administration runs through the Cuban-American National Foundation. On May 20, the same day Bush offered terms for U.S.-Cuban relations, the chairman of the Cuban-American National Foundation, Jorge Mas Canosa, told the *Washington Times* that the foundation has been the intermediary for talks between members of Fidel Castro's inner circle and the U.S. government, on ways to convert the island's economy to a market economy. "They are very important contacts, at a very high level," Mas Canosa stated.

The foundation—a group of Cuban exile millionaires, many associated with the gambling and drug-running interests which dominated Batista's pre-Castro Cuba—is a straight U.S. intelligence operation. Bush's son Jeb is an adviser to the foundation, and so close to its president, Jorge Mas Canosa, that he refers to Jeb as "one of us," the *Washington Post* reported in 1986.

The outfit is also funded by the quasi-governmental National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The Summer 1990 issue of the NED's *Journal of Democracy* called for a "carefully drawn up political pact" in Cuba. If Castro's inner circle can convince him to call elections, they can "save themselves and in some cases even have a share" in the transition government, the *Journal* promised. The magazine added that this will ensure that "communists . . . still have the opportunity to regroup."

Mas Canosa has also been negotiating with the Kremlin. He told Madrid's *El País* newspaper in July 1990 that the foundation had promised Moscow that if the Soviets helped "reform" Cuba, "we, tomorrow, can guarantee their presence on Cuba. We want to have the best diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the greatest possible commercial ties. The only difference [with Castro] is that we will pay everything in dollars." The foundation announced in mid-September that a delegation visiting Moscow has worked out permission to open an office there.

The foundation has been sponsoring forums on the economic reconstruction of Cuba for U.S. multinationals. An adviser of Anpac Group, Inc., a Miami-based mining company which attended one such forum, told the *Wall Street Journal* that he expected changes in Cuba by 1992 which would be favorable to their interests. "Fidel will turn into a figure like the Queen of England, a symbol, rather than an executive of the Cuban government, and allow regional elections," he suggested.

Cuban nationalists will never tolerate these plans to sell off Cuban freedom before it arrives, Cuban exile Ernesto Betancourt warned in his syndicated column Sept. 7. "The Cuban-American Foundation claims to have buyers willing to pay \$15 billion for 60% of Cuba's assets. Nobody gave the foundation the authority to sell the island." The Bush administration's support for the foundation "discourages an internal solution. . . . Cuba can no longer be a Soviet surrogate; nor should it be an American colony. It is time to let Cuba be Cuba."