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FJM-42: Report From a Cuban Prison XII
Andreas*

I put downthe phoneand sat on the edge of the bed, blankly staring out the window of my 15th floor room. For the first time since I had come to Cuba, I felt totally vulnerable, marooned, isolated. After Delia, the only person I might have called was Andreas. But he had disappeared three weeks ago, vanished as if he had never even existed. . . .

"Valdez? Oh yes. He's with a delegation in the interior," the voice on the phone at MINREX had said. I'd heard about others being told something like that before, to learn subsequently that the friend or relative in question had really been picked up by MININT (The Ministry of Interior). That's a very different kind of trip. If Andreas was with a delegation in the interior, he certainly wasn't there voluntarily. I decided to see for myself. I walked down Linea to the glass-enclosed headquarters of MINREX hoping to find Olga, Andreas' Division Chief. If anyone could tell me where he was, she would.

But Olga wasn't available either. Instead, a functionary I had never met before, Eduardo, he called himself, came to the lobby to talk to me. I asked if I might be able to telephone my friend Andreas. I was about to leave Cuba and would like to say goodbye. I got an evasive response: "No, Professor, it's impossible you see because where Valdez is there are no phones." I opined that if he's with a delegation he would surely be staying at some sort of hotel. Again evasion. There was no way I could get through the cool control made sappy with that teethy, polite smile.

The following day I called Rachel, Andreas' wife. Had she had any news? Hers too was a cautious response. ". . . with a delegation somewhere in Pinar Del Rio. . . cannot be reached . . . he'll call you when he returns." The only indication that something was wrong was the slightly restrained inflection in Rachel's voice. There was no point in pushing her further. Besides, the phones no doubt were tapped.

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*Names and circumstances have been altered in this series. The conversations are reconstructed from notes taken afterward.

Andreas was my closest friend. He was also the first Cuban I'd met when, as Cuban Consul to the Jamaican government, he was the one who was responsible for approving my visa to Cuba.

In February 1969, during a short trip to Jamaica, I thought about applying for a visa to Cuba to write Newsletters, a spontaneous idea that after a year and a half paid off. I felt very uneasy ringing the front doorbell of the Cuban Consulate, looking around at the high fence surrounding the property that had been erected for security. At the time, with the exception of two others--in Mexico City and Ottawa, the Cuban flag that was flying on a flagpole in the Kingston courtyard was the only one displayed publicly in the western hemisphere.

After several rings, the door finally opened and a well-tanned man--about 32--with bright brown eyes and a welcome smile asked me what I wanted. Andreas Valdez wasn't a tall man, no more than five foot seven, but he had stature. Hefty but not fat, with that barrel chest and strong arms he looked as though he could have easily thrown me through a wall.

I explained who I was and that I wanted to go to Cuba to write about the Revolution. Simple but direct, I had figured. Andreas didn't reject the request at all, as I had thought he would, but simply told me that such things were difficult. I would need patience. In time it might be possible. He would like to have a resume and some examples of my writing. I agreed, left him some Newsletters, a short vitae and then left.

Six months later we met again, this time over lunch at what turned out to be our favorite eating spot, a small Mexican restaurant off of Halfway Tree Road on the outskirts of Kingston. I was delighted he had read all the material I had given him and that he thought the Newsletters "informative." He encouraged me and told me not to be impatient, then asked me a number of questions about my schooling and background.

It was at this point, with some trepidation, I asked Andreas what he thought my chances of getting a visa were, if I had an uncle who was in the CIA. This caught him by surprise. He looked at me, hesitated a bit, then threw himself back in the chair and laughed. "Don't worry about that," he said. "All of us, especially Cubans, have someone, a friend or relative working for the CIA. Why even Fidel's sister works for them. So don't worry about it!" I laughed, impressed by the apparent sophistication of Andreas' response. The subject was changed and Andreas began to describe his days at the University of Havana; how he had studied politics there and then joined MINREX where he'd been ever since. He was a part of Division Number IV, Las Americas and his specialty was the Caribbean.

Then we began talking about Cuba. I noticed that Andreas never used the word, "government," or referred to Castro as the Prime Minister. It was always "The Revolution" or "Fidel," terms that at first amazed me until I understood how Cubans identify with a process and not a set of officials or leader set apart from them. I was also struck by the depth of Andreas' affection for Fidel, my first exposure to a phenomena that I would eventually take for granted once in Cuba.

Finally, as a result of the attention Andreas gave to my application, I spent the summer of 1970 in Cuba, returning to Jamaica by September, eager to tell Andreas how impressed I'd been by what I saw. For me, the summer was enlightening insofar as it revealed the stark contrast between what I'd known in the other Caribbean countries--unemployment rates as high as 25 percent, children with bellies blown big with malnutrician, beggars in every town, vast discrepancies between the wealth controlled by white minority and the poverty of the illiterate, primarily black majority--and what I'd seen in Cuba. Indeed, Cuba isn't hurt by the comparison and it quickly disabused me of the absurd fear of any "Red Menace" there. Furthermore, I couldn't ignore the impatience I felt when I realized that if itwere possible to eliminate unemployment, arrest disease, teach the illiterate to read and write, universalize education and eliminate racial or economic injustices--as Cuba has done--why then couldn't the rest of the Caribbean governments do the same? Even more disturbing was the distortion or misunderstanding (depending on how you look at it) created in the American media about the Revolution.

"Well, if you're satisfied that you learned something, then we are both pleased," Andreas said. "We can also probably count on seeing each other in Havana next year since I heard that the University would like you to return for a year to lecture on Caribbean Affairs. Rachel, my wife, and I plan on returning about the same time. What do you think about that?" It was a happy thought that we all shared, especially for me because by then I knew I would need much more time in Cuba to get deeper into the complexities of the Revolution.

Our return to Havana did in fact coincide in the summer of 1971, and the first encounter Andreas and I had in Havana was one cool June evening in front of the Havana Libre Hotel. First we had a cup of coffee in the "snack bar" (still so named) and then walked down Avenue 23, La Rampa, toward the Malecon. We had much to talk about, apart from the pleasure of renewed friendship. We shared a common

interest and enthusiasm for a very beautiful and equally complex part of the world--the Caribbean. Few Cubans, even though they themselves are Caribbean people, appreciated the fact. Yet Andreas did. He was also one of the few in Cuba who knew anything about the region, which was one of the reasons I presume I was invited to return. It was a fair trade that Andreas and I capitalized on. For him, I proved to be someone with whom he could bounce off his own views about the area, discussing the latest news from Trinidad or Barbados, and complain about the fact that nobody seemed to care about what was happening in those states anyway. (It sounded like a familiar U. S. State Department complaint to me.) For me, besides being a friend, Andreas was someone whose judgment about the Cuban Revolution I could respect, someone upon whom I could depend for help to accomplish the kind of research and writing I wanted to do while in Cuba.

Our meeting that night, however, was quite different than I might have expected a year before. While my enthusiasm for the social changes Cubans had brought about had not diminished, I was worried about some of the blemishes I'd uncovered below the surface as I got deeper into the Revolution. In the year since my first visit, much had happened in Cuba: the distortions in the economy flowing from the failure of the Ten Million had taken hold; and these in turn had affected every facet of Cuban life. I could sense the changes in the atmosphere as soon as I arrived, though I couldn't pinpoint them until later. I tried to express this feeling to Andreas.

We were sitting on the five foot thick seawall that ran along the Malecon, talking about the arrest of Herberto Padilla. "....I mean Andreas, how can you justify it? The absurdity of the charges that were brought against him are obvious to everyone and it's done a lot of harm to the prestige of the Revolution internationally." It was a hard way to begin a reunion, I know, particularly for someone who had been away for so long and was just getting adjusted. Yet Andreas was sympathetic and tried his best to explain his point of view to help me.

"I'm not going to justify the arrest," he said, "it <u>was</u> probably a mistake. But don't get carried away by the European intellectuals either. No one is going to tell us how to run our affairs here. Padilla was a fraud and an over-rated spokesman for the so-called artists of the Revolution. I don't want to argue about his poetry. He may have been a good poet, but he was a bad man, shallow and certainly

not one to emulate. The important things to watch are the changes taking place in respect to ideology. We are undergoing a shift--or if you prefer--new developments in ideological terms."

Andreas began to work into his ideas, trying to give me some perspective. "I think the Revolution has entered a new phase," he said. "I guess you can count it the fourth. Of course, this is oversimplifying it somewhat, but we can say that the first phase of the Revolution began in 1959, and ended in mid-1961. That was a nationalist period when the Revolution proclaimed Cuba for Cubans. You recall that we formed the ORI (Integrated Revolutionary Organization) then as the basic political structure in order to unify the various political groups then separately organized. We needed unity to counter the increasingly hostile attitude of the United States. Economically, we nationalized large American-owned firms and estates which Fidel realized had to be used as a foundation for our rather grandiose industrialization schemes. Doing so, we probably squandered many of these resources, indulging ourselves thinking that making a Revolution was going to be easy. Culturally, things were better. We blossomed, though it was still a cultural flowering made by and for the middle classes."

"Then in April, 1961, Fidel declared our Revolution would follow the socialist path of development. We had reached a new phase, the second. This period lasted until 1965, during which we broke diplomatic relations with the United States and were cut off from our sister states in Latin America by the DAS. Ideologically and politically, we went through some domestic upheaval as well. The main threat was "sectarianism; or dogmatism on the part of the old-line, PSP Communists. As a result, the ORI had to be disbanded in 1963 and reformed as the PURS (United Party of the Socialist Revolution). Meanwhile economically, there were some significant changes, especially when Fidel came back from the Soviet Union and announced that we were going to abandon our utopian hopes of quick industrializaiion and concentrate instead on building a strong agricultural base. It was a difficult decision to make; but it was clear to everyone that we had to develop the way we knew best, that is agriculturaly. Culturally, of course, there was that series of debates about whether anything other than work done in the tradition of socialist realism could be acceptable to the Revolution, a result really of sectarianism again. Many orthodox Party members said no. Finally however, Fidel gave his famous defense of the artists in the main reading room of the Jose Marti Library. If you haven't read it, you must. In it he defended the right of Paul's writers and

artists to produce so long as it does not oppose the Revolution. I think he used the terms 'inside/outside' to define what was or was not permissible."*

"From 1965 to July of 1970, the Revolution went through a third phase which we can say was in many respects the most radical of any period in the Revolution's history. Our Foreign policy, for example, called upon revolutionaries throughout the world to wage armed struggle to emulate the Vietnamese. Che went to Bolivia....and died there as an heroic example of this. At the same time, we must honestly admit that our relations with the Soviet Union were not so good. They deteriorated in inverse proportion to the emphasis that we placed on a foreign policy based on armed struggle. There were other problems, some involving the implementation of radical economic policies like moral incentives and the Revolutionary offensive which began in March of 1968, and which nationalized all but the smallest businesses in Cuba. (Cuba's economy represents the highest percentage of State control of any socialist nation). We also began making preparations for the giant harvest of 1970. Hundreds of thousands of man-hours and millions of pesos were diverted from other sectors of the economy into the sugar industry. We had hopes that the harvest would provide us with the necessary foreign exchange to pay off the huge deficit in our balance of payments. As you know, we only harvested 8.5 million tons of sugar that year and only 5.9 this year (1971)."

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*The exact quotation from the speech of June 6, 1961 follows:

"The Revolution must denounce those who are incorrigibly reactionary, who are incorrigibly counter-revolutionary. ....But the Revolution must also realize that those who are not genuinely revolutionary writers and artists must have an opportunity and the freedom to express themselves. Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing. Against the Revolution nothing because the Revolution also has its rights; and the first right of the Revolution is the right to exist and before that, prior to the right of the revolutionary to be and to exist, there is no one. Because the Revolution incorporates the interests of all the people, because the Revolution itself signifies the interest of the entire nation, no one can present a reason to have rights contrary to it. I believe this is very clear. What are the rights of the artist and writer? Revolutionary or not revolutionary? Within the Revolution: everything. Against the Revolution: no rights!"

"In terms of political development, the formation of the Communist Party in October, 1965 was the most significant event. One hundred revolutionaries were selected to form the nucleus of the Party, that is, the Central Committee. From these 100, nine were appointed to serve as the hierarchy of the Party--what we call the 'Buro Politico.'

"Which finally brings me to the point. As I said at first, because of the drop in production, not only in the sugar industry but in other spheres of the economy, the Revolution must call for greater sacrifices and increased production. To do this, we need the enthusiasm of the masses, the workers in the factories as well as the workers in the field. Contrary to what Dumont or K. S. Karol* have written, the Revolution has not chosen the path of Stalination by forcing workers to produce at the crack of a whip. On the contrary, the speech you and I heard at the "Chaplin" (the Chaplin Theatre, August 1970) announced a very different policy. There is more participation at base level in decision making, greater consultation with the workers on matters of policy and lawmaking now than at any time before. That doesn't mean there will be National elections for political leaders. It means there are elections for union leaders, for production supervisors, and public discussion of work norms amongst other things. As you know all these things have and will continue to take place. It's what we call the 'mass line,' and I see it reflected in every facet of the Revolution. Culturally, after the Congress in April (Congress of Education and Culture held in April, 1971) we know that there is presently a big push to make culture a mass activity. The Aficionado Movement (National Amateur Movement) is an example of what I mean. While there is less emphasis on professionalism in theater, poetry and music there is great interest in the amateur, in incorporating the masses into the work of artistic creativity. At the same time, there is also a strong movement to orient Cuban culture to Latin America rather than to the North as it has been for so long. That is why so many groups from Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and other Latin American nations have been invited to come here and participate in cultural exchange programs. We must make a radical break with North

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*Both Dumont and Karol published books as a result of their visits to Cuba in 1968. Both accused the Cuban Revolution among other things of increased Stalinization and militarization of the economy.

American culture, which for us, is corrupting and imperialistic.

"By the same token our foreign policy emphasizes political developments taking place in Latin America. Events in Chile, Uruguay (before the military takeover in 1973), Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Argentina have demonstrated that soon it will be the United States that will be isolated in this hemisphere rather than Cuba. Don't doubt it. Just wait. Already, as you know, changes in the Caribbean will result soon in the establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba. Already we have had soundings from Forbes Burnham, the President of Guyana. He wants very much to have an exchange of ambassadors with us; but I think Fidel is waiting for the rest of the Caribbean to establish jointly diplomatic relations with us. It will be more significant then. (Andreas was, as usual, on the mark: Trinidad, Guyana, Barbados and Jamaica all established joint diplomatic relations with Cuba in December, 1972.)

"One final point, that really takes us back to where we began. Padilla's arrest and other strictures placed on intellectuals points up what I have tried to say. While there is more action at the base, there are also more severe strictures enforced at the top."

"I have heard that from others too, Andreas," I said. "But I wondered if it wasn't an oversimplification, or a device to excuse what is happening here. I know Fidel is famous for his 'two-handed' technique of policy making: Hit with the left and soothe with the right! In this case, he hits the intellectuals and soothes the workers, tightens the limits on the elite and loosens restrictions in the factories and the fields."

"Well, I don't know about that. But you heard him at Chaplin that night. He said: 'The more responsibility, the more sacrifice.' I think that was directed at Party Members as well as intellectuals; at bureaucrats and Ministry officials as well as artists and poets. But let's not spend all night talking about the difficulties and the problems. Let's talk about the good things, like being back home."

Andreas was happy. Rachel was about to have a baby, their first, and he told me that he hoped it would be a son. At Minrex, things were also going well. A new post, head of the Caribbean desk, had been created for Andreas and he was delighted with the chance to have more policy making influence for the Caribbean. "Just watch," he joked, "when

Fidel wants to know about a problem in the Caribbean, everyone will be jumping around shouting about our need for expertise. And no one will know anything about it but me and one or two others. That's the way it always is."

In August, Rachel had the baby, a boy. Yet for a month afterward, I heard no word from Andreas, despite repeated calls to the Ministry. When at last he did get in touch with me, he apologized for his inattention and offered his heavy work load plus the rush of events surrounding the birth of the baby as excuses. Whenever I did see him thereafter, however, I knew, as with all the others, that something had gone wrong. Andreas had erected a subtle yet impenetrable shield shutting me off. The only difference was that because he and I had been friends for a longer time it was much more noticeable than with the others.

Finally, determined to get to the bottom of the change in him, I invited Andreas to dinner at the Libre. He had never dined there and I thought it would be a good place to talk. We met in the lobby and went up four flights up to a small private dining room set aside for long term residents like myself. Quiet, with tables discreetly placed a good distance from each other, the regulars who came to lunch and dine there were a unique group of people. A young British girl, apparently doing nothing but wandering about Havana trying to get a job with the Federation of Cuban Women usually ate in the corner. Two other women, one Swedish, the other American, also maintained separate tables, and distance, from everyone else. The first, a blonde, embodied all the characteristics of Fellini's fantasies in "8 1/2"--beautiful but elusive and unapproachable. She used to smile, even say hello occasionally, though there was never anything in her look that suggested anything else but "I want to be left alone." Like so many mysterious visitors wandering around the corridors of the Libre, no one knew what she was doing in Cuba. One waiter was perhaps right: "She's a friend of a 'high-up' perhaps maybe even Fidel." The Libre created such fantasies. In fact, the only time she did seem to pay attention to anyone was when Regis Debray appeared one evening. The two of them seemed to know each other well, an example I thought of the International Revolutionary Jet Set.

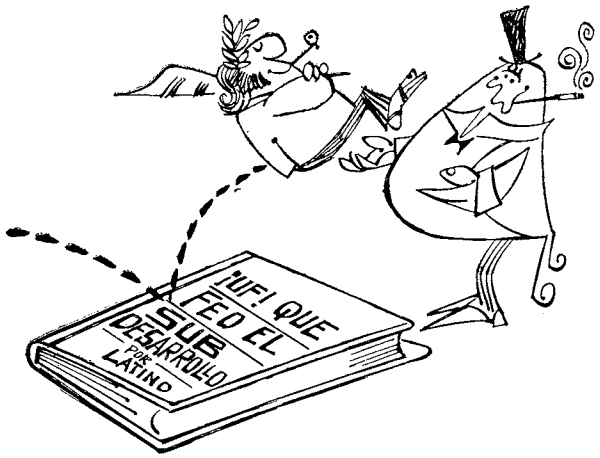
The other woman was an American, one of the toughest, most hostile people I've ever met. I learned from a mutual friend who knew her that she was "just visiting," this being her fourth trip to Cuba. I was curious and wanted to get to know her. So one afternoon, I gathered courage and approached her table to ask if I might join her. She shrugged. I accepted

**LONDRES...BERLIN OCCIDENTAL...NEW YORK...PARIS..**

# LOS SEUDO


A CARTOON TAKEN FROM A CUBAN MAGAZINE THAT DEPICTS VIEW OF THE REVOLUTION REGARDING NORTH AMERICAN AND WEST EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS CRITICAL OF THE RECENT CHANGES IN THE REVOLUTION'S CULTURAL LINE.

...LONDRES...BERLIN OCCIDENTAL...NEW YORK...PARIS






it as enough of a gesture to sit down at her table, determined to make friends at all costs. We exchanged the usual kind of pleasantries: "How long are you here for?....How long are you going to stay?....What do you think of?"....But it was very hard work and finally, when she pulled Granma* out of her shoulder bag, I gave up. We finished the meal in silence and then I escaped, muttering to myself something about SDS types.... paranoia....intolerance....even though I had no reason to consider her a member of SDS.

I pointed out others equally interesting and equally distant to Andreas that night. There was the Venezuelan guerrilla fighter who had been shot in the back escaping from a police patrol. He lived out of a wheelchair, his spinal chord severed in two by the bullet. Living with the hope that some day he might walk again and then return to his country to continue fighting, he was receiving every kind of medical treatment available from the Revolution. He was a profoundly dedicated yet gentle man with a large beard and a book of poems always at hand.

In another corner of the room, sat a Uruguayan literary critic--tall, erect with a full grey beard, he had been invited to judge the Casas de las Americas literary competitions that year. Another Latin, a Peruvian agronomist working on the results of the land reform Cuba has carried out since the Revolution was a special guest of the Revolution. Fidel had given him permission to do a study for the Peruvian government that wanted further information before it went further with its own land reform program. Others in residence included the Chilean ambassador, a Soviet General staying a few days, a few North Koreans, an Indian journalist and a Brazilian film maker. They provided me a passing review of the world's revolutionary celebrities.

Despite the theatrics, everyone was confined to their tables, their own ICAP guide, no doubt for security. I would have preferred living in one of the houses reserved for visiting academics or journalists near the University, and I made the point to Andreas that night. "Frankly, I don't like it much at the Libre. I eat away from here as often as I can, as you know Andreas. It's a crazy atmosphere. No one here is open, everyone guards himself, I presume because they're afraid of encountering a foreign agent who might report their presence here to the "enemy" back home. So everyone sits at his or her own table and nods an acknowledgement, though they hardly relate to each other in a human way. That's not what I thought the Revolution stood for. I say that because part of the cause for this, I think is ICAP. Those gides foster isolation by insisting, in a very indirect way of course, that people of

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*Granma is the official daily newspaper of the P.C.C. There is only one other national daily, Juventude Rebelde, published by the Union of Young Communists.

different delegations should not mix. How absurd! It wasn't that way last year at the Nacional. There, everyone mixed. We got to know each other as if we were all at a summer camp. It made the whole program much more enjoyable.

"Well, this is one of the things about the Libre. It's just the atmosphere traditionally found here. At the Nacional, we usually host the academics, the journalists and those who stay here for that kind of work. You're in that category somewhere, I know, but when you arrived there just wasn't a room available. If you want, you can switch to the Riviera. There you'll find the food a little better and the atmosphere warmer. You'll find that it's also jammed with Soviet and Bulgarian technicians, some foreign businessmen and of course, all those couples on their honeymoon."

We continued the small talk for a while, discussing bureaucratic problems, primarily. I was frustrated at not being able to interview anyone regarding the Revolution's line on artists and writers. I had gone to the Consejo Nacional de Cultura on several occasions to try and interview Luis Pavon, its Director, or Armando Quesada, the official in charge of theatre, dance and music. I'd made no progress at all. So I asked Andreas to see if he could work through the Ministry of External Relations' cultural arm for me. Then we moved to what I hoped would be an exchange that would break down some of the barriers that seemed to have arisen between us. At least I was determined to allow my own concern to surface.

I made a vague remark about not getting together often enough, but Andreas parried with his work and his frustration at not having found an apartment available for himself and his family. At the time he was still living with Rachel's mother and father. "Look, Andreas," I said, "I'll be honest with you. It seems to me that I'm being isolated personally and professionally. And I don't think it's paranoia. Other friends, like Delia and Lisa, even Hebert are acting strangely, certainly differently than they were when I first came. Then professionally, I have been waiting for certain interviews for several months now and I'm beginning to wonder if someone has placed some sort of bureaucratic embargo around me."

Andreas laughed. Either he didn't take it seriously, or else didn't want to and was clever enough to conceal his real feelings. "Look, chico, it's just your imagination. I really think you've been in the Libre too long, eating here in this dining room with white tableclothes and camouflaged conversations. As for the professional side of things, I'll see what I can do. I promise you that you'll get your interviews. It just takes a bit of patience, remember?"

I could see there was no point in pursuing it further. Andreas had a way of being polite but firm when he didn't want to discuss something, and I could tell by the way he had woven his remarks that I should leave it there. So we picked up the conversational threads, something about which officials had access to Alfa Romeos and how they could be driven for private use. "...After all, you can't divide the official in two. So we allow them use of the car at home too..."

After our dinner together, Andreas must have pulled some levers because within the month, I received a rush of calls, all fixing times, places for interviews with the appropriate officials This was important because with everything going better professionally for me, I shook off or repressed the concern I had about the deterioration of my relations with friends. December had come, and I figured I had but three weeks of work to do before departing Cuba. All my energies, therefore, were channeled into the business of getting that last bit of vital information, that last interview, tour, book, or photograph that would complete the job. That was in December. A few days later Andreas disappeared, arrested by the D.S.E., a fact that Diaz confirmed for me yesterday during interrogation.

"I presume," Diaz was saying, "that you're wiser today than you were yesterday. After all you've had a whole day to think. That should help you be a little smarter if not more honest. "Why don't you tell us the truth. Your friend Valdez has!"

"Andreas? You know where he is? What did he say?"

"I have news for you," Diaz said. "Valdez thinks you're a spy too."

"He what....?"

"He agrees with me that you are working for the CIA or some intelligence agency. He's thought so for some time."

"Is he under arrest or being held by you somewhere?"

"Let's say that he is discussing your case with us. By the way, did you tell him that you had once been contacted by the CIA to work in Vietnam? Did he know about that?"

"No. I never mentioned it. It didn't seem important then."

"So you never told him?"

"No."

"Did you tell him that you were in touch with the CIA?"

"I'm not in touch with the CIA. I'm not now nor have I ever been paid or directed or worked for the CIA...."

Diaz began another round of charges, and from me received another round of denials: an endless circle that day after day went on without let-up. By then though the denials have become pure routine, I uttered them without even thinking about it. Particularly at times like that, when all I could do was shrug and figure that the best Diaz could do was threaten and use my friends against me. Or were they really friends, after all?

Frank McDonald

# Una fase nueva, decisiva en la historia de este Continente

**UJC - Habana**

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