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SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 1964

GUEST: Major Ernesto "Che" Guevara

INTERVIEWED BY: Lisa Howard, ABC Correspondent

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This is the first exclusive interview with Major Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Cuban Minister of Industries, seen and heard in the United States. Feeling that a portrait of the man who has been called "The power behind Castro," "The architect of the Cuban Revolution," "The top leftist in Cuba," and the man who may succeed Castro, would have meaning to the American people, ABC sent its cameras and Lisa Howard to Cuba for this filmed interview with Major Guevara in his offices in the Ministry of Industries in Havana.

(Complete text of interview follows:)

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MISS HOWARD: How seriously is the economic blockade affecting the Cuban economy?

MAJOR GUEVARA: I can't give you an exact figure of the effect of the blockade on Cuba, and, believe it or not, but the blockade has good and bad effects. Among the good ones is the development of the national awareness and the

fighting spirit of the Cuban people to overcome difficulties. Yes, if you consider that all of our Cuban machinery was made in the United States, and that your secondhand machinery was dumped on us as well, and at a profit, and many of these lines of supply have been discontinued now, then you can realize what this blockade has put us up against and the effort required to counteract it.

Figures can not be given. I don't know them. But obviously it has been a serious drawback. But at the same time, it has been a helpful lesson to us. It has taught us how to manage our economy in the future. I think this more or less answers your question.

MISS HOWARD: Russia is pouring a great deal of money into the Cuban economy each day. Now what would happen to the economy of the island if that a'd suddenly stopped?

MAJOR GUEVARA: These statements of daily amounts are, I think, typical of the American way of thinking and the concept you have, of investment. It may in fact reflect somehow the idea of what Americans understand as "aid." American aid to the countries of South America finally revert against the state receiving the assistance. In our case there has been what could be called aid, such as the writing off of certain trade debts, long-term loans, but granted on a purely commercial basis. As for the rest, it is the normal, natural trade between two countries. The

United States is no longer the main import-export customer of Cuba. It is the Soviet Union.

Now if, with your questions, you are asking what would happen should Soviet aid stop, you refer to all our exchange, then I can answer the life of the country would be paralyzed because -- for example oil, all of our oil, almost four million tons, comes from the Soviet Union, but that is not assistance, that is trade exchange on a basis of absolute equality and we pay for it with sugar and other products.

MISS HOWARD: Would you assess for us how effective has the United States' blockade been?

~~MAJOR GUEVARA:~~ I think that you are almost inviting me to leak confidential information to you. We have recognized the importance of the blockade, but we have also stated with the same calm that the blockade was not going to prevent us from advancing. But first of all it is difficult to be specific about it, and then it is not very appropriate, either. After all, in spite of your good intentions, we are still enemies. And the enemy should really only know generalities about the other party.

MISS HOWARD: Cuba has recently purchased buses from London. You are negotiating for ships from Spain. I understand there is an economic mission in Switzerland. does this represent for you a fundamental change in the Cuban

economy?

MAJOR GUEVARA: I do not think so. I think there has been a change in the economic policy of some countries. There has been a certain breaking up of the so-called monolithic unity of the free world. There is more trade with Cuba now. Our commercial eagerness has always been on the same basis. In other words, merchandise is merchandise and it should be to the mutual benefit of both, the buyer and the seller. And on that basis we have traded with the whole world, including the United States, even after we severed our relations.

The United States had used great pressure to stop certain goods being sold to us, and you know full well the debate that was held and the discussions that took place because Leyland sold us buses. But actually it is not we who have changed. Certain aspects of international politics have changed. I don't know whether we have anything to do with that. I don't think so. I don't think we are that important.

MISS HOWARD: Do you feel that these purchases represent a failure of the United States' blockade?

MAJOR GUEVARA: Yes.

MISS HOWARD: A serious failure?

MAJOR GUEVARA: That depends on how it affects the American ego, that of the United States.

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, do you believe that this trade with the West that you are now engaged in will continue

and perhaps expand in the near future?

MAJOR GUEVARA: I hope so. Naturally it doesn't only depend on our wishes, but also on the wishes of the people with whom we trade today. But I do have hopes that it will continue and that we will enter a new era as far as relations with Cuba are concerned. That the countries of Europe have realized the importance of having relations with all countries of the world and that Cuba is a good market, a market that is reliable, stable, and in one word, a permanent market

So that everything leads us to hope that these relations will go on and that they will expand in the future. We are extremely interested in this. We have since closed deals for the purchase of complete plants with certain countries, with France, with England, with Japan. We feel that in the future we can continue this type of transaction and with greater security, because in the past there was always the fear, if trade relations were interrupted, how were we to obtain spare parts, but especially England and France have maintained very good relations with us in this respect. They have guaranteed the supply of spare parts for the equipment we bought from them during the revolutionary stages.

This has also strengthened our confidence in the possibility of importing new machines and then, with first class technical equipment of the latest models, to build up a whole series

of industries which we are now developing.

MISS HOWARD: What would happen to the Cuban economy if this trade with the West were suddenly cut off?

MAJOR GUEVARA: Nothing.

MISS HOWARD: Now there will be a brief pause and in a moment we will be back with more ISSUES AND ANSWERS.

(Announcement)

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, much external evidence indicates that the Marxist system of economics simply doesn't work. It doesn't provide a bountiful life for its people. After 47 years of trial, the Soviet Union still can not feed and house and clothe their people properly. Do you think it is possible that the Marxist system just doesn't provide the proper incentive to create a really high level of productivity?

MAJOR GUEVARA: You have a tendency to make declarations in the form of questions. And again, I have first to refute your declaration and then answer the question. You say that it has been proved that Marxism, or the Marxist system does not provide the people with what they need and insure their well-being. I think it is just the opposite. If we compare the United States' standard of living with that of other countries then we must recognize that the other countries are lower, but when you speak of the American way of life and that of the free world, you've got to consider the 200 million people in Latin America who die of hunger, who

die of diseases, who do not even reach adulthood. Who die as children, starving. All these people contribute to the economic greatness of the United States that exploits them in one way or another. The same happens in Africa and it happened in Asia, as well. Marxism ends all that. At the same moment when we are being besieged by American imperialism we can not offer our people all the things we would like but we have given them all we could, all we have been able of doing, so far, and on equal footing, from Ministers to the lowest official of the government. And that is the main reason why the people continue to fight for their liberation.

MISS HOWARD: But the United States government is quite aware of the problems in Latin America, and through the Alianza is trying very hard to lift the standard of living of the people throughout the hemisphere. Now if the ruling classes agree to make land reforms and tax reforms and if the living standards are raised, won't the message of the Cuban revolution lose its effectiveness?

MAJOR GUEVARA: Of course it would lose it right away. The message of the Cuban revolution has that meaning because through its own weight, imperialism can only carry out lukewarm reforms which do not go to the very root of the problems. If all of Latin America were freed from imperialist domination, then imperialism itself would face very serious problems. The foundation of imperialism is

the domination of Latin American countries through unequal exchange, through the exchange of manufactured goods for raw materials, the taking over of key posts in the governments through the national oligarchies that are subservient to imperialisms.

Now if all this were to be changed, imperialism would have lost its strength. It, then, would face the general crisis of capitalism. In other words, the crisis from the working class within its own country.

Although this is not so imminent in your country because exploitation of the working classes is transferred to Latin America, Africa and Asia, but then the conflict would be directly within the United States. Obviously the message of the Cuban revolution would lose all of its importance, but it wouldn't be needed either, because that is precisely what we desire for all our people in Latin America, and once that was achieved, there would be no further need to launch messages. It would have no meaning.

MISS HOWARD: So in our desire for these reforms, we agree?

MAJOR GUEVARA: True reforms, for the access of the people to power. Then we agree.

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, do you feel this can't come about through an evolutionary process or must it come about through violence and revolutionary upheavals?



MAJOR GUEVARA: That, of course, depends upon the reactionary classes. It is they who refuse to give up power, to hand over the reins of power. Where the reactionary classes insist on holding on to power, outside of the will of all, the spark will break out and it may well set the whole of Latin America on fire, and the people will come to power.

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, since the success of the revolution, the Cuban economy according to all reports has seriously deteriorated in every sector. Industrial output, the vegetable crop, the sugar harvest last year which hit a low of three and a half million tons. How do you account for this economic regression?

MAJOR GUEVARA: Well, again that question is a statement. So the first thing that must be done is to refute the statement and then answer the question. You say that all aspects of the Cuban economy have deteriorated during the course of the revolution, and I say you are wrong. The industrial output increased since 1959 and it could have

increased much more had it not been adversely affected by the sugar industry which has in fact decreased. The industrial output has increased at an annual rate of seven percent, of course, not counting sugar. And the increase for 1963 and the estimates for 1964 show an even higher rate. For 1963, it amounted to ten percent, and the estimates for 1964

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will even be higher and the sugar output will also increase

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, when you were fighting in the hills of the Sierra Maestra did you foresee that the revolution would take so radical a turn?

MAJOR GUEVARA: Intuitively, I felt it. Of course, the course and the very violent development of the revolution couldn't be foreseen. Nor was the Marxist-Leninist formulation of the revolution foreseeable. That was the result of a very long process, and you know it very well. We had a more or less vague idea of solving the problems which we clearly saw affected the peasants who fought with us, and the problems we saw in the lives of the workers. But it would be very long to recount the whole process of the transformation of our ideas.

MISS HOWARD: There is a conviction in the United States that Major Guevara was one of the most radical influences in the revolution and that he pulled Dr. Castro to the left. What happened here, was partially his blueprint. Does he accept or deny that?

MAJOR GUEVARA: For a long time in the United States and in many other countries I have been given the honor of being considered the brain of the revolution, the cold mastermind, the leftist, the power behind the throne. Well, personally speaking I wouldn't be bothered about this, but my honesty as a revolutionary, my innate modesty and honesty

force me to confess that the top leftist in Cuba is Fidel Castro and that the greatest danger to the United States in Cuba is the danger of Fidel, and not me.

MISS HOWARD: In the hills of the Sierra Maestra, when Fidel Castro said he was not a Communist, did you believe that he was not a Communist and that he would not become a Communist?

MAJOR GUEVARA: I knew he was not a Communist, but I believe that I also knew that he would become a Communist. Just as I knew at that time that I was not a Communist, but I also knew that I would become one within a short time, and that the natural development of the revolution would lead all of us to Marxism-Leninism. I can not say that it was a clear, or conscious knowledge, but it was an intuition, the result of an examination of careful assessment of the development of the attitude of the United States and the way in which your country acted at that time against us and in favor of Batista.

MISS HOWARD: If something were to happen to Fidel Castro, what do you think would be the fate of the Cuban revolution and whom do you think would succeed to power here?

MAJOR GUEVARA: From your question I presume that you refer to something violent happening to him. Well, we can't deny it would be a very serious blow to the Cuban revolution. Fidel is our leader, unchallenged and undisputed.

He has been our true guide through a series of very, very difficult situations that Cuba has had to face, and at that time he gave proof of his stature as a world leader. I don't think any of us has that stature, but we have acquired revolutionary experience in the years of fighting side by side with him. We became what we became through going through the same school with him, a school of courage, boldness, sacrifice, of determination to defend our principles, of analysis of the different problems. And I think that altogether we could, I think, limp on, even if something were to happen to him.

Now as to who would replace him, well that would have to be discussed at that time. We can't indulge in that sort of "iffish" history now. None of us have that sort of political aspiration, but logically, his brother Raul, not because he is his brother, but because of his own qualifications -- he is the Deputy Prime Minister and naturally would be the one most suitable among us to follow the same path of the Cuban revolution.

MISS HOWARD: Major Guevara, Dr. Castro has often expressed his desire to normalize relations between Cuba and the United States. Do you desire such a normalization of relations?

MAJOR GUEVARA: If it is based on principles, yes. And I perhaps more than anyone else because industry is the one

that suffers most from the blockade. Industry and transport are perhaps the sectors of production which are hardest hit by the blockade. Transport has more or less freed itself but not industry and therefore on the basis of principles and total equality, the normalization of relations would be ideal to us.

MISS HOWARD: Are you optimistic about the possibility of a normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States?

MAJOR GUEVARA: I think it is a difficult question to answer. We are watching. We are waiting. We are planning for either one road or the other, whichever is followed. It depends on a series of circumstances. The very characteristics of the American government. It also depends on how the American government is able to gauge the situation in the world. So far your government hasn't given any clearcut idea that it does know how to weigh the correlation of forces in the world so that there are no clear ideas regarding the total normalization

MISS HOWARD: Now there will be a brief pause and in a moment we will be back with more ISSUES AND ANSWERS

MISS HOWARD: What would you like to see the United States do, as regards Cuba?

MAJOR GUEVARA: It is very difficult to give a precise answer. It is somewhat unrealistic, as a question. Perhaps

the most frank and objective answer would be: Nothing  
Nothing in all respects. Nothing for or against us. Just  
leave us alone.

MISS HOWARD: Thank you very much, Major Guevara

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