

[Segment of the televised round table discussion of the incident at the Mexican Embassy, featuring Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, broadcast live from the studios of Televisión Cubana on March 5, 2002, Year of the Heroic Prisoners of the Empire \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Commander in Chief.- I would like to make a comment first of all. I want to say that I have followed these round tables for a long time, and it was at yesterday's round table that an issue was analyzed with the greatest clarity and precision ever. I regretted very much to hear later that the strong winds that hit Havana yesterday had interrupted electrical power service in many areas of the capital. That is why I even suggested that it be replayed, but I understand that as of noon today, at least, there were still a number of areas without power, and it still is not certain how many people are watching or listening to this round table right now.

Of course, I watched it over again, since we had agreed that I would offer a few opinions, I wanted to review the points that you had covered and where I might contribute to clarifying matters with a few additional details.

Yesterday, for example, the participants talked about Castañeda's meeting with the dissidents. On this matter, I should say the following:

In the weeks prior to President Fox's visit to our country, a visit that pleased us all very much, the United States was already carrying out its traditional crusade in connection with the (Commission on Human Rights) meeting in Geneva. As someone said here, this is one of the United States' obsessions. At that point in time, an intense campaign was being waged in the Latin American region. There is a reason for this. This particular maneuver has become increasingly discredited, and the United States has had to pay a high price for it: the humiliating fact that it was not elected as a member of the Commission on Human Rights. There was not even any way of knowing who had voted against them, since this was a secret ballot. They are very thirsty for vengeance, so they have begun working on a plan through which Latin America can act against Cuba in Geneva.

This issue was already discussed here yesterday, but it did not seem prudent to reveal everything. I am simply going to say that we know about all of the maneuvers undertaken by the U.S. State Department in this hemisphere, all of the meetings and all of the pressures - and we could go so far as to say all of the plotting. We know who they can count on and who they cannot count on. It was just the tip of the iceberg when the esteemed Minister of Foreign Relations of Argentina, that paradigm of neoliberalism, went running to Washington to sell Cuba like a piece of meat. There are some who sell out this way every year; this practice has been going on for quite some time. This issue was analyzed here, but not everything that could be said about it was said. I am not going to reveal everything we know about this matter right here and now.

We were very pleased by the opportunity provided by Fox's visit. I mentioned that it pleased us; it was truly a novel gesture. Mexican presidents usually visit us at the end of their terms. But Fox, from the very beginning, said that he was going to make a quick visit to Cuba, and he was invited, of course. It is

only logical that when a Mexican president wants to come to Cuba, our doors are open to him. That phrase "the doors are open" almost makes me laugh. And so we were very happy when he made that decision, because it was an opportunity for us to go through a number of economic, cultural and international issues.

It should be kept in mind, for example, that Mexico is now a member of the UN Security Council, for a period of two years. And when Mexico was nominated for membership, nobody needed to come here to ask us to give Mexico our support, because we gave Mexico our support voluntarily. And we know that President Fox was very appreciative of this gesture, which we directly communicated to him.

In addition to all these issues of common interest and international problems, we wanted to have the opportunity to discuss this subject of the UN Commission on Human Rights. We wanted to know what their positions were and present our own to them, and this is in fact what we did. Both the official talks, in which a number of people participated, and our personal conversations were very positive, and we had the opportunity to present our points of view.

That same day, since it was a very short visit, as you know, I accompanied him to various places. I was with him almost the entire time, from when he placed the wreath on the monument, and we visited various locations. We went to Old Havana, and we also went to see the combined cycle power plant that runs on the natural gas accompanying our heavy oil. It is heavy, but very useful, as it is becoming the energy source for all our electricity, which would be much more costly using fuel oil. I accompanied him to the plant, which is past Guanabo.

Along the way we conversed. I told Fox about (Havana City Historian Eusebio) Leal's mother, a truly selfless, self-sacrificing person, whom we all love very much. I even suggested that in addition to the distinction that Leal was going to be awarded, he would be very moved if we paid a visit to his mother. Fox agreed, and we went to visit her.

Then we went on to CIREN (the Center for Neurological Restoration), where a large number of Mexicans are receiving medical treatment, with very encouraging results. There was a very moving ceremony there, in which many of the patients participated. Then I left him for a few minutes, you could say, until we met again in the evening for the scheduled private talks. There were actually many private conversations, because as we were taken from one place to another we conversed about a wide range of subjects. And the entire visit developed in an excellent climate, right up until the end.

Felipe (Pérez Roque, the Cuban minister of foreign affairs) also had talks with the Mexican foreign minister in the afternoon.

I do not remember the exact time, but at more or less the time scheduled, Fox and I met in my office. We had a good conversation there as well, and both spoke very frankly.

The entire time that the program for his visit was being prepared, nothing was ever said to us about a probable meeting with the infamous "dissidents", manufactured by U.S. propaganda and directed by the U.S. Interests Section. They are forever being invited there and live quite a splendid life, given the millions of dollars in funds invested in all of this by USAID and other institutions with similar purposes. Every time an illustrious guest visits us, they use the mechanism of public pressure, in addition to the pressure exerted through other means; it is almost an obligation to meet with the leaders of the grouplets. No visitors can come here, regardless of their political position, whether from the United States or elsewhere, without being pressured into one of these meetings. It is a way of upholding this fiction.

These individuals are well connected to the mercenary radio station, whose very name is an insult to our country, and an ever greater insult as our people and our children learn more and more about Martí. They maintain ongoing contact, violating laws, and this is something that should not be forgotten: they are breaking laws that were debated and passed by the National Assembly of Cuba. They issue false

information, wage campaigns, all in close concert with the empire's policy against Cuba, in every respect, in the shameless maneuvers in Geneva and all aspects of the imperialist policy against our country. And they are closely linked to the terrorist mob in Miami as well; this should also be kept in mind.

Now that there is so much talk of terrorism around the world and they have even gathered up terrorists and sent them to a U.S. naval base, the issue of terrorism has taken on particular prominence in worldwide conscience. And in our country, everyone is aware of the misdeeds that have been committed against Cuba from Miami, where crimes against our country have been continuously sponsored and financed. Dozens of years of terrorism against our country, acts fully tolerated by the United States throughout the course of 40 years. So it is somewhat difficult to portray the mercenaries who serve this policy as freethinking individuals, no matter what disguises they may adopt. And this is what they want, publicity, and the chance to present themselves as victims. They are full-time, permanent provocateurs, who distort the truth and lie about anything related to Cuba. But this is all the empire has here; these little fish in a dry fishbowl, because there is actually no water to keep them alive. The oxygen needed for these little colored fish to survive certainly will not be found in the waters of a people that is ever more revolutionary, with an ever greater degree of knowledge and culture. And these little colored fish are very well known beyond the borders of our country, simply because they have been artificially promoted. Let the truth be said. This is a mechanism created by the United States. They are directed by the U.S. Interests Section, which recruits them and pays them, in a thousand and one different ways.

This is the tribute demanded of any visitor who comes here.

I am not saying that Fox is a weak man, a man lacking in character. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have the impression, and I do not hesitate to say so, that he is a man with a sense of personal dignity, a man of character, and for me it is obvious that he, who knows our people, was not inclined to play a role that does not please him whatsoever. But the formula that emerged at the last minute, about which not a word was said to us, was the formula of a breakfast.

Someone must have organized this program; someone must have come up with this breakfast. And of course, he is a totally free man, he can travel here and they can tell us, "We want this kind of program, or that kind of program." Because we do not impose restrictions on any of our visitors. Much less have we lost any sleep over something that has been imposed on him like the Caudine Forks. This is a term from the Roman era, when prisoners were hung beneath arches or something like that, as a means of humiliation. This has become an instrument of humiliation and a hassle for all visitors, who cannot figure out what to do or how to do it. Sometimes they tell us about it, sometimes they do not, but it is applicable to all visitors, from both the right and the left. And so we know of many leftist visitors, and above all a few European leftist visitors who have had this tribute demanded from them. "Listen, go there, yes; but look, meet with these people." And then they force illustrious and distinguished personalities to live through some very embarrassing moments. They meet with me, and they have something very hush-hush, the Interests Section has organized something for them. If it is someone coming from the United States, they arrange for a lunch or something else over there to get them together.

Basically, the Interests Section takes care of all this, they are the organizers of all meetings with visitors, although there are also pressures from higher-ups.

I am not accusing Fox of any disloyal act, because I do not believe he was disloyal. Instead, I should pay tribute to the care with which he handled a meeting put together by someone else. Fox is a serious man; you can see the honor in him. He brought up the subject with me during that meeting we had, before dinner. He explained that the next day there would be a breakfast at the Embassy, where he would greet the employees of the Mexican Embassy, and that the infamous dissidents would be having a meeting there with Castañeda, and he was going to greet them, nothing more. And that is in fact what he did, he greeted them. But of course, after this infamous meeting in Havana with the enemies of the

Revolution, the foreign press agencies reported on all of the issues we had discussed, because such is the mechanism that has been created.

I simply told him, "Look, you are not going to have any problems with me over this, but what worries me is that, because this is such a sensitive subject for our population, this meeting could tarnish your image in the eyes of our people." That is what I told him. And I also reiterated to him, "You are not going to have any problems with me."

Then, the next day, a few misunderstandings surfaced as well, because the wire services reported that he had given me a list of prisoners. In fact, this list of prisoners thing ended a long time ago, because in the past, anyone who came here –whether from Europe, Canada or anywhere else– would be given a little list of prisoners by the United States, and told to speak on their behalf. It was a way of spoiling their visits and harassing us with their little list of prisoners. But a long time ago now we said that we would not put up with that anymore, that it was finished, once and for all and forever. This is now ancient history, and we have made it very clear: we do not accept lists of any kind. They can bring them, but I do not even look at them, and that is that.

The wire stories claim that Fox raised with me a list of prisoners. I had to clarify that Fox had not given me any list whatsoever, and that he had not even brought the subject up with me. He is a very tactful and courteous man, and in fact, he gave to Felipe, who accompanied him to the airport, a little list. The wire stories read that he had given me a list of prisoners, and because this was not in fact what had happened, I explained that he had not even raised the subject with me, nor had he given me any list of prisoners.

It is through these little lists that you know which ones the empire has the greatest interest in, who their most beloved prisoners are, although they have little concern for the fate of their mercenaries.

Now, we could also send a little list to everyone who visits the United States, but we do not send little lists. Instead, every day we will continue to talk about our very beloved and heroic prisoners, the Heroes of the Republic of Cuba, whom they have cruelly transferred to far-flung prisons. They have even chosen, for no plausible reason, to keep them locked up in solitary before they arrive at their final destinations. We will now see what kind of brutal living conditions await these comrades, each one of them thousands of kilometers away from the others, with absolutely no communication possible among them. But we do not need lists, because we have the truth on our side, and the right to demand the freedom of our heroic prisoners. These men are heroes, not mercenaries; genuine patriots, not traitors.

So after Fox's visit and all the Yankee intrigues, it was necessary to make a few clarifications. But, at the same time, President Fox told me, and Mr. Castañeda also told Felipe, that Mexico would not promote or facilitate or support any maneuvers against Cuba in Geneva. That is what he told me, with great dignity and conviction.

Then as we talked about so many subjects, we forgot about the meeting, because that meeting was not important, and neither was the question of the list. Compared with our satisfaction over the visit, and the subjects we addressed, these things were insignificant. There was absolutely no reason for even the slightest friction, and there was not any. At least for us, there was no friction whatsoever.

It was necessary, on the day of the opening of the Book Fair, to give the journalists there some details on to the infamous list, to clarify that I had not received such a list, and had not even been informed of it beforehand. It was also necessary to say something about the strange statement made by the Mexican foreign minister, that as of that moment relations with the Cuban Revolution were severed, and that in the future there would be relations with the Republic of Cuba. I made a few reflections. I wondered how the two could be separated, since there has only been a genuine republic here since there has been a Revolution. That caricature of a republic that existed before, how could anyone call it a republic?

In Cuba, the republic is inseparable from our struggles and the struggles of those who fought so long for independence in the century before last. It is inseparable from the heroic deeds of our people throughout more than 40 years, unparalleled in all history, thanks to their capacity for resistance and for doing things that have now placed us above any other country in the world, and have created the conditions to do what we are doing now with more strength, greater intensity and deeper conviction than ever. How can all of this be separated from the Revolution? We did not give it a great deal of importance; it was just another statement, although you cannot really play around with statements like these.

Then came the event in Miami, and along comes the infamous incomprehensible story. You have explained here about a strange statement that has been used by the mob in Miami and some of their friends in Mexico to suggest that we invented the forced entry into the Embassy, as if such a thing could be invented. Not even if we were clairvoyant and had 25 crystal balls could we have known that there in Miami, during a ceremony we were not even aware of, for the inauguration of a Mexican cultural center and also a consulate, such a speech was going to be made.

There were a lot of decent and honorable people there, but there was also a whole infestation of terrorists at that inauguration. I do not really know what terrorists have to do with culture. Yesterday you were joking here on the round table about the subversive radio station, and how they needed professors to teach them about Cuban geography, because they do not know anything about our country's geography, or the number and location of the provinces, much less after the Political-Administrative Division. They must not have heard about that division, or about the assemblies of People's Power, just as they know nothing about elections, or district delegates. It is almost impossible to explain these things to them, because the only things they know about are making dead people vote and rigging elections, they are Olympic champions in such things. But they know nothing about culture. The author of that speech was very, very proud and very happy.

We are not saying –and I state this categorically– that Mr. Castañeda is responsible for what happened. We have said that his words were manipulated. I think the first statements I made are around here somewhere, here they are: "The words expressed the previous evening by Mr. Castaneda were immediately taken up by the ill-named Radio Martí and brazenly manipulated."

The gentlemen from this U.S. government radio station defended themselves from certain declarations made by Castañeda in the sense that an improper use, or something similar, had been made of his words. They maintained that they had changed nothing that Castañeda had said, that all they had done was to broadcast word for word what Castañeda himself has said. But his words were in fact manipulated, and in such a way that their meaning was distorted.

Castañeda is fond of literature, and of writing and making statements for history –or that is the way it seems to me. There is a weakness shared by all of us who say something or write something. Once again he used his famous statement that relations with the Cuban Revolution had terminated, to be replaced by relations with the Republic of Cuba. He repeated it there, and because I am firmly convinced that he did not pronounce these words in collusion with the Miami terrorist mob or the U.S. government, we have stated that he is not responsible for this.

They took his words and manipulated them, in such a way as to give them a completely different meaning. "The doors are open." That is what made me laugh a while ago. The doors are open is just a turn of phrase.

What did the gusano radio station do? It took these words and started to repeat them, beginning early in the morning, at 7:30, over and over and over again, around eight times. Lázaro said that they were repeated a number of times.

Randy Alonso.- There were 60 reports on this matter.

Commander in Chief.- On the 27th they continued repeating them. But from what I understand, they kept turning it up another notch, and by the afternoon, what they were saying was –as you noted– "The doors of the Mexican Embassy are open for all Cubans." Those are the words they used, right?

Randy Alonso.- "'The doors of the Mexican Embassy in Havana are open to all Cubans,' Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda stated in Miami."

Commander in Chief.- What they put on is the headline. Often the headlines have nothing to do with the text – it is a form of manipulation. But they also preceded it with the infamous statement that Mexico's relations with the Cuban revolution had been severed. So what is the news that starts to reach the ears of many of the people who try to get in there? And these people are not politicians, they do not read newspapers, often they do not even listen to the radio. What reaches them is a rumor, and the rumor is that relations between Mexico and Cuba have been terminated, and the doors of the Embassy are open for Cubans to come in.

That was their intent, that was their misdeed, linking these two headlines together. There was nothing wrong with the transcription. They were simply using two statements, sticking them together in headlines to distort their meaning, and repeating them over and over again. This is what people believed, and we know it, because we have been asking them how the news first got around. And I should point out that the first news about this started arriving at about noon. People ask themselves, When did this news come out? Here, as a general rule, there is so much nonsense and so many lies coming in that what they do is to gather it all through two different monitors and pass it on to whomever it would normally concern. There were two guards at the embassy at noon, but then nine slightly suspicious individuals appeared. Neither the guards nor barely anyone else knew that this news had come out, but even if they had known, the amount of attention they would have paid to it is relative, because so many lies are said all the time.

The two guards saw these individuals and became suspicious. They sent notification, and asked them what they were doing there. They responded, "Relations have been broken off between Mexico and Cuba, and they say that the doors of Mexico are open to all Cubans. We wanted to know what was going on, and to get into the Mexican Embassy." At the same time, an embassy staff member reported that all morning long, people had been phoning to ask if it was true that they could seek asylum there. That was at 1:00 in the afternoon, more or less, and that was when a small reinforcement was sent to the embassy. I think the first ones notified, in view of all this, were 20 people sent to boost protection, to help the two men who were posted there, members of the embassy guard regiment. That was during the day. But I will have to get back to that, when I analyze other matters. I have arrived at the point where it was done, but I will get to that later.

I think that this is a clarification and it does not change in the slightest our view of President Fox, our appreciation for his trip and the gesture he made in coming to visit us and discuss issues of mutual interest, of interest to Latin America, and of international interest as well. After all, Mexico is now a member of the UN Security Council, and it has historically played an outstanding role in international politics. I want to make this very clear, that I am not accusing Mr. Castañeda of anything. Rather I am exonerating him from any blame, because I do not think that he intended to do this, or arranged with the subversive radio station to do it.

Political and ideological differences aside, it is not my intention to offend him or to blame him, but rather, to explain what mechanisms created the problem, and tell the real truth. There are so many so-called truths in this world, and so many lies that aspire to be believed, that I have no choice but to explain the real truth, which the population must be told.

Now, what happened on the 27th? I already told a small part of the story, about how the guards there discovered that something strange was going on.

When did I receive news that there were problems at the Mexican Embassy? Quite simply, I received

news about the incidents at the Mexican Embassy at 10:55 p.m. on the night of the 27th.

Everyone knows that we all very busy around here, attending to visitors, delegations, meetings and talks. Not all of this appears in the newspapers. That day I had a meeting; from 8:20 p.m. on I was in a meeting with a Chilean delegation, headed by a man who was a candidate for president in the latest elections in Chile and who will doubtlessly be a candidate in the next elections, with a very high rating. Well, this is none of our business, who is a candidate and who is not, whether their ideology is right-wing or left-wing, in accordance with all those constantly changing and sometimes confusing party names. We have already talked about members of the left who come here, but with their eyes looking North and willing to indulge all conceivable demands. Two city council members from Santiago de Chile, one from the Independent Democratic Union Party, or UDI, and one from the National Renewal Party headed this delegation up, primarily.

We have had relations with various left-wing and right-wing leaders in this world. Many times it is because they have come to Cuba to learn about our experiences, other times because they have needed some kind of medical treatment, and we cannot ask anyone, "What do you think?" And we have met many people this way, even people from the right, just as we have met people from the left. They are serious people, and we accept them, even if they are a million miles away from us ideologically and we do not agree with or share any of their political views whatsoever. But there are many things in this world to talk about, aside from politics.

I had met President Fox around four years ago, when he was the governor of the state of Guanajuato. We spent six or seven hours talking, and we talked about ecological problems, the problems facing the state, agriculture, the drought, and a great many other things that are of interest to a governor. We talked about technological development, markets, and problems of all kinds. He showed interest in a great many things, to such an extent that when he was elected president, he declared that he was going to ask for Cuba's cooperation in education, health care and sports, because Cuba was the country with the most experience in these sectors. It was the first time in the history of Mexico that a president had made such a declaration, with such modesty. I think he was being objective, because we believe that yes, we do have the best health care system, the most just and equitable, and also the best education and sports systems in the world. I do not hesitate in saying so, and all of this is nothing, because these are fields in which we are going to continue to make considerable advances, particularly in medicine, education and culture.

The feats that our country is already capable of in the field of medicine, the enormous human capital it has developed: no other country in the world has these things. We have professionals willing to travel anywhere in the world, no matter how tough the conditions are there, and this is something no one else has. If Europe and the United States joined together to gather the same number of doctors that we have providing comprehensive health care services abroad, they could not manage to do it. Even if they had ten years, they could not gather the number of doctors we can gather in a week, and if they did manage to gather any, they would only be willing to do it for two weeks, if that. They could probably only manage to gather one-fifth of the doctors we currently have working abroad, and these do not even reflect our full health care potential. So he was only being honest.

In this case, the city councilor from Santiago de Chile, who is the leader of the UDI, Joaquín Lavín, proposed visiting our country, on his own initiative, to study the family doctor system. We immediately responded positively. "Yes, of course, it would be our pleasure." And that was how this visit came about, which coincided with that day. That was his number one interest. Of course, at any meeting you can address any subject. We do not prevent our visitors from addressing any subject they like. And he was treated the way we treat all visitors, with the proper hospitality.

That evening we were going to have a meeting. I had already seen him, because he had visited the Social Workers School and I was there, to hear the explanation given, because a school like this cannot be understood on its own, if it is not placed in the context of a whole program, of what social workers are and what missions they fulfill. The Social Workers School is part of a very ambitious social program,

and I wanted him to learn more about it.

I had been there when Oliver Stone came; he wanted to see a school. We had a meeting there. It was during the days when they were rotating the schools participating in the anti-mosquito campaign, in Villa Clara, Holguín and Santiago. I went and observed carefully. There were more than 100 visitors from the United States there, all part of the U.S.-Cuba sister cities movement. I saw them all again later in Matanzas.

I even contributed to some extent to explaining the meaning of the school. Oliver Stone was there, and from the explanations that he had been given, I realized that they needed to be complemented with some additional elements.

That day, as well, I had planned to invite the Chileans to dinner after we had finished our conversation. Before getting together he asked to talk to me alone for a bit, and that conversation stretched on, because we got onto other topics. There are always other topics to talk about, and questions about opinions on one thing or another, thoughts about one problem or another, not for the purpose of arguing, but rather as a way of sharing impressions and learning about other people's opinions. And then Carlitos came and tapped me on the arm, and told me that he had received important news. I left the room and was informed that certain disturbances were taking place at the Mexican Embassy, and that a bus had been driven through the gates there. This was about 10 minutes after the bus had entered.

I explained to my visitor that an incident was developing at the Mexican Embassy, and asked him to excuse me. I said we could continue our conversation the next day, but if they wanted, they could wait until I had taken care of this other matter. I said, "It will take me at least an hour." It actually took up more of my time, around two hours and something.

And so – I have a chronological list of events as well:

"11:15 p.m., I ask the visitors to excuse me for at least an hour.

"11:16 p.m., I leave my offices and head to the city Counterintelligence Office to clarify the situation." I was nearby, it was on way. You go in that direction when you leave the Palace of the Revolution; the Mexican Embassy is on the other side of the Almendares Bridge.

"11:32, I analyze the situation in detail with the head of the General Office of Counterintelligence and go over the measures to be taken," or the ones that have already been taken. Some have been taken, and others have to be taken, right? "And I gather the pertinent data to inform the population." It was essential to inform the population of what I had seen as soon as possible. I carried a notebook to jot down information. That was when I first received the news about what had led to the problem: the first news about what had been happening, the speech made at the cultural institute, whose first fruits, unfortunately, were not the best, and the manipulation undertaken by the subversive radio station, the ill-named Radio Martí.

It was all obvious, very obvious. It was done deliberately and they knew what audience they were addressing. It was something —as someone said here— that recalled the events of August 5, when, using a similar procedure of broadcasting news from over there about some boats that were coming to pick people up, they caused those riots, those infamous, well-known disturbances of August 5.

I went along gathering information, putting the facts together, I was watching what was going on and making notes, because it was necessary to draft an official note, immediately. I had the basic elements. It was almost the same as on August 5. That time Felipe was there, this time too. That time Lage was there, this time too. The next day no, because there was a long Council of Ministers' meeting and he was dead tired for not having slept for two days by the night of the 28th. This time Carlitos Valenciana joined us on the 27th. There were four of us, plus José who was in the back. I sat where I always sit in

the jeep. I am really sorry I found out a little bit late.

Then I asked those there to give instructions to note exactly what each person said, to have it straight the next day, because there the most that one could report was what had happened and then some other information had to be prepared for the next day. That day was Wednesday the 27th; the next was Thursday the 28th. We had to get the facts together, that had to be done at top speed so it could come out in the newspaper in the morning.

"12:13 a.m." Some time had already gone by since 11:32, we had these analyses, we had kept the meeting going and had collected the facts — "I drop by over there, I even chat with some of the groups who are milling around the embassy" — they were very kind to me, actually. But they were already groups that were hanging back. The critical moment, really, was at 10:30 p.m., more or less, when the bus crashed into the gate at full speed. "I continue on to the embassy and stop in front of the entrance, where the bus crashed through. I observe the situation and I talk to those in charge." All of this was on the 27th. "I say good-bye to the comrades who are at the embassy and I go back to the Palace of the Revolution."

Randy Alonso.- It is now early morning on the 28th.

Arleen Rodríguez.- Yes, it is now the next day.

Commander in Chief.- So, I finish the note —or rather I dictate it, there, at full speed— and I continue with the meeting with the guests who very kindly waited for me. It was 2:55 in the morning.

We have the privilege and the luck of having comrades who can draft a note at the speed of light; they distribute it and send it all over the place. Now in all of that, Carlitos is the conductor of the orchestra (LAUGHTER) and therefore every time I need him, I cannot find him because he is doing something else. But, anyway, that is the story of the 27th.

Now comes the 28th. I was calm; I knew they had put their foot in it up practically up to their waist. They all got each other stirred up and began to do all those stupid things, all that nonsense, because the country they found was not the same country as in 1994. They did not know what they were up against. Well, calm down. Very easily we had fulfilled our duty to protect the Mexican Embassy. We had said to our people: "We have to protect it at any cost, with our valor. Do not use weapons under any circumstances, do it with your valor."

That day, February 28, at 15:13 —that is, at 3:13 in the afternoon— I get a call from the president of Mexico, very friendly, very respectful, to thank me for what we had done, that is, he was referring to the steps taken to protect the embassy on the 27th.

Then wire service stories began appearing saying that he had thanked me for the evacuation of the embassy. It was not like that. He thanked me for what we had done on the 27th. He thanked me twice and he even thanked me because I personally had been down to the embassy and because we had taken the right measures to protect it. We had a very pleasant, very friendly and very constructive conversation. He said that he hoped a solution could be found to the problem. The conversation lasted quite a few minutes. That is all I am going to say, because it is obvious that one must keep confidential the things one has conversations about. But he called me to thank me for protecting the embassy.

What happened next? Well, here are the details of what happened in the morning. I do not want to mention the names of the officials who talked; it is not necessary because we do not want to hurt anyone, although it was legal, normal and correct. But since this is public, you say a name and then there might be threats and all the rest of it. We are told that it is extremely important for Mexico to avoid a bilateral crisis, they tell us so at 9:30 in the morning. They tell the Ministry of Foreign Affairs this, and that they were very upset about the situation that had been created in the embassy. "It is extremely important for Mexico to avoid a bilateral crisis. There was obviously willful misrepresentation

when what Castañeda said in Miami was manipulated."

Well, 12:30 in the afternoon on the 28th. "Undersecretary Iruegas arrived in Havana" —the Mexican undersecretary of Foreign Affairs— "and was met at the airport by the head of the Latin America desk in the Foreign Ministry. According to Iruegas, there had been an obvious manipulation of what Foreign Minister Castañeda had said in Miami.

"He reiterated that the nature of the people who entered the embassy was obvious to Mexico and that he would be asking for our help in resolving the matter as discretely as possible.

"Iruegas said that he would go directly from the airport to the embassy to meet with those in there and suggest to them that they leave the embassy and make it clear to them that no-one can travel to Mexico using these methods.

"He added that he would try to get them to leave the embassy of their own free will and, if they wouldn't, he would have a talk with our authorities to decide on the most appropriate and discrete way, using our country's police force."

At 4:40 in the afternoon: "The Cuban deputy foreign minister and the head of the Latin America desk met the Mexican undersecretary and chargé d'affaires. The undersecretary informed them that they had met with those who had broken into the embassy and that what they said was that Mexico should help them to leave Cuba and work in Mexico. They did not agree to leave the embassy." That bunch are very spoiled, they do not accept anything, only immediate all-encompassing help, and even the State Department spokesperson added fuel to that, as you have said already: "Oh! Be careful with the integrity of these 'young people', Mexico must respect human rights and a number of other things," putting pressure on the Mexicans. All those people know that by heart, they are quite familiar with that trick.

"The undersecretary said he had told the individuals occupying the embassy that Mexico felt attacked by what they had done and that they would not be going to Mexico, since that is not the way to enter the embassy." This was the Mexican government's unimpeachable and well-reasoned position.

"The undersecretary asked if we could authorize him to tell these people that we would give them guarantees that they could leave and nothing would happen to them, so that little by little they could start getting them out in embassy cars." That was the mistake we had already made once. It destroys the whole embassy protection system and encourages people to force their way violently into embassies. He was given the reply that we could not give him such guarantee, since these people must be tried for the crimes they had committed by hijacking a bus and using force. If these acts went unpunished, we would be jeopardizing the security of all diplomatic missions. It was explained to him that the best thing was for these people to leave of their own free will.

"The undersecretary repeated that these people refused to leave the embassy of their own free will and he therefore pointed to the need for something to be done as soon as possible and suggested the possibility of doing something in the early hours of the morning, discretely and avoiding an excessive use of force.

"At 11:00 that night, the Mexican ambassador, Mr. Ricardo Pascoe, who had reached Cuba at 9:40 p.m. on the Aerocaribbean flight from Cancún, called Deputy Minister Nuñez Mosquera at home to repeat the request that undersecretary Iruegas had made and to tell him that if it were necessary he could bring over a letter with that request signed by him."

We had made no decisions yet, and this is at 11:00 at night.

"The deputy minister called Felipe's office, from there Comrade Valenciaga's office was consulted. Valenciaga called the Havana International Conference Center, where, after the conclusion of the

meeting of the Council of Ministers and of the provincial and municipal government presidents, including the first secretaries of the party for each province, I was just then drafting the second official note, which included the criminal records of 13 of the 21 individuals occupying the Mexican embassy."

It seemed very important to me that domestic and international public opinion be told who these people were. During the day we had already been investigating their identities and criminal records, because I had suspected immediately who the perpetrators of this attack were. They are similar to the ones who leave illegally for the United States by sea because of the Adjustment Act and because of the same privilege. Again the Adjustment Act promoting illegal migration to the United States. If you are a criminal, that is an ideal place to steal, there are more things to steal than here. Doubtless, people who like to steal would prefer that market to this one here, plus the most likely thing over here is that, one way or another, they will be found out and punished. Because in the world these days not even crimes are punished. Crime is creating chaos in society, it is overwhelming it, and countries are becoming ungovernable. Here at least crimes are punished although not all, I have to admit. But if we analyze what happens, for instance, in Mexico and many other countries, it is scary, simply amazing.

I was writing the note, because I already had the criminal and police records of 13 of the 21 individuals occupying the embassy —something really incredible.

It was fitting that, before going on with the discussion of what happened and what did not happen, people knew who these occupants were, and it had to be made public. Meanwhile, on the other hand, we were being asked to act quickly, and I understand that perfectly. I find the Mexican government has an intelligent position because if day broke in Mexico with the news... In Mexico there are many people who are Cuba's friends, many important figures from various political shades. We have friends in almost all Mexican parties and they are the ones who are most opposed to any Mexican support for the United States' maneuvers in Geneva. But on the other hand, all kinds of pressure would be coming from abroad urging impunity for the aggressors.

It is undeniable that because of the way things had happened, because of the indiscretions that were committed, the situation the next day was going to be fairly complicated, and we wanted to cooperate with the Mexican government. Furthermore, we wanted to avoid any problems in Mexico over this incident because it was highly outrageous, and especially when the sort of people who had forced their way into the embassy became known.

So we were face with two problems: one was the need to inform the public, and the other was the need for a rapid response to the Mexican government's request. Their representatives were waiting impatiently for an answer and I have just said, I think, why they were impatient, why they wanted it to be quick. The president had also told me why. The longer a solution was delayed, the more complicated the situation became, the more harm it could cause to Mexico and the more problems inside Mexico.

I do not have to repeat the arguments; anyone can understand them, using all the information that you have offered here and all that the newspapers have published. So it was also going to become an internal Mexican problem and we did not want that at all. But it was crucial that this be known, because later the debate would continue around that point. We were insisting that they be persuaded to leave because we did not want to use our people for this. But we had still not given them an answer to their request.

"12:00 at night. The Mexican ambassador called the deputy foreign minister again to tell him that he now had the letter ready and to ask him how he could get it to him.

"The deputy minister replied that he would meet him at 12:30 in the Foreign Ministry and he immediately let Felipe know and Felipe told him to accept the letter.

"12:30 after midnight" It was now Friday, March 1; it's not a leap year. "As I was leaving the Conference Center they consulted me over whether or not to accept the letter that the Mexican ambassador was

asking to deliver. I call Carlos from the car and ask him for more information about the matter and I tell him that Nuñez Mosquera should accept the letter" —Felipe had already done the same— "and I said" —this is what I added— "to communicate it immediately" —I did not know that Felipe had already given his instructions, and I told him what he should say— "to accept the document and to also tell them not to get impatient over the steps that they wanted taken quickly."

"12:35 after midnight. The Mexican ambassador, accompanied by their undersecretary, delivers the note to the deputy foreign minister and the head of the Latin America desk with the express request to evacuate the people from the embassy." They passed it on immediately.

The deputy minister, who still had not received my instructions because, as you can see, the letter was delivered five minutes before I sent my instructions, which had still not been received, simply told them that "he would process the said request." He asked the ambassador where he would be and the latter's answer was that "he would wait in his office."

"12:37 after midnight. I arrive at the Palace with Lage" —we were returning from the other meeting— "I call Carlitos and request that the stenographers go to my office so I can dictate the Information Note to them." The title was "The sort of people used by the terrorist mob in Miami and the U.S. government". This was being dictated, it is now 12:37 in the morning on March 1 and I had to talk to the ambassador afterwards, a reply had to be given. We still had not replied and meanwhile there was pressure to find a speedy solution.

"12:50 after midnight. The deputy foreign minister phoned the ambassador to tell him that he was processing the note delivered to him in order to deal correctly with it straight away, as he had said to him, which was why he was asking him not to get impatient." It is then, at 12:50, that he is given the message received: We first had to finish note number two, because we could see clearly that there would be two things for the news to report: this one, which refers to the "sort of people...", and the other, whether we were going to adopt the decision to evacuate those people.

At 2:30, in fact, is when we were able to send the second note, because they type it, they revise it, they send it to the paper, to the radio and the television, all the press outlets, to be published by Granma and Juventud Rebelde and also broadcast over the radio; at that time the TV is not on the air.

"3:00 in the morning. Instructions are given to send the note to Mexico at once, to have it published by the media of that country" —so that the Mexicans knew what kind of people had taken up residence there— "it is also sent to Ponce, from the Cuban press office, who was meeting with 13 foreign press representatives at the corner of 7th and 10th Streets, keeping watch on the embassy to see what was going on there." They were taking turns, bored already with waiting so long "and it is sent to the International Press Center too, and to the ICRT. The radio starts broadcasting it at 3:30 in the morning." I think it was a bit before, but anyway, it was late.

"The reply to the request for help to evacuate the embassy was not given until 3:15 in the morning on the 1st.

"Accompanied by Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and the deputy foreign minister, I meet with Undersecretary Iruegas and Ambassador Pascoe in the Palace of the Revolution." It was 3:15 a.m., and they wanted the action at 4:00.

"It was then, and bearing in mind the request they had made, that I told them that we would act at 4:30 in the morning and at the same time I consulted them over the note on the subject which was to be published immediately after the operation was complete." Because in addition to the other one, and before they arrived, we had to draft a note reporting on the action taken to evict the people who had assailed the embassy. It was drafted in a such a way that it recounted things the way we thought they were going to happen.

"At 3:39 in the morning the Mexican ambassador and deputy foreign minister left for the embassy, where they would be at the time of the operation." They wanted to be right there, and we had no objections.

"At 3:45 in the morning I leave the office with Felipe, Nuñez Mosquera and Carlitos. We had told Lage to go and get some sleep, it was time now for the operation and we were going to watch how this unfolded.

"3:51 in the morning, at the Headquarters of Counterintelligence in Havana, the same place where we had been before, Division General Carlos Fernández Gondín, Brigadier General Armando Quiñones Machado, Operations Detachment Chief José Rodríguez and I were going over every detail of the evacuation plan, placing special emphasis on the idea of carrying it out unarmed, with a minimum use of physical force if there was resistance, calling on the occupiers to cooperate from the very beginning, saying to them: 'We have orders about this and we ask you to cooperate'." Without wasting a second they would communicate this to them, their mission. All of the occupiers were together, the embassy officials had not been able to separate them, there was not enough room. They were all in the library. The leading officer of the operation had orders to urge them to cooperate without wasting a second.

"The operation had been worked out in minute detail beforehand by the leaders and the staff of the Special Detachment." They were already working on it, they had all the maps, all the facts, all the ideas. What was being examined there was each step and all possible occurrences.

"The operation was carried out as planned, it took four minutes and 33 seconds, without the slightest incident" --and I say that because we were timing it with this watch here, which is pretty accurate (HE HOLDS UP HIS WATCH). The images that were shown here were taken from outside the embassy, while looking at the entrance and exit, the departure, our people marching, the arrival. I was counting the minutes, not from the minute they began their approach but from the moment when they got into the building until they left, four minutes and 33 seconds. We had calculated six minutes and they did it in less time.

"Coordination with the Mexican deputy foreign minister, the ambassador and the diplomatic staff was precise, calm and highly useful." I have to say, that was how the deputy foreign minister and the ambassador behaved, and they were very determined.

I was not so happy with some of the explanations the ambassador gave afterwards. And since I am keen on details and the truth, it is my duty to say that I did not like the idea that they were there as if to keep watch on us, or to keep watch on how everything was done. There are three small points in this.

Randy Alonso.- Yes. Right there, Commander in Chief, excuse me for the interruption, but Taladrid pointed out —since we are talking about the time of this operation— a discrepancy which exists between the official note which you say was discussed with the Mexican side and which came out in the press, where it talks about their wishes. You were even saying there was also a wish for the problem to be resolved speedily, because of the internal Mexican situation. And then, on the other hand, there are the Mexican ambassador's statements that Taladrid mentioned, that they had imposed three conditions on our country. It seems somewhat strange to us that on the one hand they talk about what they would like to be done and on the other about conditions.

Commander in Chief.- Yes, I saw it there, and I even asked Taladrid for it. Please read the three conditions that were mentioned.

Reinaldo Taladrid. - Ambassador Pascoe says: "In the request we made to the Cuban government regarding this eviction, we stated several conditions.

"The first condition is that we stated that the Mexican government had no intention to press any charges against these people. That is to say, we had no intention of entering into a legal conflict with

these persons, or of starting proceedings against them, nor of taking part in a legal persecution against these people.

"In the second place, we demanded that the eviction be, we asked that it be carried out with unarmed police, because they were going into the diplomatic mission of another country, and out of concern and respect for that country, we asked that the security forces enter our premises unarmed.

"In the third place, that it be a police action, if the need emerged, and that it is carried out with absolute respect for the rights of these people. We requested that it be a peaceful eviction, understanding, obviously, that we were, nonetheless, talking about an eviction."

Commander in Chief.- It is a pity, it really is a pity, because their behavior was excellent, the ambassador and the deputy foreign minister, but I feel it is my duty to say exactly how things happened.

As for the first point, it is absolutely true when it refers to the fact that they had no intention of pressing charges. But as for the second and the third, I am not going to say that they are lies, I will simply say, very politely, that there is a difference between truth and fiction, and I can prove it. I have here the famous letter, which reads as follows:

"Mr. Minister:

"I have the honor of addressing your Excellency to speak of the unfortunate events of this Wednesday, February 27 at 22:45, when a group of people used violence to enter the embassy's chancellery.

"As I have learned, that night several hundred people surrounded our facilities with the intention of invading them.

"Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that police authorities tried to defend the premises, a group of 17 people managed to break in by crashing a bus against the main entrance, seriously injuring two people who were traveling with them." I should explain that there were more than two, there were nine injured in total. Five were policemen or civilians, if we include the time when they threw stones at a bus to make it stop and at a private citizen in a car, and other people, like the passenger on the bus who was quite badly hurt, since he could not get off and was seriously hurt when they crashed the bus against the gate. And four of the people who attacked this vehicle or who wanted to take advantage of the bus crashing through to get into the embassy. The number of people injured is nine, not two. But he says: "Two people who were on the bus with them and who were able to get medical attention from the city's medical services."

Yes, because they asked us immediately to send them doctors to examine the injured and asked us to evacuate the seriously wounded people. It was necessary to evacuate those people and some others, because they had injured the others when they threw stones at a bus and when they tried to take a car away from a private citizen who was driving by.

"Another four people got in, according to their own statements," because not everyone went in on the bus. I think that three jumped over from the Papal Nunciature which is next door and went into the embassy. They were discovered the next day in a bathroom. This is why he says:

"Another four people got in, according to their own statements, one from 14th Street and the others from the grounds of the neighboring Papal Nunciature. Twenty-one people in total are still in the offices of the Mexican embassy."

The letter goes on. "In spite of the numerous requests that have been made to them to leave the premises peacefully, they have refused to do so. Faced with such circumstances, and even though the Mexican government does not wish to lay formal charges against any of these individuals, I find myself

obliged to ask Your Excellency to do what is necessary to evict them from the embassy.

"I take this opportunity to once again assure your Excellency..." etcetera.

Well, here it is, with the signature and everything. (HE SHOWS IT) As you can see, neither of the other two points are anywhere.

In fact, in the third official note, which we had the courtesy to show them --the draft already elaborated by us-- the following sentence was my idea: "The Mexican government expressed its wishes that the said measures be carried out in such a way as to avoid any physical harm to the intruders and with a minimal use of force." This sentence was my idea, because I had written the draft and I showed it to him. There was one word that Iruegas suggested.

Randy Alonso.- The word "intruder".

Commander in Chief.- Oh, yes. They wanted to use the word "intruders" and I had used the word "assailants". Their suggestion was accepted at once.

I was also the one who gave the orders to the leading officer of the operation not to carry any weapons whatsoever. Because, what right would anyone have to request or demand that the men enter the building without weapons? What if the others had weapons hidden in there, or they had brought them in through the Nunciature or through some other place? I was the one who gave the order not to carry weapons, as I had previously given orders to the guards at the embassy not to use arms when they were there. This was when they were in the minority and it was a matter of a small group of policemen against more than 200 individuals who were struggling to break into the embassy, and there had already been some disturbances, some pushing and shoving. When the bus broke through, it was a miracle it did not kill two guards who were close by; two others saved them by hurriedly pulling them aside to save them from them being squashed against the iron gate.

Then the other people who were hoping to invade the embassy —they were not far away— after seeing what happened with the bus, which came down a certain street at full speed and rushed at the gate, they tried to take advantage of the confusion and the moment to get into the embassy. The men who were protecting it managed courageously to prevent hundreds of people from getting into the embassy grounds. That was the exploit of those who were there on guard and there were, I repeat, just a few of them.

There was a moment when there was heavy pushing and shoving and there are two journalists who were hurt in the melee. I think that maybe they were hit and lost some filming equipment and a still camera. We have been in contact with them, they have behaved very decently, they understand. The police had no reason to attack journalists, you can imagine what it was like for a small group of police who had had a bus driven at them, which almost killed several of them, and there they are. Not one of them used guns, not even to fire some shots into the air, and the other bunch took advantage of this to try and get in through the gap made by the bus. I understand —because I sent someone to investigate— that it was then that the journalists were hurt, at around 10:30, more or less. Being journalists they were, naturally, filming the events.

I think maybe some guards with dogs turned up there, I do not know where. I cannot explain what the dogs were doing there; there was no need for any dogs. We never wander around using dogs to keep order in these kinds of situations; our people are brave enough. Who knows why they took dogs down there, I think it even appeared on television. After all, we do not use horses or tear gas, or water cannons or other such things, all the stuff they use in the West every day to crush workers who are out on strike and people who are protesting. I wonder what role the dogs could play.

We have the glory and the honor that what we use is our courage, when we are dealing with unarmed people, and all the valor needed when we are dealing with armed people in a clean fight. Our people

have demonstrated that more than once. But even dogs were seen around there. Oh! Someone had the idea of taking dogs down there. Dogs are for other things, as far as I know, is that not so? In cases like this, there are other things that are much more effective. If tear gas or mustard gas is thrown, everyone disperses. But when have we used these methods? We have not even needed to use them. It is because of our sense of decency that they had to struggle there, hand to hand, against those misled and confused individuals. They did not use weapons because, if they had, think how many people would have been wounded there, where there were around 200 people behind the bus. That is how it is.

Randy Alonso.- It would have led to a much more serious provocation, if they had not managed to stop that avalanche.

Commander in Chief.- But, no. Please, remember that this is nothing but a "small provocation". All of this that I am telling you is, according to some, but a "small provocation".

Who could make demands on us as to how our men are going to go in and how they are going to protect themselves? Only we can give that order. And we would not have accepted conditions, because under those circumstances, we could reply: "Thanks, no. We will continue to protect the embassy, which is our duty."

It would have been impossible for us to accept any condition that might cast doubt upon the rectitude and the honesty in which we have always acted. We had no interest in invading Mexican territory, on the contrary. But, what if the occupiers were armed? What right would anyone have to say to our men, "Go in unarmed"?

However, we took the risk because there is also such a thing as psychology, the mood the occupants, the surprise element, the detailed operation, the skill of the men, their training, so that even if they were armed it would be possible to evict them. Nonetheless, these kinds of inaccuracies are painful, are they not? There was never any need to impose conditions on us. We included that sentence because when the deputy foreign minister arrived, as I read earlier, he said that "these people are refusing to leave the embassy", etcetera, and the possibility arose of evicting them in the early hours of the morning, discretely and with a restrained use of force.

What's more. If we wanted to cooperate with the Mexican government in a fair and honorable decision, we had to take extra care to ensure that no one was beaten or wounded. It was not just one of our Revolution's traditions, which we have always abided by, but also our consideration for the Mexican government. No one needed to ask us, as if there were no trust, as if we were a bunch of thugs, as if we were going to hurl grenades, fire shots or anything of the sort. So, I am sorry, but I felt the need to make these clarifications. The rest is pure fiction and I have the proof here.

The truth is, actually, we were strongly pressured, and more than once in fact, to act with all speed.

Arleen Rodríguez.- But Commander in Chief, the first condition is not a condition either, as I see it, because when they say that they are not going bring them to trial, that is not a condition.

Commander in Chief.- That is up to them, but we do have jurisdiction over what occurs in this country. They do well if they do not want to lay charges.

But must we allow these incidents to go unpunished? What guarantee would be left to the other embassies every time that someone wanted to crash a bus, a truck or an armored 16-wheeler to get into an embassy? We said some time ago that no one who forces his or her way into an embassy would ever leave this country. They will never get an exit permit. And those who have those kinds of aspirations should have learned that some time ago. They would become permanent residents and no embassy wants permanent residents because they have experience of what some permanent residents are like, if one is not careful, and since they are as a rule lumpen, they want to become the masters of the embassies.

We will also have to examine this problem here. The right to asylum itself has been greatly abused; you only have to look back to the first few years of the Revolution when thousands left. Some embassies filled up like honeycombs. They took them because that was part of the propaganda and the campaign against Cuba, using the famous right to asylum.

In all these years of Revolution, as far as I remember, Cuba has never used the right to asylum, has never given asylum to anyone in an embassy, that I remember, although I have wracked my brains. And now what? Will it become the right to force one's way into an embassy? No, we are not going to put up with that. That is our right and our duty and I assure you that I am really sorry.

But well, the ambassador is himself a reporter. I have spoken several times with him. I met with him the same day that he arrived in Havana, and the next day I read in the wire service several articles published in the Mexican press about various aspects of the meeting. He is in the habit of acting as a reporter. Every time that I have a meeting it is reported, here, there and everywhere. And a report is a report; one can even accept that fiction may be used in a report. However, when it comes to issues as important as this, involving principles as this issue does, I cannot bring myself to accept fiction.

Is there something else? Would you like to know anything else?

Randy Alonso.- I agree with Arleen, that the first one can in no way be a condition, when the ambassador himself at the press conference acknowledged that it is within Cuba's jurisdiction to pass judgment on the incidents and to apply Cuban law. For, in fact, those who broke into that embassy are Cuban citizens. There cannot, therefore, be any kind of condition in Mexico's stand about not judging them or not asking for legal proceedings against those people.

Commander in Chief: - That is not being questioned, he has not questioned it. But he has spiced up the history with some things that have nothing to do with a situation in which we were being pressured, for a whole heap of hours, to give a reply. We were ready; we even consulted him over the note. We acted on what he himself asked us to do, and on our principles and because our aim was to help the Mexican president. We wanted to collaborate with the truth, when the mob and the villains came along saying dreadful things, declaring war, deciding to impose a ridiculous boycott on Mexico. They will have to boycott the cars made in Mexico that they use; they will have to boycott the thousands of things, which the maquiladoras in Mexico manufacture. Anyone would laugh; I imagine the Mexicans are laughing about this right now.

That's the reality, and I can say that it is really stupid; I challenge anyone to deny it.

Is there anything else? Would anyone like to ask anything? I still have two little things to add, but I am a bit worried about the time. The last time we finished at around 11:00 and I do not want that to happen again, I do not want history to repeat itself. But I do want to tell you, with regards to this matter, how much truth there was in the first note, when we said they were lumpen and criminals.

I have this file here which contains the criminal and police records of 122 people who were arrested during the night of the 27th - the early morning - and the day of February 28 for attempting to force their way into the Mexican embassy. There are 122 people here, in addition to the 13.

Randy Alonso.- So the 13 were 64% of those who had gone in, the majority.

Commander in Chief:- That might be close, or more or less half, because some scoundrels left, some of those who were trying to get in and were arrested. Later, of course, the police contingent was reinforced. It is true that at 9:30 at night the number of those trying to get in increased. There is an explanation for that. Here are the names and surnames, identity card numbers, occupation, if they had one, addresses. Some have argued over the charge, if it was for that charge or not, what the charge was.

Here are those individuals who have been punished, and more than once, or were on bail, or, because some did not pose a great threat to society, they were warned and released. For example, there are very few women, and precisely to spare any bitterness and humiliation we do not want to mention them. There are very few. Some were warned, more than once for being hookers. We do not wish to make their names public, maybe they will reform and at some time in the future will be honest women. But everything is here, in these pages. Here is someone chosen at random. Record: tried for violent robbery in 1999 (report 1367/99, 1487/99, 3317/99). Another, opening at any page of this volume. Record: arrested in 1994 for violent robbery. Tried in 1996 for possession of a sharp instrument (report 11412/96). Tried in 1996 for creating a disturbance in a penitentiary (report 11021/96). Tried in 1997 for disorderly conduct (report 11313/97). Served time in 1997 for violent robbery. In 1998, tried for violent robbery. In 2001, arrested in connection with a police inquiry. Another one, anyone. Record: in 1998 served time for violent robbery; in 1999 was tried for breaking and entering (report 376/9); in 2000 served time for violent robbery. The list includes 122 names. There are worse cases. A veritable collection of people with criminal and police records who were arrested trying to get into the Mexican embassy. The 13 who got in with the bus have to be added. You could say that two out of every five were criminals; the rest, marginalized and antisocial elements. What would have happened if all of them had got into the embassy grounds, responding to the invitation from the ill-named radio Martí?

Another thing, four or five of them said they were students. We investigated thoroughly and not one was a student, only one, who, I think, was one of the 12 who were in the embassy, he was a student in a trade school.

Randy Alonso.- Were there any professionals?

Commander in Chief:- Wait a minute. (LOOKS THROUGH THE DOCUMENT) Not one, not a single one is a professional, not a single one is an intellectual, not a single one is involved in the arts. Maybe there is someone who played the guitar back in his neighborhood. (LAUGHTER). But look carefully, not a single one is a university student; it was almost a foregone conclusion.

"I must point out that of all of them, and there were several hundred, virtually no one holds a steady job." Pestering tourists and things like that cannot be considered a steady or decent job.

"They were, as a rule, habitual layabouts, and they earned their living in illegal ways". Note how I say, "as a rule they were", it means that there is always an exception. Very few said they did it because they got caught up in it all or out of a spirit of adventure.

The label lumpen and criminals is absolutely accurate, not a single professional of the hundreds of thousands of professionals we have in Cuba, nor a single intellectual, and an artist or a university student was found among them.

"Cuba, the real Cuba, had absolutely nothing to do with that irresponsible, marginal scum who were used for this imperialist provocation." That had nothing to do with this country. Our schools are full, the new ones, with 3,500 students, 2,000 in the school of art instructors. In this country there are schools for hundreds of things; social work schools and those we are creating for tens of thousands of students aged between 17 and 30 who are in the comprehensive youth education schools. Not a single one of those; and there used to be a lot in the capital, who were once called the missing link.

Now this brings us to a fact: this justifies the colossal effort the country is making now, because that category, ladies and gentlemen, must disappear from our society, using the only way, which is the way of culture and education, that we are implementing by all possible means.

I have talked at some time about the connection between education, culture and crime. We have a lot of information about this and we are working on it, because all of these lowlifes are created by imperfections in socialism, by the fact that there is still not a real equality of opportunity for all children.

That has been discussed in quite a few places. What are the thousands of social workers we are training for? Why have we weighed 2,200,000 children under 15 years of age? And why are we distributing 97,000 additional rations to those who are underweight for their age? Because even a child's intelligence is affected if he or she does not get proper nutrition.

Why have we visited 505,000 families in Havana? Why have the University Social Work Brigades visited 76,400 children who live in what are known as marginal neighborhoods? Why and what for? It is because we are well aware of what a totally just society should be and we are absolutely determined to achieve it.

Why are we going to revolutionize primary education, in spite of the fact that primary and secondary school children in our country have twice the average knowledge of Latin Americans? Why are we trying to reduce the number of children per teacher, per classroom? Why are we proposing to completely revolutionize secondary education, which is the most important and most critical stage for adolescents? And we are not dreaming, we are doing things, and we have seen results, these are not unattainable theories.

Oh, but today we have all the human capital, all the experience and all the motivation in the world to do this.

Let the United States, as someone said, apply a Cuban Adjustment Act to Mexico. Let the doors of the United States be opened to Mexicans, instead of murdering them when they cross the border. Let those doors open which they say are open to Cubans, without giving a damn for the children, women and especially adult males who die crossing the border with Mexico; many more each year than all those who died in the 29 years of the Berlin Wall. And then we will see what happens.

Why do they not legalize the situation of the four million undocumented Mexicans in the United States who cannot go to visit their families, because then they would have to risk their lives constantly, coming and going?

All of these are subjects that I asked President Fox about. I am not going to say anything about the content of his replies, but I will say that it is an extremely important subject, the immigration problem and the explanation of what the Cuban Adjustment Act is. Why do we not ask for a Cuban Adjustment Act for other countries? Because it is a murderous law. We would rather ask for resources for development. We would rather ask that exploitation and plundering cease. We would rather ask for education, health care and jobs for all of the peoples of Latin America, than for an adjustment act. But with every right in the world we ask, if they have opened the border between Mexico and the United States for capital flows and the flow of goods, why do they not open it for human beings, instead of killing them? That is the question I would put to the spokesperson for the State Department who said all those stupid things he said. Who are they trying to fool with that stuff at this point, with all those lies, hypocrisy and demagoguery?

It is the same with that slandering document on human rights in other countries that they produce. There is so much hypocrisy, so many lies, so much demagoguery and so much shamelessness that I think that this document will only be good for hygienic purposes. In my opinion, that is all this document, in which they invested their time, is good for and I say that with all respect for hygiene. (LAUGHTER) It is a fiction, a joke, a lie, they have no arguments, they have no case, they are empty-handed, they have nothing, and they are full of contradictions. What I wonder is, when are they going to stop killing Mexicans who emigrate to the land they were forcibly deprived of and who do the worst jobs that nobody else will do? Whereas what they earn over there, well that everybody knows.

I am discussing issues, all these issues and there are quite a lot to discuss, and common things between the Mexicans and us. We are demanding that the U.S. repeals the murderous Cuban Adjustment Act, and the Mexicans are striving to have immigration relations between Mexico and the United States made more humane.

There are so many things one could say and discuss about human rights, but they do not talk about them, nor are they concerned about children who die like flies in Latin America and the underdeveloped world. They should say that for every 1000 children who are born, less die here than die in the United States. They should say that children in Cuba get 13 vaccines and that if they go over there, they go with the lowest rate of AIDS of all countries in Latin America, with the best health and the best education, that too, because it is quite possible that even those antisocial elements we have been talking about get at least as far as ninth grade.

We know what we are doing while they have no real arguments against us. They are enraged over their helplessness, because they have not been able to destroy the Revolution, and they never will be able to, in spite of all the treachery and aggressions, slander and lies that we have suffered.

No one has more faith than we do in our country, in the Revolution, in what it has achieved, in the virtues of our people; not a single name of any of those excellent people is on that list.

And we must even strive for those with criminal records. We are implementing some programs, which we have not mentioned.

People talk about reeducation but we say that you cannot reeducate someone who has never been educated. We have a lot of ideas on this subject. We know realistically what can and what cannot be done; it will take time, but at the rate we are going now, it will not take long. Let us see what will happen in five or ten year's time.

We do not feel contempt for those people. It is necessary to punish them, albeit not all of them, but those who threw stones and caused harm to other people in some way. I estimate that around 130 will have to appear before the courts, for the common crimes they committed. Now, the others will not be able to say that they are prisoners of conscience and dissidents. For the moment they are looking for a way to get some mileage out of the incident and for a way to defend those who were arrested because of imperialist provocation.

No, we are the ones who are going to defend them, but at the same time we are going to punish them. All of them? No, because if someone is not really a danger to society, it will not be necessary. We have to differentiate between them carefully, we have to work with all of them regardless of the sentences they are given, see what their lives have been like and get them to a point where they make a commitment to society.

What the bus people did is serious; the attacks on other people are serious. This is why we told the Mexican representatives that we could not make any promises. Anyone who breaks into an embassy like that must know that he will face charges in court and be punished, and that that way he will never leave Cuba. And we will guarantee the safety of the embassies, as nowhere else; we will not make any concession that compromises future action.

We now know the facts better than on the 27th or 28th, the facts about all of them, about those who were there, about those who threw stones. Now we have got all the facts, because initially they were in different places, in this police station or that, as they were arrested there. But they will go before the courts, according to the offense and the characteristics of each one. They have to be aware of that from this moment on. And there were a few gusanos mixed up in all that. They were trying to orchestrate a provocation, to create a disturbance. They did not know what they were up against, but they learned.

Well, some of our fellows Cubans have offered their opinion, we have them here. If you like, I can even read those from the 2nd, those from yesterday. Let us see how fast I can read these opinions so that people know that these opinions are taken into consideration, they are listened to, and they are collected. There are 742 opinions here from 13 provinces. I am going to read them, no matter what they say.

"Once again the United States made a mistake, everything turns out badly for those idiots!"

These might be representative opinions, because we do not omit those, which are opposed, even if there is only one of them.

"They wanted to repeat what happened in the Peruvian embassy, but they were caught and removed. Their show failed.

"The show in the Mexican embassy was arranged to accuse us before the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

"This only happens in this country, going unarmed to remove people who got into the embassy. Anywhere else they kick them out.

"This is what the Mexican government gets for meeting with counterrevolutionaries in Havana.

"This was a strong reply to the Miami mob's provocateurs. For every one of those crazies, Cuba has hundreds of excellent young people.

"Here we are ready for anything, those counterrevolutionary grouplets better not think they are going to destroy this.

"The press conference given by the Mexican ambassador was very good.

"It seems the Mexican ambassador to Cuba and the foreign minister do not speak the same language.

"It seems the Mexican foreign minister does not know that here republic and revolution are one and the same.

"We hope that President Fox says something concrete about this problem and ratifies or rectifies.

"The Mexican government is now playing innocent, but, when all is said and done, it's all its fault.

"I don't really understand Mexico's position vis à vis Cuba, they want to run with the hare and the hounds."

What we were afraid of —that these types of reactions would surface— is happening, after such a pleasant and friendly visit as the one we had, and I say that the President is not to blame. I am reading people's opinions here exactly as they were recorded.

"The Cuban government has a favorable attitude towards dialogue with Mexico, but they should reciprocate.

"Once more it became obvious that what Radio Martí does is twist the news to suit itself.

"The National Revolutionary Police should be congratulated on how well they performed during what went on at the Mexican embassy.

"The maximum sentence is what those criminals deserve.

"We have to come down hard on those offenders so that we don't get a kind of free-for-all in the embassies.

"The people who broke into the embassy must be criminals with criminal records and a very bad history.

"The Cuban courts must adopt new methods, clamp down, so that this sort of thing does not keep happening.

"Those criminals should be in jail." Here, again, the philosophy that everything can be solved with jail. I am just saying it in passing, bearing in mind what I said before.

We still need to be inspired by or infused with the philosophy that there are other much more effective actions to take. Furthermore, they are the only actions to take if we want to put an end to this category of citizen. They are the actions we are pursuing, which are complementary to punishment and social repression. It is not in vain that we are tracing the seven thousand odd young people in the capital who left school and their studies after the ninth grade. We found that among those between 16 and 20 years of age, 600 had committed a somewhat serious offense. We must study the causes. Why do they leave school, why this, why that. There are many things to be analyzed and considered.

I saw one of the vile things from over there, one of those pieces of Yankee libel, accusing us of discriminating against women, saying that there was even racism. No, I pointed out the remnants of racism that there are here. Oh! Because it says: "Castro himself said". Yes, I have said publicly that there is still not full equality for all, but not just because there may be poor black families, but also poor white families. There is white marginalization and black marginalization. I am not going to say anything else, but I have not hesitated to speak about those problems and how we are going to eradicate them. What impudence!

I will continue, I only have a few minutes left.

"The courts", they criticize the courts as well, because there is still that idea, like I said, imprisonment, repression and jail.

"I cannot fathom how people with this kind of record are free, they should be in prison.

"Our people support the measures taken against those who broke into the Mexican embassy.

"The Mexican government responded as it should and the Cuban authorities completed the operation when they removed those criminals.

"The Mexican government clarified the situation between Cuba and Mexico; the gusanos must be really sad.

"The Mexican ambassador's reply to journalists was ambiguous, I didn't understand anything."
(Someone in Havana)

"As soon as that stuff at the Mexican embassy happened, two trucks full of the Blas Roca Contingent arrived and started lashing out left and right with sticks; well done." (Another opinion from Havana)

In fact, what the Blas Roca people are doing is combating the mosquito, because you must not forget that right now the country is involved in the battle against the aftermath of the hurricane; the battle against the mosquito, with increasing success; the sugar harvest; and a number of programs that we are trying to implement at all costs. That is the truth. The Blas Roca Contingent is fighting a dangerous enemy.

That opinion there, that they arrived lashing out left and right with sticks, the truth is that this is the first time I have heard that the Blas Roca people were there. I do not know that they were. They and other contingents, thousands of people, are fighting against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, and they were not pulled off that job, we did not want to move them. Therefore we are calm, not only that, we did not want to waste our energy, because there are forces here in order to organize noisy protests. But we can use a

weapon, the truth, the sword of truth, to unmask them and to have all of our compatriots involved in the battle.

"All of them were criminals? I hope what happened with the Peruvian embassy won't happen again, when it was said that they were all criminals and there were some decent people." (An opinion from Havana)

"The government is to blame that these kinds of things happen, because it is too soft on criminals." If we were to let public opinion take the measures there would be the devil to pay, because I know how a lot of people feel and how angry they get with these things. That is an opinion from Santa Cruz del Sur, Camagüey that the blame lies with the government.

"People were seen roaming around from early on. Why didn't State Security take steps in time?" (An opinion in Havana, one in Cienfuegos and one in Granma)

"That's how they attack us, we must take more safety measures." (An opinion from Havana)

"You'll see, they'll have a chat with those people they removed from the embassy, they'll release them and it will be like nothing happened." (LAUGHTER) (An opinion from Cienfuegos.)

"Someone broke into the Interests Section on Friday and nothing has been said about it." (An opinion from Havana)

It is true, while all of this was going on, an individual was passing by there and suddenly jumped over the fence. We waited to see what they were going to do with him. They were talking, criticizing the fact that the Mexicans had or had not removed them from the Mexican embassy, and I said, "Let us see what those gentlemen do now." They grabbed him, they removed him very discreetly, they maneuvered to create confusion and they took the guy home. All the neighbors and everyone knew right away who he was. Once he had been investigated, it was obvious that he was someone who was mentally ill. Compared to all this other uproar it was not even worth using five lines in the paper to report this case, it was not important. However, since a citizen has given his opinion about it I feel I should explain that yes, a guy snuck in. They had him there and they removed him. He was ill. I will not give out his name.

So the person who said that told the truth. Which is why it is a good thing to read out people's opinions. And here we have reported what those who expressed their opinions on this subject said, what they said about everybody and what they said about us.

In fact, something must be said: there were two men there, guarding the embassy, as I explained. At midday the first news arrived, because we have people who systematically monitor enemy broadcasts. Normally they are passed on to the relevant people. There are hundreds of pieces of information every day. One must put oneself in the place of those who receive them, analyze them and may take some decision, according to their evaluation of them. Generally, those who get them are people who hold certain positions and who have many things to do every day. Those who monitor tell the latter what they have heard.

Randy Alonso.- At given intervals.

Commander in Chief.- Yes. But, in this case, what they said in the morning of the 27th was different from what they said in the afternoon, the tone and the nature of the news had changed. They were putting two things together, especially: "Cuba's relations with Mexico have been severed, the doors of the embassy are open." Above all "the doors of the embassy are open." We well know what a lumpen person will do if someone says the doors of the embassies are open.

For example, back at the height of the special period when they were hijacking the small Regla ferryboat and doing hundreds of other things, and we said that we were not obliged to watch over the

U.S. coasts for them and declared a strike, then lumpen, antisocial elements, and even people who wanted to emigrate or rejoin their families mobilized immediately.

Randy Alonso.- Incited by this same anti-Cuban station.

Commander in Chief.- The same. Then what we used to do, we would try to dissuade them on the coast if it was dangerous: "Look, do not use that," and then we took them in a convoy to where the U.S. coast guards were.

Today, even when there is an immigration agreement between Cuba and the United States, we do the same thing with the people who cannot get a visa and try to emigrate illegally. To avoid accidents, we do not try to intercept vessels when they are already at sea. The method of using speedboats from Florida for trafficking in persons has become very popular. You can catch them before they arrive, or you can discover where the people are waiting. We have caught more than 100 pirates, immigrant smugglers who live in the United States and set off from there. But they certainly do not want them back there, they would not even dare to put them on trial, so they leave us to deal with the problem. This is the real truth and they never say anything about that.

There is nothing wrong with people criticizing.

In fact I can understand the way it works. What happened? Our authorities noticed that there was something unusual, they reinforced the guards with a few people. In the evening, after some hours had gone by, everything was apparently normal. When night fell all was calm. They had reinforced the guards with 20 auxiliaries, volunteers who cooperate with the police and others. When night fell, there were around 60 men there, if I remember correctly 63, and no abnormal activity was detected. There was almost complete calm.

It was at around 9:00 p.m. that dozens of people began to get together here and there.

Randy Alonso.- At 8:00 p.m. the headline of the broadcast was more attention-grabbing, "the doors are open".

Commander in Chief.- The last broadcast was at 8:00. Which they had not even announced... When night fell, Counterintelligence sent a written report saying what had happened during the day and the measures that had been taken. Given that what had happened was not very important, they did this in writing. It never occurred to them, they were really surprised by the manipulations of the subversive radio station, which became worse as it grew dark. Rumors of the break in relations and the "open doors" had multiplied. Hardly anyone of those who tried to get into the embassy had heard the broadcasts, they had heard a rumor and they thought that night was the best time. Those at the subversive radio station know this trick and they carry out their incitement deliberately, that was their worst treachery. We are very familiar with it, if one says: "The Capitol has opened its doors for those who want to emigrate to the United States," those same individuals would go down there at once.

We know the potential for this kind of thing still exists, that they feel they will receive special treatment from the U.S. government; the enemy plays with all that stuff. But to date, imperialist intelligence has been conspicuous by its absence, they have failed in everything.

We can be absolutely and completely confident about what we are doing, and about the future.

I think that the Counterintelligence comrades themselves and all of those who were involved in dealing with this provocation, the special unit which did its job to perfection, it was just a handful of men really; the special units have been downsized. Perhaps this experience will lead us to analyze what should be done. There are enough forces in this country, including 100,000 reserves in the capital who can be mobilized in a matter of hours and that is apart from the enormous potential of the armed forces and their special troops and an entire population organized, trained and armed for the war of all the people.

Here we have the capability to mobilize hundreds of thousand of men, in no time at all. But you should never use a cannon to kill birds.

A well-trained force, specially trained to deal with such situations rapidly should be used. But those who were there were auxiliary troops, they were not people from Blas Roca, no. And when the bus went in, there must have been around 60 or 63 men there. They contained the attackers, they did not let them get in. I think, it is my personal opinion, that they should have had more reinforcements, because at 9:00 p.m. the antisocial elements had begun to gather there.

The comrades had sent a four-page report. Everyone knows, it has to be drafted, corrected, the exact numbers must be found, it has to be dictated and typed. This is what happened. As soon as I was informed at 11:00 p.m., I went down to the place with a notebook in hand. The written report arrived at more or less the same time as the bus had already smashed through into the embassy. From 9:00 on, some pushing and shoving had gone on because the crowd had been advancing towards the embassy and that is when reinforcements were needed, from the time when 100 people turned up over here and another 100 over there, that is what I think.

Our comrades did a great job, they know the signs well. Some people wonder how it is possible, because actually it was a bit of a surprise for these two reasons: the strong rumor campaign and all the broadcasts that had been going on for almost 13 hours, from 7:35 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., that is twelve and a half hours. Some news and rumors had spread and although reinforcements had arrived, the calm at the beginning of the evening had reassured them. I think that reinforcements should have been sent at 9:00. Given that situation, those who were there behaved heroically, a few men who were not going to use their side arms, and up against those who were pushing and shoving. The agitators know that the police are not going to shoot, they know that those methods which we see everyday on the television in other parts of the world are not used here.

This is my contribution to the story. And there are more things; there are a few other things that we will discuss some other time. But we will see tomorrow what you Round Table people decide. Maybe we will have to spend a whole week discussing it; anyway, we are ready.

Randy Alonso.- Commander in Chief, I would like to add a Prensa Latina wire report which arrived a few minutes ago, datelined Mexico, which reads that "President Vicente Fox said today that the ties between his country and Cuba at an excellent level and both sides are working to strengthen them with the same enthusiasm as before.

"Relations are the same as they were before or perhaps better, because we have had the opportunity to talk to President Castro himself, directly,' he said. He explained that this is how his government usually works, he picks up the telephone and speaks to whomever necessary when this type of situation occurs.

"At a press conference for foreign correspondents this afternoon, Fox stated that 'bilateral relations remain at a wonderful level and we are continuing to work with the same enthusiasm as before.'

"Asked about the reaction that the invasion of the embassy in Havana had aroused in Miami and the United States, he replied: 'It seems to me that each person, each group is free to make its own interpretations and to think about what happened in its own way.' He called the invasion of the official Mexican mission by this group of Cubans inopportune without mentioning any request for political asylum or political persecution; they just simply smashed into the embassy with a bus.

"This led us,' he said, 'to ask the Cuban government for the protection owed to our embassy and for the eviction of these persons, since they had no statements to make, nor had they gone to ask for visas, for political protection or protection of any other sort.'"

Commander in Chief.- A clear, honest statement that proves the things I have said here, and it makes us

very happy for this round table to end with that.

Randy Alonso.- Commander in Chief, we give you special thanks for being with us at the round table, I think that you have helped to give our people a better idea of what went on. I think that you have clarified some important points about all that happened in the Mexican embassy, about this provocation financed and cheered on by that anti-Cuban mob with the help of their mercenaries inside the country and using antisocial elements who, as you were saying, still exist in our society. Well, they tried to provoke an incident and once again they met with defeat, which is what this mob and their treacherous intentions are accustomed to. They were yet again condemned to failure.

The arguments that have been given over the last few days have helped, naturally, to give our population much more information. From the very first moment they were informed by the official notes, which were issued as soon as these event took place. But I think that this today has helped to clarify things even more.

Commander in Chief.- And there is still more news. Apart from those I was referring to, I remember one in particular where there has not been the space or the time to give it a lot of coverage, because it should be examined. It has to do with some criminals who murdered some Miami émigrés who had come to visit their families so they could rob them. That is another task on which we worked very hard, and the police unraveled the case with great tenacity and intelligence, because it was difficult to solve.

Everything was discovered, and although we do not use nor practice tabloid journalism, which often only serves to encourage crime rather than to combat it, we have not had the space nor the time to make a proper analysis of these events. Some people are wondering about what happened and what the investigation had revealed.

I can tell you that all those responsible have been caught. They committed the murders out there on the highway, many people knew about it, or had heard about it. It was necessary to investigate thoroughly, to gather together all the evidence and other details needed for the trial and to prevent the guilty from escaping. We needed a Sherlock Holmes, but in the end, among many Sherlock Holmeses, they discovered everything down to the last detail. The truth is fairly disgusting, because the criminals even killed a little boy. We must learn a lesson from all of that. (APPLAUSE)

Randy Alonso.- Once again we thank you Commander in Chief, we thank the panelists who have been with us, the guests we have had in the studio, and especially our foreign minister and Comrade Lage.

Tomorrow we will be back for another round table.

Good night.

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