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1961

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TESTIMONY OF

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Edmund A. Chester

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Tuesday, March 21, 1961

United States Senate,
Subcommittee to Investigate the
Administration of the
Internal Security Act and Other
Internal Security Laws
of the
Committee on the Judiciary,
West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:40 o'clock p.m., in Room 432, Hotel George Washington, West Palm Beach, Florida, Senator Thomas J. Dodd, presiding.

Present: Senator Dodd (presiding).

Also present: J.G. Sourwine, Chief Counsel and
Francisco G. Cajigas.

TESTIMONY OF EDMUND A. CHESTER

(Being first duly sworn by Senator Dodd.)

Mr. Sourwine. What is your full name?

Mr. Chester. Edmund A. Chester.

Mr. Sourwine. Where do you live?

Mr. Chester. Mount Dora, Florida.

Mr. Sourwine. Where were you born?

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Mr. Chester. Louisville, Kentucky.

Mr. Sourwine. And you lived for some time in Cuba?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. Would you tell us briefly the circumstances of your going to Cuba and what your employment was while you were there?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

In 1933 I went to Cuba as Chief of the Associated Press in Havana and I lived in Cuba from 1933 until about 1936, when I became Chief of the Latin American Department of the Associated Press and lived in the Latin American countries with Havana as my base of operations.

I returned to Havana in 1952, March of 1952, as an adviser to the Cuban Government.

Senator Dodd. When did you leave the Associated Press?

Mr. Chester. I left the Associated Press in 1940.

Senator Dodd. What did you do between 1940 and --

Mr. Chester. I worked in the International Division of the Columbia Broadcasting System for eight years, 1940 to 1948.

Senator Dodd. Where were you based then?

Mr. Chester. Based at New York, and I traveled from there.

Mr. Sourwine. There was a period then after you left Havana when you were still with the Associated Press?

Mr. Chester. Oh, yes.

Mr. Sourwine. And where were you based during that time?

Mr. Chester. All over Latin America.

Mr. Sourwine. Were you ever based in Washington or New York City with the Associated Press?

Mr. Chester. Yes, New York; but not Washington. And from 1948 to 1952 I was Director of News and Public Affairs for the Columbia Broadcasting System and I left Cuba on December 22, 1958.

Mr. Sourwine. That was just before Castro took over?

Mr. Chester. Right.

Mr. Sourwine. And about three days before Batista left?

Mr. Chester. That is not -- I think it was -- I think he left New Year's Day.

Mr. Sourwine. Well, you left before Batista?

Mr. Chester. That is right, I left before.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you while you were with the Associated Press in Cuba know a man named William Wieland who also sometimes used the name Arturo Montenegro?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. Will you tell us what you knew of him?

Mr. Chester. When I first knew Wieland he was a young man who had been employed by an English language newspaper in Havana, the Havana Post, as a sort of an editor. They had only one American employee and he was copyreader and headline

writer and editor and what have you.

At that time he was known as Arthur Wieland, but it was -- well, everyone knew that prior to that he had used the name of, first, Guillermo Montenegro and at other times Arthro Montenegro -- you want me to go ahead?

Mr. Sourwine. Yes, you go ahead.

Mr. Chester. In his work as -- on the newspaper, he became acquainted with Sumner Wells, who was then United States Ambassador to Cuba and this friendship became outwardly and publicly a very firm friendship. He spent a great deal of his time with Wells who was living alone at that time at the Hotel Nacional -- and, I mean, not related to his work with the newspaper.

Senator Dodd. Not what?

Mr. Chester. Not related to his newspaper job -- social activities.

Mr. Sourwine. That is, in his business as well as socially he spent a great deal of time with him?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. Was he commonly referred to at that time in diplomatic circles as "Sumner Wells' white haired boy"?

Mr. Chester. Yes. Not in diplomatic circles, I don't know what the diplomats thought of him, but I know the newspaper thought of him as one of Wells' preferred boys.

Mr. Sourwine. And what do you mean by that, or what did

they mean?

Mr. Chester. I think all of them realized the shortcomings of Sumner Wells' personal sexual habits, and I think they had that in mind.

Senator Dodd. I think we ought to make this clear. Was it known, or was it said at that time in Havana, that Sumner Wells was a homosexual?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

Senator Dodd. It was a well known fact?

Mr. Chester. Well, again, Senator, you cannot tell which are facts and which are not facts, but it was generally known -- he was generally considered a homosexual.

Senator Dodd. Well, that is what I mean.

Mr. Sourwine. It was generally considered that that man, Wieland, or Montenegro, was one of his boys; that is, has sexual relationships with him?

Mr. Chester. It never came to the point of spelling it out, but very certainly held that the men were bosom companions, and yet there was such a vast difference in social and economic levels, with Wieland earning approximately \$30 or \$35 a week, that was all the money in the world he had, and Sumner Wells was the United States Ambassador.

Mr. Sourwine. Now, he visited Mr. Wells' home, did he?

Mr. Chester. Wells was living at the Hotel Nacional most of that period.

Mr. Sourwine. He visited him there?

Mr. Chester. Many times.

Mr. Sourwine. Did they go around together otherwise?

Mr. Chester. No, not publicly. They were together quite a bit in his office and quite a bit in his home.

Mr. Sourwine. In Wells' office?

Mr. Chester. Yes, in Wells' apartment. At the same time Wieland's closest companion was a well known homosexual, Cuban homosexual, called Maceo.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you know his full name?

Mr. Chester. No. If I had, I have forgotten it.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know what happened to him?

Mr. Chester. No. Please remember in this period we never dreamed we would be at this point --

Mr. Sourwine. I understand. You don't know whether Maceo is still alive?

Mr. Chester. I have no idea.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know what Maceo was doing for a living?

Mr. Chester. I never knew him to be gainfully employed. He traded on the fact his name was Maceo, which was the name of two Generals in the war against Spain; it was a name very honored and he claimed to be a relative. He was a mulatto.

Mr. Sourwine. Cuban?

Mr. Chester. Cuban mulatto, and the Maceos were Negroes,

both Generals, mulattoes, and this boy claimed to be a descendant a grandson, of Maceo.

Mr. Sourwine. And you say there was a connection between Maceo and Wieland?

Mr. Chester. Very close companions.

Mr. Sourwine. This was publicly known?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

The Associated Press, I want it mentioned here, occupied offices in the same building as the Havana Post. In other words, our offices were along-side the Havana Post in the building owned by the Havana Post. In other words, the Associated Press was upstairs and the Havana Post downstairs.

So we saw quite a bit of each other.

Now, do you want me to tell you some of the stories we heard of Wieland's strange activities?

Mr. Sourwine. I think so, sir.

Senator Dodd. Yes.

2.

Mr. Chester. Well, at the time that I was in this position at Havana, I had seven or eight employees, all Cubans. The office of the Havana Post, and the office of the Associated Press were in the dead center of the redlight district and these reporters and photographers of mine knew just about every prostitute in the center, in this area, and the prostitutes were pretty good sources of news because certain people talk, when in bed with a prostitute, apparently, that would

not talk otherwise.

So these fellows had these connections and they came in several times and told me that one or two of these girls had told them that there was a man working for the Associated Press named Wieland who had very queer sexual habits. Now, the reason that they said "Associated Press" was that in that period any American newspaperman in Cuba was thought to be an Associated Press man. It was one of the problems we had because even some of the opposition would trade on the fact that the AP got the blame for it.

So, there was one girl who all of us knew around the place named Julieta who said that this boy, his favorite pastime was paying her money -- this is horrible -- to get her big toe dirty and he would suck her big toe while masturbating. Now it seemed too strange to be true, and I doubted it at first, but then the boys brought me the girl and she said yes, that was true, and she thought it was bad for all the American newspapermen because the story was that not only she -- he was doing the same thing with other girls, and the American newspapermen had a pretty bad reputation as the result of it.

At that time, at the same time, Wieland was living with -- he was married, but living with another woman, a Russian girl named Sonja, who was an adventuress of the first water.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know her last name?

Mr. Chester. No. A very pretty girl, but obviously an adventuress. There were stories at the time that this girl was identified with Soviet Russia. I never knew of anything, never heard of anyone proving that, or never saw any evidence that it was true. The fact that she was Russian and her name was Sonja may have had something to do with the rumor.

Mr. Sourwine. She was known as Sonny, also, wasn't she?

Mr. Chester. Probably. I never knew that. She finally married a man who at that time was the Chief of Operations of the Cuban Telephone Company, a man named E.D. Miller and led him quite a life, I understand.

Mr. Sourwine. Did Wieland continue his association with her after she married Miller?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know if he ever took her out to his home, to his house?

Mr. Chester. No, I wouldn't think so. I can remember when Wieland had a child born. He was married to some -- she seemed to be a very pleasant woman; she seemed to be Polish or Czech or something, extraction, I don't know. And they called me. I was living in the Hotel Presidential. Those days were the revolutionary period, and we were working usually until two or three o'clock in the morning before we closed the office.

And I can remember this night I had gone home after working

to about two or three o'clock in the morning and the phone rang and some other newspaperman, if I am not mistaken it was Dick Armstrong of the International News Service, called me and asked me if I knew where Wieland was, that his wife just had a baby and she was in the hospital and not doing too well, and they could not find Wieland.

I didn't know, but I heard the next morning they found him in a whorehouse with two or three of the girls, up to his usual habits, and they had to yank him out to get him home, to get him to the hospital.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you have any knowledge respecting Wieland's discharge from the Havana Post?

Mr. Chester. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. What do you know about that?

Mr. Chester. Well, I say "Yes." I think I do. Let us put it this way:

Wieland, during the revolutionary period, the International newspapers had a full time reporter there, a fellow named Armstrong, whom I just mentioned. After things slowed down, they relieved him and sent him to Mexico and took on Wieland as a string correspondent; in newspaper parlance that means a part time correspondent.

Now, the INS and the AP were competitors and Wieland, as head of the -- well, Wieland as an editor of the Havana Post had access to the news reports that were coming in upstairs

and some of the employees of the AP reported to me that he was taking news from the AP and refiling it back to INS and backing up to INS on news that had -- that they had missed in their domestic service in the North, which was an old trick that can be done very easily.

I reported to the publisher of the Havana Post the question of the violation --

Mr. Sourwine. Do you mean Mrs. Pessino?

Mr. Chester. Yes; Mrs. Clara Park Pessino. She investigated and checked it and found he was doing it, to her satisfaction.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you have any part in establishing to her satisfaction that he was doing this?

Mr. Chester. I probably did, but I can't remember in detail.

Mr. Sourwine. On the record, your understanding then is that he was fired for pirating AP news off of the AP wire and back-filing it on the INS wire?

Mr. Chester. That is right, but I think Mrs. Pessino was more than glad to get rid of him because he had been so thoroughly unreliable.

Mr. Sourwine. But he was fired after your complaint that he had been doing that?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. And she told him he had been fired

because she was satisfied he was doing that?

Do you know whether she told him that?

Mr. Chester. Yes, I think she did tell him, yes.

Mr. Sourwine. She told you that?

Mr. Chester. No. But I think she told him.

Mr. Sourwine. Did she tell you she had told him why?

Mr. Chester. I can't remember.

Mr. Sourwine. Well, you were not there?

Mr. Chester. No; no.

Mr. Sourwine. What makes you think she did tell him?

Mr. Chester. Well, I don't know, but usually when you fire somebody you give them a reason for firing him.

3. Mr. Sourwine. Did you have a speaking acquaintance with Wieland at that time?

Mr. Chester. I knew Wieland very, very well.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you discuss with Wieland that matter of the firing?

Mr. Chester. No. It wasn't my place to discuss that.

Mr. Sourwine. Was he employed by Associated Press shortly?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. How did it happen?

Mr. Chester. I may be a little vague. At the time this happened I was Chief of the AP in Latin America and we kept in Washington two reporters who were exclusively on Latin

American matters. They worked for me though they were serving under the Bureau Chief in Washington, there is a question here of jurisdiction.

These fellows were people who had to speak Spanish and they worked mostly in the Latin American Embassies in Washington.

Just about the time that Wieland was through with his work in Cuba we were short one man in the Washington setup for Latin America. What I am telling you is to the best of my memory. There may be flaws in it.

I think that when I left to go on another trip to South America, which I did constantly, to Latin America, I asked the Washington people of the Associated Press to look out for a man of the necessary qualifications for this job.

In other words, it was important to get the job filled. Some months later I got a notice from the Washington office that they had filled the job for me with a man named Wieland.

So on my return to the United States I went to Washington.

By that time Wieland had affected what he considered Senatorial garb; he had a big black hat, you know, shoestring ties --

Senator Dodd. Off the record.

(Discussion off the record)

Mr. Chester. And he was throwing his weight around Washington in a very substantial way.

Now, I asked the people in the AP, I can't remember the individuals, I don't know, that I talked to, this was 27-odd years ago. And they told me he had said he had discussed this with me in Havana, and I had told him he could have the job.

I had never discussed it with him and never told him. It developed that he got it through the efforts of Sumner Wells -- I am not certain -- or he was recommended to the AP by Sumner Wells. I think that can be determined.

And I told them he was not satisfactory, I did not like the manner in which he got into the organization, I did not like his personal conduct, and he better start looking for another job.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you remember when this was?

Mr. Chester. No, I can't tell you in years. Somewhere in 1936 to 1940, somewhere in there.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you give him specific notice, a certain amount of time?

Mr. Chester. No. I told him to get out of the job as quickly as possible, get out. I am trying to remember. I may have given him some time, but I don't think -- anyway, it didn't bother him any because he quit and went into the diplomatic service.

Mr. Sourwine. Right away?

Mr. Chester. I don't know how much time elapsed, but

the next I heard of Wieland, he was doing very well in diplomatic service.

Mr. Sourwine. He was never formally discharged from the AP?

Mr. Chester. He was given the opportunity to resign.

Mr. Sourwine. The record will show he resigned?

Mr. Chester. I don't know what the records show.

Mr. Sourwine. But you told him if he did not get out you would fire him?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know anything about the circumstances of his entering the diplomatic service?

Mr. Chester. No, I do not.

Senator Dodd. Did you know Mike McDermott?

Mr. Chester. Yes, very well.

Senator Dodd. He had been in Havana?

Mr. Chester. No, I never saw Mike -- I saw him in 1940 at the Pan American Conference.

Senator Dodd. Were you there then?

Mr. Chester. No, not from 1933.

Mr. Sourwine. Do you know of any connection between McDermott and Wieland?

Mr. Chester. None.

Senator Dodd. I believe he said McDermott hired him.

Mr. Chester. Oh. I understand he asked Sumner Wells

to get him in out of the rain.

Mr. Sourwine. Where do you have that information from?

Mr. Chester. Which information?

Mr. Sourwine. That Sumner Wells had told the State Department to take him out of the rain?

Mr. Chester. Various newspapermen, gossiping, and the grapevine.

Senator Dodd. And by that time Wells was Under Secretary of State, wasn't he?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. Did you have any knowledge of the relationship between Mr. Wieland and Mr. Wells while they were both employed in the State Department?

Mr. Chester. No. The knowledge I had of them was when Wells was -- he was Under Secretary, but acting as Ambassador, on this special mission, and Wieland was in the Havana Post.

Mr. Sourwine. That was before Wieland went there?

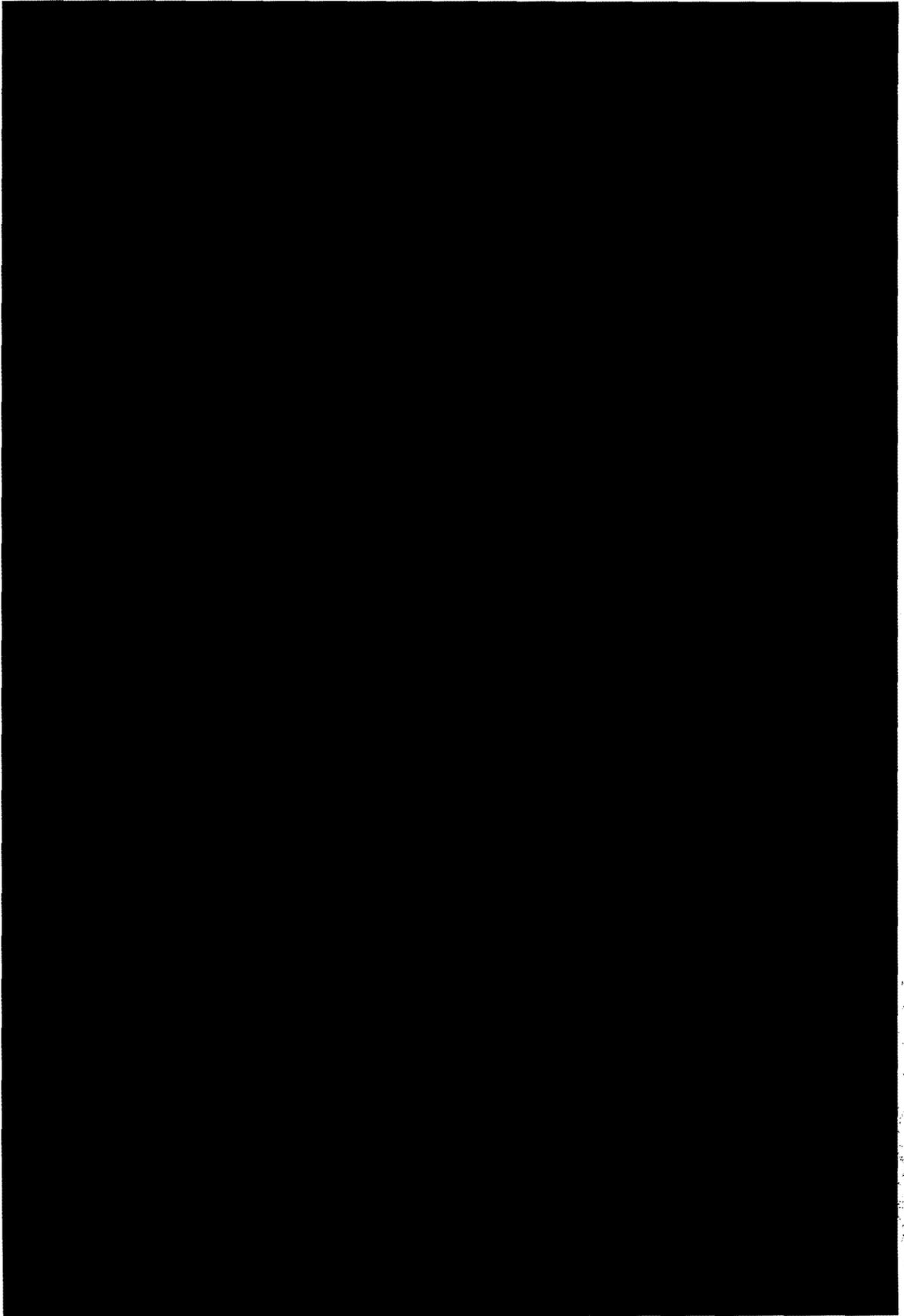
Mr. Chester. That is right -- I don't know what the relationship was then.

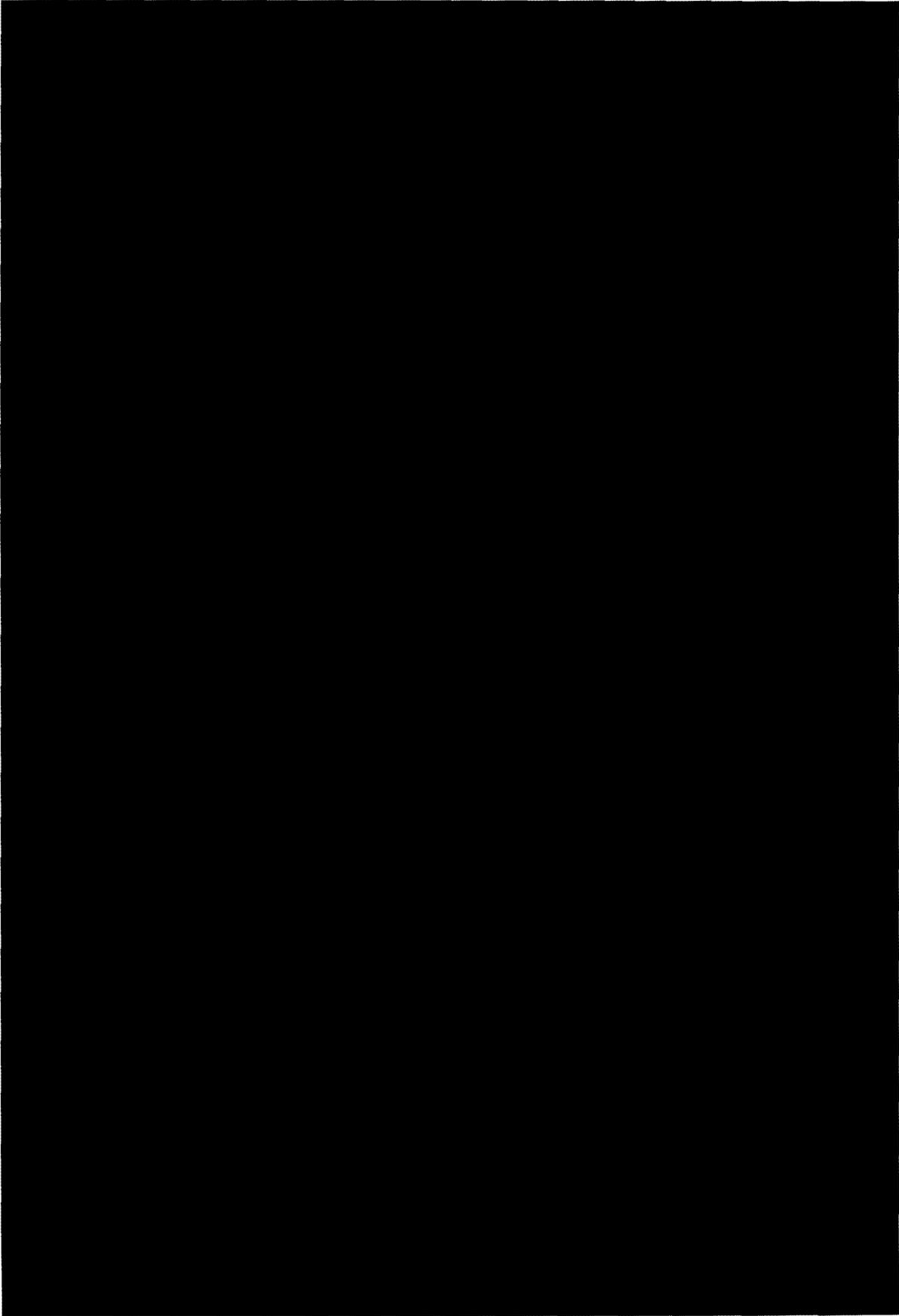
Mr. Sourwine. Did you have any knowledge of the State Department's attitude with regard to Castro?

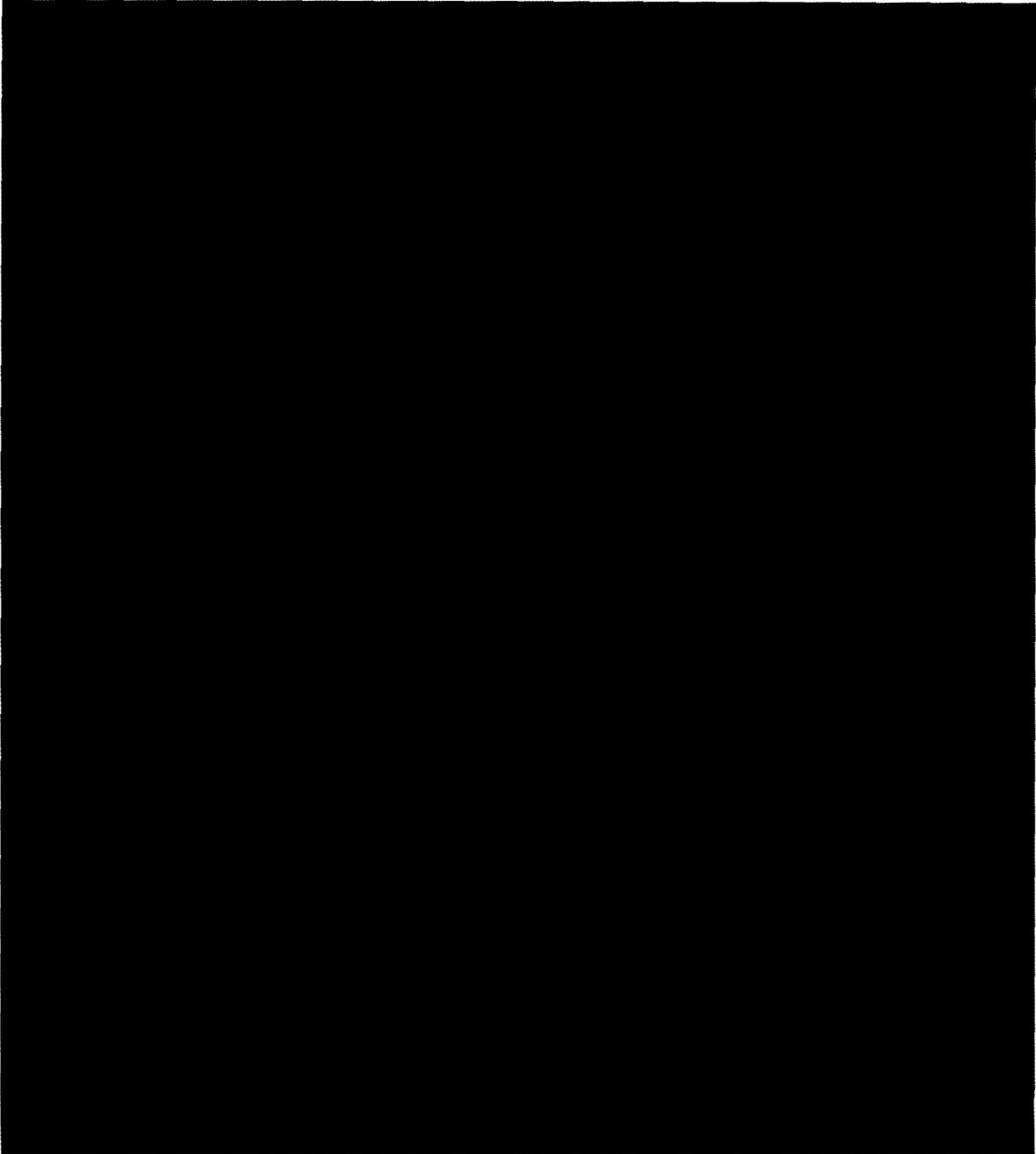
Mr. Chester. Did I have any knowledge of it -- yes.

Mr. Sourwine. Tell us what you knew of it. You were at that time adviser to Batista, were you not?

Mr. Chester. That is right, [REDACTED]

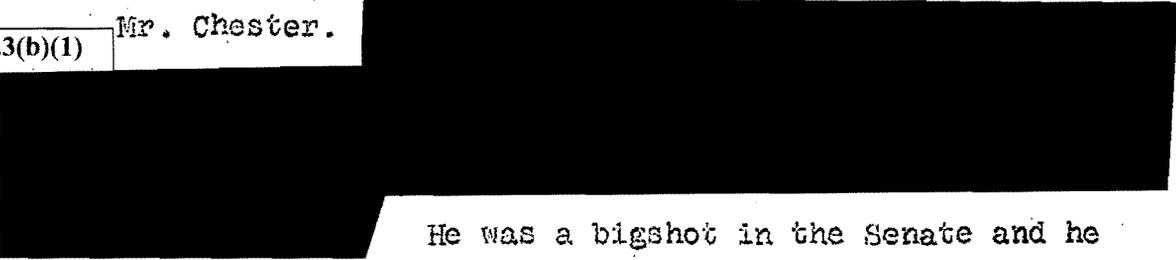






Mr. Chester.

E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)



He was a bigshot in the Senate and he became very violent in his criticisms of me, as he called it, "informing on Castro."

Senator Dodd. Was he pro-Castro?

Mr. Chester. I can only tell you what he said. He became critical of me informing on Castro --

Senator Dodd. Did they call that "informing"?

Mr. Chester. Bringing in information.

Mr. Sourwine. He did not like your bringing in adverse information on Castro?

Mr. Chester. That is right. And one occasion when I went to a great deal of effort to get some information, and if I am not mistaken it was at that same time, I gave [REDACTED] the names of fifty Communist leaders in Latin America with a thumbnail biography of each one of them --

Mr. Sourwine. This was in what year?

E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)

Mr. Chester. In around 1955, 1956.

Mr. Sourwine. This was before Castro landed?

Mr. Chester. Before and during the time he was in Cuba.

Mr. Sourwine. I am talking about --

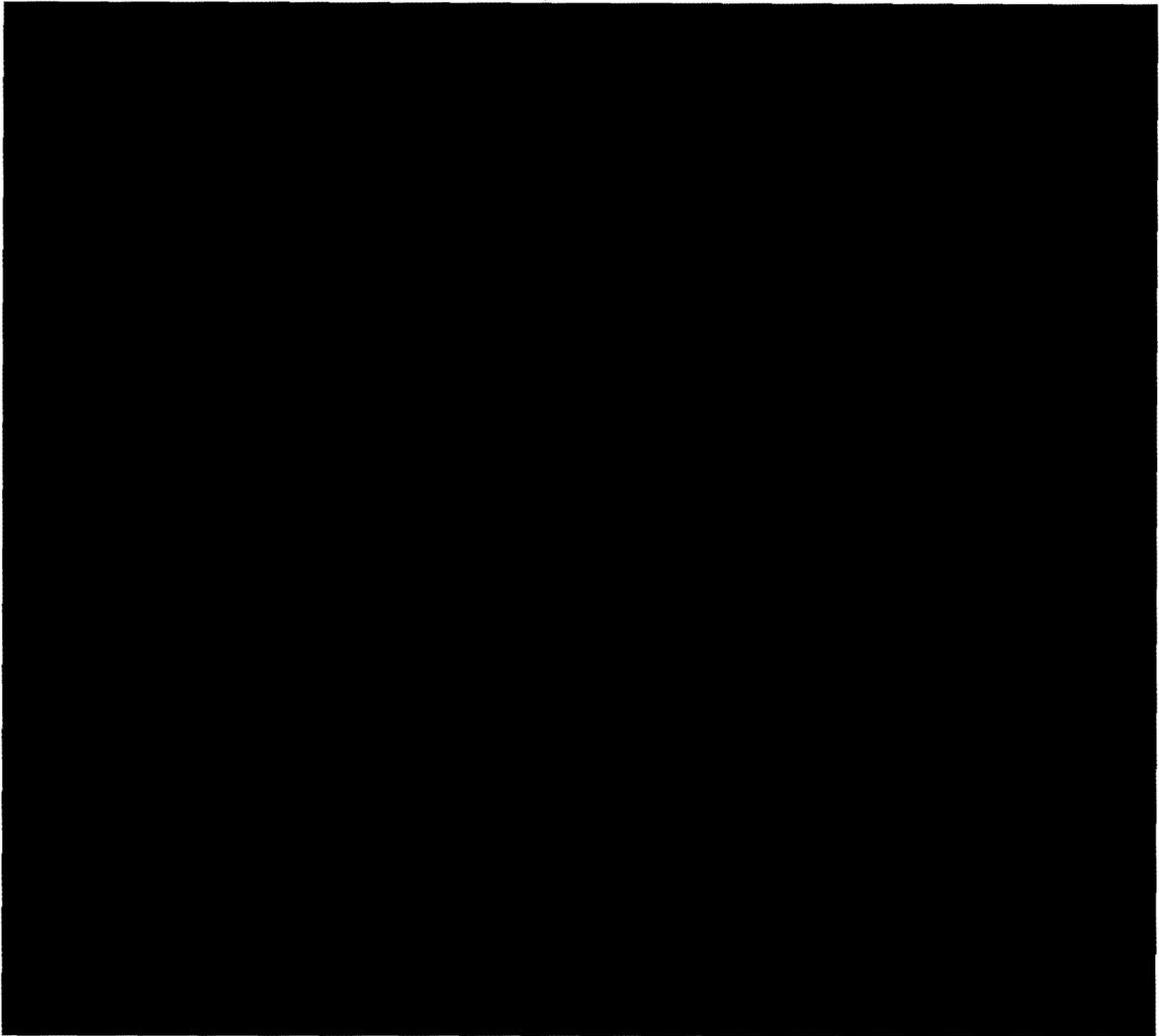
Mr. Chester. No, it was after Castro landed.

So it seems that there was a fellow named Diaz Balart going around whose sister was married to Castro, who was a classmate of Castro in the University, and I am convinced they were Communists during the student days and who was a great pal of Fidel Castro who later left Communism and was in the Government, a young, personable fellow who claimed to have seen the light after he got older and a little more mature.

Well, every time I came in with information, he would say, "Why in the hell don't you bring in something about Diaz Balart?"

And "Why worry about Castro?"

E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)



Senator Dodd. About what time was this?

Mr. Chester. It was about two or three or four months after Arthur Gardner left; that would give you the time. The Cuban Government had assembled a diligence, a file, on Castro that they felt was complete evidence and substantial evidence and documented evidence that Castro was affiliated with the

Communist Party over a period of years, and that this, the military movement in Cuba was sponsored, directed, and commanded by Communist forces, Communist elements.

So, he told, he sent word to the Ambassador he had this information --

Mr. Sourwine. That is, Batista did?

Mr. Chester. To Gardner, and it was available to the United States Government, the results of a great many agents working over a period of years, Cuban agents, but he had not turned it over to anyone in Havana because he had some misgivings about the loyalty or political beliefs of certain members of the American Embassy in Havana.

E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)



Mr. Sourwine. This was two or three months before Gardner left?

Mr. Chester. Yes. At the same time I delivered a

message to Mr. Dulles at the request of the President of Cuba which was that, "Here is the evidence on Castro, and Castro has said publicly that he will destroy the United States Embassies to Cuba," and the President felt it would be ill-timed to remove Gardner -- in addition, rumors that Castro was going to get him, Castro said publicly he would, in less than six months or a year, and he asked me to pass that word [REDACTED] and I did. E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)

And Mr. Dulles said he understood how the President felt, and he would see what could be done. He made no commitments, made no promises, and I think he made it very clear it was not his assignment, but he would be glad to -- and within three or four months time Mr. Gardner was removed.

And by that time, what I had not known was that the sellout of Batista had already been completed in our own Government -- and then you run into the Pawley things and what have you -- but during the time I was around the Embassy I met very, very outspoken favoritism in favor of Castro from people like John Topping, who was political attache and adviser to both Ambassadors, Gardner and Smith.

Senator Dodd. What was his first name?

5. Mr. Chester. John. He was a queer man, and he was openly pro-Castro.

Mr. Sourwine. You have not explained on the record how you were around the Embassy so much. Were you serving in

some capacity for Ambassador Gardner?

Mr. Chester. I thought I mentioned, I don't know whether on the record, but I acted as sort of a messenger boy between Ambassador --

Senator Dodd. Yes, he did.

Mr. Chester. Between the Ambassador and the President of Cuba.

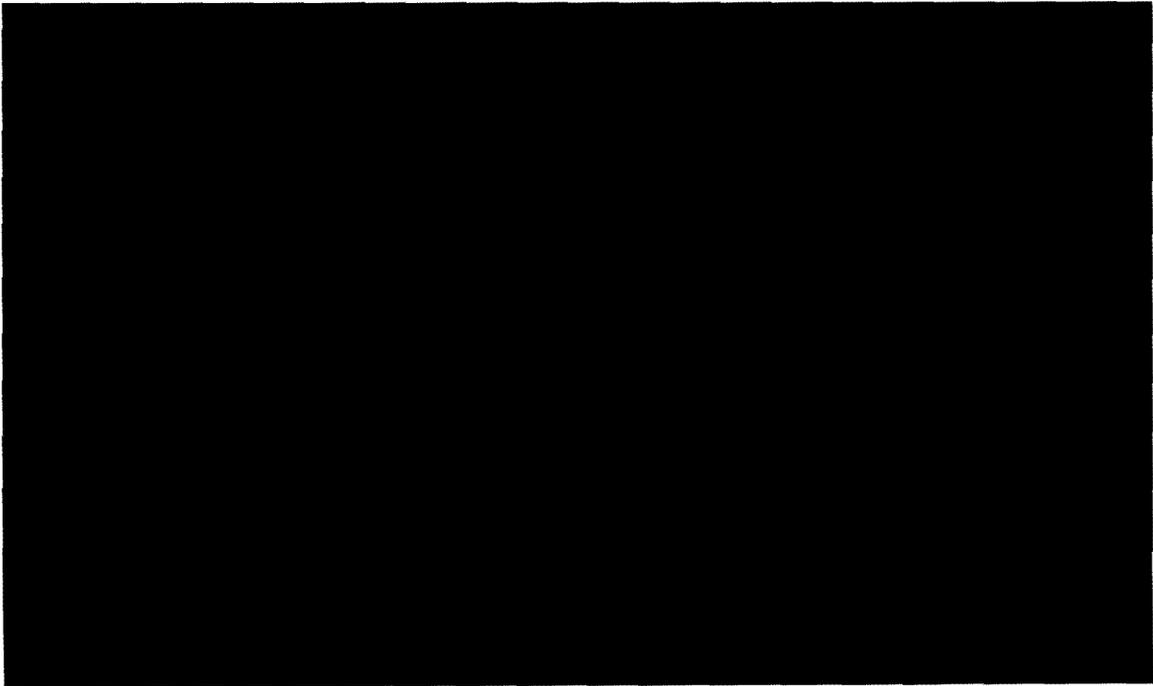
Mr. Sourwine. So you had occasion to be in the Embassy?

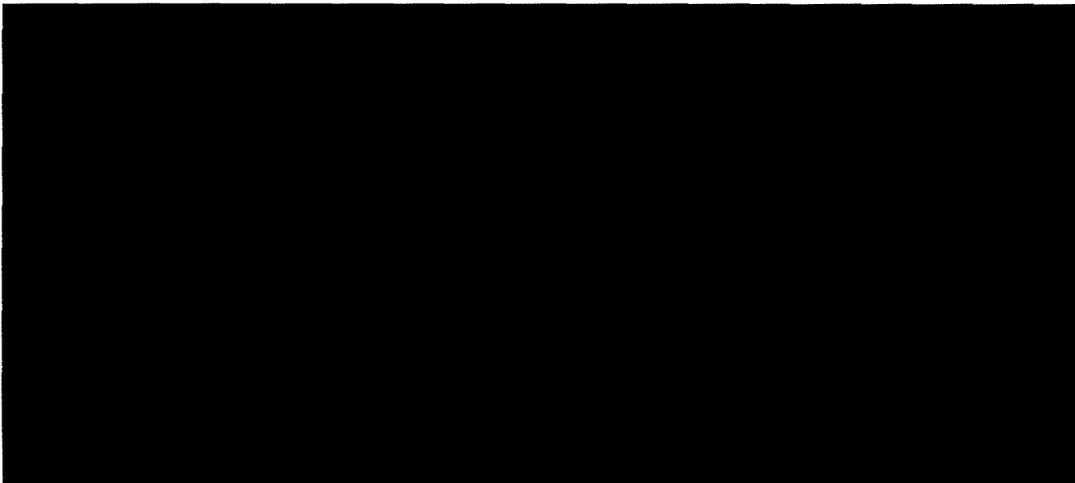
Mr. Chester. I was in the Embassy at least four or five days a week and all of that can be verified if you want to, while you are right here, from Gardner.

Mr. Sourwine. What other evidences of pro-Castro feelings in the Embassy did you see, if any? E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)

Mr. Chester. Well, I got such a mess of it, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and then the Topping thing --





Mr. Chester. Yes.

Mr. Sourwine. During what years, do you know?

Mr. Chester. I would have to guess again. I don't think we realize that we are making a record; we are living. It must have been about '54, '58, somewhere in there -- when did Castro land -- '56, I guess.

Mr. Sourwine. '57.

Mr. Chester. I don't remember, but it was something around '54, early '54 until after Castro had been in there --

Mr. Sourwine. When did Gardner leave?

Mr. Chester. I can't tell you. The calendar fools me. I can time it when I delivered this stuff by Gardner's departure time.

Mr. Sourwine. All right.

Well, you left soon after you made this delivery 



E.O. 13526, section 3.3(b)(1)

Mr. Chester. No --

Mr. Sourwine. 



Mr. Sourwine. Now, you said it became apparent that Batista had been sold down the river, I think were your words, or the sellout.

Mr. Chester. It was now apparent --

Mr. Sourwine. That the sellout was complete.

What do you mean by that?

Mr. Chester. Well, the business of Pawley telling him he had to resign, and then Mr. Smith following that up -- I mean, it looked like a man being sold out.

Mr. Sourwine. You did not know these things at the time?

Mr. Chester. No.

Mr. Sourwine. You didn't leave Batista until the 22nd of December?

Mr. Chester. That is right.

Mr. Sourwine. Pawley saw him on the 17th, you didn't know --

Mr. Chester. You see, during the last year, that is, calendar year '58, I spent half of my time on my place in

Florida and half in Cuba with Batista, and the arrangement was I would check him before I came in to spend the weekend for the list of appointments, or list of work to be done on the coming week, so I saw him on December 22nd and told him I was going to spend Christmas holidays with my family in Florida, and he -- we had spent most of our Christmas holidays together -- and he felt I should bring them down, but I was adamant on spending them at my place in Florida, because my wife wanted to.

He said, "Okay, but be back by the sixth of January, because I had a lot of work to do!"--

Mr. Sourwine. So when you left you did not know you were leaving Batista, the regime went down from under you, and you lost your connection --

Mr. Chester. That is right, and --

Senator Dodd. And you never went back?

Mr. Chester. No. No, because this fellow indicted me, and -- this is not for the record.

(Discussion off the record)

Mr. Sourwine. Would you repeat that?

Mr. Chester. One of the reasons Castro has this tremendous dislike for me is that when he raided my house in Havana immediately after he took over the country, he found certain documents which were the basis for the report I made [REDACTED] some months prior to that. He raided -- it was

a penthouse -- he raided the penthouse seven times, and shot out all the windows, all the mirrors, everything, all my personal property, everything else.

Mr. Sourwine. I think you understand this Committee's position is basically concerned with the security of this country in the Caribbean. We are pursuing the matter of Wieland not to be vindictive about a particular individual, but because it appears to bear on the security of this country and it may be part of a picture in which it will appear that a good many wrong decisions may have been made, not entirely out of error.

Knowing this background of the Committee's interest, do you have any information that you think would be useful to us that you have not told?

Mr. Chester. No. I might if I sat down and reviewed it.

But you would be interested in knowing I told this gentleman (indicating Mr. Cajigas) coming over here that what our Government has to do is to find out where we are going in this thing and quit blaming the errors on ignorance, because it was not ignorance, it was malicious, it was maliciousness.

We are prone to say, well, the poor fellows don't know any better. But that is not true. In my opinion we are going through a very, very difficult period and unless Committee's like yours can do something, it will give the

United States away.

Mr. Sourwine. This may be the last chance we have.

Mr. Chester. I think it is. I have been fighting Communism for 25 years and always having my ears pinned back for it because every time you say you are against Communism, you become a McCarthy-follower.

Mr. Sourwine. The current line of the Communist Party is that anti-Communism is a great weapon against peace, because you are a "warmonger."

Mr. Chester. That is right. That is, I am not pro-Communist, I am anti-Communist -- and, what the hell, that is pro-Communist.

(Whereupon, at 3:30 o'clock p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.)
