

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
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Mark Chalkley
Albany, New York

Dear Mark,

Your letter of September 26 to the Political Committee on the Non-aligned conference was referred to me to answer.

I'm glad you generally liked our coverage of the event. However, you are critical of one point: the treatment of what Castro said about Spain in his speech to that conference.

You note that Castro praises the fact that Spain is not "allowing itself to be drawn into the aggressive NATO military bloc," and that the "non-aligned movement needs friends who are not tied to the imperialist wagon."

Your opinion is that this statement required a critical comment on our part. I disagree. The speech at the Non-aligned conference was given by a head of state to other heads of state and the subject matter of the conference revolved essentially around various aspects of state-to-state relations.

Castro's role at the conference therefore falls under the heading of revolutionary diplomacy, which is different than the approach taken, for instance, by the leader of a party or an international directly seeking to bring the workers and peasants into action.

Of course, Castro appeals over the heads of the leaders to the masses as was so well done in his recent speech at the United Nations. The pressure and revolutionary actions of the masses on a world scale are the only thing that made Cuba's role in the conference and its positive outcome possible. But to do that effectively in the context of the conference, Castro approached it as the head of state seeking common ground with other heads of state.

The Spanish government's decision to send an observer to the conference was an important one and Castro properly noted it. It gave the conference and its Cuban hosts added legitimacy and tended to cut across attempts by U.S. imperialism and its ardent supporters to blockade and discredit both the conference and the Cuban government.

This is part of a broader policy of the Spanish government to advance its own imperialist interests with greater independence of Washington. This has been reflected in Spain's consistent refusal, even under Franco, to participate in the economic boycott of Cuba.

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It is reflected in Spain's official position that Morocco should withdraw from the occupied Western Sahara, and allow the people of that region self-determination.

Spain's course was also demonstrated immediately after the conference of non-aligned nations.

The Spanish government invited Yassir Arafat for an official visit, a big step forward for the Palestine Liberation Organization in gaining official recognition. This gave a big boost to the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle undercutting the U.S.-Israeli refusal to discuss with the PLO or recognize the right of Palestinian self-determination.

Spain abstained at the United Nations on the move, heavily backed by the United States, to seat Pol Pot as Kampuchea's legitimate government.

Spain is also under heavy pressure to join NATO, which it has not yet done.

In my opinion, Castro would have been irresponsible not to take full advantage of these differences between Spanish and U.S. imperialism. After all, don't we think it is good that Spain is not in NATO, and that it adds legitimacy to the PLO?

Castro's diplomatic stance strengthens Spanish working people in demanding that Spain stay out of NATO, refuse support to Pol Pot, etc.

Castro's statement that Spain is "not tied to the imperialist wagon" and has not been "drawn into the aggressive military bloc" carried no implication that Spain is not imperialist, but merely stressed its relative independence from Washington, which is an advantage for Cuba and for the underdeveloped countries.

As for Castro's statement that lining up with U.S. imperialism would damage the Spanish people's "brilliant future," I am frankly not sure what you find objectionable about it. Don't revolutionary socialists think the Spanish working people have a brilliant future (and American working people, too)? Won't that be damaged if Washington gets away with its war plans?

You note that the Spanish comrades criticized Castro's statements during his trip to Spain last year. These really did involve political concessions to the Spanish government, and were criticized in the pages of the Militant.

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But it is a mistake to read errors into Castro's revolutionary diplomacy at the Non-aligned conference because of errors he makes in diplomacy at other times. His statements at the conference were a good example of taking advantage of differences among the imperialists (which can involve a positive approach to one or another power at times) without making political concessions.

Comradely,

Fred Feldman

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