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Conversation with Raul Castro, Minister of Defense
of the Republic of Cuba, 26 March 1962'**

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Summary:

Raul Castro reflects on difficulties in creating a United Party in Cuba, including Anibal Escalante's renegade policies.

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FROM THE JOURNAL OF
S. M. KUDRYAVTSEV

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Raul Castro, Minister of Defense
of the Republic of Cuba

26 March 1962

I met with Raul Castro at my apartment today and had a detailed conversation with him about the situation in the Party and the internal situation in the country in connection with this.

Raul Castro said that a number of difficulties had begun to be felt in the country recently, not only economic, but also of a domestic political nature, which were caused to a certain degree by both the actions of the Americans and the internal counterrevolution as well as by the blunders and mistakes of individual Cuban leaders.

Closely analyzing the developing situation, Fidel, as Raul Castro declared, noticed that the process of the creation of a United Party was going extremely slowly, but recently had stopped completely. Trying to establish the reasons for this phenomenon, Fidel Castro was soon convinced that the primary Party organizations are being created on an incorrect basis, and therefore do not enjoy the trust not only of the workers, but also of the revolutionary-minded elements who have not heretofore been in the Popular Socialist Party [NSP].

Anibal Escalante, Raul Castro continued, who was the secretary for organizational questions in the National Leadership of the United Revolutionary Organizations, held the questions of the creation of the United Party completely in his hands. When doing so he proceeded from the principle of the formation of primary Party organizations primarily from former members of the Popular Socialist Party, slowing the influx into these cells of representatives of other revolutionary organizations in every way, and in particular participants of the "26 July Movement". As a result of such a policy the primary organizations were created, as a rule, of leaders of one or another enterprise or people's estate and people close to them. The Party organizations were essentially sort of combined with the administration, and it was difficult to distinguish where was the Party and where was the local authority. This in turn led to various excesses at the local level. In recent days, stressed Raul Castro, Fidel has personally travelled around a number of primary Party organizations, or rather enterprises, where he held meetings of workers, and established that in the overwhelming majority of cases these primary Party organizations did not enjoy authority from the workers, but essentially the very system of the selection of their members itself compromised the idea of creating a United Party and gave the internal counterrevolution beneficial material for splitting the revolutionary forces of the country.

Raul Castro continued, making use of his position as secretary for organizational questions, Anibal Escalante established one-man control over the security organs, and made appointments without coordination with the Party or Fidel Castro. Recently Anibal Escalante began work to create Party organizations in the armed forces; however he tried to do this on that same basis. Of course, the military comrades, not

having been members of the NSP in the past, protested against such methods of creating Party organizations in the army. Raul Castro noted further, it is necessary to bear in mind that many of our prominent military leaders were actually not previously members of the NSP; however, they were and remain devoted to and a loyal support to Fidel Castro. These military leaders hold Marxist-Leninist positions right now and rightly [zakonno] think that they are not worse Communists than those who were previously in the NSP. Raul Castro noted in this connection that even the Communist Flavio Bravo, who is now the Chief of the Operations Department of the General Staff, resisted Escalante's incorrect policy, understanding its harmfulness and danger. However, until recently Flavio Bravo did not raise this question either to the United Revolutionary Organizations or to Fidel Castro.

Fortunately, continued Raul Castro, Anibal Escalante did not manage to carry out this work in the armed forces. Otherwise there would have been created an extraordinarily serious situation in the army, the consequences of which it is hard to imagine.

In the near future, stressed Raul Castro, Party organizations in the armed forces will be formed on the basis of genuine unity and the selection of the best people in it regardless of which party they belonged to previously.

Raul Castro noted, we young people were sickened and wronged by the paternalism instilled by Anibal Escalante and his supporters. Raul Castro stressed, we, including Fidel, consider ourselves the same Communists devoted to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism as the old Communists, for example, Blas Roca, Escalante, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, and others. Raul Castro said, we fought against the Batista dictatorship no less actively, and in a number of cases more actively, and right now we are fighting for the development of Cuba along a socialist path. Therefore, for example, Escalante's line, when he tried to keep such eminent figures of the revolution as Juan Almeida, Guillermo Garcia, Sergio del Valle, and others from the Party leadership is absolutely incomprehensible and harmful.

Raul Castro continued, Fidel was very alarmed by the fact that the decision about uniting all the revolutionary forces was being performed incorrectly, inasmuch inside this union, as before, there continued a peculiar faction of old Communists who did not want to unite to the end, but wanted to preserve their special positions in the new United Party. Fidel Castro got this impression as a result of the incorrect policy of Anibal Escalante which, as has now become clear, the former leadership of the NSP also did not share for many years; however, earlier it did not want to talk to Fidel Castro about this.

Anibal Escalante, making use of the sickly condition of Blas Roca (an illness of the cardiovascular system), held the Party leadership in his hands in the past and in a number of cases sidestepped Blas Roca. Recently, making use of his influence, Anibal Escalante actually pushed Blas Roca into the background, which naturally caused a number of difficulties inside the former NSP leadership.

Therefore, when Fidel Castro raised the question of the incorrect actions of Anibal Escalante, all the leaders of the former NSP supported the position of the General Secretary of the ORO and told him about their past differences with Escalante. Only his brother, Cesar Escalante, asked that his resignation be accepted, although on the whole joining the common opinion. Fidel Castro categorically objected to this, and it was suggested to Cesar Escalante that he remain in the ORO National Leadership as before.

Raul Castro stressed, we are confident that the decision to remove Anibal Escalante from the ORO leadership will improve the situation in the Party and promote the strengthening of the unity of the revolutionary forces of the country and the rapid

creation of a militant [bojevaya] Marxist-Leninist Party.

Raul Castro continued, in his television speech today, 26 March, Fidel Castro will explain the tasks and forms of work of the United Revolutionary Organizations and condemn the incorrect methods of Party leadership employed by Anibal Escalante.

Raul Castro informed me in this connection that [in] light of the recent moves in the National Leadership of the ORO a decision had been made to appoint him Second Secretary of the ORO and Vice Prime Minister of the country.

In return, I congratulated Raul Castro on these appointments and wished him success for the good of socialist Cuba.

In the course of further conversation Raul Castro also informed me that the ORO leadership had adopted a decision to replace the Party leadership in four provinces: Havana, Pinar del Rio, Oriente, and Matanzas, strengthening it with reliable and capable people. In Havana former secretary of the provincial committee Silvio Quintana has already been replaced by Joel [Khoehl] Domenech, who was previously was one of the leaders of the youth movement of Cuba. Some moves will also be made in the security organs. In particular, evidently department chief Malmierca, who was appointed by Anibal Escalante without Fidel Castro's consent, will be removed from [his] position. Abrantes, who was previously the aide-de-camp and secretary of Fidel Castro, has already been appointed to the security organs.

In reply to my question, could not the hasty removal of a considerable number of old Communists from their posts entail a revival of anti-Communist sentiments in the country, which are still alive and being kindled by the internal counterrevolution, Raul Castro replied that, of course, such a danger exists. He said further that Fidel Castro well understands such a danger, and therefore long resisted a public discussion of these questions, preferring to carry them out without any publications or open statements.

A decision was made to send Blas Roca in order to the grass roots [na meste] to correctly explain to the provincial Party organizations that in this case it was not a matter of beating [izbienie] Communists, but about removing incapable people who had slowed the process of the revolutionary merger of the country's strength.

At the end of the conversation Raul Castro repeatedly stressed that the measures adopted by the National Leadership will promote the consolidation of the revolutionary forces of the country and the swiftest advancement of Cuba along a socialist path.

The rest of the conversation touched on some general questions.

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