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Record of the meeting on 3 March 1986 between Erich Honecker and Fidel Castro

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Summary:

Record of the meeting on March 8, 1986 between Honecker and Castro. Topics include
plans to celebrate the impending 40th anniversary of the GDR, the Cuban government's
relations with the Catholic Church, the arms race, U.S. imperialism and
importing/exporting of Cuban goods.

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Record

of the meeting on 3 March 1986 between Comrade Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Social Unity Party [SED] and Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, and Fidel Castro, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and Chairman of the State Council and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba.

Comrade Erich Honecker warmly welcomed Comrade Fidel Castro on behalf of the delegation of the SED and on his own behalf. He noted that the visit to Cuba by several members of the party and governmental leadership of the GDR- Comrades Kurt Hager, Egan Krenz, Horst Sindermann, and Gerhard Schiirer just in the last several months - is an indication of the abiding and friendly relations between the two countries.

If it were known in the GDR that [representatives from the two countries] were meeting again, this would be a cause of great rejoicing throughout the entire republic.

He said that the SED and all of the workers of the GDR are currently actively engaged in preparing for the XI Party Congress of the SED, while the Communist Party of Cuba has just successfully concluded its III Party Congress. Comrade Honecker mentioned that he had spoken by telephone with Comrade Egan Krenz and had been informed that the work was proceeding well at home and the preparations for the XI Party Congress were on schedule. The Party Congress will take place from 16 to 21 April and will culminate in a gala event commemorating the 40th anniversary of the founding of the SED in Germany. As is known, the Communist Party of Germany was founded at the end of 1918/beginning of 1919 at a time characterized by revolution. However, the traditions of our party extend all the way back to the Federation of Communists. This is appropriately incorporated into the SED program. Comrade Honecker added that he does not, however, want to dwell on the past- rather, he wants to express that we are very gratified by the report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba on the III Party Congress and how it went. The SED's hope for all Cuban comrades is that all of the resolutions will be implemented successfully. The III Party Congress will undoubtedly have far-reaching positive effects on Cuba and on development in Latin America overall, where important social processes are underway. Comrade Honecker referred to his speech during his visit to Cuba; in the speech he emphasized this point in particular. What is important for the GDR is that we accomplish everything that we have agreed to.

Not only did Comrade Castro champion the cause of the canceling Latin American debt- his appearance was highly valued by the SED party leadership but he also sat down with representatives of the Catholic church, as was evident.

Comrade Fidel Castro: In Cuba the Church differs from the Church in the rest of Latin America in that it is small in numbers and is not in agreement with the representatives of the "Theology of Liberation". Latin America is what interests the Communist Party of Cuba. Given the new situation, and the social movement that is underway, we also speak to representatives of the Catholic church, not because it is a force, but because it is in agreement with our party's policies.

However, the Cuban church is closely connected to Cuban emigres and can therefore be used as a tool for influencing them. The Cuban Communist Party is aware of the Church's character and will not be deluded by the Church. However, there must be discussions with this force. This is why meetings were recently held with representatives of the clergy, which has alleviated our situation. This tactic has also proved effective with regard to Latin America. One should keep in mind that the "People's Church" developed within the Catholic Church and represents an important

political force with progressive inclinations. This can be seen in Brazil, for example. The disparities between the People's Church and the reactionary Catholic clergy must be exploited in the interests of the struggle against reactionary Catholicism and imperialist hegemony in Latin America. The task now is to combine and unify the numerous forces that oppose the imperialist dictatorship and that are socially so different.

In the past, it has proved difficult in Cuba to draw the Church into such policies because the Church has primarily represented the interests of the major landholders. The high-ranking Catholic clergy has been composed mostly of foreigners. This is the reason they have been so conservative and mediocre. The Church in Cuba can be controlled. But it is important to win it over to a position against US imperialism.

Comrade Erich Honecker: The clergy plays an important role. It is understood that one must make use of anything that can help Cuba. A dialog with the Church does just this and does not harm Cuba.

Comrade Fidel Castro: This Cuban position is supported and actively pursued by the Communist parties in Latin America. Today even believers would fight in the ranks of the Latin American Communists. The talks initiated by the Cuban party leadership should eliminate any remaining obstacles on the path to cooperation.

Imperialism is in a profound crisis. The future of the US is not assured. The US escalated the arms race, its debt is growing and is currently \$250 billion. Its budget deficit continues to grow and has reached \$350 billion.

The US built new battle cruisers, but lost more and more ground in the competition among the main centers of imperialism. Japan, on the other hand, gained ground, for instance, in the chemical industry. Given this background, protectionism is growing in the US, which further aggravates imperialist dichotomies among countries, especially in western Europe. The US has abandoned foreign diplomacy and now practices pure extortion. In Latin America, as well, the positions of those who work against the dictatorship of debt and against the protectionism of the US became stronger.

Although Reagan asserts that not one square centimeter of ground has been lost to the Communists since he took office, his policies are creating a climate in which millions of square kilometers could be conveyed to the Communists. The risk of social explosions and the radicalization of important political forces continue to grow. The Reagan administration is not able to break the will of the people in Central America, e.g., in El Salvador or Nicaragua.

Comrade Erich Honecker remarked that in the next several days he will speak with Comrade Schafik Handal, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of El Salvador, and that he is therefore interested in an assessment of the situation in that country.

Comrade Fidel Castro: Over the past five years, the revolutionaries in El Salvador have mounted great resistance and skillfully adapted to the tactics of the US and to the constant flow of money and weapons for the regime. Morally they are far superior to their foes. During these years they gained experience in battle and matured. If the US were to intervene, they would create an explosive situation. El Salvador can be compared to a powder keg. It is possible that rapid changes could occur in the country.

The capitalist crisis that has afflicted all of the Latin American countries is more profound than the global economic crisis of the 1930s. No one can say with certainty that the Reagan administration will not intervene militarily in El Salvador or

Nicaragua. This speaks for the unpredictability of the most reactionary circles in the US. And yet there is no future for their policies.

Comrade Erich Honecker: The US truly does have tremendous problems in many respects. US Secretary of State Ikle's most recent attendance at a meeting in Munich is indicative of this; he asserted that the Reagan administration is unsatisfied with the western Europeans and demanded that they stop hesitating and clearly commit to the US. It is telling that the EC did not comply with US demands that it join in sanctions against Libya. The Kohl government was among those that declined this presumptuous command.

The western European countries declined because the damages for them would have been too great.

Ikle presented the western Europeans with yet another series of demands and remonstrances - it is astounding how great the differences are between the White House and western Europe. Some of the western European governments, most of them belonging to NATO, support the Star Wars program. On the other hand, their resistance to attempts by the US to burden western Europe with US foreign policy is growing. Ikle demanded that western Europe jointly assume responsibility with the US in all parts of the world, and not only in words, but also in deeds and with financial means.

US imperialism is encountering problems in western Europe and is currently attempting to counter this pressure in that it threatens some of the allies with the withdrawal of US military protection if they continue on their course. This results in interesting new developments.

It is easy to understand that Latin America's interests are different from those of the US. What we are experiencing [along with the rest of Latin America] demonstrates that the Yankees and their policies are not becoming more popular but rather are becoming less popular.

Comrade Fidel Castro: They are not popular anywhere.

Comrade Erich Honecker: But they are able to undertake steps that could be dangerous. Nevertheless, one has the impression that Cuba's security situation has improved.

Comrade Fidel Castro: In fact the enhancement of Cuba's defense readiness has contributed to this. It has become more difficult to undertake military action against Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

But there are also adverse factors. The drop in oil prices has further aggravated the situation in Latin America. The situation in Mexico is catastrophic, and has been exacerbated compared to last year. At that time, Mexico had to devote 70 per cent of its oil exports to debt. This year Mexico will have to use all of the proceeds from its oil exports and will still only be able to meet less than 80 per cent of its interest payments.

Comrade Erich Honecker: The Reagan administration has recently made numerous attempts to reduce its domestic and foreign debt.

Comrade Fidel Castro: They have enacted a law that is intended to force them to reduce their deficit automatically. But it is unconstitutional. What they are doing is absurd.

Comrade Erich Honecker: Their laws could in fact work against them.

Comrade Fidel Castro: agreed and also alluded to the Reagan administration's attempts to replace its puppets in Haiti and the Philippines.

Comrade Erich Honecker: They are also trying to insert a new Pinochet, which is not easy.

Comrade Fidel Castro: We will see what happens in Chile. It is not so easy to find the right figure. No one knows exactly how the situation in Latin America will play out. Nothing the bourgeois governments and middle classes have shown and attempted has improved the situation. The high foreign debt has made it abundantly clear that there is no escape from the current situation. The reality is that any resolution to this problem must be political. If one country in Latin America could be persuaded to suspend its foreign debt payments and other countries were to support this position, this could initiate a chain reaction.

Comrade Erich Honecker: Which would have major repercussions. Since his last visit to Cuba it has become clear that the general crisis of capitalism has intensified and the forces of social progress have swelled. Cuba's situation has certainly improved. Cuba has become stronger. In addition, the conference, especially Fidel Castro's address, made some headway with the debt problem; there was great international participation in the conference, as well.

The SED appreciated this very much. That which so many do not want to acknowledge is true --namely, that imperialism must go to absurd lengths in its difficulties.

Comrade Fidel Castro: agreed and added that the Imperialists are opportunists, despite everything, and calculate their actions.

Comrade Erich Honecker: But they also miscalculate. 140,000 businesses failed in the US in the last year alone. A similar trend can be identified in all of the major imperialist countries. At first production was somewhat active, but then it dropped off again. Unemployment is high and even on the rise. The number of bankruptcies and closings is growing. In the FRG alone, 17,000 companies have been affected. Capital is being concentrated. The big fish are gobbling up the little fish. This is a law that Karl Marx discovered.

Comrade Fidel Castro had the following remarks on a question by Comrade Erich Honecker about work by operations in Cuba that were started up by the GDR and about bilateral cooperation:

The operations are working well. The "Karl Marx" cement factory produces 1.2 million tons, but has not reached capacity yet. Cuba is experiencing difficulties in exporting [the cement] due to the capitalist economic crisis.

There are also problems due to a lack of apartments and social services. This has caused some of the workers trained in the GDR to move to other jobs. In addition, speaking subjectively the management is inadequate and not very efficient.

As is the case for the entire Cuban economy, efforts are currently focused on increasing efficiency and reducing oil consumption.

The brewery is functioning well. The beer is of high quality. But it is not enough in

terms of quantity. Cuba wants to increase production.

The textile factory is also doing well. The SED delegation to the III Party Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba saw this for itself. With this factory the GDR made an important contribution to supplying the people with high-quality goods that are urgently needed and that are prized by the people.

The ceramics plant is also doing well. All of the Plan goals were achieved.

Comrade Fidel Castro had a number of suggestions for continuing cooperation; Comrade Erich Honecker responded to these as follows:

Over the last five years, foreign trade revenues were 9.5 billion Marks. An increase is anticipated in the next few years.

The grounds cited for expanding beer production are sound. Cuba has the technical equipment, experience, and trained personnel. The GDR agrees to build a second brewery.

There is assured demand for the sale of Cuban sugar. In addition to the USSR, the GDR will take a portion of the sugar in the future, as well.

The allocation of oranges shall be handled as has already been discussed.

The GDR will use imports, primarily from Cuba, to cover its demand for citrus fruit and citrus concentrates.

Training of Cuban workers in the GDR is also important. Approximately 10,000 workers were trained in 1985 alone.

Pursuant to the "Long-Term Program of Economic Cooperation, Socialization, Cooperation, and Social Integration," by 1990 the GDR will take part in the production and processing of nickel.

Comrade Erich Honecker agreed to Comrade Fidel Castro's suggestion that 2 million Havana cigars be imported, and that 3 - 5 scientists in the fields of biotechnology and genetic research be sent to Cuba.

Comrade Fidel Castro: A new scientific institute with equipment worth \$25 million is scheduled to open in Cuba on 1 July 1986. He further made a request for experts in the foodstuffs industry, especially experts in the production of candies and sausage.

Comrade Erich Honecker agreed and suggested either that GDR specialists be sent [to Cuba] or that Cuban experts come to the GDR.

Comrade Fidel Castro: Cuba also has substantial unused capacity in the field of tourism and is interested in increasing the number of tourists from the GDR.

Comrade Erich Honecker responded positively.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Comrade Fidel Castro expressed his desire to meet with Comrade

Erich Honecker again in Berlin, and Comrade Erich Honecker agreed to this.

The meeting occurred in an open and warm atmosphere of brotherly unity.