

January 11, 1961

Record of Conversations between Soviet Ambassador to Cuba Sergey Kudryavtsev and Che Guevara

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Summary:

A record of two conversations between Soviet Ambassador to Cuba Sergey Kudryavtsev and Che Guevara, recorded in Kudryavtsev's diary. They discuss economic relations and financial trades, especially the Cuban purchase of Soviet gold. They also discuss how mobilization in Cuba has led to a decrease in the activity of the counterrevolutionaries, as well as the possible military intervention from the United States.

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From S. M. Kudryavtsev's Diary

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RECORD OF CONVERSATION

with President of the National Bank of Cuba

Ernesto Guevara

11 January and 17 January 1961

In accordance with my instructions from the State Bank of the USSR, I informed Guevara that at the present time we could sell up to thirty tons of pure gold in blocks no less than 99 proof at the fixed gold prices in London on the day of payment in pounds to the National Bank of Cuba. In accordance with the preference of the National Bank of Cuba, the purchased gold could be deposited in the State Bank of the USSR in Moscow in the National Bank's disposal, or, by instruction of the latter, at the disposal of third persons or organizations. The State Bank will not charge any fees for depositing the gold. The payment for the gold purchased by the National Bank will be processed on the day of depositing of the relevant amount of gold to the account of the National Bank of Cuba. The State Bank will process transactions in pounds. Then I said that of course we believe that by the time of the gold purchase the National Bank will have the needed resources in its account at the State Bank of the USSR. Then I informed Guevara that the State Bank would send specifications for the deposited gold to the National Bank of Cuba through our Embassy. The National Bank, on its part, can give instructions to the State Bank to give the authorized representatives of the National Bank in Moscow a part or the whole of the gold deposited in the State Bank in its name at any time, or to transfer a part or the whole of the deposited gold with given destination to other locations. All expenses incurred in connection with transportation of gold to the locations specified by the National Bank will be the responsibility of the National Bank. The details regarding transportation of gold and relevant transactions will be coordinated between the State Bank and the National Bank in each individual case. All correspondence regarding these issues should be conducted confidentially through our Embassy in Havana or the Cuban Embassy in Moscow. Guevara said that he was very grateful that the State Bank of the USSR was willing to satisfy the requests of the National Bank regarding the purchase of gold. We will probably buy part of the proposed gold because at the present time our gold reserves have decreased significantly, noted Guevara, and we probably will not be able to buy all 30 tons. However, before I give you a final answer to this proposal, said Guevara, I would have to discuss this issue with Fidel Castro. We decided to return to this issue some time later.

On 17 January, Guevara informed me that he consulted with Fidel Castro on the issue of buying gold from the Soviet Union. As a result, it was decided to buy gold for the overall sum of 20 million dollars from the State bank. The Cuban government, said Guevara, presently has 25 million dollars in its account in Mosnarbank in London. In addition, they are presently processing a transfer of 8 million dollars. However, the sum of over 20 million dollars that the Cuban government has at its disposal, is needed for other expenses. Guevara stated that they agreed to purchase approximately 20 tons of gold on the conditions proposed by the State Bank, which we discussed in our conversation on 11 January.

In the conversation with Guevara, in addition to the question mentioned above, we touched upon some other issues of the situation that are developing in Cuba. In this respect, Guevara expressed the following considerations.

The internal political situation, in the opinion of the Cuban government, does not give any reason for concern at the present time. The danger of a possible American invasion of Cuba has united the masses around the government even more. The implemented mobilization of the people's militia helped the Cuban government to be assured of the further growth of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses and their readiness to defend their Motherland, on the one hand. On the other hand, the mobilization helped the government to discover a number of organizational drawbacks and mistakes, which are being corrected now, and that in its turn will enable it to further strengthen the entire governmental structure, and to improve the preparedness and the organization both of the people's militia and the army in general.

Using the experience of the mobilization, the Cuban government, continued Guevara, drew a conclusion that the people's militia was the main force on which it could rely on fully both in the political and in the military respect. During the period of mobilization, the internal counterrevolution has noticeably decreased its activity. This can be explained, on the one hand, by the measures introduced by the government, beginning from 4 January, and by the general demoralization of these forces hostile to the Cuban revolution, which were hoping that the US would come to their rescue immediately after the breakup of its relations with Cuba, on the other hand.

At the present time, continued Guevara, we are observing the flight of the counterrevolutionaries from the cities, and especially Havana, to the mountains. The main center of concentration of counterrevolutionaries is located in the area of Escambray mountains, where there are up to 400 armed counterrevolutionaries overall. Those counterrevolutionary forces in Escambray are not united, and they represent separate spots of resistance. Presently, the revolutionary army and the people's militia, said Guevara, have surrounded all the locations where those counterrevolutionaries are [located]. Gradually, the army and the people's militia are pursuing elimination of those [groups]. The operations for clearing mountain forests of those counterrevolutionary groups will continue for some time, noted Guevara, because the counterrevolutionaries avoid clashes with the people's militia and hide carefully in the mountain caves. Those isolated and surrounded counterrevolutionary groups in Escambray, noted Guevara, in our opinion, do not present any danger to the government today. The most [important] counterrevolutionary group in the province of Pinar del Rio, said Guevara, had been totally liquidated.

In the course of further conversation, we touched upon the question of the danger of possible direct military intervention on the part of the U.S. against Cuba. In this connection, Guevara said that in his opinion, danger of a direct aggression on the part of the American armed forces has essentially passed. It is impossible for Eisenhower, for a number of internal reasons to embark upon an aggression against Cuba now. In any case, Kennedy and the Democrats do not want the Republicans to put them in a difficult situation on the eve of assuming power. It could be seen clearly from Kennedy's statement regarding the break-up of relations with Cuba. Besides, in the last several days, the Democrats' press started to actively reveal the training of the Cuban counterrevolutionaries by the Eisenhower government in Florida, Guatemala, on the Swan Island and in other locations for an attack on Cuba. Such revelations, noted Guevara, in our opinion, clearly speak to the fact that Kennedy does not want to associate himself with this kind of operations from the start, and wants to make it impossible for Eisenhower beforehand.

In the course of our conversation, I told him that everything said notwithstanding, they should still exercise caution and restraint in order not to give the Americans any pretext for any provocations against Cuba, especially in the days left before Kennedy assumes power.

Guevara said that he personally understood it very well. However, noted Guevara jokingly, presently we do not have anything where we could respond to the

Americans' new challenges as we have done it in the past. All that remains is essentially the American base in Guantanamo. However, in this question, of course, we will exhibit maximum caution, said Guevara in conclusion.

The rest of the conversation dealt with general issues.

USSR Ambassador to the Republic of Cuba (Signature). Kudryavtsev)