

November 24, 1967

**Memorandum of Conversation between
Czechoslovak Communist Party official Vladimir
Koucky and Cuban Communist Party official Carlos
Rafael Rodriguez, Prague, 24 November 1967**

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Summary:

Memorandum of Conversation between Czechoslovak Communist Party official Vladimir Koucky and Cuban Communist Party official Carlos Rafael Rodriguez that took place in Prague.

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Record of a conversation of c. Vladimir Koucky with a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CP of Cuba, c. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez (November 24, 1967)

At the very beginning of his visit with c. V. Koucky, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez indicated that he had also other worries than his health. After c. [Soviet Premeir Alexei] Kosygin's visit in Havana [in late June 1967], relations with the Soviet Union began to improve rapidly, but later deteriorated again, which was reflected in composition of the delegation to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Moscow [earlier in November 1967].

According to Carlos Rafael, [Fidel] Castro holds c. Kosygin in very high esteem for his honest and firm attitude. This was indeed apparent in the fact that much more attention was given to c. Kosygin's departure from Havana than to his arrival.

Therefore, it was initially decided that the President of the Republic of Cuba c. Osvaldo Dorticos would lead the delegation to the celebrations. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez was to join the delegation in Europe. The situation changed when the Moscow Pravda published articles of comrades [Chilean communist Luis] Corvalan and [Argentine communist Rudolfo] Ghioldi, in which the line of Cuba's CP was indirectly criticized. Minister of Health Machado Ventura, MD, was then appointed as the head of the delegation, and Carlos Rafael was told that he was not to participate in the celebrations. Carlos Rafael expressed regret that he was not in the homeland; he thought that he would have been able to persuade Fidel not to change the delegation.

Comrade Koucky pointed out that not only the level of the delegation, but also the fact that the head of the Cuban delegation did not speak at the celebrations of an important anniversary, gave the capitalist press an opportunity to write about a deep rift between Cuba and the socialist countries, especially the USSR. The attitude of the delegation put all participants in the celebrations in Moscow in a very awkward situation.

Carlos Rafael Rodriguez did not respond directly to this remark. He said, however, that we certainly know that the leadership of Cuban CP is not homogeneous, and there are also people who do not realize the importance of friendship with the USSR, and some might not even wish it. It is reflected in Cuban press as well, and for instance the chief editor of "Granma", [Isidoro] Malmierca [Peoli], was removed due to a questionable stance of the magazine on the importance of the USSR.

Carlos Rafael Rodriguez also expressed the view that both sides should suspend polemics between Cuba and Communist parties. The Cuban side wants that.

That's why it currently does not publish principles governing the build-up of the economy. It wants to avoid controversy about problems that Cuba is solving in a completely different way than other socialist countries. For this reason, economic and party workers are being instructed internally.

Comrade Koucky responded that we have a sincere interest in Cuban friends being able to avoid mistakes and errors that we and other fraternal countries had to

overcome. In this sense, Cuban economic theories cause considerable concern. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez then recalled this year's visits by representatives of the Italian Communist Party [PCI] in Cuba. He said that Italian comrades had many meetings with Cuban leaders, saw many things up close, and their whole stay was focused on a fruitful exchange of views. He believes that such informal discussions and contacts between important parties can be very beneficial. At the same time, he offered for consideration a possible visit of comrade Koucky to Cuba.

Carlos Rafael also spoke how he himself strives to clarify views on fundamental questions, and said that for instance on issues such as [Régis] Debray's brochures "Revolution in the Revolution?", which was published in Cuba, he prepared a memorandum for the party leadership, in which he pointed out the erroneous views Debray expressed.¹ He believes that his intervention was not entirely without effect.

As for the Communist Party of Cuba's relations with other fraternal parties of the Latin American continent, he said that they worsened in many ways, mainly due to a lack of understanding. Lack of contacts does not help either because views are often spread that do not contribute constructively to the common cause, and can even be exploited by some people.

Similarly, in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the CP of Cuba, especially in the Committee on International Relations, there is a group of young people who lack erudition or experience and are damaging the relations of the Cuba's CP with the Soviet Union, the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], and other fraternal parties. However, these people will be removed.

Carlos Rafael then expressed the view that European communist parties and maybe even the CPCz are not objectively informed of developments in Cuba. He said that since Prague is an important crossroads, many people are passing through, and not all of them inform objectively. He was pointing it out already when in Prague during the XIII. Congress.²

As an example, he mentioned false information about the relationship of the Cuban leadership with China. Only 4 members of the Cuban government were at the reception held at the Chinese Embassy in Havana, and none of the leaders came. Of course, the Chinese invited many people and achieved a great turnout. But these were only insignificant people. Despite this, one Embassy of a socialist country - Carlos Rafael said that it was not ours - considered the reception as evidence of deepening Cuban-Chinese relations. The Consul of the Soviet Embassy himself allegedly refuted such a view.

The result of distorted information is the more reserved attitude on our [Czechoslovak] side, which was reflected, according to Carlos Rafael, after Ernesto ["Che"] Guevara's death [in Bolivia in October 1967]. Our press did not pay enough attention to this tragic event, which had to be received negatively in Havana.

Comrade Koucky noted that a telegram of condolence was approved and sent to him, and a report was published about it. It is common practice in cases involving similar events, and it reflects the mindset of our readers. Carlos Rafael said that Cuban officials considered our attention to the death of Che Guevara to be inadequate, and he himself did, too. He said that during the recent stopover in Prague, c. [Frantisek] Penc welcomed him and failed to console him, even though it was their first meeting shortly after Guevara's death.

Carlos Rafael further complained about the "poorly reasoned article" (published in the Reporter), which could not benefit anyone.

Comrade Koucky remarked that neither the character of the article nor that of the

journal is indicative of the official view. He also said that our workers have an ongoing keen interest in events of the national liberation movement and in problems of the international communist movement, are asking about Cuba's position, and we have to explain.

To that Carlos Rafael replied that the response to Guevara's death was much more vivid in the Western press than in ours. He mentioned the Italian press as an example. To the remark that our press has a different mission and character, Carlos Rafael said that, for example, the Bulgarian press devoted much more space to the event than ours. He said that especially appreciated was the personal condolence of c. [Soviet leader Leonid I.] Brezhnev to the widow of Ernesto Guevara.

Carlos Rafael also indicated that there is a discontent over our relations with the Communist Party of Venezuela, with whom the CP of Cuba has deep divisions.

Comrade Koucky noted that we have had these relations with the CP of Venezuela even at the time when its leaders, such as c. [Eduardo] Gallegos Mancera, were enthusiastic supporters of the Cuban position. We thought this was the affair of only Venezuelan comrades. If the CP of Venezuela now holds a different opinion, and decided to change its position, we consider it again its inalienable right.

Carlos Rafael Rodriguez countered that people like c. Gallegos Mancera swayed the Cuban side to interfere with development in Venezuela; they promised a fight, received a lot of help, but did not fulfill promises; instead began attacking Fidel Castro when he stood up for those who continued to fight.

In the next part of the interview in connection with the development of Cuba's views on the issues of the international communist movement, Carlos Rafael sought to defend Cuba's rejection of convening the World Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties, and its absence in the preparations for it. He referred at that to [Uruguayan communist party head] c. [Rodney] Arismendi. Carlos Rafael did not reply to c. Koucky's remark that he was surprised because he talked with Arismendi and knew his views.

Unlike during the last meeting, Carlos Rafael was reserved. He did not even mention the latest development in the CP of Cuba, and did not indicate, whom Fidel Castro meant by the alleged "micro fraction" that he spoke in the closing speech at the OLAS [Organization of Latin American Solidarity] conference [in Havana in August 1967].

The meeting took place on Friday, November 24, and the interview lasted two hours.

[1] Ed. note: a reference to Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967)

[2] Ed. note: this refers to the 13th Congress of the CPCz on 31 May-4 June 1966; Rodriguez co-headed the Cuban delegation. I thank Mark Kramer for supplying this information.