

December 12, 1963

**Memorandum of Conversation, Vladimir Koucky,
Secretary of Czechoslovak Communist Party (CPCz)
Central Committee, and Carlos Rafael Rodriguez,
Head of Cuba's National Institute of Agrarian
Reform (INRA), Prague**

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Summary:

The memorandum includes topics discussed between CPCz Secretary Vladimír Koucký and Cuban government official Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. Rodríguez lists points of misunderstanding between Cuba and other socialist countries. Discussion topics include Chinese publications in Cuba, Cuba's unique approach to socialist revolution, the proposed nuclear-free zone in Latin America, and building socialism under various conditions (e.g. Islam's role in Algeria), among others. Rodríguez encourages more communication among socialist nations to prevent misunderstanding.

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Record of a conversation with c. Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, member of the leadership of the Unified Party of Socialistic Revolution of Cuba (12/12/1963)

C. Rodriguez said, just like in his first conversation with c. [CPCz Presidium member Otakar] Simunek in the evening of the 11th of December 1963, that according to the opinion of the Cuban leadership, some misunderstandings persist with regard to relations between Cuba and the CSSR. At that, the Cuban leadership think that these misunderstandings do not involve the leading comrades. To c. Koucky's remark that misunderstandings can happen in various discussions and talks but these are no fundamental differences, and that misunderstandings can often be caused by certain nervousness because there are problems in every party and every country, c. Rodriguez said that according to his opinion, it is not just occasional nervousness but that some political, diplomatic and economic cadres display in many different ways some uncertainty related to the Cuban policy.

Leading Cuban comrades think that the ambassador to Cuba c. [Vladimir] Pavlicek, for instance, understands fully the complexity of Cuban issues while the rest of embassy officials and other diplomats in Cuba do not. The same applies to the Soviet embassy where Ambassador c. [Aleksandr Alekseyev] Alexeiev has very good contacts with leading comrades, and understands the situation in Cuba very well while the other diplomats are not as advanced. C. Rodriguez emphasized that the highest Cuban officials, including Fidel Castro, have very close personal contacts with especially these two embassies.

C. Rodriguez continued with the fact that one of the things that in the opinion of Cuban comrades caused some confusion, is promotion of Chinese publications, articles, and materials in Cuba. He said that the Cuban comrades could not agree with this Chinese activity and after consultation with c. Alekseyev, the Soviet ambassador to Cuba, c. [Emilio] Aragonés talked with the Chinese Ambassador in order to limit the scope of publications and materials published in the Spanish language.

It should be noted, c. Rodriguez further said, that in connection with all these activities of the Chinese Ambassador, a false opinion was created as if Cuba supported the Chinese views. It shows particularly in this case that some comrades do not understand the conditions of the Cuban revolution. If a communist party took power in Cuba, there would have been a different situation. However, old Cuban communists now see even with the help of Fidel Castro, they are achieving number of successes, and they are aware that if Cuba were to use traditional forms of Communist activities while developing the revolution, it could lead to bad consequences. Particularly in this context, for example, Fidel Castro's statement that Cuba holds its "own line" was very much misunderstood. For instance, a CZPO (ČTK [Czechoslovak state news agency-ed.]) correspondent sent information, in which he directly said that Cuba's political line had changed; c. Rodriguez accepts with satisfaction that the material was not published in Czechoslovakia. Returning yet again to the issue of operation of the Communist Party of China, c. Rodriguez stressed that Cuba cannot take the same approach as the CSSR, and leading Cuban officials ask for understanding.

Another issue, which caused misunderstanding, is the position of the Cuban revolutionary government on the Moscow agreement about a partial ban on nuclear testing. The whole issue was widely debated in the higher circles of Cuba. In these discussions, Fidel Castro still hoped a possibility would arise that Cuba could become a party to the treaty. He was also aware that hesitation about signing the treaty

might give the impression that the Cuban Revolutionary Government takes the same position on the treaty as the PRC [People's Republic of China]. C. Rodriguez stresses that their stance on the contract is Cuba's own and absolutely not that of the PRC. At that he pointed out that after his return from Moscow, Fidel Castro in his speech explained extensively the Cuban government's stance on issues of peace, peaceful coexistence, etc. At the same time, he suggested in his speech the possibility of negotiations with the United States, which could calm down the current tense situation between Cuba and the USA.

However, when negotiations about the Moscow treaty began, Cuba has become the object of a broad new wave of attacks from the United States. This of course created for the Cuban Revolutionary Government a new situation, in which they had no other choice, given the state of mutual relations with the United States, than not to sign the Moscow treaty. It would be a great mistake to believe that the Cuban Revolutionary Government takes the Chinese positions. C. Rodriguez stressed we can all see that there is no party nor government document that expresses support for controversial positions of the Communist Party of China. He further pointed out that Fidel Castro's speech in connection with the assassination of Kennedy [on 22 November 1963] was motivated also by the desire to clearly express differences in judgment of Kennedy as opposed to how he is judged by leading Chinese comrades.

According to the leading Cuban comrades, the Cuban line with regard to Latin America causes uncertainties as well. They decided in principle to patiently continue to develop relations with those countries that have until now maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, i.e. Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Mexico. On the other hand, it is not possible to view the issue of Latin American countries through European eyes. Cuban comrades know very well what the situation in Latin America is. For example, they are surprised by some opinions at the Cs. Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding an assessment of actions of the Argentine President [Arturo Umberto] Illia. It seems to them that some comrades too much overrate his progressivism in comparison with what was in Argentina before his election.[1] Even though the People's Revolutionary Government of Cuba does not want to underestimate certain possibilities that are emerging in Argentina, it knows very well that the current regime in Argentina is aimed against the People's Cuba. In this context, c. Rodriguez mentioned the complaint of the Cuban Ambassador to Czechoslovakia about the reserved attitude of some staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs towards him.

Another issue about which C. Rodriguez spoke concerns Cuba's stance on the notorious proposal of some Latin American countries to create a nuclear-free zone in Latin America. C. Rodriguez said that the Cuban position on this issue has already been formulated in the past year in connection with the Caribbean [i.e., Cuban missile] crisis. Its position on this issue stems from the fact that the Cuban Revolutionary Government sees no advantage in creating a nuclear-free zone in Latin America in a situation, when in many Latin American countries, there are US bases, and the United States refuses to declare explicitly that it will not keep nuclear weapons at these bases. A speech by a Cuban delegate to the UN on this matter was very carefully worded in order for the Cuban position not to challenge the co-authors of the resolution on the nuclear-free zone in Latin America, namely Mexico and Brazil. In this context, Rodriguez rejected the alleged argument of some comrades, who compared the threat to Cuba from the United States to the threat posed by West Berlin to the socialist countries. Cuba does not think she might be under danger of nuclear war. On the other hand, she is aware of the danger of local wars in the Caribbean. Despite her own complicated issues, Cuba is trying to see things from a broader perspective.

S. Koucky responded to this part of Rodriguez's reasoning in the sense that our party understands the overall situation, in which Cuban comrades operate; on the other hand though, Cuban comrades should realize that, especially our lower ranking comrades may have and indeed have different questions concerning Cuban positions.

At number of meetings and gatherings, members of our party ask about Cuba's position on such issues as, for instance, not signing the Moscow Agreement; from our side, the position of the Cuban Revolutionary Government and leading Cuban comrades is explained in accordance with the way Cuban comrades formulate their policy and how they justify it. With regard to the issues associated with the position of the Communist Party of China, our party of course cannot pass in silence the fact that the Chinese CP in its literature grossly distorts the line of the international communist movement and attacks leading comrades of the CPSU and other communist and workers parties. He also emphasized that our party throughout its history has always assumed that it was necessary to adapt and possibly even to subordinate some of its own particular interests to the collective interests of the socialist camp and the international revolutionary movement.

Comrade Rodriguez then continued that the Cuban government and Cuban revolutionary comrades face a number of issues that must be addressed. They all realize that new problems may always arise. From this point of view, c. Rodriguez praises highly an article that was published in Pravda, in which some opinions on the development of the Algerian Revolution are newly formulated, and where the need is recognized for a broader understanding of issues related to building up socialism under various conditions (recognizes the need to take into account that religion, particularly Islam, will play a role in Algiers, which is deciding to go the socialist route).

Cuban comrades, says c. Rodriguez further, realize that world peace is a question of paramount concern for Czechoslovak comrades. In contrast, the question of world peace does not have such a decisive influence on the masses in Cuba. They [Cuban comrades] believe that cadres of the fraternal parties should understand the situation in Cuba better. Yet some misunderstandings appear in specific contacts between Cs. and Cuban officials. Many comrades push their own opinions, and try to do separate analyses without consideration of the overall development of the revolution in Cuba. The worst is that some political uncertainties and differences are then reflected in economic relations. Some uncertainty about Cuba has its impact on business. Cuban comrades consider recent development of economic negotiations as unsatisfactory. Although they are aware that it is impossible to avoid problems, they still believe it is necessary to look above of all for what unites us and not what divides us.

He stressed that we must never forget about the enemy's activity when considering all these issues. He reminded [us] of his and Guevara's talks in years 1959-1960, when a purchase of capital equipment for Cuba was negotiated and when the revolutionary leaders had to overcome misconceptions of their experts who looked with disrespect on the capability of socialist countries in terms of technology deliveries to Cuba. Also, very strong divisions over pricing for different products appear in many discussions. Further, as for the technological level of many products and equipment that are shipped to Cuba, there are shortcomings and Cuban comrades have to overcome in many aspects opinions of their own cadres who were used to the often perfect American technology.

After several queries of c. Koucky about the situation during the creation of the Unified Party of Socialist Revolution [PURS] of Cuba, in order to clarify some delays in organization of the party (the founding congress may convene in the second half of 1964), c. Rodriguez again emphasized that it was necessary to understand the special political situation that existed in Cuba. He explained that there were many anti-communists in Cuba, who, at the moment, especially under the guise of combating sectarian tendencies (Escalante case[2]), are actually trying to fight against communism. It is necessary to do everything possible to avoid creating suitable opportunities for their dark intentions. Cuban leaders have many concerns with the problem of youth in Cuba. For example, the entire leadership of youth organizations had to be replaced recently, because it did not follow the correct policy.

In subsequent partial conversations, c. Rodriguez stressed many times that an old former member of the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba was deliberately sent on a trip to Czechoslovakia, GDR, Poland, and finally to the Soviet Union, so that communists in these countries could better understand the complex issues of the development of the Cuban revolution and also in order to prevent various problems and misunderstandings, which may arise

In a conversation with c. Koucky, the question of replacement of our ambassador to Cuba, and the case of our Ambassador-designate c. Kocman has been also discussed. C. Rodriguez confirmed that among some Cuban comrades - he specifically named [Joaquín] Ordoqui, there are certain objections to his appointment as an ambassador to Cuba, and that he himself believes as well that this appointment should be abandoned. C. Koucky replied that c. Pavlicek is to be replaced within 2 months and that a new Cs. ambassador will be sent to Cuba.

On the way back, c. Koucky informed c. Rodriguez of the main issues discussed at the December plenary session of the CPCz Central Committee.

[1] The Argentine elections were held on 7 July 1963 and Illa became president on 12 October 1963-ed.

[2] A reference to the so-called Escalante affair, in which Fidel Castro purged from the leadership some members of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), led by Aníbal Escalante, in March 1962, charging them with "sectarianism." This was seen as reflecting lingering tensions between Castro's "26th of July Movement" guerrillas and the old, urban, pro-Moscow communist party-ed.