

RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN N.S. KHRUSHCHEV AND F. CASTRO

28 May 1963, Pitsunda

In the morning of May 28, 1968, there was a conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and F. Castro on the issues related to the Soviet assistance to Cuba for the development of agriculture. Present were: ~~N.S. Khrushchev's assistants A.S. Shevchenko, V.S. Lebedev~~ [*markup in the original document*] ambassador of the USSR to the Republic of Cuba A.I. Alekseev.

N.S. Khrushchev proposed to F. Castro to discuss the issues that were raised by the Cuban side [in their conversations with] the Soviet representatives on the subject of providing Soviet assistance to Cuba for the development of agriculture. In particular, they raised the issue of sending to Cuba 1500-2000 automatic loaders, which are necessary for collecting and loading cut sugar cane onto cars, in 1963.

N.S. Khrushchev and F. Castro together looked at the photos of relevant Cuban and Soviet equipment, and F. Castro noted that in the Cuban circumstances, the labor expenditures for collecting the cut sugar cane from the ground and loading of it on the cars are 30% of overall labor expenditures for growing and harvesting sugar cane. Full automation of collecting and loading of sugar cane would free up several tens of thousands of workers, who are needed in other sectors of industry and agriculture, and would cut the length of harvesting significantly.

N.S. Khrushchev said that the Cuban request for this number of machinery could be satisfied. However, it is not a radical solution of this problem.

N.S. Khrushchev said that we should be thinking not about adjusting the existing equipment for the needs of sugar cane production in Cuba but about creating a principally new machine, specially designed to work on the sugar cane plantations. Such a machine should combine two most important operations—cutting the cane and transporting it in trucks or in carts.

F. Castro noted that the Cubans did not even think about creating such a universal machine, they were working only on building a cutting machine. For this purpose, they purchased several models of machines of this kind, which are used on sugar cane plantations in other countries, and on the basis of those models, they created their own machine that is used for cutting cane. However, there are only a small number of those machines, and so far they are not quite reliable in use, so even some of the leaders of people's farms often speak against their use because of their low effectiveness. An average amount of cut cane per day per one of the machines is 25 tons; most of the cane is still cut manually in Cuba. This work is one of the harshest for the Cuban peasants. This is our eternal curse. Neither us, nor the owners of the plantations, ever thought about introducing machines for two reasons: first of all, the labor was always very cheap and the economic effect would not have justified the machine-based way of growing and harvesting sugar cane, and on the other hand, in the conditions of high unemployment in Cuba, which in the best years reached 500 thousand unemployed, introduction of machinery would have created an insurmountable problem for the existing

bourgeois government. It would put it in a situation where it would have to face sharp discontent of new 500-600 thousand workers, who were employed exclusively on cutting sugar cane only 5 or 6 months a year. That is why all the work on mechanization of the cultivation of sugar cane was abandoned and progress in this sphere was quite negligible.

The situation changed drastically after the revolution because a considerable number of the former sugar cane plantation slaves started working in new sectors of the economy, started cultivating new agricultural crops, many people went to the army or to school. And subsequently, they started experiencing shortage of labor in agriculture. Therefore, today, the government has to engage in mobilization of the urban population and to bring the army to harvest sugar cane from January to May.

Creating a combined machine to cut the sugar cane and to simultaneously load it into cars or carts would be exceptionally important for the development of the Cuban people's economy, would lead to rapid drop in the cost of production of sugar cane, would free up several hundred thousand workers and above all—would eliminate forever one of the hardest forms of work—sugar cane cutting.

N.S. Khrushchev said that he would think about the design of such a machine, which he could already envision in general terms as something quite real and effective. He said he would share his thoughts with Fidel Castro in the nearest future.

Regarding deliveries of hay lifting machines and tractors, N.S. Khrushchev noted that before a combine for harvesting sugar cane is built, one has to ensure mechanization of at least the loading [of sugar cane], and in this connection, the government of the USSR will supply 1500 tractors adjusted for tropical conditions with appropriate suspension lifting mechanisms, and in addition, 2500 separate removable loading gadgets, which the Cubans could install on the Romanian and American wheel tractors that they have and on the tractors produced in other countries.

N.S. Khrushchev proposed to think about supplying the lifting mechanisms disassembled into parts—to save space and in order to make transportation cheaper. In particular, the entire hydraulic system as well as certain specialized turning parts could be produced in the USSR and shipped to Cuba ready to use, but the capturing part (teeth and the like) could be made locally in Cuba.

F. Castro agreed to N.S. Khrushchev's proposal.

N.S. Khrushchev said further that the Cubans raised the issue of supplying 200 of rice harvesting combines and 20 cotton harvesters. While mentioning that the Soviet government could meet the Cuban requests and provide them with the necessary number of agricultural machines, N.S. Khrushchev drew main attention to the preparation of the Cuban agricultural cadres—agricultural engineers and especially tractor drivers. No technology will save you, said N.S. Khrushchev, if it falls into the hands of inexperienced people, who could break it and ruin

everything. He added that along with the cotton harvesting machines, some of experts propose that we should send some of our best drivers of those machines, in particular, cde. Akhunova, who achieved the record cotton harvest on her machine. At the time when, according to our information, one cotton harvester in Cuba gathers 30 to 40 pounds of cotton a day, Akhunova harvests 25 tons of cotton with her machine. This, of course, leads to a sharp drop in the price of cotton fiber and to freeing of a significant number of workers.

F. Castro said that the Cuban government devotes great attention to the issue of preparing the cadres of agricultural machine drivers. Some time ago, 1000 specialists did their training in the Soviet Union, and now another thousand is currently in training. In addition, a special tractor driver school will open in Cuba in June, which will enroll 5,000 students. There is also a special agricultural academy, which prepares leading cadres for agriculture. The main category, from which we select candidates for this academy are the best industrial workers from enterprises, who took additional three months-long party courses and who showed themselves as politically educated and possessing all the necessary organizational skills.

In this connection, they discussed the question of sending a group of 400 Soviet young people to Cuba.

F. Castro said that he did not insist on the number 400, although, frankly speaking, the more Soviet people could come to Cuba, the better, because they would bring with them not only the high agricultural skills, not only the spirit of organization and order, but they will also bring high political consciousness and the spirit of the new world, which are so needed for our revolution.

Conversation was translated by N.S. Leonov

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