

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

with members of the Executive Bureau, Secretaries of the National Committee of the People's Socialist Party of Cuba comrades Anibal Escalante and Manuel Lusardo, and Chairman of the National Bank of People's Republic of Cuba, member of the NC PSP[C] comrade Ernesto Guevara, which took place at the CC CPSU on 31 October 1960.

Present were comrades Suslov M.A., Mikoyan A.I., Kosygin A.N. and Ponomarev B.N.

In the beginning of the conversation, comrade Suslov M.A., on behalf of the CC CPSU, greets the Cuban comrades and wishes comrade Guevara, who arrived in Moscow as head of the trade-economic mission of the People's Republic of Cuba success in the cause for which he came to the Soviet Union. Comrade Suslov emphasizes that the Soviet people admire the heroic struggle of the Cuban communists against the common enemies of the peace—the U.S. imperialists.

Comrade Escalante thanks comrade Suslov for his warm words and says that the decision to send a trade-economic mission to the USSR was made after the leadership of the PSP[C] carefully studied the issue on Fidel Castro's request. The PSP[C] leadership considers the questions that the mission intends to pose to the Soviet comrades extremely important in connection with the situation that developed in Cuba. That is why [the leadership] entrusted the party commission consisting of comrades Escalante, Lusardo and Guevara with informing the CC CPSU in detail about the tasks of the mission before it could start the negotiations, and also to pose a number of other questions stemming from the present situation in Cuba to the CC CPSU. Comrade Escalante asks [the Soviet side] to take into account that you can negotiate with comrade E. Guevara on the issues outside of the prerogatives of the trade-economic mission, because comrade Guevara together with comrade Raul Castro had recently been promoted to the Leadership of the PSP[C] (although it is only known to a very small number of people and is kept secret from Fidel Castro).

Comrade Escalante then lists the questions that they are authorized to pose to the CC CPSU:

about the prospects of the development of the Cuban economy and strengthening trade ties between Cuba and the USSR and the countries of the socialist camp;

about the threat to Cuba from American imperialism and possible measures that could prevent aggressive U.S. actions against Cuba;

some requests concerning the issue of strengthening Cuba's defense capacity and improving the equipment of the revolutionary army and people's militia.

Comrade Guevara in his presentation gave a brief characteristic of the state of the Cuban economy. He said that the basis of the Cuban economy was the sugar industry and export of sugar—this was the main source of revenue, which determines the living standards of the population. Comrade Guevara explains the connection between prices of sugar on the free market and on the American market, on the one hand, and the salaries of the sugar plantation workers, on the other. As is well known, Cuban sugar was always sold at two prices: on the free market at 2-3.5 cents a pound and on the American market at 5-5.5 cents a pound. Therefore, the average price of sugar was up to 4.7 cents a pound. Salaries for workers of the sugar cane industry were set on the basis of this price. However, the average price, and, consequently, the salaries that are tied to it, cannot be a stable value now. The reduction in sales of sugar on the American market leads to the reduction of the average sale price of this product, i.e. the U.S. market had the highest price for sugar. Sales of Cuban sugar on the markets of socialist countries are still not big enough. As a result, there is the danger of the decrease of the already low wages at sugar plantations and sugar plants, i.e. precisely in the category of workers who used to be and are now the main force of the Cuban revolution. We cannot undermine the social base on which the revolution relies, stated comrade Guevara.

Cuban economists, continued comrade Guevara, calculated that taking into account the cost of production of sugar, it should be sold on the external market at the minimum of 3.5 cents a pound. The question arises about a reliable market for the sales of sugar, which would ensure a guaranteed wage for the workers.

Bourgeois economists believe that the United States of America could purchase up to 3.5 million tons of sugar per year from Cuba without undermining the demand for this product on the world market. The party leadership examined these numbers and they are inclined to

believe that this conclusion is correct. Soon, the United States will stop purchasing Cuban sugar completely. Moreover, not only will they stop importing from Cuba, they will create obstacles to shipments of other countries' goods to Cuba, above all from the United States.

In the current year, Cuba can easily sell 1.5 million tons of sugar. If we take into account that the internal annual consumption of the country is only 350 thousand tons, it can reliably supply 1.850 tons of sugar. But the harvest, according to the preliminary information, will reach 5.7-5.8 million tons. Therefore, about 4 million tons [of sugar] will not be sold (traditional annual remainder of the unsold sugar is 750 thousand tons). The only hope for us, stated comrade Guevara, is to sell this entire amount of sugar in the socialist countries.

Comrade Guevara says that F. Castro, when he was sending the mission off to Moscow, instructed [us] to explain to the Soviet government the difficult situation of the Cuban economy and to ask for help. He instructed comrade Guevara to find out if it would be possible to sell 4 million tons of sugar in the socialist countries at the price of 4 cents a pound and asked to inform [the Soviet comrades] that during the exchange calculations it would be possible to raise the prices on the Soviet goods that are delivered in exchange for the sugar. This proposal is completely understandable from the political point of view; however, stated comrade Guevara, from the purely commercial point of view it is hard to understand.

Talking about his own position in the government, comrade Guevara said that F. Castro is unaware of his membership in the PSP[C], although he has certain hunches about many things. The same can be said about many other members of government. The leadership of the party does not inform Fidel Castro about it because it is aware of his mistrust and caution. Raul Castro also hides his party affiliation, and especially his membership in the party leadership, from his brother. However, all this does not prevent Fidel Castro from working in close contact with the party leadership in trying to solve the most important issues.

Adding to what comrade Guevara said on the issue under consideration, comrade Escalante said that as far as they see, the political importance of the proposal about the purchase of the 4 million tons of the Cuban sugar is great because we are talking about whether the revolutionary government would be able to hold the national economy at the proper level or whether it would fall, i.e. whether the wages ensuring the minimum living standard would be

preserved, or whether it would shrink. If we can solve this problem, stated comrade Escalante, on the basis of coordination of interests of the socialist countries and Cuba, then we will deliver a crushing blow against the designs of the U.S. imperialist circles. Besides, he continued, it would ensure the development of the Cuban economy in 1961 and would elevate the reputation of the Cuban revolution and the revolutionary government in the entire Latin America. Comrade Escalante especially emphasized the need to discuss the issue of linking together the plans of economic development of the socialist countries and Cuba, because, in the opinion of the party leadership, it would be the most important step in the cause of strengthening of the country's economy. He also said that the Cuban government believes that the PRC will also buy 1 million tons of sugar from Cuba. Guevara's trade-economic mission will travel [to China] for negotiations with the PRC leadership, and comrade Lusardo will accompany them too.

Then comrade Escalante talked about the relationship between the party and Fidel Castro. Although the latter does not know that his brother Raul and Guevara are communists, he knows very well that they are working in [close] contact with the party, and even jokes sometimes that they are PSP[C]'s representatives in the revolutionary government. Fidel Castro has even expressed an idea about the desirability of creating a single Marxist-Leninist party in Cuba. This question is being considered. It is suggested that Fidel Castro will play the leading role in the new party. Along with representatives of the PSP[C], its leadership will also include representatives of the "July 26" [movement], such as Ernesto Guevara, Raul Castro and others. At the present time, a number of provincial schools preparing leadership cadres are working in the country. It was Fidel Castro's initiative to create them. Following his request, the PSP[C] leadership took charge of those schools; the party develops the program and the instruction materials; the teachers are appointed by the party.

Comrade M. Lusardo also added that all the issues raised by comrade Guevara should, first of all, be considered from the political perspective. He said that the Cuban government, the PSP[C] leadership thought about how accepting their proposal would affect the economies of the USSR and other socialist countries. From the economic point of view, it looks not quite acceptable. But the Cuban government and the people, remembering what inestimable

assistance they had already received from the USSR and the socialist countries, believe that this time, the Soviet Union will provide the necessary support for Cuba again. In 1961, the Cuban sugar industry will function as state industry for the first time, and without the assistance from the Soviet Union, it would not be able to stand on its feet. The Czech comrades, said comrade Lusardo, proposed to hold a conference of representatives of the countries of the socialist camp with the purpose to discuss the requests put forward by the Cuban government. In his opinion, it would be necessary to do it.

Comrade Lusardo, as well as comrade Escalante, spoke about the relationship between F. Castro and the communist party, and emphasized his desire to strengthen the Marxist instruction of the cadres. During one provincial party conference, F. Castro even confessed that he had not yet finished reading *The Capital*, although, among the participants of that conference, there were only two or three people who read the entire book.

Explaining the Soviet position regarding the Cuban government's requests, comrades Suslov, Mikoyan, Kosygin and Ponomarev told the Cuban comrades that the CC CPSU informed the Central Committees of communist and workers' parties of the socialist countries about the desire of the Cubans to discuss those issues and that the CCs of the fraternal countries, with the exception of the CC CPC, responded positively. Deputy Prime Minister of the PRC Chan Ye responded that the proposal about [convening] a conference would be examined, but that the Chinese comrades were more inclined to conduct bilateral negotiations. According to his statement, it would be difficult for China to pay for the Cuban sugar due to the lack of industrial goods and technology in their country. That is why the PRC so far has been able to buy only 500 tons of sugar. Comrade Mikoyan noted that it was unlikely that the Chinese comrades would be able to give their reply even by November 10. However, he stated, the Soviet government was ready for such a conference, regardless of the PRC government's position on this issue. Speaking specifically about convening such a conference, Mikoyan named the approximate date on November 4 and advised comrade Guevara that he personally should negotiate about the date [of the conference] during the meeting with the ambassadors of the countries of people's democracy, which was scheduled for later that night, October 31, and to

talk to the ambassadors about what specific products Cuba would want to receive in exchange for sugar. The ambassadors could then consult with their governments.

Comrade Kosygin especially emphasized the importance of comrade Guevara's meeting with the ambassadors, to whom he should explain the needs of his country, since at the moment only Czechoslovakia knows about this. The success of the meeting depends on how well the governments of the socialist countries are aware of the needs of Cuba.

Comrade Mikoyan expressed the view that the Cuban comrades should not openly declare the reorientation of its foreign trade, a break with the capitalist market and the desire to merge their economy with the economies of the socialist countries. Instead, it is better to make the case about their readiness to trade with all countries regardless of their social structure. More caution should be exercised with the term 'integration,' so that it clearly indicates the growing connections of the Cuban economy with the economies of the countries of the Communist bloc. In official statements it is necessary to emphasize the commercial approach to issues of trade, so as to make it clear that Cuba is compelled to seek new outlets for their goods and new sources of acquisition for those goods that the U.S denies them. It is necessary to preserve normal relations with capitalist countries.

Comrade Escalante notes that in Cuba there are two Canadian banks that are not nationalized, and several British enterprises have not been touched. Cuba is thinking to expand trade relations with these countries.

Comrade Kosygin makes an observation about the correctness of the policies of the party and of the Cuban government. After all, Canada did not declare an economic blockade, therefore a certain flexibility must be shown toward it.

After the information about Cuba's economic situation and the purpose of the arrival of the Cuban economic-trade mission in Moscow the Cuban comrades move on to other issues.

Comrade Escalante gives an assessment of the current political situation in Cuba and dwells on the issue of the threat of aggression from the U.S. He says that at this time the American military establishment has changed their original plans for the organization of American troops landing in Cuba and initiating a civil war here. The reason for this largely came

from comrade N.S. Khrushchev's statement about assistance, which the Soviet Union would render to Cuba in the event that the American imperialists attempt to launch an intervention.

Now the government of the U.S. is developing plans for strangling Cuba by way of a blockade. Refusing to buy sugar in Cuba, they are also stopping all sorts of shipments of consumer goods and equipment to Cuba. Simultaneously with the organization of the economic blockade, the government of the U.S. is planning an assault on Cuba by various criminal groups from Batista's supporters, war criminals and fascist elements taking shelter in the U.S. whom they have trained on the territory of Florida and Guatemala. To this end, American planes are being flown to Florida and Guatemala, and ships of the U.S. Navy are based in their ports.

In organizing the American blockade, conducting training for mercenaries for the invasion of Cuba, the American authorities are attempting, on the one hand, to hold the Cuban people in a state of continuous tension, and on the other hand, they are striving to encourage internal counterrevolution. The government of the U.S. intends to create an interim anti-Castro government in some part of Cuba. This anti-Castro government, after being recognized by the imperialist state, would have to apply for help from the U.S. and, through the use of interventionist troops, unleash military action on the island with the aim to overthrow the people's government and the restoration of the old regime.

However, comrade Escalante emphasized that the American imperialists understand that to do this would not be easy, because the Cuban people are united around their government and their leader Fidel Castro, who will never give up and will fight to the bitter end. In addition, the territory of Cuba is located a relatively large distance from the United States of America, it is mountainous, therefore, a landing of naval or an airborne assault force is considered difficult. However, despite the difficulties, the American military authorities are trying to organize the landing and start implementing their aggressive plans anyway.

Comrade Escalante emphasized that all of the Cuban people are now going through extensive military training; the party and the government are paying very close attention to the country's defensive capabilities. The assistance that the Soviet Union rendered to the Cuban people in the form of arms sales has played a huge role. This aid not only bolstered the defensive capabilities of the country, but also inspired all of the people, who see in the face of

the Soviet Union, in the face of the countries of the Communist bloc their true, selfless friends. The People's Socialist Party is conducting great ideological work among the population. It explains to them the need to mobilize all forces in order to defend the gains of the revolution and to expose enemies from within who are trying to weaken the Cuban Republic from the inside. And if an invasion takes place in Cuba, the Cuban people will give the invaders a crushing rebuff. But the challenge now is to prevent the landing of the enemy on the territory of Cuba. Comrade Escalante stated that the people of Latin America and other countries must play a large role in the disruption of the aggressive plans of the American imperialists by launching a campaign of solidarity with the Cuban people.

To comrade Mikoyan's question about whether events in El Salvador are helping the Cuban friends, comrade Escalante replied that although a military coup has taken place in El Salvador, in his opinion, it does not constitute an event which could lead to the establishment of a democratic system in this country; [but] the very fact of the overthrow of the pro-American dictatorship in El Salvador, which aroused the hatred of all the people, is positive and is lending support not only to the Cuban revolution, but also to other people's countries of Latin America that are fighting for national independence. It should not be overlooked that this military coup was built on a mass popular movement.

To comrade Guevara's remark, whether the military junta would not try to create a new anti-people's regime and deprive the popular masses of the first, although minor, achievements, comrade Escalante answered that maybe this would happen in the future, it is difficult to say anything specific now. However, he stated, the events in El Salvador have a positive meaning for the cause of the national liberation movement in Latin America, since they bear witness to the fall of a regime which was supported by the American imperialists.

The statements of comrade Khrushchev and the Soviet government, said comrade Escalante, play a very large role in terms of curbing the American military circles. The publication of comrade Khrushchev's interview with Cuban journalists was very important. The previous day the American government sent a note to the Organization of American States with a proposal to gather for a meeting, in order to discuss Cuba's behavior in connection with its

acquisition of weapons in socialist countries and to compel Cuba to accept the decisions of the OAS.

The note was sent on Friday evening, and on the following day comrade Khrushchev's interview with the Cuban journalists appeared in print, in which comrade Khrushchev again emphasized the Soviet government's commitment to provide the necessary aid to the Cuban people if the American imperialists launch an invasion. The statement of comrade Khrushchev was a sort of answer to the note of the United States of America.

Currently, comrade Escalante asserted, the party leadership is thinking about what else the Soviet Union can do to help Cuba, to which the [Soviet government], together with other countries of the Communist bloc, has already provided strong support, in order to disrupt the Pentagon's reckless plans. The Cuban people know about the fight that the Soviet representative and the representatives of other countries of the Communist bloc are leading in the UN in support of Cuba. But, comrade Escalante asked, it might be very useful if the Soviet government approached other governments of the socialist countries with a proposal to address the United Nations with a joint statement in defense of Cuba. In the opinion of comrade Escalante, the countries united by the Bandung Agreement could also make a similar statement.

Comrade Escalante noted further that in the opinion of the leadership of the PSP[C], the Soviet government could approach the governments of France and England with an appeal to denounce those actions of the United States of America, who is playing with fire. Some time ago, the Soviet government sent a letter to MacMillan.

It is clear to everybody, continued comrade Escalante that Cuba has now become a dangerous hotbed where a new world war may break out; and therefore, all progressive humanity, and primarily, the people of the countries of the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union must take all necessary measures to extinguish the fire before it breaks out.

In comrade Escalante's view, it would now be advisable to launch a campaign in a number of countries under the slogan "Hands off Cuba!" Such a campaign could be launched in capitalist countries, and in particular in the countries of Latin America.

Comrade Guevara notes that in the view of party leadership and of Fidel himself, the most serious danger for Cuba may arise during the period between the 4-6th of November and February, in the period when the new President-elect has not yet assumed the Presidential post and the old President has practically laid down their full powers. During this period, on any day, the Pentagon will be able to unleash an invasion against Cuba, without encountering any objections on the part of the president. Possessing superior power and with the armed gangs assembled in the territories surrounding Cuba at their disposal, the American militarists are capable of inflicting a serious damage to the Cuban military. Moreover, they can do this within a period of 24 hours. It is difficult, comrade Guevara stated, to present any evidence of the possibility of such an attack on Cuba in this period of time, but such danger exists.

Taking the floor then, comrade Lusardo confirmed that there indeed was a serious danger of a military invasion of Cuba by the imperialist mercenaries. In connection to this, he said, the leadership of the PSP[C] had petitioned to put a number of issues before the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union concerning improvements to the defensive capability of the country. Currently the Cuban revolution possesses a rebel army and people's militia, at this moment numbering more than two hundred thousand people. The young people are getting enhanced military training. Thanks to the USSR, now the Cuban government has a sufficient quantity of weapons. Recently, the structure of the organization of the people's militia has been changed. Now it is built on the same principles as the army- there are branches, platoons, companies, and battalions.

However, comrade Lusardo said that serious difficulties emerged in mastering the weapons. Many members of the people's militia, as well as the army, lack the skills for operating the advanced weaponry, and there is insufficient number of military specialists. The danger is that in the event of an armed attack even the modern anti-aircraft capabilities could be left inactive due to a lack of people who can operate them. In this connection, the leadership of the Cuban party is presenting to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union a question about the preparation in the Soviet Union of a relatively large group (comrade Lusardo said that they will specify the size of the group later, after the preliminary consultation) of Soviet military specialists who, if necessary, could be urgently transferred to Cuba to carry

out accelerated training for the military personnel of the Cuban army and people's militia and to provide instruction on how to handle the received weaponry. In addition, the leadership of the Cuban party asked to find out if it would be possible to train a number of military specialists from Cuba in the USSR, and also to send to Cuba a group of military instructors, in addition to the three military instructors who are already doing their work in the country. To comrade Suslov's question of what specialists the Cuban comrades would like to ask for and if they would mind if they were Spanish, comrade Lusardo answered that they need instructors for training military personnel, primarily for tank and artillery action. Comrade Lusardo emphasized that it would be a good idea for all the Soviet military specialists, referred to above, to be Spanish, since this removes difficulties with language right from the beginning.

Comrade Guevara noted that time was running out, an armed attack could be expected any day. Therefore it would be advisable to accelerate the consideration and the resolution of the issue of sending a new group of military instructors to Cuba.

Comrade Escalante added that together with comrade Dolores Ibarruri they had compiled a list of 20 Spanish specialists who would be able to go to Cuba as military instructors. In particular, [Enrique] Lister himself had expressed his willingness to go to Cuba.

At the end of the conversation comrade Suslov thanked the Cuban comrades for the valuable information. He said that their information would be reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which will review all of the issues raised by the comrades.

Comrades Escalante, Lusardo, Guevara in turn thanked [the Soviet comrades] for the consultation and asked to send their regards to comrade N.S. Khrushchev.

The conversation was recorded by:

Head of the International department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union –N. Mostovets

[Source: State Archive of the Russian Federation

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya and Sarah Dunn for the National Security Archive]