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

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Summary:

A record of a conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Cuba Sergey Kudryavtsev and Che Guevara, recorded in Kudryavtsev's diary. They discuss the U.S. policy toward the revolutionary government of Cuba. Guevara says that U.S. President Kennedy's recent speech, in which he said the U.S. would not take direct military action in Cuba, was an effort to portray the U.S. in a positive light on the eve of Cuban discussions in the UN, and to ameliorate opinions of the U.S. in other Latin American countries.

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From S.M. Kudryavtsev's Diary

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RECORD OF CONVERSATION
with Minister of Industry of the Republic of Cuba
Ernesto Guevara
14 April 1961

In the conversation with E. Guevara, [I] inquired about his point of view regarding the situation, which recently developed in Cuba, and also about his assessment of Kennedy's recent statements regarding the U.S. policy toward the revolutionary government of Cuba.

In response, Guevara said that the situation remained quite tense, although he personally believes that the danger of invasion of the country by large beachheads of the external counterrevolutionary forces has now in all likelihood receded. The counterrevolution understands that given the presence of large contingents of well-armed people's militia and the revolutionary army, an operation of deploying paratroopers, even numbering several thousand troops, would be doomed to failure. Therefore, mentioned Guevara, it is unlikely that the forces of external counterrevolution would undertake such a risk now, knowing that it would be senseless to count on any kind of extensive internal uprisings in Cuba.

We know, said Guevara later on, that there is no single point of view on this issue among the leadership of the counterrevolutionary formations, who would have to command such operations. A number of counterrevolutionary officers believe that it would be risky and senseless to go forward without a direct military support from the United States. This split will likely deepen now especially because Kennedy stated that the US armed forces would not take part in a direct military intervention against Cuba.

In this regard, Kennedy's statement, noted Guevara, has a positive meaning. Besides, it will exert some demoralizing influence on the internal counterrevolution. However, this influence will be very limited, because the chiefs of the counterrevolutionary gangs know perfectly well that the US policy toward Cuba has not changed and that Kennedy's statement represents some kind of camouflage. By this statement, Kennedy, first of all, is trying to present the US in a good light on the eve of the discussion of the Cuban issue in the UN, and secondly, he is trying to ameliorate the unfavorable reaction, which is present in a number of Latin American countries, regarding the explicitly aggressive character of US policy toward Cuba.

The current American president follows the same [policy] line toward Cuba [as his predecessor], though the tactics are being somewhat changed. We know that the United States is presently increasing its assistance to the forces of external and internal counterrevolution. The main emphasis here is toward undermining the Cuban economy through stronger acts of sabotage, subversion and the like. This serves as a kind of supplement to the economic blockade, which is enforced against Cuba from the US. Recently, well-trained groups of subversive elements equipped with the newest technology for conducting explosions and arson are deployed in Cuba from the US. Also, the U.S. is transferring large quantities of explosives and weapons to Cuba.

In the recent days the internal counterrevolution, continued Guevara, stepped up its activity and has practically begun an attack. It would suffice to say that just in the last several days there were explosions in the Havana water system, power station; several warehouses were burned down, a sugar plant was burned down, and finally the biggest store "El Encanton." All this occurred over the period of 3 or 4 days, and it is extremely difficult for the government to undertake anything effective to prevent acts of that kind. The El Encanton store, as it has been established, was put on fire with special thermal bombs, which produce very high temperature and burning for 20 minutes. The bombs themselves, however, are very small in size. One of such bombs was found unexploded in the store building after the fire with a stamp "US Army" [on it]. Damages from sabotage and subversive acts, continued Guevara, are estimated in tens of millions of dollars. One can say that the internal counterrevolution has inflicted a serious economic damage upon us during these days.

Guevara said then that the revolutionary government would respond to these strikes of the counterrevolution with counterstrikes. First of all, the repressive measures will be strengthened. A significant number of captured terrorists and subversive elements will be executed, and the people will be called to even more vigilance and more decisive struggle with the enemy of the revolution.

The political situation in the country, emphasized Guevara, is generally good. The pressure of the internal counterrevolution only unites people and revolutionalizes them. Almost all the peasants stand behind the government. Recently the position of the government in the working class has strengthened significantly. If winning of the peasantry over to the side of the revolution has been already accomplished, noted Guevara, much still can be done in regard to the working class.

The economic difficulties, which, according to Kennedy's and the counterrevolution's calculations, should lead to dissatisfaction in the country and create the conditions for an internal explosion, will, in our opinion, said Guevara, have just the opposite effect. These difficulties will unite the people, because the overwhelming majority of the population understands that this is not the government's fault, but rather the consequence of American imperialism's fight against revolutionary Cuba.

In the course of further conversation, Guevara said that the revolutionary government is presently seriously studying the question regarding the ways of overcoming the growing economic hardships. The government would not want to be in the role of beggar, especially because realistically the Soviet Union is the only country among the countries of the socialist camp that can help Cuba, but the Soviet Union already provides enormous assistance and support to Cuba. And yet, nonetheless, said Guevara, it looks like we will have to ask the Soviet Union to help us in some areas, especially in supplying some kinds of raw materials to ensure uninterrupted work of our industry.

Evidently, we will not be able to avoid rationing on fat-containing products and soap. As it is known, continued Guevara, Cuba imported all fat-containing products and raw materials for production of soap from the US for hard currency. At the present time, the hard currency inflows do not cover the needs of the country, and therefore, we would have to sharply cut the import of fat-containing products and ingredients for soap production. Introduction of rationing cards is very undesirable politically, but it is unavoidable. The main task now, emphasized Guevara, is to provide the industry with raw materials and the workers with work. The nationalized industry works well, and its organization is improving. However, production quotas are under-fulfilled by 15 to 20% as a result of deficit of raw materials, and also as a result of distraction of a significant number of workers from production in the period of mobilization of units of the people's militia.

In the course of further conversations, we touched upon several general issues. I

informed Guevara about the scheduled trips to the Soviet Union for a number of Cuban delegations, and also gave him a film about his stay in Moscow.

USSR Ambassador to the Republic of Cuba.

[Signature]
(S. Kudryavtsev)