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Italian Communist Ugo Pecchioli, Report on Trip to Cuba

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Summary:

Italian Communist, Ugo Pecchioli, reports on his trip to Cuba. He discusses: the relative international situation of Cuba; meetings with Fidel Castro; the profound divergence that exists (in his opinion) between the Chinese Communist Party and the great majority of the other communist parties; the development of the struggle for democracy and socialism in different Latin American countries; and Italian and Cuban communist party relations.

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COMMUNIST PARTY OF ITALY - FEDERATION OF TURIN

12 August 1963

To the Secretary of the Party
ROME

Dear Comrades,

I send to you the first notes on the results of the trip to Cuba in reference to the principal political questions examined in the meeting with Fidel Castro. Other relative information about the domestic situation in Cuba (economic development, life of the PURS [United Party of the Socialist Revolution], union activity, etc.) will be possible to send to you when - at the end of the month - I will meet with other comrades of the Italian delegation and we put together our notes and collected materials.

Additionally I will send to you and the Foreign Section a note on the concrete proposals to establish tighter contact between the two Parties and for other initiatives about which you will also find mentioned in the attached report.

I think the trip was very useful and it served to launch a basis for profitable collaboration and more intense relations between PURS and our Party. I consider that all of the complexities of the discussed proposals for Cuba should be well-examined as soon as possible, elaborating the opportune solutions. It is my conviction and the conviction of all of the comrades of the delegations that our Party can and must have a role of great importance in Cuba and in Latin America. In this sense, I hold that we do not just content ourselves to sending more materials, but we must think about the ways to have Cuba as another Comrade of ours. The proposals, contained in the notes, are for the radio, for l'Unità, for tourism etc. if they are sorted out for us, could allow us to have in this country a small collective that would have fortuitous connections, beyond Cuban comrades, also with many exponents and representatives of other Latin American countries that are always present in large number in Cuba.

A job well done, now for Cuba it is necessary above all to take into account with a general perspective of the development of the democratic and socialist movement in south-central America.

Heartfelt thanks to you for offering me the possibility of this experience, I salute you all cordially.

Ugo Pecchioli

The meeting with Fidel Castro, upon our prior request, had no formal character of simple courtesy - as is usually the case with numerous other foreign delegations - but consented to face the political problems and common interests for the two parties in a very frank and open manner. The conversation unwound itself in a climate of great cordiality and is considered very useful.

I sum up here the opinions of Fidel Castro on the topics that I posed to him:

1. Relative to the international situation of Cuba, Fidel Castro openly acknowledges that in the months that have followed the crisis of last autumn there has been a marked improvement. Although there remains a significant imperialist threat, for Cuba a phase of increased security has opened up. Many times he underlined - on this subject - the firmness of the responsibility to guarantee Cuban independence from every aggression directed by the United States. This commitment was confirmed

in the joint Soviet-Cuban communique penned during the trip to the USSR of Castro and - added Castro - in different classified cables, marked with a strong support, from the Soviet government to that of the United States. Castro is definitive in saying the solution given to the crisis was positive, opens a new period of increased peace [tranquility] for Cuba, thus allowing the government and the Party - always maintaining at a maximum vigilance and bettering the level of military preparation - to gain momentum in order to strengthen the socialist party internally.

Castro confirmed that his recent trip to the USSR [27 April-3 June 1963] had definitively liquidated every possible residue of divergence and misunderstanding with the Soviet Union. Incidentally, this was well signaled in these weeks and in the course of the rallies for the tenth anniversary of 26 July, one of the dominant themes is the Soviet-Cuban friendship (the documentary of the Castro trip to USSR is broadcast in all of the cities after being premiered - Fidel Castro in attendance - to all of the foreign delegations with visible embarrassment from the Chinese delegates.)

Still on the topic of the international situation of Cuba, Castro said that only the politics of such an end [of USSR guarantees] by the Cuban government can discourage the intent of the more aggressive American imperialist circles and deepens the contradictions between them and the "opportunistic route" of Kennedy.

There is today in the Cuban leadership absolute certainty in Soviet protection; they have the conviction that a direct aggression by the United States would mean a world war. From this the documented opinion of a new level of relative security is derived.

The government's decision, announced by Castro, to institute obligatory military service does not contradict this new phase of relative increased security. This measure has two fundamental purposes: to allow for the intake in the economic and social life of the country many technical and political cadres which until now were concentrated predominantly in the army and of absorbing in rank the mass army which still consists of youths that are out of work or not studying. A well thought decision of conscription means precisely an effort in favor of the social and economic development of the country.

Castro believes on the one hand, and we think with good reason, in the possibility of new attempts to land mercenaries (in Florida, Guatemala, Nicaragua departments of Cuban exiles continue to be trained and armed by the United States) and on the other that the army and the Cuban militia are today capable of repelling and disrupting in little time any operations of this kind. Also to this idea Castro underlined that the USSR furnished the Cuban army with massive quantities of conventional arms, technical assistance and the most modern equipment.

He continued to add that the normalization of the international situation of Cuba, and of relations between the US and Cuba, are strictly tied to the success of USSR in the socialist camp for the fight for peaceful coexistence. They firmly reject every prospect of aggravation of the international situation by means of accelerating, in Latin America and the world, the revolutionary process. In this regard - Castro affirmed - a solution must be found for the problem of Guantanamo. An attack by us on Guantanamo would signify an unpardonable provocation.

2. Regarding the profound divergence that exists between the Chinese Communist Party and the great majority of the other communist parties, Fidel Castro explicitly affirmed that the Chinese attack on the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] doesn't have a foundation and that it was a grave error of the Chinese to publish their "25 points" during the course of the meeting in Moscow. Before speaking to the split with the Chinese, Castro underlined the great worry of the Cuban comrades for the current division: "In our difficult situation internally and internationally - he in essence said - and with a party that is still not ideologically prepared this discourages and deprives popular enthusiasm."

He affirmed that, in an attempt to smooth out the contrasts and favoring compromise, the Party and the Government of Cuba have held that they must not take an explicit position of dissidence with a formal act. He considers, however, that at this point it has become necessary for PURS to take an official position and that this position is under consideration.

The preference to not dive into a position of dissent (and that, as I see it, is even more important than not disturbing enthusiasm and revolutionary tension of Cubans and other revolutionary movements in Latin American) has also caused the Cuban leaders to publish nothing - up to the last few days - on the international debate in their media. Castro, however, announced to us that in the next edition of the PURS magazine, "Socialist Cuba," it would be reporting the entire text of the letter of the CPSU and the "Chinese 25 points." Two days after our meeting, in fact, the magazine came out with the two documents and this signals an opening, in the Cuban party, of a debate from which it was no longer possible to escape.

Fidel Castro on this topic said that he was confident that the Cuban communists know how to confront this issue without being discouraging. "The Cuban revolution will not fall because of this. Our Party is firmly united."

On the subject of the divergence he was very rapid and explicit. He affirmed that he is completely in support of the policies of the USSR. Peaceful coexistence, achieved by a struggle for reasonable agreements with the imperialists, opens up new possibilities for the advancement of the revolutionary movement. The liberation of the people can not ride on the use of thermonuclear arms. Relative to the liberation movements of the dependent colonized countries, Castro affirmed that they assert themselves and progress thanks to the help of the USSR - ("we live and build socialism because we have the help of the USSR. We help other revolutionary movements in Latin America because we have the help of the USSR.")

Definitively Fidel Castro defined the [Cuban] relationship with the USSR and CPSU as "magnificent." It's also needed to point out that in his speech on July 26 he really underlined the Soviet-Cuban friendship, he emphasized the agreement with Moscow to partially suspend nuclear experiments, he referred many times, to exalt them, to the policies of peace of Khrushchev. Meanwhile in previous speeches and official acts - also in the 2nd Declaration of Havana - he always made reference to the USSR and the People's Republic of China jointly, in all the following rallies he cited only the USSR. It is not without significance the fact that the slogan repeatedly chanted by the hundreds of thousands of people present at the July 26 rallies was "Fidel-Khrushchev nos estamos con los dos" ["Fidel-Khrushchev we are with both"].

In numerous other contacts made with other Cuban leaders - particularly with Fabio Grobart, director of "Socialist Cuba", with Calcinez [Rafael Calcines?] member of the leadership of PURS, with Jolanda Perez director of ICAP, etc. we ascertained that the Chinese comrades send out a great number of materials against the CPSU and other parties including our own. They are ready to create an expanded media agency whose publications will reach every environment. Comrade Grobart sustains that the PURS [United Party of the Socialist Revolution] and the government must take positions to limit this fractious effort, he sees that at this moment it is difficult. Among all the comrades in leadership, there was talk of great indignation toward the Chinese comrades.

It is my opinion [and] that of the comrades of the delegation that the cadre of leaders of the Cuban Party have conquered the right position. However, we believe that while having their justifications, in the cautions and preoccupations of the Cuban comrades in informing the Party and public opinion about terms of dissent with the Chinese, in opening a debate and in taking a position, they can today - at the moment in which nothing can no longer impede a discussion - come up with some counter strokes. This also takes into account the level of education, experience, the still crude ideological grounding of the Cuban militants, for many of them the actual divergences with the Chinese comrades go off without actual understanding of all the moments that have led to these divergences. To this one can add two facts: that the Chinese comrades

have worked and are working to widely disseminate their positions, and that in the Cuban people lives a sentiment of gratitude for the help given by the Chinese in their revolution.

There is however a good reason to believe that the great prestige of Castro and his group of Cuban leaders will succeed in overcoming these difficulties, just as they succeeded to overcome the critical moments in the "caso Escalante" ["Escalante Case"] and of the split with the USSR last Autumn [over the Soviet withdrawal of the nuclear missiles to resolve the crisis with the United States - ed.].

We did not have an inkling of eventual clashes in the group of Cuban leaders in terms of the present controversy in the communist camp. Comrade Grobart, speaking with me, did not exclude the possibility that the inferior level of the cadre of leaders might necessitate a political struggle, but he said that he was confident in the possibility to capture all of the party with the right positions.

3. On the development of the struggle for democracy and socialism in different Latin American countries Fidel Castro affirmed that he shared the conviction that it is not possible to generalize through a single model. Implicitly correcting an impression that to us some time ago seemed to be in the media, from declarations and speeches of Cuban leaders and of Castro himself, it comes today clearly affirmed that also in a relatively homogeneous group - single Latin American countries have diverse situations (for the level of economic development, for tradition and experience, for knowledge and revolutionary and democratic organizations, for the amount of United States intervention, etc.) consequently the revolutionary vanguards of every single country vie to elaborate and pursue their own avenues and objectives of advancement. Other than in the conversation with us, Castro also spoke about this question in his speech of 26 July. Speaking with us he wanted, country by country, to illustrate to us where a peaceful avenue that could be taken and where instead there was no other option but armed struggle. The two cases that speak most to this are that of Chile and Venezuela. For the latter country he reminded that some time ago the Venezuelan revolution was accused (he did not specify by whom) of risking armed conflict; today he underlined the correctness of this choice that corresponds completely with the actual situation of that country and is obtaining good results. Castro said that the armed conflict in Venezuela could rapidly bring stabilization of democratic liberty and to elections that would signify the broken cracks of [Venezuelan President Romulo] Betancourt. Regarding Chile, and in general in the countries where it is today possible to advance in a more peaceful way, he parsed that he fundamentally could identify with a peaceful avenue and with the possibility of the conquest of the majority in an election.

Considerations for a democratic route to socialism, that for example, were worked on by us (fights for economic revendications, for structural reforms, for the development of democracy, links between the different levels of these struggles, electoral momentum, etc.) seemed still like a very foreign political idea to the Cuban leaders. This question must be, I think, addressed with great depth on the occasion of the arrival in Italy of the PURS delegation and materials on this topic (as was explained before) must be sent to Cuba.

Speaking with us, Castro more than once expressed the concept that "Latin America is the weak link of imperialism. The collapse of the positions of power in Latin America will provoke an irreparable crisis in the United States." His opinion that was proposed is that in only a brief matter of time there will be other breaks in countries that today are today subjects of the United States. The situation is most advanced in Venezuela. He also insisted that because also the Parties of Western Europe, in the first place our own, which are intensifying their solidarity toward the liberation movement of the Latin American countries, [we should] not exclude the possibility of direct assistance.

Speaking then with some Argentine and Chilean comrades I had the impression that today - after Fidel's trip to the USSR - the relations are much better between the Cuban Party and the other Latin American parties, in whose ranks - these years - there have been open lacerations the origins of which were certainly not foreign to the view that the experience of Cuba was outright [tout court] reproducible everywhere.

4. On the relations between PCI and PURS and on the Italian situation the conversation can be summed up like this:

a) Castro expressed great admiration for our Party, for its struggles, for the great electoral success that for Cuba was loudly celebrated. Particular emotion was kindled by the solidarity of Italian workers during the landing [sbarco] at the Playa Giròn [i.e., Bay of Pigs] and during the crisis of '62.

b) He has a relatively exact knowledge of the conditions in which the PCI fights, of its objectives, of its strategy (knowledge which is very scarce and fragmentary, as was demonstrated by the fact that time and time again, in our trip we heard the question posed: "How come with two million registered and eight million votes you can't take power?") Castro said he understood and shared our political line given that the situation in the West entails a suitable revolutionary strategy. He recognized that the exchange of information between the two parties is too meager and occasional and that forms of organic contacts must be added. To this proposal he welcomed with enthusiasm the invitation contained in the letter of Comrade [Palmiro] Togliatti to send to Italy a PURS delegation. He then welcomed all of our proposals:

□1) Transmissions in Italian language from Radio Cuba for Latin America where there are tens of millions of Italian emigres;

□2) Exchange of correspondence between "Hoy" and l'Unità. It would be even better to have a reporter from l'Unità in Havana; it is rather more difficult for them - because of the absence of a group of expert journalists - to send a correspondent to Italy;

□3) Reciprocal translations of political documents and books etc;

□4) Organized and permanent sharing of party materials, asking that PCI regularly print its foreign bulletin in the Spanish language and send it in large quantity

□5) Exchange of delegations of diverse nature

□6) Reciprocal sending of lecturers

On all of these proposals I will enclose an attachment with some concrete proposals to be examined separately by other PURS comrades. Relating to defining a period for receiving a PURS delegation in Italy it will occur that the Secretary of the Party will solicit a written response from the Cubans.

I think that it will also be good to find a way to make known that it would greatly please us to receive a delegation of comrades of great qualifications.

c) Fidel Castro posed to us two other problems:

1) To find a way to send to Cuba a group of Italian technical experts (medics, teachers, industrial experts of any branch, etc.) For them Italians offer a double advantage of coming from a country with a great democratic tradition and of not encountering great difficulties with the language. In successive meetings with other comrades in the Cuban leadership the question was proposed always with great

insistence. They also consent to the sending of also the family of these technicians and they welcome the idea that their stay would be long. I consider that the question must be examined with attention also because the experience up to now has not been amongst the happiest, and it has left some bad legacy (on what we can now know especially from the experience of the failed group of our comrades sent to Cuba from Czechoslovakia and that are now almost all back in their homes, it will need to be examined fully).

2) To organize mass tourism to Cuba from Italy. Castro said that, through their touristic agency (INIT), Cubans are able to offer easy payment terms [Rateazioni] also for up to two years. He insisted that there be rise in the direct contact between INIT and ITALTURIST. The Cuban leaders, to break the American blockade, make great efforts to establish economic, political and cultural relations with all of the countries of the world. To tourism from Europe they give great importance and it must be remembered that the preexisting hotel-touristic apparatus that the old regime which has been recently prepared, offers ample possibilities in this sense.