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**From the Journal of S.M. Kudryavtsev, 'Record of a
Conversation with Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel
Castro Ruz, 21 January 1961'**

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Summary:

Fidel Castro discusses the conditions of the Cuban economy and militia and expresses his belief that Cuba-United States relations are heading in a positive direction.

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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with Prime Minister of the Republic of Cuba
Fidel CASTRO RUZ
21 January 1961

Fidel Castro came to my apartment this evening.

In the conversation which passed in a warm and friendly atmosphere, I touched on several questions of the domestic political situation and the foreign policy situation of Cuba.

Fidel Castro talked much about how he was quite satisfied with the results of the mobilization of the Cuban people held on days when the threat of possible direct intervention from the US hung over Cuba. This mobilization, stressed Fidel Castro, again showed the readiness of the Cubans to defend their homeland, and helped the revolutionary government rally all the people together to repel possible American aggression. This mobilization helped the military formations of the people's militia better prepare from the military point of view, and at the same time reveal and correct some shortcomings in the organization of the country's defense as a whole.

The people's militia, continued Fidel Castro, has passed through a good combat school, moved considerably forward in mastering modern weaponry, and have now essentially been turned into a serious military force capable of resisting any aggressor.

In the course of further conversation the discussion turned on the operations conducted by the people's militia to put down counterrevolutionary breeding grounds in Escambray. Saying that every cloud has a silver lining Fidel Castro noted that the participation of the people's militia in operations to clean out the mountain forests in Escambray strengthens their combat readiness still further. In his words, at the present time there are groups of counterrevolutionaries in the mountains of Escambray surrounded by individual armed detachments of the people's militia. Right now it has been decided to send additional detachments of the people's militia to this region directly from the capital so that they get a baptism of fire, liquidating the counterrevolutionary clusters in this region.

Fidel Castro said, the counterrevolutionary breeding grounds in Escambray do not present any serious danger either to the revolutionary government or the domestic situation of the country as a whole. A decision was made just now to conclude agrarian reform in this region more quickly and to first of all undermine the economic base of the rich peasants, who are as a matter of fact supporting these counterrevolutionary groups, supplying them with food. The most dangerous elements of the rich peasants will be exiled from this region and hauled into court in the event that their ties with the counterrevolutionaries are detected.

Fidel Castro continued, on the whole the activity of the internal counterrevolutionaries fell somewhat after the adoption of a stricter law by the government. However, this does not mean that internal counterrevolutionaries have been done away with. On the contrary, a long and difficult struggle lies ahead, but we are all confident that the internal counterrevolution will be brought to an end in 1961.

Then the conversation turned on the economic situation of the country. Fidel Castro noted in this connection that, in his opinion, the state of the economy does not arouse any serious worries, although of course there will be some difficulties in 1961 in supplying the population with individual goods.

At the same time unemployment in agriculture will probably be ended, and this fact will strengthen the revolution even more. In order to continually supply the population of the country with food the government intends to somewhat reduce the amount of land occupied by sugar cane. The stalks of the sugar cane will be used to feed cattle, and the land under the sugar cane released from the sugar cane plants will be sown with grain crops.

The mood of the peasant population is very good. At the present time all cooperatives and public estates [narodnye imeniya] are on the whole operating successfully. A growth of sugar production is taking place. As regards the situation in nationalized industry, of course the mobilization performed in January created certain difficulties in this sphere. However, this mainly affects the quality rather than the quantity of output produced.

In our view the external danger, Fidel Castro continued, has somewhat declined with the coming to power of Kennedy. However we, of course, realize that it would be naïve to think that the US will suddenly abandon its aggressive designs with respect to Cuba. In our view, the preamble [sic: vstupitel'naya chast'; trans.: presumably referring to Kennedy's Inaugural Address, given the date of the conversation] of Kennedy represents a certain concession to the forces of peace and progress, that is, to the socialist camp. Fidel Castro stressed, I am confident that the consistent struggle of N. S. Khrushchev for peace, disarmament, and the elimination of the vestiges of colonialism forced Kennedy to make some concessions. This is what forced him to say that the US is supposedly ready to hold talks and they are also in favor of peace. Of course, Kennedy continued in the previous positions on the questions of Latin America, and he still could not say anything new in this area. But this worries us least of all. Fidel Castro said further, a national liberation movement is developing in Latin America and whatever Kennedy says he will not be able to stop it.

In my view, continued Fidel Castro, the second part of the speech of the American President is more important. It is this part of the speech which can be defined as positive. Of course, everything depends on whether these words of Kennedy's remain on paper, or he will actually pursue a policy of lessening tensions.

In any event, said Fidel Castro, the Cuban government thinks that the most dangerous period for Cuba has passed, and now our main task will be to throw all [our] efforts into ensuring the best organization of Cuban industry, agriculture, and the state apparatus. The main task will be to increase the production of industrial goods, and also food for the Cuban people.

In the course of further conversation at his own initiative Fidel Castro touched on the question of his plans for a trip to the Soviet Union. He talked much on this subject, stressing that he anticipates to accomplish this desire of his in the spring or summer of this year. Fidel Castro continued, I would like the majority of my stay in the Soviet Union to be devoted to the study of the experience of managing agriculture. Fidel Castro said, I am especially interested in your achievements in the virgin lands, the organization of state farms there, and all the problems associated with opening up these lands. In this connection he again began to develop the idea regarding sending approximately 1000 young Cubans to our state farms in order for them to adopt the work experience there, study the language, and then become active leaders of the

Soviet experiment in Cuba.

Returning again to the plans for his trip to the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro said that he would like to give Cde. N. S. Khrushchev a wigwam in advance which could be built in Cuba beforehand, and then erected near Moscow by two Cuban craftsmen. Fidel Castro noted, I would like for Cde. N. S. Khrushchev to have good memories of Cuba and the hard work of its people.

He began to speak in this connection about the successful experiment of building wigwams in the area of Treasure Lake [trans. note: on the Isla de Tesoros (Treasure Island), now called the Isla de la Juventud (Island of Youth)] for tourism purposes, which a delegation of Soviet journalists viewed.

In the course of further conversation Fidel Castro warmly spoke of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev and the aid of the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro stressed, I will never forget my meetings with Cde. N. S. Khrushchev at the UN General Assembly in New York. The struggle of Cde. Khrushchev for peace has won him personally, the Soviet Union, and its foreign policy universal respect in the entire world. The authority of the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro continued, as far as he can judge from the reports of his ambassadors, has grown immeasurably recently especially in the countries fighting for their independence. The growth of the authority of the Soviet Union, the growth of the popularity of its foreign policy, Fidel Castro said in conclusion, is what is forcing Kennedy to search right now for ways to develop more flexible methods in US foreign policy.

At the end of the conversation I passed Fidel Castro lectures on military questions in English which were sent at his request.

Thanking me for the materials, Fidel Castro said that he needs them very much. He would not only study them closely himself, but would also give instructions about the study of the materials contained in these lectures by all senior Cuban military leaders.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA
(S. KUDRYAVTSEV)