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Complaint by [Government of] Brazil Regarding Czechoslovak Transport of Guerrilla Fighters from Cuba to Latin America

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Summary:

Head of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of the Interior Josef Houska reports a complaint by the Brazilian government regarding to Czechoslovak assistance of transporting guerrilla fighters from Cuba to Latin America. Brazilian government issued an official warning that relations between Brazil and Czechoslovak could be deteriorated in connection with the support for Cuba. Houska says Brazilian officials' argument could be proof that Czechoslovak specially selected officials making technical arrangement for the transits belong to some section of the Czechoslovak civil service. However, the Czechoslovak authorities cannot be blamed that they go along with the activities of the Cuban Embassy in Prague, which controls the transport of the guerrillas since an embassy is entitled to engage in full diplomatic activities in a friendly country. Houska argues that the Brazilian government does not have conceret evidence for the direct accusation of Czechoslovakia. The position of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs could have been the result of pressure by ultra-reactionary forces in domestic policy which are concerned by the opposition activities in Brazil and abroad.

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1st Administration of the
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STRICTLY SECRET

Comrade Josef Kudrna Copy no. 2
Minister of Interior

Complaint by Brazil at Czechoslovak interference in the transport of guerrilla fighters from Cuba to Latin America

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On October 17, 1967 a complaint by the Brazilian Government was conveyed to our Ambassador in Rio de Janeiro in which the Brazilian Government protests against the assistance which the Czechoslovak authorities are giving to Brazilian anti-government elements in facilitating their journey to Brazil. According to the complaint, their journey was arranged to Cuba through Prague and in the course of their return journey they were in contact with Czechoslovak Government institutions which provided them with financial resources to cover their journey to Uruguay and from there to Brazil. The involvement of the Czechoslovak authorities was said to be discovered in the course of the interrogation of guerrilla fighters who were detained during clashes in the Caparao hills on Brazilian territory. In addition to this official protest, the authorities of the secret service (Stb) in Prague found out that the Secretary of the Brazilian Embassy in Prague had made statements to the same effect. He referred to information from his Government and declared to sources of the Main Administration of the Stb that the Czechoslovak authorities ignored the emigration of Brazilian opposition politicians to Cuba. In both cases a warning was issued that the continuation of such practices could have a negative influence on relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil.

Apart from Brazil, which issued an official warning that relations could be jeopardized in connection with the support for Cuba, negative comments were made in Venezuela as well in accordance with the decisions of the conference of the OAS in August. Here the pressure took on the form of a more stringent control of issuing visas to Czechoslovak nationals (employees of foreign trade companies) where each application must now be approved by the Minister of Interior. When the Head of our commercial representation contacted the Venezuelan authorities with the question whether the refusal to issue short-term visas to our trade delegates meant a worsening of relations, he was given an affirmative reply.

In appraising these reports and reasons for the reaction of Brazil it is necessary to consider the Operation MANUEL (arranging the journey of revolutionaries from Latin America to Cuba and back) which is organized in Prague by officials of the Cuban residentura, legally working at the Cuban Embassy in Prague, and by specially appointed officials of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of the Interior. The 1st Administration of the Ministry of the Interior has drawn up a detailed report on the course of the operation, on its nature and on problematic issues; this was done as part of a general review of cooperation with the Cuban Ministry of the Interior. This material was submitted to you in January 1967 and subsequently passed on the Head of the 8th Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of

Czechoslovakia as a document for the highest Party institutions in discussing relations with Cuba. All conclusions contained in that report, including proposals for measures to be taken, remain valid because neither objective (Prague as the only crossroad by air for connections with Cuba) nor subjective factors (orientation of Cuba on armed struggle) have changed. On the contrary, in connection with the meeting of the Organization of Latin American States in July in Havana, Cuba's orientation on a guerrilla struggle has been further intensified and not even the considerable setbacks for the guerrilla fighters on almost all battlefields in Latin America – including the physical liquidation or the arrest of the main protagonists of this struggle – have so far not contributed to any greater degree to a change in the policy of the Cubans.

Factual foundations of the Brazilian complaint:

The evaluation of the materials of the Operation MANUEL in relations with Brazil has revealed that throughout its duration a total of 41 Brazilians have passed through Czechoslovakia and have been handled by officials of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of the Interior. This was their number during individual years: 1963 – 1; 1964 – 2; 1965 – 12; 1966 – 17 and 1967 – 9 participants. But apart from this many more Brazilians which were handled by the Cuban residentura in Prague or by international organizations such as the WFTU, the IUS and others as well as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must have passed through our territory; we cannot have a check of these. It is more than likely that among the handled and registered travellers only a small portion will be in actual transit. Brazilians who came under the 1st Administration of the Ministry of the Interior were handled in strict accordance with the principles stipulated for the Operation MANUEL, i.e. only assistance during check-in at the airport and instructions concerning the departure route to Latin America. They were given absolutely no other instructions, no advice concerning their activity and no financial resources.

It is not possible to ascertain how many of those in transit have returned to Brazil and joined any form of opposition activities and how many have remained in Uruguay or other Latin American countries. We possess only very fragmentary information about people who in April 1967 were detained in the course of guerrilla struggles in Brazil. According to incomplete reports in the press, about 30-40 guerrilla fighters have been arrested, but only very few of these were listed by name. Of six names mentioned it was found that only one had passed through Prague under our care (Gregorio Mendonca). A further report appeared in the USA, in the Miami Herald on 20.9., regarding the detention of Hermes Machado Neto in the area where struggles were raging in Brazil. After his arrest he declared that he had passed through Prague together with other 3 Brazilians and 1 from Ecuador. (According to our records, the person named returned from Cuba in September 1966).

Vulnerability of Czechoslovakia:

In principle it should be pointed out that in assessing our vulnerability we proceed solely from the practices of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of Interior and its forms of assistance during the transit of Latin Americans through Prague. We do not know in what ways the WFTU and other institutions with their headquarters on the territory of Czechoslovakia are helping the revolutionary and progressive movement; consequently this assistance is linked with Czechoslovakia. This assistance could well be a pretext for campaigns against Czechoslovakia.

The main argument for the Brazilian official quarters could be proof that our specially selected officials making technical arrangement for the transits belong to some section of the Czechoslovak civil service. A certain possibility arises from the dual

legalization of our officials at Ruzyne airport where in their dealing with the airport staff they claim to be employees of the Ministry of the Interior and vis-à-vis participants in transit they are presented as employees of an unnamed Cuban institution. The involvement of Czechoslovak state institutions could be borne out indirectly by the fact that in exceptional instances the officials of handling institutions arrange changes to documents, medical attention which in some instances has been provided in the Ministry of the Interior medical centre at Krakovska Street. Another possibility is the following and identification of vehicles as cars of the Ministry of the Interior. The fact that the participants travel on two documents can hardly be exploited; what is more, the passport control does not register the change of their identity. But in this case it is very difficult to provide proof in view of the transit regime and in general maximally tolerant visa regulations, which apply to all passengers, irrespective of their nationality. In all the above-mentioned cases the testimony of a detained participant or of an outright traitor in the ranks of the MANUEL participants is not enough; instead an enemy agency in Czechoslovakia which has closely followed the entire project and accumulated the necessary documents would have to engage in intensive work to find a proof.

The Czechoslovak authorities cannot be blamed that they go along with the activities of the Cuban Embassy in Prague, which controls the transport of the guerrillas, since this applies to an embassy which is entitled to engage in full diplomatic activities in a friendly country. Under the agreements in force, Cuban nationals do not need a visa to come to Czechoslovakia and, consequently we have neither the possibility nor the right to assess the identity or intentions of those in transit, unless they violate our laws.

The facts ascertained up till now on the revelation of our participation in the operation demonstrate that enemy counter-intelligence agencies do not even possess sufficient material for the direct accusation of Czechoslovakia that it is active in the course of the transit of guerrillas. A certain demonstration of this consideration is the fact that the testimony of the Venezuelan Carasquela was published within the frame of the August deliberations of the Organization of American States when he fully exposed his activities and said “that he had been in Prague in 1964 under the name of Jose Escobar Espinoza and has been given instructions by a Czech woman, called Marie who had been working in the past for several years at the Czech Embassy in Uruguay”. When we checked our records it was found that a comrade who had never been to Latin America had indeed, handled the Venezuelan. The information on her activities in Latin America is inaccurate and applies to another of our comrades who had been in Argentina in the past as the wife of our resident. The above-mentioned inaccuracy shows that Carasquela's testimony was based not only on his personal experience but probably on experience gained by other participants in the operation. The statement by a woman employee of the Czechoslovak Embassy mentioned in Carasquela's testimony was, in addition to mentioning Prague as an international crossroad, meant to serve to accuse Czechoslovakia in detail of participating in the operation.

In conclusion it should be pointed out that our Embassy in Rio de Janeiro has rejected the accusation as well as the demand of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide written documents, which would disprove the Brazilian arguments. The Embassy referred to the principles of our foreign policy and the fact that Prague was an international communications crossroad, which any passenger was able to use freely and without any obstacles. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued supplementary instructions to the Ambassador in Rio to come back to the matter at some future stage and state that he considered a verbal explanation as adequate. If the Brazilian side were to insist on an explanation it should have requested concrete evidence and specified the accusation. When the Ambassador conveyed this position to the Head of the East European Department Netto on 30.10. the latter replied that the Brazilian protest contained concrete arguments since “the documents and finances could not be handed over, and transport facilities could not have been provided without the knowledge of the Czechoslovak authorities”. He added that the

Czechoslovak position did not meet the expectations of the leadership of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and stressed that it dealt only with what had happened but failed to mention the most significant point, namely that Czechoslovakia would cease to be a communication bridge in activities which Brazil considers to be hostile. He went on to say that Brazil had full understanding for tourism problems but he felt that the Czechoslovak authorities could not fail to be aware of the above-mentioned matters, which are highly significant for the further promotion of mutual relations. When the Czechoslovak Ambassador reiterated the Czechoslovak position he terminated the conversation by stating that the Czechoslovak position together with a supplementary analysis would be handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for assessment.

This conversation, too, did not change the overall picture of the situation and our argumentation and position allow us to maintain the above-mentioned standpoint unless more serious concrete arguments were to emerge, demanding a new assessment. It cannot be ruled out that the position of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been the result of pressure by ultra-reactionary forces in domestic policy which are concerned by the activities by the opposition in Brazil and abroad. The fact that certain officials in exile (for example, the eminent representative of the military opposition Admiral Candido Aragao) reached Cuba from where they organize anti-government activities – via Prague - together with the direct instructions given by the conference of the Organization of American States, could be the main reason for the exceptionally sharp protest of the Brazilian Government against Czechoslovakia.

It is possible that following the example of Brazil and Venezuela and in accordance with practical political and economic interests we may well encounter other protests and concrete measures by Latin American Governments in the sphere of diplomatic and trade relations. The situation will not be changed even by a decision of the Cuban intelligence service to send some of the guerrillas via Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic about which we have been informed (without any details) by the leadership of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior. However, even if this were so, Prague would remain the transit station in most cases especially since for the moment there are no direct flights from any other socialist countries (with the exception of Moscow).

I am enclosing an excerpt of a report on cooperation with the Cuban intelligence service, mentioned in the introduction. It contains a basic general view of the entire problem and that is why it could not be combined in practice with an assessment and evaluation of the concrete Brazilian complaint. A basic political decision on the further progress of the Operation MANUEL, suggested in the report with a list of possible alternatives as well as all positive and negative aspects, has not been taken and that is why the operation continues in accordance with agreements concluded in the past between representatives of the Czechoslovak and Cuban Ministries of the Interior.

Head of the 1st Administration of the
Ministry of the Interior
(Col. Houska)

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