

October 13, 1962

**Memorandum of the Conversation between China's
Ambassador to Cuba Shen Jian and Cuban Finance
Minister Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Havana**

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Summary:

A conversation between China's Ambassador to Cuba Shen Jian and Cuban Finance Minister Ernesto "Che" Guevara. They discuss the situation of the Cuban economy given recent U.S. blockades, as well as the various situations in other countries like Yugoslavia, Argentina and Guatemala.

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Conversation between Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Ambassador Shen Jian

Date: 13 October 1962

Venue: Ministry of Industry of Cuba

Ambassador Shen began by offering maps of the strategic situations of several major campaigns of the Chinese Liberation War, as requested earlier by Guevara. Shen explained them one by one. Guevara enquired about Indonesia, Nepal, and the Sino-Indian border issues.

Ambassador Shen: Since I'm leaving for China for holiday on the 15th [of this month], any message you expect me to carry for you?

Guevara: Nothing in particular. Please forward my greetings to Chairman Mao [Zedong], Chairman Liu [Shaoqi], Prime Minister Zhou [Enlai] and other comrades. And please let me, again, point out that it is important that China publish Spanish editions of books [as soon as possible]. The Peking Review so far, still hasn't had its Spanish edition. I'm very much interested in this magazine, because it has many valuable articles.

Ambassador Shen: [The continuing absence of the Spanish edition] is due to the shortage of translation personnel. For the moment, we have only 18 Chinese students studying Spanish in Cuba.

Guevara: 18 are too few. Translating to Spanish is far easier from English than from Chinese. Any possibility that we could translate the English version of the Peking Review into the Spanish one right here in Cuba? By no means am I advising you.

Ambassador Shen: Good idea.

Guevara: We have invited Comrade Anna Louise Strong to visit us. She replied with a letter saying she would, as soon as she finishes her ongoing tasks in China. What do you make of this?

Ambassador Shen: I have not quite been informed of this issue.

Guevara: Please say hello to her for me when you meet her back in China. Let her know that she is always welcome in Cuba and could come whenever suitable. I'm afraid I will be too busy to write her a reply. Her book on people's communes has already been published. The rest of her books, however, will not. They are not quite the cup of tea for the local readers.

Ambassador Shen: When will the Cuban Socialist Party of Revolution and Unification be set up?

Guevara: Early next year. [We are] recruiting members. It is estimated that only some 50,000 people will enter the short list. Indeed, not many, but it's meant to be selective.

Ambassador Shen: What's the situation of the Cuban economy?

Guevara: The Soviet Union has given lots of aid. We could cope with some basic problems by ourselves, but the overall situation is far from good. We have an agricultural sector that is poorly organized and an industry without its own basis.

Ambassador Shen: Recently the US has pressured other nations not to send their merchant ships to Cuba. Has this had an impact on the Cuban economy?

Guevara: There will definitely be some difficulties in one way or another. But it won't last. The British, for example, didn't yield [to the Americans]. We once expected the arrival of bearings for the sugarcane-reaping machine, after we had made all other components ready for assembly. But in the end, we only found ships which carried these bearings, no more willing to reach Cuba, to unload in Panama.

Ambassador Shen: Apart from the embargo, what other measures would the US turn to?

Guevara: The Americans have always wanted to attack us directly. But this view has yet to gain popularity. They, for the moment, prefer political isolation and sabotage of Cuba, which indeed won't cause any great losses on our part.

Ambassador Shen: What's the view of the ruling class of the US towards the statement of the Soviet Union in support of Cuba?

Guevara: We think the ruling class has been divided into two factions. One is the Pentagon and the other the group rallying behind Kennedy. Both parties have decisive influence on US foreign policy. The Kennedy [faction] appears less arrogant whereas the Pentagon does look more aggressive. The Kennedy [faction] demonstrates their moderation on the issue of POWs exchange [i.e., anti-Castro Cubans held prisoner after the Bay of Pigs invasion]. They promised to offer cargoes worth 50 million.

Ambassador Shen: [The US] used to say that the amount was 62 million. So on top of the cargoes worth 50 million, was there a cash payment of 12 million?

Guevara: Only 2 million cash and the total was 52 million. The bargain is inseparable from negotiation. Indeed, it [the negotiation] is nothing but a deal.

Ambassador Shen: Any possibility to reach a deal?

Guevara: The lawyer [James B. Donovan] said that [reaching a deal] wouldn't be a problem. They, of course, attempted to deceive us by proposing unfairly high priced goods. We turned down their proposal, flatly.

Ambassador Shen: Were those mercenaries released, would they pick up arms and turn against you once more?

Guevara: We couldn't fear them less.

Ambassador Shen: Any other moves on the American part?

Guevara: No idea. Perhaps they would send a neighboring country to attack us, which, of course, won't solve the problem.

Ambassador Shen: What's the motive behind the American recruitment of Cuban

counter-revolutionaries?

Guevara: I am not really sure. The rumor goes that these new recruits will be sent to Latin American countries. The Americans expect to symbolize, with this measure, their support to counter-revolutionaries. We are well equipped to crush them however.

Ambassador Shen: Will a world war, do you think, break out as a result of a direct US invasion?

Guevara: I believe so.

Ambassador Shen: Any American moves on this matter?

Guevara: They publicly reject the idea of a possible US attack on Cuba touching off a new world war. In my opinion, they in fact know that a world war could break out. The attitude of the Soviet Union towards us is very clear.

Ambassador Shen: This is a result of your trip [in late August/early September 1962] to Moscow?

Guevara: On the contrary, we [Cuba and the Soviet Union] discussed Soviet backing, and I went to Moscow only with all Soviet support already in hand.

Ambassador Shen: The press says that you and Soviet comrades have exchanged views on certain international issues. Have you reached any agreements yet?

Guevara: There is one point we haven't settled on: in what specific form will the Soviet support be, in the event of a US invasion? At least, we haven't put this point in written form. Anyhow, we are so convinced, by what the Soviet Union told us, that there's going to be a world war. Also there are other issues that Soviet comrades believe are worth discussing at another time.

We understand the attitude of the Chinese comrades. Some Latin American parties act meanly, in the name of the Soviet Union who, on contrary, is very nice towards us. For instance, the Brazilian communist party said that they didn't want war, because peace was of paramount importance. The Soviet Union knew that we are training new recruits; they, in fact, helped us.

Still there is something we don't quite understand, even as Marxist-Leninists, probably because we need communication of a higher level. For instance, which is confidential, I sent a delegation to a youth meeting (probably in Warsaw). Their performance there turned out to be disappointing. The theme of their speech fell mainly on peace rather than national liberation. They even crossed swords with the Chinese delegation. On hearing this, we replaced the delegation with another in the charge of Liweilong [sic; perhaps the José Rebellón-ed.], the chairman of the College Students Association of Cuba. Now the point is: it is the Soviet Union that released this information - the disappointing performance of the Cuban delegation in Warsaw - to us.

We are distressed at the split of our [socialist] camp, which is why we requested the polemic between the Soviet Union and Albania to be extended no more. The Soviet Union agreed. Albanian comrades, however, published and distributed an anti-Soviet Union statement. We as leaders had the rights and were obligated to see this statement, but again, public distribution was wrong. The problem won't be solved

unless both sides admit their faults. At the end of the day, time will solve this problem.

Ambassador Shen: I have not seen that document of Albania. So far Albania has been the smallest fraternal country in the socialist camp, beleaguered by imperialism and capitalism. Never has it stopped fighting against imperialism, feudalism, and revisionism. On certain issues, Albania admittedly has fundamental disagreement with the Soviet Union, but the disagreement should only be discussed and solved within the framework of proletarian internationalism and egalitarianism. No one would seriously believe that Albania was bullying the Soviet Union, a powerful country. Indeed, as a giant and powerful country, the Soviet Union should take the initiative to promote inter-party and inter-state relationships. Sadly, it is the Soviet Union that touched off the polemic with Albania. The Soviet Union escalated criticism in their party meeting, and furthermore, initiated the termination of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Comrade Zhou Enlai made a speech in the 22th party [CPSU] Congress of the Soviet Union [in Moscow in October 1961], as you know, [which indicated that] we don't agree to the attitude held by our Soviet comrades.

Guevara: Neither do we. The problem is that we don't want to be the arbitrator between them. It's because we are weak and have made little contribution to the development of Marxism-Leninism. The Soviets used to say bad things about Albania. They no longer do so because we reminded them. But [recently] there occurred an incident. Among our military instructors, there was a Soviet. One day he discovered his trainees circulating a book from the Albanians, named "The Clique of Khrushchevite Revisionism," which was, of course, considered [by this officer] as a negative attitude towards the Soviet Union. Although we didn't mention this to Albania, we think this is bad.

The Soviet Union has given us great support, indeed, support that enables us to survive. But we act independently on the Albania problem. Between Albania and Cuba, we have maintained an amicable relationship; we, for example, send exchange students to each other. This is a true practice of proletarian internationalism. We, however, are unwilling to see Cuba pushed onto the battlefield of the [Albania] problem.

Ambassador Shen: I have published the Communiqué of the tenth plenum of the central committee of the Communist Party of China [in September 1962], which re-states our strict adherence to our statements and declarations made in Moscow in 1957 and 1960. We welcome the solidarity between socialist countries to be achieved under the framework of proletarian internationalism. To strengthen the bond [between socialist states], we have made many efforts and will continue doing so. We, of course, never mentioned our losses and difficulties because of our constant attempts to promote [socialist solidarity]. We believe in the principles of the Moscow Declaration. We are still the enemy of revisionism. The Yugoslavian revisionism now becomes ever more rampant. Tito even dared to openly feed American imperialists, via the American journalist, Drew Pearson, advice that aimed to infiltrate and sabotage socialist countries. 250 American newspapers have published Tito's speech. It has been made clear in the [Moscow] Statement of Eighty-one Parties of 1960 that Yugoslavia betrayed socialism. Against the Moscow Declaration of 1957, it developed a revisionist agenda. It received mountains of US dollars from the Americans, sabotaged socialist solidarity, and stood in the way of the national liberation movement. To expose and criticize Yugoslavian modern revisionism is the shared duty for each Marxist-Leninist.

Guevara: I have been to Yugoslavia. That is not, in my opinion, a socialist country. My position is to avoid arguing with it. An OK relationship is just enough. During my visit

to Yugoslavia, I was asked for my opinion towards this country's political system. I said that the country was in danger, because the seeds of capitalism had been scattered everywhere. My speech touched off a grand debate.

However, the adverse impact of Yugoslavia has been diminishing. For example, when we had just taken control of Cuba, there were people flirting with the ideas of following the Yugoslav model and factory self-management. Now, such ideas have long disappeared. So I don't think there is any reason for Yugoslavia to remain a serious issue. Of course, by no means am I suggesting that Fidel visit Yugoslavia, or we upgrade our relations with it. In the future, in international meetings, if everyone condemns Yugoslavia, we also will agree to this. I don't understand why Yugoslavia still continues to be a problem. Yugoslavia has become history now.

Ambassador Shen: Admittedly, the influence of Yugoslav revisionism is diminishing, thanks to the efforts made by every Marxist-Leninist to expose and criticize it. But it is far from being in the past. On the contrary, Tito's thoughts remain influential to some extent. It stood in the way of socialist solidarity and tried to undermine the anti-imperialist movement of nationalist countries. Yugoslav revisionism is both alive and active, isn't it? Consider the case of Latin America in which many communist parties are demanding a peaceful transition to socialism. Isn't this the footnote to Tito's lingering adverse impact on socialism?

Guevara: Poland has received more money than Yugoslavia from the Americans. But we still see it as a people's democratic republic, a Marxist-Leninist country.

Ambassador Shen: Tito published a separate modern revisionist agenda. He refused to join the Moscow Declaration of 1957 and the Moscow Statement of 1960—he attacked our socialist camp. Of course, we [China and Cuba] have a fundamental agreement on whether it is good or bad to receive money from imperialists.

Guevara: Didn't one of Jiang Jieshi's [Chiang Kai-shek's] generals end up being the minister of water conservation [of the People's Republic of China]? Sometimes, things turn good from bad, sometimes the other way around. It is dialectics, as we know. So far as I know, within Yugoslavia there are factions. [Leading Yugoslav communist and Tito associate] Edvard Kardelj, for example, is slightly leaning towards the right. This is a circumstance which we shall study, to see if change will be made in the future. Anyhow, we don't speak more than we should.

Ambassador Shen: [I agree] both people and things are changing, all the time, either from bad to good, or the other way around. Yet the reason Fu Zuoyi became our minister was because he surrendered his army, cut off his relations with the Jiang Jieshi Clique, and was willing to serve his people. The peaceful liberation of Beijing was indeed a great achievement. However, the fact that some bad people became good does not necessarily mean that other [bad] people would also succeed. Kennedy will not. Imperialists will not. So change is conditional.

Guevara: I agree that change is conditional. Revisionism is a kind of degradation in mind. France is an imperialist country. But while we fight imperialism, the one we target is not France but the US.

Ambassador Shen: Yugoslavia now is the leader of revisionists. Their ultimate demise lies in our constant efforts to fight against them. Marxism-Leninism has proven to grow along with its war on left-leaning and right-leaning thoughts. The principal danger facing us is the right-leaning thoughts, the modern revisionist thought.

Anything new in Latin America?

Guevara: Almost the same as in our last conversation. [Argentine leader] Juan Peron appears left-leaning, seemingly wishing to join the revolution.

Ambassador Shen: The rumor goes that the Argentine communist party wished to form a unified front by cooperating with the Peronist [party].

Guevara: A unified front in election season. The Argentine communist party speaks against Tito while in action it supports Yugoslavia.

It's said that a communist set up a guerrilla force after being expelled by the Columbian communist party. [Ironically,] the Party then condemned him by publishing his name. Furthermore, the Party sent another party member to the police department, releasing the poor man's name as well as his location in the mountains. Thanks to their comrades, all communist guerrillas were killed in the end.

Guevara: The Guatemalan revolution is developing, and [Marco Antonio] Yon Sosa is currently in Cuba which is entirely confidential. A son of an Indian person and a Chinese immigrant, he was an army officer of little education or understanding of Marxism-Leninism. He is, however, a sincere person, willing to listen and learn. I believe that he will make a splash in the world.

Ambassador Shen: What is the present situation of their guerrilla area?

Guevara: They have no area for guerrilla warfare. They are urban fighters, operating in cities. We are suggesting that they should open a guerrilla battlefield [in the countryside].

Cc: Chairman (MAO Zedong), Shaoqi (LIU Shaoqi), Enlai (ZHOU Enlai), ZHU De, CHEN Yun, LIN Biao, Xiaoping (Deng Xiaoping), PENG Zhen, Fuchun (LI Fuchun), Xiannian (LI Xiannian), HE Long, Dinyi (LU Dinyi), Boda (CHEN Boda), KANG Sheng, Jiaxiang (WANG Jiaxiang), Shangkun (YANG Shangkun), Qiaomu (HU Qiaomu), Ruiqing (LUO Ruiqing), KONG Yuan, FANG Yi, LI Tao (4), Central Confidential Office, Party Foreign Office (5), Central Propaganda Office (2), Central Liaison Office (5), Central Investigation Office (4), Military Intelligence Office (4), Ministry of Public Security (2), Literature Commission (2), Headquarters of the General Staff (9), Lengxi (WU Lengxi), Muzhi (ZHU Muzhi)

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