

January 1, 1960

Italian Communist Angelo Franza, Memorandum of Conversation with Cuban Communist Antonio Nunez Jimenez and note by PCI Official Giuliano Pajetta

Citation:

"Italian Communist Angelo Franza, Memorandum of Conversation with Cuban Communist Antonio Nunez Jimenez and note by PCI Official Giuliano Pajetta", January 1, 1960, Wilson Center Digital Archive, 1959 Cuba Estero 464, 2993-2997, Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) records, Fondazione Instituto Gramsci, Rome; obtained by James Hershberg, translation by Alex Barrow.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/115426>

Summary:

A memorandum of a conversation between PCI official Giuliano Pajetta and Antonio Nunez Jimenez, Director of the Cuban National Institute for Agrarian Reform [INRA] and member of the Cuban PC (Popular Socialist Party [PSP]). They discuss the various problems relating to the internal and external politics in Cuba and the solidarity that the PCI can provide to the Cuban liberation movement.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Italian

Contents:

Translation - English

NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH ANTONIO NUNEZ JIMENEZ

Director of the Cuban National Institute for Agrarian Reform [INRA]; member of the Cuban PC (Popular Socialist Party [PSP]).

In the conversation we talked about the various problems relating to the internal and external politics in Cuba and the solidarity that the PCI can provide to the Cuban liberation movement.

Regarding the Cuban situation, Captain Antonio Nunez Jimenez illustrated some problems underlining how the revolution that led to the overthrow of Batista was essentially a peasant revolution and how he naturally correlated the agrarian reforms currently in progress. Landed estates [Latifondo] have been abolished and there is a fixed limit on property. Expropriated land does not generally become assigned to the peasants, but is organized as state farms or as cooperatives. Because of the low level of mechanization, he does not advise the excessive fragmentation of property. The state is creating special mechanization centers that will assist and lend help to the cooperatives. The machinery is bought almost exclusively from the United States and belongs to the State.

The Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) is the center of the revolution and of the government activities; they themselves have branches in every agricultural zone of the country; one of their representatives presides over all of the land redistribution operations and over the reorganization of cultivation, proceeding in a gradual way to suppress monocultivation [of sugar]. A section of the INRA is called "Section of Industrialization of Cuba" and it is responsible for state investments in national industries in accordance with the national sector of private industry. This section is directed by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, originally Argentine, already an agricultural consultant of Arbenz in Guatemala and clearly oriented toward communist ideals. Now "Che" is also the director of the National Bank of Cuba.

With the hardening of the United States opposition the government developed a plan to provide arms to the peasants, which is now underway. For the rest, control of the Cuban countryside is in the hands of partisan forces and armed peasants, that have taken the place of the army and the police of the previous regime, which have been completely dissolved with the revolution. The army, as it existed before the revolution, no longer exists; it has arisen as a new organization, "the people's army" ["Popolo in Armi"], commanded by the brother of Fidel Castro, Raul, of clearly communist sentiment.

At the heart¹ of the government there no longer exists a real and true anti-communist tendency, even if the exponents of the State, as such, call themselves "non communists." Fidel Castro does not adopt any decision of a certain importance anymore without hearing first the opinion of the communists. He and his youth group (Raul Castro, [Juan] Almeida [Bosque], Guevara, etc.) have gradually positioned themselves to the left and today have an outlook that is decidedly anti-imperialist and favorable to the reorganization of the national economy on the basis of socialism.

To help the peasants, the State, other than the machine centers, has instituted in rural zones also the "tiendas del pueblo" ["markets of the people"] a type of store where the merchandise is sold at cost or very close to it. In fact this was possible because one did not have to strike down any type of "middle class," such as merchants, which did not exist; commerce was only carried out occasionally by speculators at a high price and almost only American products.² Today the State sells almost exclusively national products and consequently has the support of the national sector of the bourgeoisie, which is in a developing phase.

Landowning peasants, after all, were a miniscule minority, when they weren't American citizens. For that, the agrarian reform practically struck a very meager social class, meanwhile it helped the peasants and it opened up to national industry a market that now is protected from the invasion of foreign commerce. The Government, with the support of the PC, is conducting a campaign to "buy Cuban products" that has been a great success.

Politically, there exists a unique situation in Cuba: there is only one party that exists legitimately, the Popular Socialist Party (communists that have their daily [newspaper], magazines, and a special radio and television broadcast.) The "anti-Batista revolution," as such was deployed behind Fidel Castro, whose name has become from now on a legend. He is even an object of religious veneration and the vast majority of the masses follow him without even reflecting on whether his actions are good or bad. Never has a "cult of personality" reached a pinnacle as high as that of Fidel Castro in Cuba. Because of this he was able to gradually eliminate the winds of the right in the bosom of his government without causing crises in his "July 26th" movement.

Now the situation is this: Fidel Castro does not support the development of political parties (meanwhile he does not impede the PC), above all for not bringing, in his words, division in the country. He would like to maintain unity around his persona. It is notable, however, that there are already signs of the rebirth of the "right [wing]," but these have not been able to find a sufficient bite. The Church is certainly conservative and worried about the innovative and revolutionary measures of the government, but they don't have a good way on their own to defend themselves in Cuba. They are not involved in a certain sense in the current economic battles, confined to an ideological opposition of principle, which is not always an insurmountable obstacle to collaboration. Above all, an important fact is that the Spanish clergy, in the last decades, has been spontaneously replaced with local elements who are closer to the people and their problems. Because of this the Church had also assumed hostile positions toward Batista. For their part, they do not seem very inclined to accept the fanatic anti-communist approach coming from the United States. And of note is that today there is a progressive differentiation between Catholics and the regime³, even if day-to-day such differences are still vague. A huge positive repercussion is the expected message from the Pope in favor of the rural reforms underway in Cuba and of the fondness that John XXIII had expressed to Antonio Nunez for the courage with which he combated poverty in the Cuban countryside.

The trade unions are unitary [i.e., on board - trans.], even if there is the presence of anti-communist agitation which the government hopes to overcome by promoting unity as an instrument of anti-imperialist resistance.

The Cuban leaders, and Fidel Castro, feel they have the power to resist pressure from the United States. The United States of America would have to land a considerable armed force to impose its will. The Cuban leaders think that if they were able to overthrow the Batista army and his police forces with few men, it is now even easier to resist pressure from abroad with a "People's Army" and with the support of the peasants. Relations with South American governments are mostly cold, when they are not outright bad. From the people towards popular organizations there exists instead great warmth for Cuba whose revolution is considered a first step toward the liberation of Latin America.

To this end, the Cuban government has also developed a plan to join in relations with neutral countries in Asia and Africa (and Yugoslavia in Europe) in order to open an avenue towards a new orientation in foreign affairs to the continent's Latin American countries. Regarding relations with the USSR, a Soviet mission, which recently visited Cuba, held that it is not opportune to re-establish diplomatic relations because such a step would not serve any practical purpose but rather would only alienate and lead to

American accusations of "pro-communism." Cuba has however stabilized economic relations, having already sold 180 million metric tons of sugar to the USSR at international prices.

Regarding the the specific relations between the PCI and the Cuban comrades and the help that would be beneficial to them, these following requests were advanced:

1. That the PCI and the Italian democratic movement (regarding this Nunez had a meeting with PSI [Partito Socialista Italiano; Italian Socialist Party] leaders and to this end will also bring in French comrades) will be able to develop more solidarity with Cuba, above all in regards to the media; they don't request any specific operations of solidarity;

2. It was asked that the PCI help with the formation of a Roman office of the "Latin American media agency" which will be financed by Cuba;

3. It was asked to agree to an exchange of materials between the agricultural section of the PCI and INRA to know their respective positions and objectives: INRA will transfer to comrade An[g]elo Franza, the PCI will send it - for now- to the INRA through Franza; then there will come other private recipients. The important thing is to establish an exchange that is regular and constant;

4. The request was advanced to the PCI (analogous to that which will be made to the French PC) to send to Cuba a technician capable of helping the Cubans give life to a grand monthly magazine "Agrarian Reform," that is proposed to be distributed in all of Latin America, where land issues are particularly acute; the magazine must be able to hold up, in terms of presentation and how it's made, to publications printed in the United States;

5. Marginally it was also hinted that support from the PCI could contribute to Cuba's economic relations with Europe (specifically the East); it was also aired out was the eventual nomination of an ambassador to Rome so we can easily understand each other, saying assurances that this would bring a positive result.

Comrade Nunez was in Rome on the occasion of the FAO congress mid-November [1959] - he was not officially noted as a communist (he was also received by the Pope!) aside from the meeting he had with Franza (drafter of the preceding note and who has had his address in Cuba) he had a conversation with Arturo Colombi and Giuliano Pajetta.

The impression that we got from this conversation is that he spoke enthusiastically and honestly when it came to technical knowledge and organizational capability, but maybe a little disingenuous on the political side. This last observation comes from the hurried way with which he responded to questions about relations with the national bourgeoisie, the danger of a class conflict capable of impeding the revolution, etc.

It appears evident that this cadre made miracles during the war against Batista and the intense popular and peasant support, above all considering the value brought forth by numerous economic and political reforms, is very energizing. In every way a good impression and the reflection of a country full of national and social revolution - highly esteemed and very friendly to our party.

[1] In seno; literally, in the bosom - trans.

[2] Literally: "In fact it was possible because one did not have to strike down any 'middle class,' such as commerce, which before did not exist, it was only carried out occasionally by speculators at a high price and almost only American products."- trans.

[3] Probably referring to the clergy or perhaps the Church as an institution - trans.