

June 16, 1960

Report of the Governmental Delegation Visiting Argentina and Cuba

Citation:

"Report of the Governmental Delegation Visiting Argentina and Cuba", June 16, 1960, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Central State Archive of Bulgaria (TsDA), Sofia, Fond 1-B, Opis 6, a.e. 4203; translated by Assistant Professor Kalina Bratanova, edited by Jordan Baev. Obtained by the Bulgarian Cold War Research Group.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/116335>

Summary:

The document includes excerpts from a Bulgarian delegation's report on their visit to Latin America in 1960. The excerpt covers the delegation's visit to Cuba.

Avramova and Agnelov report Cuba's desire to establish diplomatic and cultural relations with Bulgaria. Cuba's interest paramountly involve trade. Avramova and Angelov summarize meetings with important government officials, particulalry Ernesto Guevara, head of the National Bank, and Raul Castro, Minister of Armed Forces. Topics include: the development of the revolution against the Batista government, post-Batista power struggles, geographical fatalism and US influence, Cuba's challenges (e.g. illiteracy, the lack of specialists), land and agricultural reform, construction, industrialization. The delegation recommends the establishment of official relations with Cuba and an invitation for Raul Castro to visit Bulgaria.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Bulgarian

Contents:

Translation - English

[...]

From Mexico we left for Cuba. While we were still in Argentina, when asking for visas, we told Cuba's ambassador that our delegation would like to make a goodwill visit to Cuba and to discuss our state relationships. The ambassador told us that we were expected guests who were absolutely confirmed when we arrived in Cuba. The delegation was met at the airport by the Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs and important people from the protocol department. At the first meeting, the deputy-minister Chevari explicitly declared that Cuba wanted to establish regular diplomatic and cultural relations with the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Later on, we only specified the details in the further meetings that we had. Finally, the text for a joint message was coordinated. After being approved by the competent organs in the two countries, the message would be published simultaneously in Havana and Sofia. The date of publication will be agreed upon by the two countries' representatives to the United Nations in New York.

[...]

The greatest interest was directed towards the trade relationships. The interest was so great, that the question concerning the signing of a trade agreement was posed by the Cuban delegation at the first meeting. They informed us that they had already signed agreements with the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Cuba was receiving a long-term credit amounting to 20 million dollars from Czechoslovakia under the credit agreement. While we were there, a Czech trade delegation for signing a trade agreement arrived.

We did not only meet with important people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and economic Institutions, but with important people from the government as well. During the whole time we were there, Fidel Castro was busy somewhere outside Havana (we saw him the last evening at a performance of some visiting Chinese artists at the theater). [Antonio Núñez] Jiménez was in Moscow at that time. That is why we met Ernesto Guevara, head of the National Bank and Raul Castro, Minister of Armed Forces, with whom we had long talks. They informed us about the development of the revolution and about the internal and foreign situation the country was in now. The situation in the country during Batista's time made the revolution necessary. All people's forces were united in a huge front in the beginning of the revolution. Yet they went into the revolution without a clear ideology. The strongest movement was "July 26th". The peasants were the revolution's major force. The working class was weak, small in number. After Batista's overthrow, the fight between the revolutionary forces began. For some, the aim was already achieved after overthrowing the dictator. Hence they had to stop [fighting]. Others gave their consent on a restricted agricultural reform. There were also disputes on the size of the land that should remain private property after the agricultural reform was carried out. The situation of the people necessitated radical changes. For a great part of the progressive forces it was clear that they should keep on going; if they stopped that would put an end to the revolution. It was also clear that there was no alternative. The ideas of the revolution had to be clarified. The rightist wing started to disintegrate [under pressure from internal struggles]. Thus 1959 was a period of intense disputes and we could say that the power struggle was ongoing. It is in this struggle that the ideas of the revolution were clarified. Perhaps, it is exactly this clarity of the ideas together with the economic difficulties that explain the revolutionary government's orientation towards the socialist countries. During that time Cuba also had difficulties and threats from the imperialists, and more specifically from America, which also helped to overcome some illusions. Raul Castro told us - it wasn't easy for you as well, but your neighbor was a big friendly country like the Soviet Union, while our neighbor was a powerful unfriendly imperialist country. For quite some time fallacious opinions were imposed on the Cuban people - for instance, that the geographical situation of Cuba was such that it should necessarily go together with the USA, that Cuba will fail without the USA, that is, as the Cuban

leaders said, a geographical fatalism that was implanted. One of the most serious complaints at all meetings was the lack of specialists. As we already mentioned, the revolution's major support were the peasants and they were almost totally illiterate. 80% of the soldiers of rural origin in the army were illiterate. The old intelligentsia - specialists and tutors at the universities and schools - are brought up in a pro-American spirit. The Soviet comrades in Havana told us [of] an acute clash [of opinions] between the old and the young in the intelligentsia circles. The support was for the young. Young people between 20 and 25 years old are entrusted with the most responsible state and economic work. A program has been worked out to raise the people's general educational and cultural level. However, this program is only an attempt, as the leaders themselves admit.

Earlier the trade union leaders were in the imperialist slave's hands. It has been admitted that after seizing power they made a mistake by keeping these leaders for some time. People from the army were sent but they were inexperienced. Now measures are being taken to mend matters. The new leadership has already established contact with the World Federation of Trade Unions.

The most serious changes have taken place in villages. Now about two thirds of the land is in the hands of the state. Part of the land was acquired as a result of confiscation of [property owned by] American companies, while the other part was [acquired] through the agricultural reform. Cooperative farms are being formed on that land which should better be called state agricultural industries. There are about 600 cooperative farms in the country now. They intend to make them 1000 by the end of the year, with which about 40% of the land will be cooperated. The cooperative farmers are the ex-agricultural workers in the plantations. As cooperative farmers they get a fixed salary from INRA (Institute for agricultural reform) during the whole year. INRA also employs the administration. The cooperative farmers form a consultative body. INRA also supplies the basic tools of the cooperative farms; it helps them in the construction of houses for the peasants, in the construction of agricultural, social and cultural buildings. The major issue is how to distribute income. Now only 20% of the net profit earned is allotted among the cooperative farmers, each family having an equal share. Only the head of the family is considered to be a cooperative farmer. The family members get wages for the time they work. The villages are now spread in a few cottages made of mud and leaves, which makes the work with the peasants difficult, and hinders the cultural development of the village. The funds, which are raised by INRA, are being used for building homes for the peasants in central sites, thus a [greater] concentration [of population] in larger towns and villages will be achieved. We visited one of the cooperative farms and some of the newly-built houses. We talked to the workers. What impresses [us] is the peasant's great joy, their devotion to the revolutionary government and their readiness to defend it.

As far as the country's industrialization is concerned, a general plan has been worked out, which marks only the major points. It suggests that metallurgy be developed on the basis of the mineral resources discovered so far - chrome, iron, nickel etc. The Americans have done research, but the whole documentation is in their hands. It is necessary to continue the research. The food industry should also be developed. Cuba's economy is still very much dependent on the USA. For example, two thirds of the petroleum comes from the USA, while only one third from the USSR. If one day the USA happens to refuse the supply of petroleum, Cuba's whole life will die, since the whole transport is based on petroleum, electrical energy is produced by a petroleum electric station etc. The sale of Cuba's goods, above all sugar, followed by coffee and tobacco is another question of vital importance. Thus the interest towards the trade issues is justified. The threats that if Cuba is detached from the USA it will fail have been refuted by the facts. For instance, the revolutionary government found 60 million pesos (one peso equals a dollar) foreign currency. What had been accumulated during the war was squandered by Batista's camarilla. Now the country's foreign currency is about 200 million pesos that comes to show that the country's economy is developing better than it was at the time when Cuba was bound

up with the USA. The country is living in revolutionary conditions and the young people are particularly active. But this has not disturbed the normal pace of life.

USA's provocations against Cuba have not ceased but they have decreased considerably. This does not mean that the USA has put up with the loss of Cuba. Moreover Cuba's authority with the Latin-American countries is great. However the Cuban leaders exclude USA's direct intervention. They consider the latter to be prepared by the neighboring Latin-American countries above all the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Guatemala. They have collected many facts indicative of that. Yet the Cuban people rely a lot on the Latin-American countries' peoples, on their hatred toward the USA and love for Cuba. The reactionary forces are also trying to infiltrate the revolutionary segments [of society] and to perform their contra revolutionary acts from there.

IN CONCLUSION WE SUGGEST:

The text of a joint message for establishing diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Cuba should be endorsed as soon as possible, and, after being coordinated, should be published simultaneously in Havana and Sofia.

The text of a cultural convention should be prepared and our representative in the UN should be authorized to sign it in New York.

To quickly take up the question about the commercial relations, taking into consideration the necessity to help the Cuban revolutionary government.

To take up the question about signing a convention for scientific and technical cooperation, on the basis of which we could offer technical help to the revolutionary government of Cuba.

To invite one of the leaders of Cuba to our country. With view to that the Bulgarian Embassy in Prague should be entrusted with Raul Castro's invitation, if he happens to go the Prague, which is due by the end of the month. The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested this invitation.

Sofia, 16 June 1960

Members of the delegation:

Ekaterina Avramova, Chairman of the State Committee for friendship and cultural cooperation with foreign countries

Lubomir Angelov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs