

RESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, April 1, 1968

Present: Waters, Vernon, Dobbs, Mayhew, Torres, Reed, J. Hansen, Shaw, Scott, Jenness, Sheppard, Ring, Graham, Jones, Lavan, B. Barnes, A. Hansen, Roberts, DeBerry, Novack

Guests: Rosenshine, Lund, Bolduc, Thomas, Dawson, Brundy, Singler, Seidman, Stapleton

Chairman: Lavan

AGENDA: 1. Report from Cuba

1. REPORT FROM CUBA

Ring reported (see attached report).

Discussion.

Meeting adjourned.

Attachment to Minutes of Resident National Committee Meeting, 4/1/68

If I had been in Cuba for 3 weeks instead of 3 months, this report would have been alot simpler to give. I'm sure I would have come back and reported about the many new homes that many peasants and workers have, the schools they're building all over the country, the new hospitals and clinics -- all of which are free -- the free nursery schools in the most isolated mountainous rural areas, and the remarkable sports and cultural programs.

I would have described the big drive to develop agriculture, to replace coffee plants that were destroyed in the big hurricane, the growing of fruit all over the country to the point where they expect, on the Isle of Pines alone, to be outproducing Israel, a major producer.

I would have discussed the educational program which is a whole subject in itself, the vast agronomy schools where thousands of young people are being trained in the most modern, scientific methods of farming, the general scientific and cultural programs at the universities and the pre-university schools. At the end of this coming year they'll have a quarter of a million scholarship students. That is, kids who are boarded and receive all of their needs without any cost.

Cuba is a country without unemployment -- this country where the depression of the '30s continued right through until the revolution. There is a very adequate program of social benefits for those who are ill and unable to work or too old to work.

Thousands of people participate in the militia. (I remember that story about how the government disarmed the people there and took back the guns. If they had more than they got now, they must have had quite a bit.)

There are such things as the "School Goes to the Country" program where young people go out for 45-day periods to do productive work and at the same time get an idea of what life in the country is -- an educational project as well as a very necessary contribution to the work of the country.

I say, if I had been there three weeks, that would have been enough to see all of these things. Just by going on the organized tours you can see most of the things I've indicated. And nothing is faked. It's all very real; it's very meaningful, very positive, and very inspiring.

And if people come back and talk about these things, as so many do when they go to Cuba for a brief visit, it's not because they've been taken in or because they're willing or unwilling dupes who are simply painting a rosy picture like the "friends of the Soviet Union" did in the '30s.

But, if you stay longer than 3 weeks, you have an opportunity to see more, to dig more, to learn more. You discover that as real and as positive as these accomplishments of the revolution are, they are only

one aspect of a very complex reality. You learn that the Cuban people are not only making enormous strides with their revolution, but that they're also living with extremely difficult problems. And that's the side that doesn't come through during a quick visit.

It's not a matter of people trying to conceal it from you, but it's not the kind of thing that is readily apparent. For example, you don't see ragged people on the streets; you don't see hungry people on the streets. In three months I was approached literally only twice for a handout. In Mexico City it's five times on every block. And it's a fact, I'm convinced, that there are no people in Cuba who are hungry or wearing tatters -- who are in desperate need. But that doesn't mean life is not difficult for them, because it is.

I'm going to read a list I compiled of rationed goods in the province of Havana, and Havana is the most prosperous section of the country and gets the highest ration:

Butter is 4 ounces for 2 people per month. Meat is a few ounces a week.

Oil for cooking -- and in Cuban cooking they use a great deal of oil -- two pounds per person per month; one pound peanut oil and one pound lard.

Rice had been 6 pounds per person a month -- it's another major staple in the Cuban diet -- until the Chinese cut off rice shipments and it was reduced to three pounds a person per month, a very minimum amount.

Black beans which are traditionally cooked with rice are 1½ pounds per person per month.

Coffee, in a coffee drinking nation, is three ounces per person per week.

Eggs are unrationed and generally plentiful, and are now a major staple in the Cuban diet.

Fish is unrationed and available perhaps once, sometimes twice a week -- generally at least once.

Fruit is unrationed but not all kinds are available at all times.

Malanga -- I remember in 1960, a revolutionary told me, "We'll hold out if we're reduced to living on malanga" -- is now a luxury which only the very young and very old and those on medical diets can have.

The same thing applies to chicken -- only the very old and very young and those on medical diets can obtain it.

Yogurt is unrationed and is generally plentiful and quite widely used now, particularly since milk has been virtually eliminated for all adults except those on medical diets.

Women's clothing: one pair of dress shoes a year, one pair of tennis shoes. Last year they also got a pair of sandals. One dress a year; one skirt; one blouse; one pair of stockings; 11 pair of underpants in the last three years, two in the past year.

Men's clothing: one pair of dress pants and one pair of work pants a year; one dress shirt each six months -- previously there had been none -- and last year there were two; one sport shirt a year; three pair of socks; one pair of leather shoes, one pair of tennis shoes; underclothes -- 12 pair have been issued in the last three years.

The food rationing, I should add, does not give a complete picture for two reasons: first, people, most of whom work, can buy meals at their work centers which are not rationed. Children -- all the scholarship students, and other children, many other children -- get at least one, and sometimes more meals at school. When people go to work in the countryside, which is often, they are provided with meals.

In addition, in the cities -- principally in Havana, but in other cities -- with the exception of the very lowest paid, most people can go out and eat at least one night a week, and often more, at a restaurant.

There are medium- and low-priced restaurants which don't offer very much. Those who can afford to eat in good restaurants, expensive ones -- and there are a surprising number who can -- can get a virtually unrestricted diet. So, the ration list is not the total picture, but it indicates food is not plentiful and clothing is not plentiful in Cuba today.

In addition, the people of Cuba have to work very hard in order to maintain even this standard of living. In the "School Goes to the Countryside Plan", children of junior high school age go for periods of 45 days to work in agriculture each year, planting fruit trees and so on. Workers leave their jobs and go for as long as 90 days to the country to plant, fertilize and harvest -- particularly for the sugar cane harvest, the heaviest, most difficult kind of work there is. Brigades go out for periods of six months to work in the sugar harvest. Thousands from Havana go at least one day a week.

There's a huge new agricultural project -- the green belt around Havana of coffee, fruit, vegetables, rice. There's a mass migration virtually every day of the week from the work centers to participate in this.

People do this in addition to their regular jobs; large numbers also go to school. In the literacy campaign of 1961 they virtually eliminated illiteracy, but now there is a drive to bring everyone in the nation up to a sixth grade minimum -- a major project in Cuba.

Large numbers are members of the militia -- have militia duty, guard duty at their work centers, in their neighborhoods. They're members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and, when you add the agricultural work to this, it's a very hard and a very heavy schedule. A friend complained that at 25 she really doesn't have enough energy anymore. Well, I figured out for her that she teaches school five hours a day, plus preparing for classes. She goes to the University five hours a day. At home she does her homework, waits in line to do her shopping. On weekends, to the country for planting and then away for a 45-day period to work in the country. A very grueling schedule.

The chief psychiatrist at the big mental hospital in Havana said they now have much less psychosis than before the revolution, but there has been a big increase in neurotic problems. He said a major cause of this is overwork, the fact that so many people have to work so hard.

What are the reasons for these things? First, there are the reasons that are, so to speak, beyond the control of the Cuban people, of the Cuban leadership. First, the U.S. blockade, which is extremely effective and creates enormous problems. They have made some remarkable breakthroughs in establishing trade with many of the European countries, but it's still at enormous cost and with the most energetic interference from the United States.

Fidel, at the Cultural Congress, cited one example. They'll finally negotiate, after much effort, a deal with a European tool manufacturer to buy some expensive machinery. Then, after they buy and pay for this machinery and have it installed, a United States company will buy up the plant and Cuba will discover it cannot get spare parts for machinery in which it invested heavily.

In addition, there's the economic squeeze by the Soviet Union to force the Cubans into the status of a satellite and to force it to give up its revolutionary internationalist policy.

I understand a Cuban trade mission is now in the Soviet Union negotiating a new trade agreement. From the comments Fidel made in his March 13 and 15 speeches, and from other indications, it's quite safe to predict there will not be a substantial increase in the amount of Soviet trade with Cuba.

Those are the two big overriding problems which are beyond the control of the Cubans -- the blockade and the role of the USSR. On a smaller scale is the Chinese cutoff. I learned they had been supplying not only rice, but also a good many manufactured items which are no longer available, simple things like ball-point pens had been imported in quantity from China. Now a ball-point pen is a major luxury.

Also, they've had terrible luck with the weather. They've had far more than the normal number of droughts and storms in the last nine years.

In addition, the price of sugar is at rock bottom. For the last two years it's been below two cents a pound. That means they've got to go through this heartbreaking, backbreaking work to harvest sugar for about 1.86 cents a pound to get the foreign exchange credits they are dependent on for all imports.

Then, they have correctly decided, I think, on a basic approach, to invest a very large portion of national income in the development of the country. The great bulk of imports are things used in the development of agriculture and industries related to agriculture. Several giant fertilizer plants for example, thermo-electric plants, things of this kind.

This means the amount that can be imported of simple commodity needs -- food, clothing, and so on -- is extremely limited. There can be disagreements among people who know something about it as to the extent of their investment in basics and whether it should be eased up a bit. I certainly would not consider myself qualified to have a serious opinion on that. But I do believe their main approach is a necessary one; that if they didn't have this approach the crisis would soon be even worse than it is today.

There is an additional problem that is, so to speak, not beyond their control. That is the internal policy needed to cope with these major problems which cannot be eliminated; finding ways to reduce their impact to a minimum. And the internal difficulty can be summed up in a very meaningful phrase, "workers' control."

In my opinion, this is a major problem in Cuba and one that the Cuban revolution is going to have to come face to face with. The conception of workers' control, of workers' participation in the planning of production, and distribution -- this is an absolutely essential thing for the Cuban revolution if it is to go forward and if it is not to find itself in a very serious political crisis.

Agricultural planning is limited to upper echelons as far as I can determine. Fidel himself has become deeply involved in agricultural problems, and he apparently has acquired a good grasp of agronomy. But I am sure the same thing applies on a magnified scale as applies politically and organizationally in our party. There is no one man smart enough, no matter how smart he is and how much he knows, to solve all the myriad problems that confront a country with the kind of problems they have.

The lack of wide participation in agricultural and industrial planning is largely responsible for the mistakes that have been made in the past, and the efforts to correct them. Quite a number of people I talked with -- all of them supporters of the revolution -- are convinced that the scarcity of food is only in part due to external difficulties; that it is due in a not insignificant degree to faults in planning and distribution. There are numerous examples of terrible foulups and wastage in the distribution of available food.

The need for such participation in coping with these problems is essential just in terms of maintaining the morale and the revolutionary political spirit of the people. The handing down of decisions from above took the most extreme form when milk was eliminated in Havana in February for adults. The announcement appeared as a 2-inch, 2-column notice on the second page of Granma. It announced tersely that because of the drought, it was necessary to suspend the allocation of milk for adults in Havana.

This immediately sparked a whole series of rumors about other foods. There happened to be a shortage of bread at the time. A rumor immediately went out that there would be rationing of bread. At the same time the rumor spread throughout the city that the rice ration would be cut. A woman told me this and I said, "Well, maybe that's a rumor." She said, "Maybe. But when I heard they were going to eliminate the milk, I said that was just a rumor. Now, I won't say it."

The people who are opposed to the revolution seize upon every one of these things and use them to beat down their neighbors. A revolutionary can only repeat what he reads in Granma, that milk has been cut off because there is a drought. And his counterrevolutionary neighbor says, "That's a lot of bull. We had a drought last year, and we had a drought the year before. How come they didn't have to suspend the milk then?" And the revolutionary can only throw up his hands in despair because he doesn't know the answer.

As a result of this hard life and hard work the population has been divided into roughly three sectors:

1. Those who are leaving the country. These are no longer simply the conscious counterrevolutionaries, but those who are leaving because in the United States there is a higher standard of living. Two thirds are from Havana and they are mainly middle class. But the exodus now includes some workers and even some black people.

2. There is another whole layer which would not go to the United States but which is no longer politically active. They're described as apathetic. They're with the revolution. They support it. They participate in their own jobs, and in the voluntary work but they're considered politically apathetic.

3. There is the third section of those who remain conscious revolutionaries despite all of the difficulties. These two latter sections -- the revolutionaries and those who are apathetic -- still constitute a majority of the population. Otherwise the regime would be in deep crisis. But there is a very significant increase in the number of those who are leaving and in the number who are apathetic.

In 1960 you could say the great majority were active supporters of the revolution. Now, you have to say, a majority are either active or passive supporters of the revolution and a significant minority are

opposed and they show their opposition by signing up to get on one of the boats at Varadero.

This setting which I have tried to indicate here in a very rough way provides the context of the two big political events that took place in Cuba while I was there. The first was the trial of Escalante and the group around him and the second was what is called the "revolutionary offensive" launched with Fidel's speeches of March 13 and March 15.

First, very briefly on the Escalante case. There were two basic charges against Escalante and the 37 people convicted with him, you can say three charges really. Number one, that they had organized a faction to advance their viewpoint and their program. Number two, that they opposed the revolutionary line of the Cuban party and government. Number three is that they sought to have the Soviet Union and other workers' states bring economic pressure on Cuba in order to force abandonment of its revolutionary line and support to the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence.

The bill of particulars is not a frameup. That is, I think it's a completely accurate description of the views and of the activities of the Escalante group in all basic respects.

The charge that they opposed the line of the revolution is obviously based on fact. They reprinted the reply of the Venezuelan CP leadership to Fidel's attack at the OLAS conference. They defended the collaborationist policies of the Latin American CPs. They opposed the main lines of internal development of the revolution. They opposed the conception of the use of social incentives, moral incentives, and they actively counterposed the political line of individual incentives advanced by the Stalinists. But the charges related to their political views and internal factional activity have to be separated from the charge about their relations with Moscow and Prague.

In my opinion, if the charges had been limited to that of collaboration with the Soviet officials to bring economic pressure on Cuba -- the charge that they were helping to make more difficult Cuba's relations with these regimes -- if the charges had been limited to that point, the Cuban revolution could have made a fully defensible case for the prosecution of this group. In my opinion, in their present very difficult situation, they would have been justified in putting these people in prison if only to serve notice on the Soviet Union that they will not tolerate what in effect constitutes interference in their internal political life.

But the charge that organizing a faction to advance their views is a crime against the revolution that calls for a jail penalty is in complete contradiction to the Marxist concept of socialist, of workers' democracy. I don't think we could or should try to defend that aspect of the trial.

I think we have to say that the Cuban leadership made a very serious mistake in that regard. We should also point out that this is one more example of the heavy price the world is paying for Stalinism -- and the



Cuban revolution is paying. Even in the struggle against Stalinism -- and that's what they're struggling against -- they find themselves borrowing from the arsenal of Stalinism.

That's because the only exposure to so-called Marxism they've really had, comes from these very same Stalinists. The one point that Escalante and the prosecutor agreed upon was that if he had actually tried to organize a faction to present his point of view, this certainly was the gravest crime that could be committed against the revolution and was entirely deserving of any kind of a penalty imposed.

The move to bolster the morale of the population now seems to be centering around what, as I was leaving, was opened as a major campaign by the leadership. That is, the campaign to develop a "revolutionary offensive." It came in the form of the sudden nationalization of all the petty shopkeepers remaining in Cuba. Fidel had discussed this problem of the shopkeepers, the small "cockroach" businessmen, hole-in-the-wall proprietors, in two previous speeches. He first spoke about it last July 26 and then returned to the subject in September.

In those speeches he pointed out that the revolution is supposed to be doing away with these things, but they have found that the number of small businessmen had doubled in Havana since the revolution rather than going down. He said then that they were going to work very consciously to phase out all small business operations. He said in September they didn't want to do it all at once, that they were serving notice on these people that they considered them in the main parasites, operators of black marketing and so on, and that eventually over a period of time, they would all be done away with.

Well, on March 13 he suddenly announced, this is it; this is the end; everything is nationalized. The party and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution moved in to take over these things.

In addition, they not only intervened all the privately-owned bars and shut them down but also shut down the state-operated bars as well. This came as a complete surprise to the Cuban people and there was no clarity as to what it meant. The night I left they were opening bars associated with state-operated restaurants. How extensive this will be, how it applies in the interior of the country, I simply don't know. Nobody knew as of the time I left.

The central theme of the "revolutionary offensive" is the need to recognize the austerity and the hard work that it calls for; the development of revolutionary solidarity as against what they call egoism -- individualism, the concern with individual needs and individual lacks and individual difficulties -- as counterposed to social needs and social lacks and social difficulties. From the way that the press, the CDRs and all propaganda media were being mobilized, as I was leaving I got the impression that this was the opening of a major campaign.

It's out of the totality of this problem, I believe, that the pressure for democratic participation in decision-making will inevitably develop in Cuba. I've tried to give as sober an account as I can of the problems of the revolution. The problems I have tried to indicate here are the things that, as supporters of the revolution, we have to be aware of.

If we're to be effective supporters and defenders of the revolution, it's necessary for us to know the whole picture as well as possible, and not only the positive, very inspiring aspects of it.

At the same time, however, in noting these problems, which I had not fully appreciated before actually seeing them, it's still necessary to point out that in its overall aspect the revolution is still a good revolution. It's still a great achievement.

The most remarkable aspect of this that I saw in Cuba is the absolute solidarity of the entire leadership and of the great majority of the population in support of the revolutionary international line of the government. When you stop to think about this, it is quite an unusual phenomenon. In a country isolated, blockaded, under seige, you would assume that the first place to try and cope with these problems through some nonrevolutionary forms would be to slacken up on its revolutionary internationalist policy. Instead of that you find the leadership deepening its international revolutionary policy. And, throughout the period I was there, I did not hear a single voice of dissent in relation to Cuba's foreign policy. That doesn't mean there aren't people who don't disagree with it, and who don't think that Cuba would be alot better off if they could arrive at an accomodation, either with the United States or with the Soviet Union, or with both, and stop making trouble for themselves by supporting revolutions in Latin America and all over the world. But the people who do feel this way obviously don't feel that the climate in the country is such that they can freely say so, even in private conversations. It's not because people didn't want to talk to me. There were many who talked to me about many problems and did a lot of moaning and complaining and griping. These included good revolutionaries, and some not so good. But none of them, not one, questioned the foreign policy of the government.

Che Guevara is the hero of Cuba today and his picture and one slogan is spread over every corner of Cuba: "Make two, three, many Vietnams." And that policy has the support of the Cuban people. The one thing they have learned in these nine years --there's alot that they haven't learned -- but the one thing that they have learned and that they are convinced of is that the only hope for the survival of the Cuban revolution is to extend the revolution and to oppose any political group that stands in the way. They really are anti-Stalinist in that respect. In that respect they understand what Stalinism is, and they are opposed to it.

They are still being educated as to the role of Moscow and the Communist Parties on this question. One very good point that Fidel made in his March 13 speech was that the people had to go through a certain education at the time of the missile crisis. Prior to that there

had been a widespread misunderstanding amongst many of the leaders of the revolution and among the people that when push came to shove they could rely on their friends to defend them.

He said, we learned from that experience that we can rely only on our strength and on the revolutionary forces. Now, he added, we're going to have to learn the same lesson in relation to our economic needs, and indicated that an educational process would have to go on in that respect.

Insofar as the attitude toward Moscow and the Communist Parties are concerned, with many of the revolutionaries in Cuba and among the Latin Americans who support them, we seem almost like conciliationists in our approach as compared to their attitude. There's no trick that they don't consider too low for the CPs, or too counterrevolutionary.

Out of this, along with the other events in the world, has developed what in my opinion is an extremely significant political force in the world. That is the axis that has developed around the North Vietnamese, the North Koreans and the Cubans. This has grown to a remarkable extent and the evidence of it is very much apparent in Cuba. This is more so with the Vietnamese than with the Koreans, but there is far more awareness politically of North Korea in Cuba today than I had realized, as a result of the very active collaboration of the Koreans and the Vietnamese with the Cuban government.

Their collaboration is promoting a revolutionary force in the world independent of both Moscow and Peking -- a force that opposes the coexistence line of Moscow and the verbal radicalism and abstentionism of Peking. They consider themselves a third bloc. When they speak of the third world, this is what they mean. They are talking about a world, a revolutionary world, that is opposed to both the policies of Moscow and Peking and is waging an active ideological struggle against them and attempting to build forces in all parts of the colonial world, most particularly in Latin America, but in Asia and in Africa as well, on the basis of an ideological and political struggle against the forces that adhere to either Moscow or to Peking.

This is having a very profound effect in Latin America. One of the great values of spending time in Cuba is that you get some conception of what's happening among the Latin American revolutionaries. While I was there -- I believe we reported it briefly -- the Guatemalan FAR, the guerrilla movement which had been under the control of the CP, broke with the CP. It issued a statement blasting them, denouncing them, exposing their counterrevolutionary role. A week or so later, César Montes, the head of the Guatemalan FAR, issued a personal statement -- he hadn't been able to sign the original one -- which is an absolutely devastating revolutionary indictment of the counterrevolutionary role of Guatemalan Stalinism.

I had an interview with a Peruvian revolutionary associated with the MIR, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left; again a conscious anti-Stalinist. That movement is involved in a struggle against both the

CP and the Maoist splitoff from the CP.

I had an interview with a leading revolutionary figure from Brazil, a spokesman for Acción Popular, one of the major revolutionary forces in the country, a very conscious anti-Stalinist.

I was granted a formal interview with Francisco Prada, the political secretary of the Venezuelan FALN, and when you read it, you'll see that he, too, is a very conscious anti-Stalinist.

This has, of course, the greatest import for the revolutionary struggle in the world, and for our movement. To one extent or another, these people take an open-minded attitude toward our movement now. In each case, we have the problem of clearing up the question of the Posadistas, of making clear to them that these people are in no way part of our movement, that we regard them as mortal political enemies. Once you get past that barrier, you find a genuine willingness to discuss with us. As the Brazilian put it, he was genuinely glad to learn there was another revolutionary force in the world that he hadn't known about.

I say this opens up a tremendous opportunity for our movement, one that we have to follow through on vigorously. Also the development of this revolutionary struggle against Stalinism is assuming an international character. Let me give you one example. I became friends with an Egyptian, a very strong anti-Stalinist with a very clear understanding of the role of Moscow and of Peking. One night, after we got to know each other well enough, he mentioned he'd been in jail for five years under Nasser. Nasser had clapped all of the Egyptian CPers in jail. He sat in jail for five years.

I asked him, then, when he had broken with the Communist Party, since it was very obvious from all of his political positions that he had broken with it.

He replied: "I can tell you the exact day. I was sitting in prison and the news came that Krushchev had agreed to the U.N. inspection of Cuba. That finished me."

Insofar as I can determine, there is a good attitude on the part of the Cuban leadership. That is, they're out to build a revolutionary force in the colonial world and they appear to be ready to collaborate with any force that is genuinely revolutionary, that stands on the program of armed struggle.

In closing I would like to say that of all the important things I learned in Cuba, the thing I learned most deeply, was the meaning of our movement, our political cadres and what it has to contribute. I always felt that I had a good understanding of that. But it became far more clear to me as I saw how much we can contribute in collaboration with these wonderful, devoted revolutionaries from every part of the world. We can learn much from them but there is also very much they can learn from us. This may sound a bit corny, but I feel it very strongly.