

March 19, 1962

Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on meeting with Yugoslav Ambassador Boško Vidaković

Citation:

"Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on meeting with Yugoslav Ambassador Boško Vidaković", March 19, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) [Hungarian National Archives] Budapest, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Top Secret Documents, XIX-J-1-j-Kuba, 3.d. Translated by Attila Kolontári and Zsófia Zelnik <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/116757>

Summary:

János Beck reports on his conversation with Yugoslav ambassador to Havana, Boško Vidaković. Vidaković notes an increased interest in Yugoslav socialism among Castro supporters. Previously Cuban officials rebuffed Vidaković. Vidaković believes the change is prompted by Cuba's difficult economic and political situation, in which the latter includes organizational and leadership strife.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

The Embassy of the Hungarian People's Republic
to Comrade Foreign Minister János Péter
Budapest

Top Secret!

94/1962/top secret

Havana, 19 March 1962

Subject: Conversation with Yugoslavian ambassador to Havana, Boško Vidaković

I had a long meeting with Yugoslavian ambassador to Havana Boško Vidaković on 17 March. During this [meeting,] Vidaković made the following remarks worth mentioning:

In some parts of the Cuban public, mainly among the petit-bourgeois and intellectual supporters of Fidel Castro, who are not Marxists though, but who have been the supporters of the revolution for a shorter or longer time, he can feel a turning point in their attitude toward Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav embassy. While in the past he met with rebuffs everywhere, many called him a revisionist openly and refused any relationship with him, now more and more people visit him, they are most willing to talk to him, they inquire about the Yugoslav situation ("What is Yugoslav socialism?" "How are production and distribution organized?" etc.) This has two causes in his opinion: 1. The Cuban economic situation, the difficulties in provision, organizational problems and the political problems within the leadership, the interrelationship among the three political organizations united in the ORI. 2. The political problems within the leadership, the interrelationship among the three political organizations united in the ORI.

He knows from a completely reliable source that among friends Fidel Castro made the following statement two months ago: "He is completely aware of the help and is extremely grateful to the socialist camp, first of all, the Soviet Union whose all-embracing help has made the preservation and development of the Cuban revolution possible. However, he is still considering the idea of revolution according to the Chinese."

Four months ago Minister of Industry Ernesto ["Che"] Guevara, saying "you have not signed the declaration of the 81 parties, you are revisionists," refused to have talks with him about the development of Cuban-Yugoslav relations, he considered trade relations with Yugoslavia the same as e.g. with Belgium and refused to listen to the Yugoslav suggestions, helpful proposals.

The second Havana declaration was written by Fidel Castro alone—and he knows it from a reliable source—he had not discussed it with any Cuban leading politicians. He discussed the declaration only with one person, a Uruguayan professor, who is something like his counselor.

Fidel Castro presented the declaration to the leadership of the ORI before its reading at the mass meeting, and they approved it. Referring to another—not named but completely reliable—source, he said that Blas Roca did not agree with the declaration in many points, but he accepted it in the interest of the unity of the ORI, that is the leading layer of the Cuban revolution. Vidaković has just returned from his trip to Latin America lasting for a few days, during which he had the opportunity to see that the communist parties generally did not approve of the declaration. In Brazil the party criticizes it strongly and [Brazilian Communist Party leader Luís Carlos] Prestes threatened the Cuban party with public action if they did not give up propagating

views in Brazil that were contrary to the position of the Brazilian party. He considers it a typical fact concerning the declaration that the Western members of the Havana diplomatic corps all consider the declaration to be "the work of the communists," although the old communists cannot have agreed with it because it was not written in the spirit of the XXII. [CPSU] congress and [the doctrine of] peaceful co-existence.

The behavior of the Cuban delegation at the Punta del Este conference [in January 1962] was determined by Fidel Castro. Neither President of the republic [Osvaldo] Dorticos, nor Foreign Minister [Raúl] Roa agreed with the appointed line, but they could do nothing but stick to it. This resulted in the isolation of the Cuban delegation, in that they refused or avoided meeting several Latin American statesmen and politicians. If the Yugoslavian diplomats had not helped, they would not even have known what was happening around them. Foreign Minister Roa is too clever and too realistic to agree with Fidel Castro's inflexible and leftist revolutionary line, he does not often think what he says, or does things without personal conviction.

The communists, however, did not agree with the sharply anti-Yugoslav articles published in the party's daily, the HOY about 10 months ago, as Vidaković was told by the editor-in-chief of the paper Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, but they were forced to publish the articles according to the Chinese wish.

He considers revolting Fidel Castro's two latest speeches, in which he attacked those who had committed sectarian-dogmatic mistakes (cf. numbers 14 and 17 March 1962 of the Havana reports), because he continued in public the fight between the different groups going on behind the scenes in such a way that he gave no freedom of choice to the other party. According to Vidaković, Fidel Castro attacks the people of the Directory of 13 March on the one hand, and he makes it possible that the communists could be blamed for the consequences of the mistakes on the other hand, although it is just the communists who will make up for the damage caused by the egocentric and megalomaniac Fidel Castro.

Relying on Yugoslavian expert calculations, Vidaković thinks that Cuba is in a catastrophic economic situation. If there should be any deterioration, they must count on a change in the opinion of the peasantry (the first signs of this can already be seen), which would mean the beginning of the fall of the system. To prevent this, during 1962 and in the first months of 1963 the socialist countries must give a new loan—mainly in the form of transportation of food and articles of consumption. According to his calculations, this demand from the side of Cuba will be 100 million dollars.

Vidaković also said that the official Cuban side's attitude toward Yugoslavia had changed. Now their economic relations are better. They gave a 10 million dollar loan to Cuba (not state, but bank loan). If the Cubans follow the agreement and carry out the deliveries, this loan may be doubled in the future or even trebled.

In the sphere of politics, the Cubans seem to begin to understand his reasoning, which is the following concerning the Yugoslavian-Cuban relations:

Yugoslavia does not wish to interfere in internal affairs. But she would not like if in Cuba there was something like a cold war going on in connection with Yugoslavia. Out of general socialist interest, Yugoslavia wishes to provide help to Cuba unselfishly, she is willing to give loans as well besides the mutually advantageous trade. She has provided political help already before (e.g., she achieved that Cuba was able to participate at the Belgrade conference [of the Non-Aligned Movement, or NAM, in September 1961—ed.] against all the resistance) and will do so in the future too. It is an obvious interest of Cuba to maintain good political and economic relations with Yugoslavia, as the USA's policy—Cuba's economic isolation—is going to have its results gradually and it is Yugoslavia that could serve as a gate toward the Western

powers and neutral countries.

I have tried to sum up briefly what I heard from Vidaković. During the whole conversation, the Yugoslav ambassador represented the position of the XXII. congress, he referred to it and supported the old Cuban communists against the Chinese influence and Fidel Castro being under this influence. What he said reflected this position on the one hand—I do not know yet whether this is a position represented only by him and only toward myself—and the opinion of his circle of associates on the other hand. At the same time, he mentioned some things that give food for reflection. Concerning all this I am going to talk to other people and come back to the individual problems.

János Beck
Ambassador