

June 25, 1962

**Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on
Talk with Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos on 15
June 1962**

Citation:

"Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on Talk with Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos on 15 June 1962", June 25, 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/116761>

Summary:

In a top secret report, Hungarian Ambassador to Cuba János Beck describes a recent meeting with Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos. Beck divides the conversation among five categories—agriculture, industry, central planning, counter-revolutionary activities, and the party. Dorticos reports improvements and obstacles (e.g. agricultural production is developing, though slowly, and the growth of the party remains in its initial stages of formation).

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

János Beck
Top Secret!
ambassador
Written: in six copies:
Minister Péter
First Deputy of the Minister P. Mód
Deputy Minister Szarka
Deputy Head of Department Szűcsné
Embassy Department.

Subject: A visit to President of the Republic Dorticos on 15 June 1962

I was received by President of the Republic Dorticos on 15 June and we had a conversation lasting one hour and 45 minutes. I requested the hearing explaining the fact that I was going on my usual annual holiday and before it I would like him to discuss with me all the problems he wanted the Hungarian government to be informed about.

The president said the following concerning the different problems:

Agriculture

Some time ago the Cuban leadership considered the solution of agricultural problems the most urgent task mainly in order to ensure the provision of the country with food on the one hand, and the production of their most important source of foreign currency, of sugar on the other hand, and finally to provide a part of the industry with raw material later. To achieve this, they started the complete reorganization of the INRA (National Institute of Land Reform), which is managed by the newly appointed director Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. As a result of the serious measures of the government and the INRA, they achieved at last—said the president—that they were on firm ground concerning agriculture. The results can be observed gradually, but the early results will be felt in the public supply itself only next year. The production of poultry (mainly chicken) and pork is increasing. There is also an increase in the production of various roots (batata and other roots that are considered primary goods of general provisioning in Cuba).

The stock of cattle is about five and a half million heads, but they are economical with them to ensure the possibility of multiplication. Maybe the number of slaughters could be raised, and the quantity of beef for consumption could be increased, but they are waiting, among other [reasons] because it will be inevitable to raise the consumer price of meat as well. For the rise in prices they must wait for the best moment politically and also prepare for it.

The present shortage of food cannot be done away with in some months anyway, it will last until the next winter and even until the next year.

In the long run the food situation will be substantially improved by fishing. Before the revolution fishing was carried out by quite primitive devices and the quantity that was caught played an irrelevant role in provisioning.

There have been taken serious measures already to increase fishing, but only a few days ago did they start to eliminate radically those mistakes that hindered the development of fishing. First of all, we must mention that the fishermen got so little money for the fish and the fishermen were paid so low wages in the cooperatives, which were formed a long time ago and which have acquired a dominant role in

fishing (besides egalitarianism), that it was not worth fishing and they tried to sell the few fish they caught on the black market. They have already bought and will receive bigger fishing vessels from the Poles, and some bigger trawlers from the Soviet Union, which will make it possible not to fish only in the near coast shallow waters but in the open seas as well, e.g. first in the Bay [i.e., Gulf] of Mexico, later in the South American seas. Both the Poles and the Soviet Union are sending the ships with crews and the crews are going to fish together with the Cubans for at least half a year to teach them the industrial fishing methods. The solution of the wage problem has changed the mood of the fishermen from one day to the other, the result of material incentive can be seen in the quantity of fish on the market right away, but from the point of view of general provisioning there will be a considerable result concerning fishing only in the distant future.

Concerning sugar, the situation is the following: the dry weather has caused damage in the sugar crop in prospect as well, as the planned 3000 caballerias could not be sown in spring, so only a part can be harvested in 1963. They are going to sow in the dry (winter) period as well, differently from the usual practice, but it will be harvested only in 1964. The prospects of next year's sugar production are worse than this year. Even if all preconditions are fulfilled, that is, all planned tasks are carried out according to the plans, next year there will be a maximum of 4.5—4.7 million tons of sugar, that is, less than this year, [a situation] which is further aggravated by the circumstance that next year will be started without any reserve of sugar contrary to this year. Next year in the harvest already 1,000 harvesting machines will take part and harvest about 30% of sugarcanes. But there will still be a shortage of manpower, which, similarly to this year, but to a much smaller extent, will be made up for by unpaid or voluntary permanent work. Mechanization will be of the size to do away with the shortage of labor force only by 1964 or 1965.

As far as the harvesting of coffee is concerned, there still remains the great shortage of manpower, so harvesting will be solved with voluntary work and e.g. by deploying students who receive grants in this work during harvest time. As in the past years a lot of people have left agriculture and e.g. started to work in public projects, they are going to take measures to redirect the labor force to agriculture.

To increase agricultural production in prospect and to eliminate the serious damage caused by the dry weather, one of the most important devices will be the creation of a water economy system at high technical level. The highest level Soviet expert delegation has been to Cuba, and after the departure of their leaders the remaining experts started work right away. There is a possibility to reach an immediate result or one that can be seen in, let us say, two years by a smaller investment, but they will start to make long-run plans as well to be able to begin the bigger jobs as well to the best of their ability. In Cuba earlier there was no water economy, they could not make a step without Soviet help. This help means expert help from the highest level to the simplest skilled worker and the manufacturing and delivery of material equipment.

Industry

After they started tackling the crucial problems of industry, prospects have become better and normal progress seems guaranteed. These problems were mainly problems of norm and wages. They are far from being solved, that is, the planned solution from having been carried out, but they have started definitely. (Concerning this, the president repeated what I had written in my previous report on this question.)

Plan

This year's plan is not and will not be ready. It is strange and astonishing, but they have not been able to make a plan. The next year plan of 1963 is being prepared, it

will be ready soon, but the president stressed that it would be a plan with a lot of unreliable and inexact details. Concerning the long-run plan, he emphasized even more that he personally could not trust even the main numbers. (Let me remind you that President of the Republic Dorticos is also the president of the Cuban Party's Economic Committee.) In contrast with the agriculture and industry, where the Cuban leaders believe, even if only in recent times, that they have reached firm ground after the swamp, concerning planning and organization, they do not know where they stand. As the president expressed himself, they have not managed to create the spirit of planning and organization and he cannot report on any long-run idea either. They do not even know at this moment which line to take to change the situation radically. The cadres working in central planning are quite weak, often much weaker than in the subordinated organs, that is, the comrades working in the ministries and elsewhere. But it is worth thinking over whether they should be moved higher to do central planning jobs, because they may fail in the central work and then the smaller detail planning jobs that are carried out tolerably in some places may become worse too.

(Here I wish to interject that, according to the news spread in Havana, there have been talks going on for a long time whether Minister of Industry Ernesto Guevara or Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, the president of the National Institute of Land Reform, should be appointed to the leading post of the Planning Bureau. Even if for others, but the highest leadership of the Planning Bureau will be obviously substituted.)

The counter-revolution

The plan of the United States and the preparation for it is probably that she tries to increase the economic difficulties, which would contribute to the creation of a counter-revolutionary base in the population and the latter would provide a ground to carry out some kind of aggression. The saboteurs and counter-revolutionary organizers arriving from abroad, who organize and direct the internal counter-revolutionary forces, in contrast with the last year or the past situation, now receive not only superficial training and are not only poorly armed and supplied with financial means but are people at a higher level from all aspects and work in a new way. The experiences of the Cuban counter-revolutionary work have been evaluated by the USA, she has assessed the real internal situation realistically and on the basis of this, after long and thorough training, she is sending to Cuba people equipped with the most modern technical devices. Besides the excellent technical equipment, she provides them with a great sum of money contrary to the past. For example, recently such a group of seven people has been caught in the Eastern part of Cuba just after landing, who, apart from the modern and many arms, had serious technical equipment and not false but real Cuban money to the value of several ten thousand dollars per capita [person]. This Cuban currency is probably bought through legal emigration on the one hand, and maybe without any network of agents, through Western embassies on the black dollar market on the other hand.

The Cuban situation may be generally characterized—continued the president—by greatly increasing class struggle. After the elimination of old groups of bandits, now, partly in Las Villas and mainly in Matanzas county there appear newly organized and functioning groups of bandits. Following direct external direction, they partly lean on the richer peasants with a counter-revolutionary spirit, and partly on the middle and poor peasants, who can be easily deceived because of the sectarian and other mistakes committed by the Cuban leadership, and also they win their base in areas with scattered populations by terrorist intimidation. They carry out sabotage actions, which consist of setting places on fire, explosions and other actions, and they also kill people. In Matanzas county in most recent times the situation has become so much worse that they approached the highways as well, and raided vehicles or people. The make-up of the groups is always the same and it shows where the line of class struggle can be drawn in Cuba at present: the members of the groups are the sons of well-to-do farmers, clerical people, and people under their influence and the

ex-members of the armed forces and power-enforcement organizations of the old system or their relations and the smaller part is made up of the petit-bourgeoisie of towns.

The Cuban leadership cannot allow the spread of this movement, not even its existence in such size in a county neighboring Havana. But they cannot allow either, what the counter-revolution has already tried, that the counter-revolution formed even one group of bandits in the farthest county, Oriente county, which has always been the main fortress of the revolution. Therefore they have started the execution of the necessary measures both in the political and military lines. For this the experiences in Matanzas gave good grounds.

As an interjection, here I would like to report on the events in Matanzas, the details of which I have heard from President Dorticos: The counter-revolution managed to form a group of armed bandits of about 200 people out of small groups of 5-10 people in this county. These groups have been more and more active and in the past days they have managed to incite the population to a counter-revolutionary demonstration in a small village near the small town of Cardenas of Matanzas county. The main cause of the counter-revolutionary success is not to be found in the skillfulness of the counter-revolutionaries and their leaders in the USA, but the faulty policy led by the Cuban leadership and organs for a long time. Vice-Premier and Minister of Defense Raul Castro said that recently he had received reports one after the other from the commanders of the individual units that proved that the peasants began to see their only defender and help again in the Cuban revolutionary army exclusively, while they looked upon the party organizations and their leaders, that is the ORI, just because of the illegal sectarian arbitrary and terrorizing methods, as similar to the defeated authorities of the Batista-regime. The peasants often turned to the commanders of the individual units, not only with their problems, but with their complaints about the procedures of the ORI leadership and secretaries too. The organizers and leaders of the counter-revolutionary demonstration, the members of one of these groups of armed bandits were caught by the authorities right away and four were immediately sentenced to death through a summary procedure and shot dead. In the population the summary sentence met with protest against the renewal of death sentences and executions familiar from the time of the Batista regime. After this, the highest leadership immediately visited this place, gathered the whole population in the main square and explained for hours what had happened, then asked them to appoint and elect new leaders in place of the arrested and executed and fleeing counter-revolutionaries who held some post in the local administration or were the chemist, a cafe-owner and other bourgeois elements and in place of the badly functioning administrative and economic organs. It was during this assembly that the population of the village understood that the new revolutionary system was not the same as what they believed it to be on the basis of the activity of the local petty monarchs and under the influence of the counter-revolutionaries, and they appointed the new leaders after several hours of debate, rejecting one by saying that he was a drunkard, the other [because he] belonged to the circle of friends of the counter-revolutionary cafe-owner, etc. In this village the counter-revolution will have no base any more. A few days later in the town of Cardenas, President Dorticos held a mass meeting and observed a military parade. After the parade some parts of the army together with the other organs and a part of the population began the all-embracing great military action against the groups of bandits in the county.

The Party

During the conversation President Dorticos emphasized that one of the main difficulties in eliminating economic problems and faulty political methods was that in Cuba there was not a party. The organization of the party has started only just now in the truest sense of the word (after the Escalante case) and it is going on very thoroughly and carefully, but slowly. They try not to make any new mistakes and strive to build a strong, uniform and firm Marxist-Leninist party. He does not doubt

the success of this work.

During the conversation, mainly answering my questions, he stated that the provisioning of the population was not guaranteed this year and any food supply Hungary could help with, independently of quantity and quality, would be welcomed. He also said that they did not only need counselors, experts undertaking technical or other help in central and national work, but also at much lower levels for the solution of a small detail, to manage a smaller enterprise or institution, and sometimes for the solution of a particular task within a firm or institution requiring new technical or organizational skill, similarly to the Soviet Union, who lends us not only high and middle level experts but also skilled workers to organize e.g. the water economy and fishing.

He also stressed that in all cases when we thought that their Ministry of Foreign Trade or some organ or official within it wished to purchase something or in such quantity that did not correspond to our general situation or our prospects of development, or we could see that they missed to buy something that our more experienced organs or people considered necessary, we should not fulfill the wish of their Ministry of Foreign Trade but stand up for our position considered right and, if needed, even in smaller questions, if it could not be solved otherwise, we should turn directly to him, because even smaller things might have such major significance that he, as the head of the Cuban Party's Economic Committee, wished to deal with.

János Beck
Budapest, 25 June 1962