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## **Conversation with Xhustin Papogorgi, Third Secretary of the Embassy of the People's Republic of Albania in Cuba**

(27th September, 1968)

*In September of 1968, a group of students from the United States, most of them members of the anti-imperialist group, Students for a Democratic Society, visited Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples. During their free time in Havana, a small number of students in this group visited the Albanian Embassy there. The following are notes from the diary kept by one of these students. G.G.*

The conversation was extremely straightforward and un-‘diplomatic.’ We almost immediately got into differences with the Cuban position. The first thing was the function of the party. He said that in Albania the party is above the state organs, in the sense that these can’t take any position against the line of the party. He said that in Cuba party branches are only now being set up in different ministries, etc. I added the lack of political education in the party.

We discussed international issues, the growth of revisionism, and the idea of a ‘third line’ or a neutral course. He pointed out very sharply that the split is not just between China and the Soviet Union, but it is between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism, and that there can be no middle ground, that to hold a middle ground will in the long run lead to revisionism. He said that Cuba sometimes makes very good criticisms of the Soviet Union, but it still supports it, e.g. in Czechoslovakia, as did Vietnam and Korea. He talked about how dangerous it is for Cuba to rely on the revisionist countries for aid, since they will give it when Cuba says what they like and hold back when Cuba criticises them. He pointed out that Cuba still has very good relations with the Soviet Union and that missions always go back and forth.

He said very clearly that Cuba is a revolutionary country and that Albania never attacks her in public, especially on the question of armed struggle in the revolutionary movements, but that they don’t agree with Cuba’s line. He said that Che was a very great man and a heroic revolutionary, but that 1, 10, 100 or even 1,000 men in the hills can do nothing. There must be organisation, i.e. a party, which can mobilise masses in the countryside and in the city, and he said that in the Albanian liberation war they had at the end 53,000 men fighting, although 28,000 had died and been replaced (out of a population then of about 1 million). In private they tell the Cubans ‘Listen, comrade, the way you are doing it is wrong.’ He said that the Cubans say that Fidel had only 12 men [left alive from the boat Granma that landed in Cuba in 1956 at the beginning of the armed struggle against Batista – editor’s note] but he said that everyone supported him and he had the support of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, etc.

We discussed various other things, such as the growth of revisionism generally, but the things of greatest interest were the discussions about Cuba.

One visitor asked what Albania would do if the U.S. attacked Cuba, and he said that they would be totally at the service of the Cubans in whatever way. Another visitor asked what would happen if the Soviet Union and/or the U.S. attacked Albania (since the Soviet Union is apparently gathering troops in Bulgaria, and what China would do. He said: 'First, Albania would rely on its own forces but that China would certainly aid them and the war would know no boundaries.'

Internally, he disagreed with the idea of the historical salary [the position of Cuba at that time that anyone, particularly professionals, who supported the revolution and stayed would not have their salaries reduced – editor's note] and levelling wages by fixing the high ones and raising the low ones, and said that in Albania they levelled from two directions. He said that these must still be some differences, say between a minister (he did not bring up doctors, teachers, etc.) and a worker in the ministry, but just a little. He says a minister in Cuba gets about 500 pesos a month, while a worker might get 150, and by just raising the lower wage it would take a very long time until they reached the same level.

He said that things like the Revolutionary Offensive, the nationalisation of small shops, etc., was a very good measure, and he had a lot of praise for the revolutionary positions and actions of Cuba, but many disagreements.

He said that the lack of political education, and also the lack of a real planned economy, with a five-year plan so that people can see where all their work goes and when it will bring results, leads a lot of people not to understand and be willing to cope with the shortages, so that many people, including poor people, leave for Miami. He saw this as a serious problem. He said that most of the people in his neighbourhood had left in the last few years, including a Black worker (if he meant the neighbourhood around the embassy it is sort of 'fancy' residential, but maybe he meant where he lives, although I think he lives in the embassy).

He said that the Cubans were not using their resources as well as they could, that it is a rich country, that there are many cows, but where is the milk, why is there not enough leather for shoes, even in the shops for diplomats. He mentioned the lack of some other machine-made items and when we asked why this happened he mentioned spare parts and relying on the revisionist countries in the sphere of machines.

I asked whether he thought that they were neglecting industrialisation, and he said that at first they put everything into industrialisation, that it didn't work, and now they put everything into agriculture (one of the poster slogans is 'Toda la Fuerza por la Agricultura' – 'All Forces for Agriculture'), and that there must be some balance.

We talked about the culture problem, and he said that there was a great influx of bourgeois culture, in the music on the radio, the English, French, U.S. movies, etc. Then he went into a criticism of the Cuban film *Memorias de Subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment), partly about its not condemning for (as) taking the clothes from him, for his being let off in the trial, and also for not really condemning him. He also objected to the love (not sex) scenes. He said that movies should educate the working class and that anyone who made a film like that in Albania would have his head cut off. He also objected to the modern art style paintings and

posters, that he was discussing with two soldiers a painting representing Che in Bolivia, and he (or they, it wasn't quite clear) said, 'But where is Che?, why don't they show him, with a rifle, in Bolivia?'

We asked whether Albanian literature was available in Cuba, like in news stands, etc., and he said no, that they had asked but had been told no because they always attack the Soviet Union and it is divisive.

He wanted to know what people in the U.S. left thought of Albania, and we discussed the possibility of a group from SDS [Students for a Democratic Society – a mass left-wing students' organisation in the U.S. in the 1960s – *editor's note*] going there. We said that this could be very important for SDS internally, in supporting a working class line and the need for a Marxist-Leninist party, etc., but we didn't even try to make any plans for such a thing. We talked for about two minutes on the basic different positions in SDS. One of our group asked if he could go personally, and he was told to write a letter saying why.