New Senate Office Building, U. S. Senate, Room 1202, Washington, D. C.
April 19-20, 1972

Formal Statements

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy
Sen. Harold E. Hughes
Prof. Laurence R. Birns

Prof. John Plank
Prof. Kalman Silvert
Prof. Brady Tyson

Participants

Kalman Silvert, Chairman
Laurence R. Birns
Cole Blasier
John M. Cates, Jr.

Ford Foundation, and Director Ibero-American Inst., N.Y.U.
New School for Social Research, and Institute of Public Adm.
Director, Center for Latin American Studies, U. of Pittsburgh
President, Center for Inter-American Relations. Formerly,
U.S. Foreign Service Office
President, Inter-American Foundation
Princeton University
Executive Vice President, The Council of the Americas
The Brookings Institution
Christian Science Monitor
Prof. Littauer School, Harvard University
Director, Center for Defense Information. Formerly,
Commandant of the Inter-American Defense College
Director, Division of Inter-American Affairs, U. of New Mexico
Univ. of Connecticut. Formerly, the Brookings Institution
Univ. of Pennsylvania School of Law. Formerly, Assistant
Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs
Member, Institute of Current World Affairs
Division for Latin American, U.S. Catholic Conference
Secretary for Latin America, United Presbyterian Church
W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Formerly,
Ambassador to Bolivia
The New York Times
American University
Director for Latin America, U.N. Development Program.
Formerly, Foreign Minister of Chile
Foreign Area Fellowship Program

* Accepted invitation but were unable to participate.

Sponsors

Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Cal.)
Sen. Mike Gravel (D-Alaska)
Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.)
Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.)
Sen. George McGovern (D-S. Dakota)
Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.)
Sen. Fred R. Harris (D-Okla.)
Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Texas)
Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.)
Sen. Frank Moss (D-Utah)

Rep. Seymour Halpern (R-N.Y.)
Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.)
Rep. Parren Mitchell (D-Md.)
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Rep. Don Fraser (D-Minn.)
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Rep. Patsy Mink (D-Hawaii)
Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.)
Rep. Thomas Rees (D-Cal.)
Rep. Benjamin Rosenthal (D-N.Y.)
Conference Summary

On April 19-20, 1972, a gathering was held in Washington, D. C. which brought together some of this nation's leading experts on U.S. foreign policy and Latin American affairs. Carrying the title "Congressional Conference on U.S.-Cuba Relations," the meeting was held in the New Senate Office Building of the U.S. Senate, and was sponsored by more than a score of Senators and Representatives. The conference was an activity of the Fund for New Priorities, a New York-based organization concerned with public issues, social justice, and international accord.

Senators Kennedy and Hughes were the originating sponsors of the conference and both made formal presentations before the panel. Other Congressmen participated in the discussions. A large number of legislative staff members were in the audience, as were representatives of various organizations concerned with Latin American affairs and observers from a number of Latin American embassies.

The findings of the conference were given wide publicity throughout Latin America and were also covered in the United States press.

The conference could be considered a milestone in that it was one of the first gatherings concerned with U.S.-Cuban affairs which was less directed to the tactics and strategic elements of the relationship than with the very assumptions underlying it. Coming from a diversity of backgrounds and professional positions, the panelists represented broad sections of informed American public opinion.

One of the most important achievements of the conference was the formulation of a consensus. There was agreement that it would be in the best interest of all of the nations of the hemisphere if the process of normalizing relations with Cuba was begun. The participants proposed that 1) two-way freedom of travel should be encouraged; 2) cultural and sports exchanges should be promoted; 3) the embargo against trade should be removed and a progressive revival of commerce with Cuba should be encouraged; 4) long-term agricultural credits should be extended to Cuba to augment that nation's food supplies and assist in dealing with U.S. food surpluses; 5) a reasonable rent should be paid for leasing the facilities at Guantanamo or, alternately, the U.S. naval base should be returned to Cuba.

Aside from the consensus, the conference developed a number of other commonly shared attitudes concerning issues affecting U.S.-Cuban relations. As Senators Hughes and Kennedy stressed in their speeches, in an era of East-West détente, as evidenced by the President's recent trip to the Soviet Union and China, it was somewhat singular that bilateral relations between Havana and Washington were still so rigid and inflexible. A number of panelists referred to the peculiarly venomous official U.S. attitude to Cuban communism, as if that particular variant of the ideology was intrinsically more repugnant than the political systems of China, the Soviet Union, and the East European nations.

The panelists also determined that until an approach to a détente was attempted, the U.S.-Cuban freeze would continue to frustrate the operation of the Organization of American States and distract that regional organization from concentrating its attention on economic development and the promotion of social justice. This situation would also prove burdensome to the reconstruction of the U.S. relationship with the remaining nations of the hemisphere. In fact, some panelists felt that until outstanding issues were solved between the two nations, there could not be a viable U.S. policy toward Latin America.

The point was repeatedly stressed that it was incumbent upon the U.S., in any move that it make in the direction of normalization, to consult and be responsive to the opinions of the other members of the O.A.S., and that this consultation should be more than a pro forma inquiry. Connected to this observation was a feeling that
since this nation had taken the initiative within the councils of the O.A.S. to suspend Cuban membership in 1962, and to declare an economic embargo in 1964, it would be appropriate for the U.S. to undertake suitable unilateral moves as well as seek for multilateral action. Note was also taken that with a number of O.A.S. members like Peru, Chile, Jamaica, Guyana, and Venezuela either joining Mexico in reestablishing diplomatic contacts with Cuba, or indicating that it was time for a change, the U.S. was in danger of having its Cuban policy eroded in a formless and disjunctive pattern rather than have change brought about as a result of planning and negotiating.

The original reasons for the ostracism of Cuba from the inter-American family and the breakdown of its relation with the U.S. were investigated. These causes included Cuba's close military ties to the Soviet Union, its confiscation of property held by U.S. nationals, and the training, supplying, and staffing of guerrilla movements in other Latin American nations. It was noted that Cuban-Soviet relations had become stabilized and that Cuba had displayed some independence in its relationship with its major partner.

Several conference members examined the history of the pattern of deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations after the advent of Fidel Castro. They found that Cuban dependence upon the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance was largely a function of the U.S. decision to pressure Cuba's domestic and external policies, and that the level of Cuba's military preparedness was a response to the perceived security threat coming from the U.S., as later dramatized by the Bay of Pigs and the missile quarantine confrontation.

Regarding the Cuban role in the encouragement of insurgency ("subversion") in certain parts of the hemisphere, in general, the panelists believed that there was more rhetoric than activity in this policy. Statements were made that since 1968 the tempo of Cuban assistance to like-minded movements elsewhere had dramatically lessened. This conclusion also seems to be held by a number of U.S. officials concerned with Cuban affairs, as revealed in testimony before Congressional committees and elsewhere.

It was the finding of the panel that the security question should no longer be considered as a significant factor in justifying the rift between the U.S. and Cuba. Related to this position was a belief that a detente between the two countries would further neutralize whatever external military-subversive threat that Cuba might care to exercise, because removing the "foreign devil" menace would tend to introduce pluralizing elements into Cuban national life and decrease the ability of its leadership to mobilize internal resources for foreign adventures. It would also increase the pressure for an expansion of the availability of consumer goods, and place the nation in a skein of diplomatic relationships with the other nations of the hemisphere which would serve to temper and moderate Cuba's ideological militancy.

The panel found that while the Cuban economy has still not fulfilled its revolutionary promise, and that significant industrial and agricultural errors has occurred under the current Cuban leadership, a number of achievements have also been registered. It was suggested that more distributive justice exists today than in the pre-Castro period and that notable improvements had been made in enlarging the national community by bringing in the rural sectors and the more humble elements of the Cuban population, as well as making gains in public health, child care, and elementary education. It was also recognized that Cuba largely has been successful in replacing the professional classes that went into exile by training its youth to take their places.

In discussing a methodology of conciliation and rapprochement, it was recorded that the question of a settlement of claims of U.S. nationals who had their property confiscated would be raised. It was noted that Cuba also has made claims against certain seizures of property by the U.S. These matters were generally thought
as not placing formidable obstacles in the way of long-term conciliation efforts.
A number of U.S. corporations had already taken advantage of the U.S. tax laws
and had long since had adjustments made for their claims.

The panelists addressed themselves to the multifaceted question of diplomatic
recognition. The prevailing attitude was that recognition should not be looked upon
as a gift, or as a sign of approval, but as a normal aspect of inter-state relations.
It was felt that preconditions to recognition were not warranted beyond the usual
minimal elements of functional civility and abiding by traditional diplomatic norms.
The subject was raised as to whether the present Cuban government would lend itself
to a policy of conciliation with the United States, and whether it would accept an
invitation to return to the O.A.S. One position maintained by a number of panelists
was that the regional organization had long been under an inordinate amount of
influence by the U.S. and that it required a substantial amount of reconstruction --
in keeping with the Consensus of Vina del Mar -- in order to adapt itself to emerging
regional conditions. Others claimed that the O.A.S. of today is a significantly
different body than it was in the previous decade and that it had the resilience
to accommodate itself to these new conditions.

It was suggested that a variety of techniques could be experimented with which could
allow for a normalization effort to advance irrespective of the present public mood
of the two adversaries. If Cuba, for example, would be uninterested in returning
to the O.A.S., it might wish to affiliate itself to some of the regional organizations,
such as the Inter-American Bank, or some of the area's technical and professional
bodies. In any event, it was felt that a distinction must be made between the
indulgent prose of a political address and the clearly seen dictates summoned by the
requirements of national interest. In this sense, a caustic speech by Premier
Castro denouncing the O.A.S. cannot be seriously used by U.S. policy makers as a
pretext for non-movement on the diplomatic front. It was the feeling of the conference
that secret diplomacy of the variety that preceded the U.S. switch on the Chinese
representation issue in the U.N., and the off-the-record conversations that now
accompany the formal sessions of the Paris peace talks on Vietnam, would prove to
be an effective road to a detente between the U.S. and Cuba.

The Cuban Congressional Conference of April 1972 found that conditions are uniquely
propitious for a historic break with the old formulas, the old language, and the
now obsolete policies that have characterized U.S.-Cuban relations for the past decade.
In its consensus, it pointed a way in which a series of reasonable and practical
steps could be taken -- some unilaterally, some in full consultation with the other
Latin American nations -- that could help produce a phased detente between the two
nations. It was deeply felt by most of the participants that current U.S. policy is
static and producing a meager payoff, even if it is granted that it once made sense.
It might even be considered counter-productive in that the embargo has forced Cuba
to innovatively develop its internal resources and, at the same time, augment its
economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union.

It was the sentiment of the panel that a movement toward a detente between the
United States and Cuba, irrespective of what scenario would eventually be followed,
would be in keeping with the present world atmosphere of clearing out the traces of
the Cold War, moving toward universalism in international relations, and promoting
negotiation and conversation among former enemies and ideological foes.

It is hoped that the conference, with its consensus, will provide a beginning in a
movement within the executive branch, Congress, and informed public opinion to
generate a new, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship between two
nations in which the seeds of friendship are there to be nourished.