



## France-Cuba talks alarm Washington

The same week Carter Administration officials announced that new high-speed missile-launching patrol boats would begin cruising the Caribbean in a revived version of "gun-boat diplomacy," France's Deputy Foreign Minister Olivier Stirn held successful talks with Cuban President Fidel Castro at a special meeting in Havana. Significant economic deals and the "possibility of systematic collaboration" between France and Cuba "on the questions of development, maintaining peace, and bilateral collaboration" were at the center of the two-hour meeting, according to the final communique issued March 27th. Africa, Pakistan and the Nonaligned Movement were among the topics.

The official reason for Stirn's visit was to head the French delegation to the Fifth Annual Meeting of the French-Cuban Trade Commission, but most analysts agree that Stirn was sent to cool-out growing tension between the two countries.

Spokesmen for the U.S. State Department, even prior to Stirn's arrival in Havana, had expressed concern that he might succeed. The United States government was apparently very pleased by the development of tensions in relations between France and Cuba; at least one French political figure made accusations that implied that the U.S. Carter administration was actually engaged in fomenting those tensions. Naturally, State Department officials did not welcome the advent of talks to resolve those problems.

The focus of Franco-Cuban tensions were French possessions in the Caribbean. Talk of Cuban support for "independence movements" in the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe was highlighted in the press, spurred by a statement from the French Minister for the Overseas Departments, Paul Dijoud, accusing Cuba of exactly that several weeks ago.

Havana domestic TV responded angrily to Dijoud's statements, demanding Giscard clarify if this meant France was joining Washington in its virulent anti-Cuban campaign. The program did note, however, that Dijoud had been reprimanded by Giscard before for

mishandling African policy.

Stirn's trip cut short that talk of crisis. Castro told Stirn that Cuba "had not and would not" intervene in the internal affairs of France (referring to the islands), and praised France's "independent" policy in the international arena, according to French daily *Le Monde*. More than that, Stirn and Fidel spoke of "systematic collaboration."

Perhaps the most important area where "collaboration" between France and Cuba could have a significant impact is Africa, where both countries play a prominent role.

Fifteen new economic projects were outlined, including granting French companies exploration rights for gold, zinc, lead, and other metals, the extension of a \$15.6 million credit for agricultural imports, construction of a hydroelectric plant, and a French tourist center on the famous Varadero Beach. The French state-owned oil company, Elf Aquitaine was granted exploration and exploitation rights for off-shore oil near Cuba. Four previously agreed-on projects, sitting on the back burner due to Cuban financial difficulties, were reaffirmed—from a specialty steel plant to a fertilizer complex.

U.S. State Department officials expressed special concern over Stirn's visit to Cuba before he arrived, "watching" for the French to offer major credits to Cuba which would relieve its severe currency shortage. Encouraged by Dijoud's statements, since it indicated trouble was brewing between the two countries, they noted they still did not know whether Dijoud represented official policy. "We'll see what happens to French policy when *their* domestic interests are threatened," commented the official. What did he mean?

According to denunciations made by a leading Gaullist deputy earlier this year, it appears that American officials are actually fomenting trouble in the French islands! RPR deputy Julia twice stood up in Parliament to accuse the U.S. consul in Martinique, Harold T. Robinson, of financing the independence movements on the islands, including a number of public festivals for these organizations!

The current U.S. policy of "surrounding" Cuba militarily and economically while supporting every dissident network on the island and publicly threatening a naval blockade or even invasion (!) is designed to throw the Cubans into frantic efforts to build up their "radical" allies! Cuba has shown before that it can be *provoked* into "radical" activity in the region.

Ironically, the French offer of economic collaboration and regular channels of discussions may be the only thing heading off the spread of "radicalism" throughout the Caribbean that the U.S. administration fears in public, and supports in private.