

Handwritten initials and date: *HEA*
2/18

Files

January 22, 1957

H. D. Bruner, M.D., Chief, Medical Branch
Division of Biology and Medicine

TRIP TO HABANA, CUBA, DECEMBER 15 TO 21, 1956, TO PARTICIPATE
IN FIRST CUBAN NATIONAL FORUM ON NUCLEAR ENERGY

SYMBOL: BMM:HDB

It was well that we arrived about twelve hours in advance of the opening ceremonies in that Dr. Alonso, the Secretary-General (Technical Director), was interested in the possibility of slanting our discussion in the direction of medical uses of a research reactor; or the possible uses of a reactor which could support both medical and physical research programs. This was discussed and next morning query was cabled via the United States Embassy for permission to include this item with prepared material.

Discussion of this matter with Mr. C. Boomstra, Counsel for Economic Affairs of our Embassy, brought out that the very influential Cuban Electrical Company was proposing two power reactors, but was not too interested in research reactors or in having their engineers and operators trained locally, since it could be done in the United States for a smaller investment with greater prestige.

In connection with excessive reaction by the press and people to the possible dangers of radiation, the opinion was held that the press is no more "sensational" than many of our papers; that they are less inclined to rush into print because they support fewer reporters and depend on handouts. (Usually they were a day behind in reporting items such as the content of our meetings. See clippings.) It was agreed that the people would be most reactive if emphasis were placed on a failure of reproductive functions, whereas other sorts of damage are accepted more or less in stride as a part of life. Finally, it was felt that it would definitely be more uncomfortable for us to deal with such a reaction after the reactors were being built or operating; other things being equal, the situation would be more easily dealt with if the biological questions were thoroughly talked out, prior to beginning work on the reactors.

In that connection, the U. S. Information Service had no copies of the NAS-NRC reports. It is recommended that a number of copies be

1104310

REPOSITORY Texas A+M Archives + Special
COLLECTION Paul Aebersold Papers *Collection*
BOX No. 2
FOLDER General Correspondence - Jan 1957

sent. A moderately complete technical library has been transmitted to the Cuban AEC, including quite recent reports from BNL, for example, but not the NAS-NRC reports.

Sunday, at 9:00 P.M., was the inauguration ceremony in the courtyard of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, a beautiful new building across a square from the presidential palace. The Minister of State and several other Cuban ministers, together with the United States Ambassador (Mr. Arthur Gardner) and the invited speakers, occupied the rostrum. The Minister of State opened the Forum and welcomed us all; Mr. Gardner responded with the best wishes from Mr. Eisenhower, transferred the library and noted the preliminary agreements with Cuba in carrying out the bilateral agreement of the Atoms-for-Peace program. Dr. Alonso then stated the purposes of the Forum, such as given in the last paragraph of the black covered program. It appears that such public discussions and presentations are a part of the cultural tradition of Cuba and Spain and serve the purposes of informing the public, interesting students, solidifying support and, in general, launching a program such as this in an acceptably impressive manner.

Afterward, there was a tour of exhibits, made up in Spanish, from the United States, England, and Cuba, with models and salesmen from Bendix, Babcock and Wilcox, North American Aviation and General Electric. Photographers were all over the place. We met most of the Cuban governmental officials and Mr. Donahue and Mr. Cushing of the Embassy, whom we had met two years ago. They and Mr. Boomstra were most helpful and went to considerable trouble to see that we were introduced, etc. They also helped with protocol when Dr. Alonso gave us the job of closing the Forum at Dr. Gutierrez' formal dinner at the Habana Yacht Club Thursday night.

Attended the meetings Monday and that evening went to Dr. Alonso's garden reception.

On Tuesday, the first half of the paper containing the new material on the medical uses of a reactor was presented with simultaneous translation into Spanish. Wearing three microphones and a headphone set was a bit restrictive, but it was not too bad after getting the trick of listening for an extra voice to pace along. It would have been better, however, if the simulcaster had had a copy of the manuscript and it will be well in the future to be so prepared. Afterward, there was a Lions Club luncheon, more papers, a sumptuous buffet dinner at the Hotel Nacional and then a round-table which lasted until 12:10 A.M.

On Wednesday the sessions were doubled up in order to allow everyone to visit "El Cotorro," the showplace of Bacardi y Cie, for a Cuban country luncheon. Since the medical group was the smaller, it was relocated into another building, but no provision had been made for projecting slides, microphones, etc. By the time these were rigged, it was 1½ hours after starting time, so it was necessary to cut the paper drastically. Accordingly, without benefit of simulcast, I spoke slowly in English, choosing collateral words and presenting just the bare facts and the research possibilities. To judge by the response of the students, it was acceptable for we had another hour of informal session outside--this was real fun.

Rather than depend on a newspaper's translation of the paper, I prepared a summary which I took to the Embassy. Mr. Boomstra translated it into Spanish and had it typed so that it could be given to the newspapers through the press attache of the Cuban Commission. It probably appeared in the Friday papers; it will be interesting to see the clippings which Dr. Alonso promised to send.

Wednesday evening was spent composing the closing speech and attending the round-table in which Dr. Aebersold and the physicists participated.

On Thursday, went to more papers and then to the closing dinner mentioned above.

Dr. Gutierrez Sanchez, as Ministerio sine Cartego, has held a very tight control over Commission affairs so that matters came to somewhat of a halt when he had to be operated upon about November 1, for what is possibly neoplasia in the abdomen. He is said to be a very tough-minded man who will not admit to physical infirmities and, consequently, has not delegated authority to those responsible for seeing that Commission affairs are developed. He had emergency surgery on the Sunday morning the Forum opened and on Wednesday was reoperated upon, so that at best he will be unable to take an active interest in the affairs of the Commission for some months. Dr. Alonso naturally is concerned over this loss of forward movement since he feels that now is the opportune time to get established.

Following are some interesting people who were contacted:

Mr. Antony Mattson, chief UNESCO representative for South America, who lives at Montevideo and was on his way to Sweden for Christmas, will visit us here. He was arranging with Dr. Alonso and others for the third course in Nuclear Physics, a one-month course to be held in February in Habana. It seems that he (UNESCO?) looks on Cuba as a

bridge or center much as our thoughts have been on Puerto Rico. Possibly this matter ought to be looked into.

Dr. Ovidio de Loasa, a practicing cancer therapist and radiologist, is one of the Directors of the Cuban AEC. He was appointed despite the fact there were older and more influential medical men available. He seems to be a well-trained man with lots of energy and ambition who may go far. He is presently aiming at becoming the medical director of the Cuban Electric Company's power reactor projects and it would not be surprising soon to find him there.

Dr. Donald G. Lewis, President of the Power Company, seemed to us to be a good example of a North American business man who has transplanted himself very successfully. He is the influential man in getting the reactors in and running. His outlook seems to be strictly business but he has an appreciation of the value of academic contacts. He is thoroughly at home in the complex of Cuban politics.

Dr. Antonino Perez Ara is a pathologist with a wide range of interests and remarkable knowledge of nuclear physics. He has, however, pet ideas and theories which make him hard to control at a round-table. He was, surprisingly, the second man to catheterize the heart. (See his reprints on this and on nuclear energy.)

Eng. Luis Larragoiti, Lt. Commander, Cuban Navy, assigned to power reactors, is a very pleasant, well-trained man of about forty; he is probably the man who will do the engineering. We noticed that he spent some time talking to a young man visiting from the Oak Ridge Reactor School. This man was Carlos Wheeler, who (I believe) is the son of Mr. Lewis' predecessor; Wheeler was completely bilingual and, it seemed, rather brilliant. They might make a good pair.

Dr. Berthold Stech, from Heidelberg, but presently on leave to California Tech, impressed everyone with his ability to make sense out of current theories of the forces in the nucleus and personally was one of the nicest people we have met.

A Dr. Gonzales (middle name probably Mario O.), who is a mathematician and connected in some way with the Cuban AEC, was most impressive for his quiet command of his field. He might be considered as a top candidate for further training in the higher mathematics of nuclear operation.

Our people--Dr. Aebersold, Jim Murray, James Lane and B. F. Olson--were all well received. Dr. Aebersold has delighted the Latin Americans

January 22, 1957

by his ability to outdo them at their own pleasant customs. He is one of the best known and respected of our people who have visited Central and South America. Dr. Marcelo Alonso, of course, is the coming man in this field in Central America. He has worked very hard and now has attained the necessary position. He is an excellent speaker. To judge by his attached reprint, he is well up in his field and professionally competent. Additional people introduced at the various social functions had no close connections with nuclear energy. They were most hospitable and everything possible was done to make the occasion impressive and pleasant.

It is quite clear that the Atoms-for-Peace program is successful and regarded as a splendid gesture by most everyone; one man, however, complained about the way the financial arrangements tied a country to United States policy. A remark reported by one of the Cubans leads to the idea that other governments feel miffed at having been "scooped" by the program; that the idea was obvious and in fact general property, but we were the only ones with enough spare money to put it into effect.

Recommendations:

No special points need be made relative to the Forum or the progress of the Atoms-for-Peace program. Cuba is most progressive and, in its own way, hard working. One hopes that the cost of electric power will be reduced as well as made more generally available in the relatively undeveloped rural areas.

It would be advantageous for us to be better acquainted with the Spanish language. The usual high school or college Spanish is not enough. This boils down to a matter of courtesy as well as good business. Although they love to practice English, they naturally get a sense of inferiority when forced to use a foreign language in their own domain. Even a small grasp of their language changes their attitude toward the visitor.

cc: ✓ Dr. Paul Aebersold, OROO