

Little 'Cold War' Chills Caribbean

Cuba's Batista, Dominican Republic's Trujillo at odds over political asylum, weapons, spies.

By Jay Mallin

Havana (Worldwide Press Service)—A Caribbean cold war has blown up with the fury and unpredictability of a hurricane between two of the strongest strongmen in this area: Cuba's President Batista and Generalissimo Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

Ordinarily, Latin dictators stay—or hang—together on the premise that intramural squabbling might start a chain reaction among their adversaries and produce across-the-border aid between would-be revolutionaries.

But Fulgencio Batista has always been an exception. While retaining basic power, he has nevertheless permitted a certain amount of vocal opposition.

And, more important, Batista has committed the cardinal sin of allowing political fugitives from Trujillo to obtain asylum in Cuba.

The first sign that a storm was brewing came early this year when a top Trujillo aide charged the Cuban army with supplying weapons to a Dominican underground movement.

In reply, Batista accused the Rafael Trujillo government of using spies in this country. To prove his point, Batista showed the Organization of American States Dominican newspaper stories on the return of agents from missions in Cuba.

Charges and counter-charges flew across the stretch of water separating the two islands. A prominent labor leader here warned that Dominican military planes were being painted with Cuban insignia in preparation for a bombing of Havana and a top police official claimed that ex-President Carlos Prío was plotting with Trujillo to oust Batista.

In the Cuban Congress, Senator Rolando Masferrer headed a committee which began probing Dominican espionage in Cuba. At this point, Dominican Ambassador Federico Llaverias made a mistake: he went to Masferrer and offered him "anything you want" if he would become a Trujillo agent.

But Masferrer is a strong Batista supporter, and, without Llaverias' knowledge, he made a tape recording of the conversation. When the recording was played for Batista, he immediately had Llaverias declared persona non grata. The recording was turned over to the Organization of American States.

The best-informed opinion here is that a rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries is possible, but that an actual shooting war is not.

Reason: the Organization of American States would almost certainly intervene and, with the aid of a few U. S. Navy ships now cruising between the two islands, hostilities between Cuba and the Dominican Republic could be easily checked.