

HEMISPHERE NEWS

Commentator Is Regarded Cuba's Greatest 'Guataca'

By HENRY GOETHALS
(The Copley News Service)

HAVANA, Cuba—Possibly the greatest word of opprobrium in present-day Cuba is "guataca." It means schemer, opportunist, sycophant. Indirectly it also means coward.

Ask thousands of Cubans who is the greatest "guataca" on the national scene today and invariably they will reply: "Jose Pardo Llada."

This buck-toothed, mustachioed radio commentator with the shrieking, hysterical voice is the most generally detested member of Prime Minister Fidel Castro's revolutionary hierarchy.

His slashing, insulting attacks on anyone who opposes Castro or the revolution are well known

throughout Cuba, especially in Havana. In recent months he has also vilified the United States.

Technically, Pardo Llada is not a member of the Castro government. But without government support and, especially protection—he would be nothing.

In fact he would likely be dead.

Gunmen have made two attempts on Pardo Llada's life in Havana in recent months. The second time the gunmen put holes in his coat as he drove by, with bodyguards, behind the wheel of his car.

The bullets missed his body by inches.

Rarely has a nation felt the contempt which Cubans harbor for Pardo. Revolutionaries and

bitter Castro foes alike despise him. Despite that fact, thousands of Cubans listen in rapt attention to his distortion-filled 15-minute radio "commentary" at 1:30 p. m. daily. Many of them tune in merely to hear the government line.

No one knows really why Castro keeps Pardo Llada around. But they are thought to be attracted by reason of mutual benefit. Castro uses Pardo to blast his enemies and the US. Pardo relies on Castro to remain in the limelight and, also, to stay alive.

Pardo Llada's long relationship with ex-President Fulgenio Batista and ex-Argentine dictator Juan Peron demonstrates his preference for strongmen and his lack of conviction on the advantages of

representative government.

However, it has not prevented him from embracing and liking such men as Arthur Gardner, former US ambassador to Cuba during the Batista regime and a firm friend of the former Cuban president.

Pardo started his career in the mid-forties. He was ambitious and unscrupulous and used insult and invective more frequently than the more moderate tools of his trade.

Writing for the Havana daily Manana on June 2, 1945, the fledgling newsman denounced Eduardo Chibas of the "Autentico" party and later founder of the "Ortodoxos," as a "pint-sized gunman."

Six years later Pardo joined Chibas in the "Ortodoxos."

In a short time Pardo made

a host of enemies. Early in his career the "Autenticos" accused him of being a member of the Communist party. In 1952 Cuban politician Carlos Marquez Sterling, an "Ortodoxo," described Pardo as "more Peronist than Peron himself."

During the second Batista regime (1952 to 1958) Pardo Llada maintained on-again-off-again relations with the strongman. In 1956 he attacked Batista openly on his radio broadcasts. But rumor had it that earlier Batista had treated him to a lavish honeymoon trip.

Many Havana observers claim that Batista backed Pardo Llada to provide "proof" that freedom of the press and radio existed in Cuba at that time.

The two apparently parted company early in 1958 when Pardo Llada announced that he would run for president in the November elections on a minority ticket. Again his critics claimed that Pardo was spon-

sored by Batista in another "show" of democracy-in-action.

During the Batista years he was frequently seen in the company of Rolando Masferrer, a Batista senator and notorious gunman-racketeer of that era. He was also extremely friendly with Ambassador Gardner. Gardner was friendly with Batista and was later severely criticized by Castro factions for his extreme co-operation with the "dictator."

In late 1957 and early 1958 Pardo Llada, then widely trusted as an opportunist, spent most of his time outside of Cuba. He claimed he was in exile but few believed him.

In December, 1958, he suddenly appeared with Castro's forces in the Sierra Maestra mountains and remained with Castro a few weeks later.

Revolutionary sympathies, however, were anti-Pardo. The newspaper Revolucion, Castro's main news and propaganda or-

gan even then, said in its Dec. 22, 1958, edition:

"Pardo Llada has found no more secure place to safeguard his publicity (or the skin he treasures so highly) than there in the eastern range of the Sierra Maestra mountains.

"The silence which he maintains in the Sierra is proof that the embattled youth who now surrounds him are not forgetful of his coquettish demagoguery and the emotional speeches in which he condemned the (Castro) insurrection."

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