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837.06/4-2552
APR 27 1952
April 25, 1952
DATE

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, HABANA

1789
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, BUREAU OF INTERAMERICAN AFFAIRS

Air Pouch
PRIORITY

REF : 000183 - Labor Developments

SUBJECT: Further Report on Cuban Labor's Relations with Batista Regime

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERAMERICAN AFFAIRS
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SUMMARY

The "understanding" between leaders of the Cuban Confederation of Labor (CTC) and the government of President BATISTA which was reached during the first day of the new regime for reasons of mutual expediency still appears to be functioning satisfactorily although a feeling persists in certain labor quarters that some present union officers will be eventually replaced by men of firm Batista orientation.

Meanwhile, all public statements of the CTC and its Secretary-General, Eusebio MUJAL, seem to be directed toward support of the regime and calculated to establish as much cordiality as possible between labor and Batista. In turn, many federations and sindicatos have signified in public announcements their approval of the course being followed by Mujal. These, however, are believed to be in the main expressions inspired by Mujal to strengthen the opportunistic game he is playing with Batista.

This strategy has kept the present leaders in their jobs and their organizations intact and has kept alive the hope that somehow labor will take an important role in bringing back constitutional government to Cuba and with it the old power held by the union leaders. The unpleasant fact, from labor's point of view, remains that constitutional guarantees are still under suspension, that strikes are still forbidden, and that labor must get permission five days in advance for any meetings it may want to hold and must state clearly why it wants to meet.

No further announcements have been made by Mujal (see Embassy despatch 1625 of April 4, 1952) regarding the formation of a new political party but he is known to be at work on it. Organization of such a party, with Mujal at its head, would appear to be an extension of the original "understanding" between labor and Batista. It cannot get started without the approval of Batista, and if it does get started it will probably be for the purpose

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of attempting to gather former Auténtico labor votes for Batista in the elections now slated for November 1953. The fact that the Constitution of 1940 prohibits class line parties cannot be regarded as much of a deterrent, under a military dictatorship, to Mujal's projected party. At any rate, it will probably be disguised by a name which suggests general support rather than that of labor exclusively. Both the Communist and general press have criticized the suggested Mujal party as a brazen move by politico-labor leaders to retain their power and the perquisites that seem to go with such power in Cuba.

At least one labor leader, and a man to watch, Marco A. HIRIGOYEN, Secretary-General of the transport workers' federation, is publicly reserving his opinion about the new party. Hirigoyen told a reporter for El País that his union would not make any commitments regarding the party until its direction could be determined. He said that his group favors political action by labor but that it is not joining anything before making sure of its objectives. This would seem to substantiate persistent rumors at the CTC of Hirigoyen's resentment and suspicion toward Mujal.

Two other CTC leaders, traditional independents, who in the past have been critical of Mujal's political activities, are known to take a dim view of the projected party and Mujal's quick warm-up to Batista. They are Angel COFIÑO, Secretary-General of the electric plant workers, and Vicente RUBIERA, Secretary-General of the telephone workers.

In the main, however, union leaders are following Mujal's course as the best possible way in the absence of any other. Some are sincerely trying to save their organizations; others their jobs and political interests. All are afraid, since they know Batista can be ruthless and would not hesitate to settle with them should they stand in his way to any degree.

The CTC was quick to announce its support of the Constitutional Statutes (Habana's 1669, April 8, 1952) decreed by President Batista and under which he will run the country until next year's elections. The CTC meekly (Habana's 1733, April 18, 1952) accepted Batista's refusal to permit a large May Day demonstration although this holiday is of traditional importance to organized labor and it had indicated a desire to hold a parade and meeting in downtown Habana this year. Permission was granted for a meeting at CTC headquarters. Mujal rushed into print to disavow a story by Robert J. ALEXANDER in the official publication of the Inter-American Organization of Labor (ORIT) which was unfriendly to Batista.

In fact, it is said that he did this even before reading the article upon being questioned by a newspaper reporter. Alexander was in Habana in March to investigate labor under Batista for the AFL's Free Trade Union Committee. These events, plus certain friendly statements toward Batista, described as "sickening" by some labor leaders, show a determination to "get along".

For his part, Batista has not yet taken any hard and fast action that would interfere with this arrangement. Labor has "behaved", no crises have been precipitated and thus Batista not only can well afford to suffer labor's courting but also encourage it as an important base for consolidating his victory. His government has continued subsidy payments to Autobuses Modernos upon "demand" of the union so that wages could be paid. This had been a practice of the previous government. It has refused to recognize former leaders of the tobacco workers' union who were thrown out of their posts last fall on Mujal's orders. It has named CTC delegates to the Rio ILO conference, and it has placed Mujal on the Consultative Council set up by the Constitutional Statutes to advise the President until the 1953 elections.

Two shadows, however, appear on the horizon. One is the re-emergence of the question of labor tribunals. Last fall Mujal was able to forestall congressional action on this by threatening a general strike. At that time he claimed the CTC had not been properly consulted. It remains to be seen whether the CTC will be given more consideration this time. Labor courts have been given wide support by business and the time may have come when Batista finds it expedient to throw something that way.

The other threat seems to be implied in the designation of labor members of the Consultative Council (Habana's 1746, April 21, 1952) who are practically unknown in the union movement. Labor representation not only includes such CTC leaders as Mujal; José Luis MARTINEZ, Secretary-General of the sugar workers; Guillermo MESTRE, labor secretary of electric plant workers; and Raquel VALLADARES, Secretary-General of the clerks' union, but also such unknowns as Mercedes CHIRINO, Felipe SAVIGNE, José RIVALTA and José PEREZ González. Pérez is a former member of the railway brotherhood who is said to have been expelled because of Communist activities and who later renounced Communism and affiliated with Batista's party, Partido Acción Unitaria (PAU). He is at present in Rio as a labor member of the Cuban delegation to the ILO conference. Chirino is a Paupista and rank and file member of tobacco workers' union.

Conrado RODRIGUEZ Sánchez, Assistant Secretary-General of the sugar workers, had been named to the Council on the insistence of Miguel SUAREZ Fernández, Auténtico rebel now collaborating with Batista, but turned down the post with a public statement criticizing the establishment and composition of the Council. He said the Council does not represent the forces of freedom or a solution to the problems of labor and that it is dominated by the most reactionary elements in Cuba. He stated that he was convinced that no words of his would be listened to by the Council. Rodríguez is believed to have taken his action on urgings of his Ortodoxo friends since he was active in that party. His chief in the sugar workers, Martínez, was an Auténtico candidate for Congress prior to the golpe of March 10.

In addition to the fears of CTC leaders regarding emergence of unknown individuals as labor representatives on government bodies, disquieting reports keep coming into their offices of agitation in the provinces against elected officials of sindicatos. For example, in Camaguey a sugar labor leader has complained that despite Batista's pledge of not disturbing duly elected leaders his adherents are continuing in attempts to intimidate and incite opposition to them. This problem has been referred to an Executive Board meeting of the provincial CTC which will be attended by Mujal, Martínez, and possibly the Minister of Labor, according to a report in El Mundo. It will be recalled that after the March 10 revolution and the subsequent understanding between labor and the government, the military in Camaguey refused to permit CTC leaders to resume possession of their offices there until strong representations were made to the Ministry of Labor in Habana by the national CTC.

The CTC has announced that in its May Day rally (to be held in the CTC auditorium) it will ask wage increases "in all industries which are in an economic condition to pay them", increases in pensions for retired workers and respect and guarantees for all labor contracts signed and improvements obtained. In addition, a resolution will be offered reiterating the unity of the workers against Communism. The qualification for pay demands would seem to signify the CTC's cautious position today under the Batista regime. Such a reasonable point of view was unheard of in the last days of the PRIO government.

How far the rank and file workers will go in supporting such a moderate position by their leaders remains to be seen. Dissatisfaction among union members could result

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in new leaders when elections come up in the various organizations and in the CTC itself. In addition, those elections could provide Batista party members an opportunity to assume power.

Some believe that Batista will use Mujal as much as possible but cast him aside when he has discredited himself thoroughly by trying too hard at his opportunistic political game. Union labor's welfare will depend much on Batista's political needs of the moment and of course the unions' willingness to forego rocking the economic boat.

As of now it is apparent that the union leaders, at least, have been chastened by the change in government.

For the Ambassador:



Irvin S. Lippe
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