

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
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file - Labor

TO : Ambassador Gardner

DATE: July 28, 1953

FROM : ARA - Mr. John T. Fishburn *JT*

SUBJECT: Notes on Cuban Labor

It has been many years now since a government has been able to operate in Cuba without the support of labor. When Batista successfully staged his coup in March 1952 many conservative and business elements in Cuba hoped that one result would be a reduction in the influence of labor in the political and economic life of the country and consequently approved of his action. He nevertheless quickly reached a working alliance with Eusebio Mujal, the Secretary-general of the Cuban Confederation of Labor. Apparently he has found it necessary to continue this alliance since Mr. Mujal's CTC is his only reliable civilian, political support outside of his own relatively small party. In view of the changed world conditions which largely prevent conservative ruling groups from governing in a mild old-fashioned manner by themselves and the lack of existence of a substantial middle class in Cuba it appears essential for any ruler or would-be ruler to obtain at least the passive support of a substantial portion of Cuban labor. Tied to the growing importance of labor is its ability to make its influence felt on many important national problems.

Cuban labor has some characteristics which are quite different from those possessed by American labor, and unfortunate from the American viewpoint. In the first place there is a close working relationship between Cuban labor and the government, as suggested above. As a consequence, the previous governments of Presidents Grau and Frio supported many of labor's economic objectives to a degree which would not be possible in a country where the government was more broadly based upon the various economic interests. Also as a consequence, government is more closely involved in the maintenance of individual and group power within the labor movement. For example the Communists controlled the Cuban labor movement during the war and shortly thereafter. Only as a result of government action were the Communists expelled from leadership in 1947-48, and government assistance to the anti-Communist leaders has been instrumental in keeping ^{them in} power since that time. It is highly likely that were the government to take a completely free, hands-off attitude the Communists would be able quickly to resume leadership of a substantial portion of the Cuban labor movement. It is unfortunate but true that the Communists were able during their control to achieve more gains for Cuban labor than it has been able to make in comparable periods before or since. It is equally unfortunate that the Communist leadership appears to be more able and less corrupt than existing or available alternative non-Communist leadership.

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There is a notably high degree of corruption and lack of individual integrity in the Cuban social system. This same trait exists in the leadership of the labor movement. This makes such leadership less effective than it otherwise might be, reduces the confidence of the ordinary worker in its leadership, and on a relative basis strengthens the hands of the Communist leaders who have kept their reputation free from charges of corruption. Rubiera of the telephone and Cofino of the electrical workers appear to have maintained quite honest reputations and avoided involvement in politics.

By virtue of Communist control during the second world war and the even longer standing Marxian orientation of most of Latin American labor, including Cuban, Cuban labor is today largely Marxian in its thinking, even though not Communist in the sense of loyalty to Russia or Russian controlled leaders. As a consequence, Cuban labor is strongly critical of capitalism and is highly nationalistic. In common with that of other Latin American nations, Cubans and Cuban labor display a notable lack of desire for unnecessary personal effort, a lack of appreciation of the need for productivity, an entirely inconsistent desire for high living standards and leisure, and a reliance upon the State or employer or both for maintaining employment, high wages and extensive social security benefits. As a consequence it can be anticipated that Cuban labor is going to face a long period of adjustment and learning before it achieves its difficult objectives.

The United States is looked upon with a combination of envy, friendship, and dislike by Cuban labor, because of this country's great power and leadership. Its capitalistic structure is still held in suspicion in many Latin American quarters, especially labor circles. Even though the Cuban Confederation of Labor is a member of the anti-Communist ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) and its Western Hemisphere affiliate ORIT (Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers) it has been leading a revolt against American leadership in both institutions. It is not yet clear how far the Cubans will push their revolt or how far it will succeed in attracting the support of other Latin American labor groups. The revolt was temporarily somewhat controlled by the threat of the AFL to publicize the CTC's financial support from the present Cuban government and the use of these funds to subsidize trips of other worker groups to the recent ICFTU Congress in Stockholm. However, the CTC is still deeply perturbed about the loss to Cuba of the ORIT headquarters. On their return from Stockholm, Messrs. Mujal and Aguirre (Francisco Aguirre, ex-Secretary-General of the CTC and former Secretary-General of ORIT. His incompetent leadership of ORIT created a large portion of the difficulties.) stopped in Washington where they discussed with AFL officials the strained relations between their federations. Some progress seems to have been made by the AFL in overcoming Mujal's sensitivities. However, Mujal made it clear that he would continue to seek the return of ORIT headquarters to Havana. It is by no means clear how far the CTC will go or to what tactics it will resort in seeking to achieve this goal. Mujal has stated that he will attend the ORIT Secretariat session which will be held in Mexico City in early August 1953. That meeting may enlighten us further regarding future developments in this field.

In view

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-3-

In view of the government's financial support of the CTC, without which the latter would have difficulty in functioning effectively, especially in international affairs, further continued anti-American activities by the CTC abroad may make it desirable for this government to informally advise the Cuban Government that we are aware of and disturbed by the unfriendly activities toward this Government on the part of the CTC. However it would probably be best to abstain from any such action even on an informal basis at least until after the coming meeting of the ORIT Secretariat. If it is found desirable to mention to the Cuban Government the unfriendly activities of the CTC toward this government, an informal account of the CTC's activities in this field to the proper Cuban government officials would seem to be the indicated procedure. Data to be used in such an account could be prepared in the Department.

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