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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

196
DESP. NO.

FROM : AMEMBASSY, HABANA
TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

August 5, 1952
DATE

REF :

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SUBJECT: Further Alleged Conspiracy Thwarted

A rash of arrests, which one newspaper termed a "spell of revolution jitters", broke out over last weekend with at least 15 persons arrested on conspiracy charges. Almost immediately President BATISTA, Army Chief, General Francisco TABERNILLA, and the Ministry of Propaganda issued statements denying rumors of military plots against the Government by members of the armed forces or civilians, while Chief of Police, General SALAS, termed the affair a conspiracy "of vast proportions". Salas claimed the "conspirators" were planning to make off with the new F-47 aircraft the Cuban Air Force recently purchased, for the purpose of raiding Habana from the air.

Most of those arrested were released almost immediately by the Urgency Court because the authorities could not produce evidence that would stick.

First arrested were José FIGUERES, former President of Costa Rica and friend of ex-President PRIO, and Juan BOSCH, a Dominican exile living in Cuba who also was very close to the Prio administration. They were picked up by military intelligence (SIM) in an automobile, after Bosch had met Figueres on his arrival from Miami and Puerto Rico. Both were released after extensive questioning at Campo Columbia. The National Police announced the arrest also of 13 others, including 6 policemen and 7 civilians, four of whom were former policemen. Among the accused were Luis VARONA, former police major and brother of "Tony" VARONA, Auténtico leader, and Candido de la TORRE, a former Auténtico city councilman previously charged with "conspiracy" against the Batista regime. The authorities did not attempt to connect the army detentions of Figueres and Bosch and the police arrests of civilians and patrolmen. The press, somewhat wildly threw in the names of ex-President Prio, Aureliano SANCHEZ Arango and ex-Secret Police Chief Eufemio FERNANDEZ, as well as Ortodoxo leader Roberto AGRAMONTE and Auténtico Arturo HERNANDEZ Tellaheche. One paper, Alerta, claimed the "conspirators" used dollar bills torn in half with

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the signature of Francisco PRIO written on them, to identify one another by matching the halves. The actual number of men held varied in different reports, apparently depending on which police or army official was quoted.

COMMENT

These arrests generated newspaper criticism that the Government is so confused that one branch does not know what the other is doing. Batista's statement of denial was carefully worded to dismiss all suggestion of any kind of revolt in the ranks of the army. He asserted that "only four" persons were arrested and that these were under "surveillance to discover their contacts with gangsters". The recurrence of arrests and detentions indicates the Government's continued uneasiness as to its security. Publicity concerning these latest arrests was heavy over the weekend, but by Tuesday it had quieted, indicating either official suppression, or merely that the press had worked the few details to death.

The "conspiracy" probably received unusually sensational treatment in the press because of public preoccupation with rumors of discontent in the army and uprisings in the interior. For example, soldiers in Camaguey and Las Villas Provinces were reportedly ordered to their barracks in the last two weeks, visitors to the carnival at Santiago brought back rumors that the army is preparing a move against Batista, and travelers on the national highway continually report roadblocks and inspection of vehicles for arms.

Possibly connected with the flurry was a statement on August 4 from Prio in Mexico that he has no intention of returning to the Presidency of Cuba, but "this does not imply his withdrawal from Cuban politics".

In the meantime, hardly a week passes without a press report of a Sanchez Arango conspiracy. Recently these have placed the "counter-revolution" before October, or "toward the end of the year".

For the Ambassador:

Irvin S. Lippe

Irvin S. Lippe
Attaché

Copies to Amembassy, San José
" Ciudad Trujillo

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DCIR-*file*

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : ARA - Mr. Miller
Mr. Mahan
MID - Mr. Rubottom
FROM : MID - Mr. Topping

DATE: August 8, 1952

SUBJECT: Alleged Revolutionary Conspiracy and Arrests on August 1 and 2 in Cuba

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Despatch no. 196 of August 5 from our Embassy at Habana comments on the alleged conspiracy in Cuba as a result of which some 13 people were arrested on August 1 and 2. Six police were arrested and seven civilians. Four of the civilians were former policemen. The civilians were released for lack of evidence by the Urgency Court. Press releases today state that five of the policemen have been sentenced to four years in prison.

The Embassy reports that the situation is somewhat confused, and that the administration itself likewise appears confused. Batista and Army Chief Tabernilla, as well as the Ministry of Propaganda, have issued statements that there are no military plots against the Government by either armed forces or civilians, but the Chief of Police, General Salas, claims that there was a conspiracy "of vast proportions", and that the conspirators were planning to seize the new F-47 fighter planes which the Cuban Army purchased from us. The press has claimed that various people were involved in the conspiracy, apparently inaccurate.

The Embassy comments that the recurrence of arrests and detentions indicates the Government's continued uneasiness concerning its own security.

José Figures, Costa Rican presidential candidate, and Juan Bosch, Dominican exile, with Caribbean Legion connections, were also detained the evening of August 1. Embassy Habana reports they were arrested by Cuban Military Intelligence (SIM) after Bosch had met Figures upon the latter's arrival from Miami via Puerto Rico. The Embassy added that both were released after "extensive" questioning at the Habana military headquarters, Campo Columbia, and that the authorities did not attempt to connect the Army detentions of Figures and Bosch with the police arrests of civilians and policemen.

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