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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

*X 11/11/41*  
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DESP. NO.

FROM : AMEMBASSY, HABANA

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. 1 Enc. *Aug 22 1952*

REF :

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SUBJECT: Mario Kuchilán Kidnapped and Beaten by Unknown Assailants

On Sunday night, August 17, Mario KUCHILAN, a newspaperman who writes a column of the Walter Winchell type in Prensa Libre, was kidnapped by three individuals who entered his house, describing themselves as members of the police. He was taken in an automobile to the outskirts of Habana where, according to his story, these individuals beat him and tried to force him to reveal the whereabouts of Aureliano SANCHEZ Arango. He claimed he replied that he was not aware of the location of Sanchez Arango and that he was beaten to insensibility. When he regained consciousness early in the morning of August 18 he made his way back to Habana and gave his story to the press. He accused his assailants of being members of the "GRAS" (predecessor of the SIM).

Kuchilán is said to be one of the closest and most loyal friends of Aureliano Sanchez Arango now in Cuba. While the latter was Minister of Education, Kuchilán held a position in the Ministry. He was named recently in a court action as "treasurer" of a conspiratorial movement headed by ex-President Carlos PRIO and Sanchez Arango. In his widely read daily column in Prensa Libre entitled "Babel" he has consistently opposed the BATISTA Government.

The story of the kidnapping was headlined in nearly all the newspapers of Habana on Tuesday, August 19, along with a chorus of statements by high officials of the Cuban Government: General Batista, General TABERNILLA, Minister of the Interior HERMIDA, Minister of Information De la FE, the Minister of Defense and the General Staff, repudiating the incident. The substance of most of these statements was that the Government disclaimed any connection or knowledge of the incident and would take all measures to apprehend those responsible. President Batista said "if anyone associated with the Government was implicated it was contrary to his personal policy". Minister of Information de la Fe attributed the incident to "elements of the Caribbean Legion trying to sow discord among the populace of Cuba". The Minister of Defense laid the

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blame on followers of Aureliano Sanchez Arango trying to undermine public confidence in Batista, mentioning also "confidential information" that these same elements were planning an assault on Dr. Ramón GRAU San Martín.

Editorial comment was widespread and most considered the incident an attack on freedom of the press. Commentators were almost unanimous in demanding that the Government investigate the affair and bring the offenders to justice. The National Collegium of Newspapermen announced a meeting to be held August 24 to consider a strike if the offenders have not been arrested by then. The Communist Anibal ESCALANTE, writing in Hoy, said this was just another example of SIM brutality, citing a number of instances in which members of the PSP have been allegedly mistreated by the SIM.

Several commentators noted that this is another incident in a series of misadventures which have happened to opposition leaders in their attempts to tell their story via the press and radio. Several commentators recalled these other incidents. One of the first of these was the detention of José PARDO Llada and the confiscation of his "unauthorized" newspaper La Palabra, as well as the suspension of his radio program on several occasions for attacks on the Government. Another instance was the assault on the University of the Air program (see Habana 1893, May 8, 1952), after which the Government promised a full investigation and punishment of those responsible. There has been no further action reported. A similar example was the arrest of Ortodoxo writer and professor Rafael GARCIA Bárcena and the denial by both Minister of the Interior Hermida and Chief of National Police SALAS that he had been arrested while he was held incommunicado for 48 hours (see Habana 45, July 9, 1952). The most recent example of Government repression of the press was the confiscation of the first issue of the Ortodoxo newspaper La Calle published by representative Luis Orlando RODRIGUEZ. According to the press, the police entered the printing shop the night of August 16 (the anniversary of the death of CHIBAS in 1951) as the first edition was being run off, stopped the presses and confiscated those issues already printed, even though publication had allegedly been legally authorized and contained nothing detrimental to the Government in the first issue. Most of these comments were made on the assumption or supposition that Kuchilán's charges that members of SIM or the Police were responsible were true.

Several other commentators pointed out, however, that it was not necessarily the police or the SIM who were responsible for the incident. Luis ORTEGA (a Government supporter) wrote in Prensa Libre of August 21 that he had had "reliable information" that the Kuchilán incident was part of a plan to

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arouse public opinion against the Batista Government and to provoke a strike of newspapermen. He warned against the projected newspaper strike as playing into the hands of elements trying to provoke internal disorders. Another theory, also based on "confidential information", related the incident to the presence of Aureliano Sanchez Arango in Cuba. This story was that Kuchilán refused to turn over funds belonging to the subversive movement to the persons who attacked him.

The Chief of Military Intelligence (SIM), Colonel Manuel UGALDE Carrillo, made a statement to the press that appeared August 21, linking Aureliano Sanchez Arango to the Kuchilán affair and accusing Sanchez Arango of a plan to disrupt public order in Cuba. He did not say what the connection was. His statement said the house Sanchez Arango had been staying in had been located and two members of the armed forces and the ex-bodyguard of Sanchez Arango had been arrested. Chief of Police Salas stated he is hot on the trail of Sanchez Arango, who, he said, is in Habana. Statements attributed to Batista later in the day, (August 21) indicated Sanchez Arango had escaped by a "hair's breadth". He added that in connection with Sanchez Arango's activities he had received confidential information that a Habana firm had received orders for khaki uniforms for the Caribbean Legion to be used in an attempt against the life of ex-President Grau San Martín, which was to be made on the highway between Habana and Matanzas. Kuchilán countered with a statement to the press that these reports were fabrications the Government was using to obscure the issue.

These declarations gave rise to the rumors repeated by many of the Habana newspapers of August 21 that Sanchez Arango and his lieutenant Eufemio FERNANDEZ had been arrested. Most of the statements said, however, that this information had not been confirmed. Batista denied on August 22 that Sanchez Arango had been arrested, but said he was believed to be still in Cuba.

Several press clippings describing and commenting on this incident are enclosed.

#### COMMENT

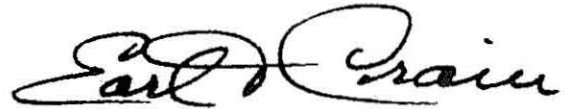
There seems to be little question that public opinion has been aroused by this incident, probably more than by any other of the incidents mentioned above. The numerous and immediate statements made by officials of the Government, including President Batista, indicate the Government is aware of the impact on public opinion and that it is up to the Government to prove this does not represent its policy.

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It cannot be said yet whether there is any real connection between the Kuchilán beating and the reports of the presence of Aureliano Sanchez Arango in Habana, or whether this is only another of the many "conspiracy" rumors that have been circulating recently.

For the Ambassador:



Earl T. Crain  
Acting Counselor of Embassy

Enclosure: *(initials)*  
✓ Press clippings

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## DOS TEMAS

# Protestamos

Por Rolando Masferrer



*Mario Kuchilán es amigo de mis enemigos. Pero quiero ser de los primeros en protestar del brutal apaleamiento de que se le ha hecho víctima.*

*No estoy de acuerdo con su posición política.*

*Pero lo estoy mucho menos con la estupidez que se ha puesto en práctica para combatir sus opiniones y sus acciones y las de sus amigos.*

*Soy un enconado adversario de Aureliano Sánchez Arango, pero respeto la lealtad de Kuchilán por quien es su amigo.*

*El país entero, pero más que nadie el gobierno, ha recibido un grave daño con las torturas que se ha hecho sufrir al periodista de "Prensa Libre"...*

*No creo que estemos en presencia de un nuevo estilo de gobierno, dirigido a borrar todo vestigio de oposición al nuevo régimen.*

*Al Presidente Batista y a la mayor parte de sus ministros, le sobran experiencia política para no incurrir en estos errores sin remedio, de los cuales no hay regreso posible.*

*Nada se gana con la cachiporra. Y se pierde todo en cambio.*

*De confirmarse que fueron miembros de alguno de los cuerpos armados de la nación quienes cometieron el desmán que constituye hoy la comidilla obligada de la República entera, estaríamos en presencia de un viraje total en los métodos y el pensamiento del gobierno.*

*Si algo ha tenido de positivo el grupo que asumió el poder el Día de Marzo ha sido la preocupación de sus figuras más connotadas por ahorrar violencias innecesarias a la nación.*

*Después de la caída de Carlos Prío, cesaron como por encanto las balaceras en las calles; y más de un crimen supuestamente impune fué esclarecido por la autoridad policiaca con el beneplácito de todos.*

louos.  
Arrancar de su hogar en horas de la noche a un periodista y azotarlo salvajemente en un camino real mientras se le somete a un interrogatorio, no puede verse jamás como una contribución al reforzamiento de la autoridad de un gobierno y mucho menos como un esfuerzo por ganarse la adhesión de las mayorías que repudian con todas sus fuerzas esas manifestaciones de barbarie.

Tengo para mí, que el primer interesado en el esclarecimiento pleno de este acto de "gangsterismo" es el general Batista mismo, quien no se contentará con menos de llevar a los delincuentes ante los tribunales.

Otras veces, han tenido lugar depredaciones de este tipo en anteriores gobiernos en los que fueron víctimas legisladores, políticos y periodistas.

Lamentablemente, no todos los periodistas, legisladores y políticos alzaron sus voces para condenar las desorbitaciones del poder público de quienes se hacían solidarios con su silencio cómplice.

No es esta oportunidad para recordarles que su complicidad de entonces abonó la recogida de estas violencias de ahora.

Pero aun cuando no se cobran estos agravios, no es ocioso recordar el deber de cada cual en cada momento y en bien de todos.

El país entero se indigna frente a este odioso atropello.

Y nosotros los primeros.

Ojalá que la patria no sea llevada torpemente por este camino de inseguridad y zozobra que conduce al charco de sangre y el luto en los hogares.