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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

737.00(W)/3-653

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1380

DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

March 6, 1953

Action Assigned to *[Signature]* DATE *[Signature]*

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Action Taken *[Signature]*

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SUBJECT: Joint Week No. 10 for State, Army, Navy and Air Departments from SANA

Part I

Political

(UNCLASSIFIED) The news of the illness and death of STALIN aroused the most intense interest in Cuba. Speculation regarding Stalin's successor is rife and the general feeling is that there will be little or no change in Soviet foreign policy. Comment thus far has ranged from opinion that the new leader or leaders may have to embark on perilous undertakings in order to measure up to Stalin's stature, to the belief that Stalin's death marks the end of the Russian revolutionary period and the beginning of a bourgeois period of guarding gains already won.

(CONFIDENTIAL) The postponement of the elections scheduled for November 1953 monopolized the local political scene during the week. The Cabinet announced on February 27, 1953 that elections will not be held until June 1, 1954, and then only for senators, representatives and local offices. The Congress thus elected will fix the duration of BATISTA's term of office and set the date for a presidential election. The Constitution of 1940 will return to force as soon as the Congress is organized. The electoral mechanics were modified, the most important changes being the reopening of the period for registration of political parties (which now will extend to August of this year) and the reduction of the number of affiliations a party must have in order to organize from six to four percent of the total electorate.

The Cabinet decision must now be put into effect by a Decree-Law which has not yet appeared. According to reports, this Decree-Law in providing for the restoration of the 1940 Constitution will not only establish transitory provisions, empowering the new Congress to fix Batista's term and designate his successor in case of need but will also suspend

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temporarily the constitutional prohibition against any former holder of the office of President running for that office until eight years after he left it. This would make it possible for Ramón GRAU San Martín and Carlos PRIO Socarrás, as well as Batista, to be candidates in the presidential elections eventually to be held. A Government spokesman, however, said that Batista would not exercise his privilege to run.

The announcement of the postponement contained a statement that it was motivated by "conspiratorial activities" that had "prevented the mobilization of the citizens so that they might participate in an orderly and normal fashion in the elections called for next November". It is not unlikely that stronger reasons were the desire of Batista and his associates to remain in power; Batista's realization of his own lack of popularity and hence of his party's weakness in any election in the near future; a desire to meet some of the opposition demands in order to secure more substantial participation in eventual elections; and a possible feeling on Batista's part that he should remain in office for at least two more years (which would be the effect of the postponement) in order to carry out the plans he may consider necessary for the political and economic "welfare" of the country.

The initial reaction of the general public to the postponement seemed to be one of relative indifference or cynical acceptance of a development that was no more than to be expected. Cynicism extended in the case of one influential person close to Batista to a remark that the Congress to be elected would have a Batista majority or "there would be no Congress". The reaction of the opposition was generally condemnatory; only some such as GUAS Inclán of the Liberals and Eusebio MUJAL of the new Labor Party, who had already decided to participate in the elections scheduled for November, expressed approval of the postponement. Grau was especially bitter in his immediate disapproval, perhaps because he did not anticipate the temporary suspension of the eight-year ban of the 1940 Constitution.

Psychological

(UNCLASSIFIED) The effort of the University Student Federation (FEU) to convoke a meeting of opposition leaders to air their various views (see Weeka No. 9) has apparently met with little success. The FEU announced that it was now requesting such views in writing rather than a presentation

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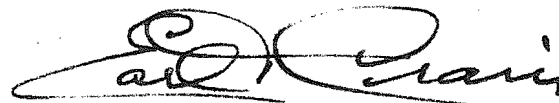
in an open meeting. Evidently the FEU attempt at bringing about a unified opposition has run into difficulties with the refusal of such leaders as Tony VARONA, Roberto AGRAMONTE and Emilio OCHOA to cooperate with the Communist party. The Communists, who for their own purposes enthusiastically backed the FEU initiative, are now denouncing the "non-collaborators" as "subservient to American imperialism" and as "trying to please Washington" by spurning Communist cooperation rather than "seeking the welfare of Cuba".

(UNCLASSIFIED) On March 3 Blas ROCA, Secretary-General of the Cuban Communist party, returned from his rather extended stay in Europe during which he attended the XIX Congress of the Russian Communist party and the Vienna peace congress. He was detained briefly by the SIM upon his arrival.

Army, Navy, Air

Negative.

For the Ambassador:



Earl T. Crain
Acting Counselor of Embassy

Participants:

ETCrain, FCFornes, Jr., ETerrell,
Elmore (MA), Mason (AA)

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