



THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

9-30-48  
ARA

837.002/9-3048  
No. 805

American Embassy  
Habana, Cuba, September 30, 1948

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Reaction in Habana to Prio Cabinet

REC'D  
6-1-48

ACTION  
1-4

INFO  
DCR  
OUT

(IXTC)

DEPT. OF STATE
OFFICE OF
EMBASSY PUBLIC AFFAIRS
SEP 30 1948
<i>file</i>

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to the Embassy's A-1078 of September 24, 1948 forwarding short biographical comments on the members of the new Cabinet named by President-elect Carlos PRIO, to take office October 10, 1948, and to report that the reaction so far in Habana to Prio's Cabinet has been what can best be termed as mildly favorable. Everyone seems willing to give Prio and his Cabinet a chance to show what they can do.

The first editorial comment regarding the new Cabinet appeared in the daily Avance September 24, 1948. Avance is an organ of the Republican Party and, because of the political alliance with the Autentico Party, might be expected to support the new Cabinet. Avance's editorial commenced by noting that the composition of the new Cabinet was not a surprise to anyone because most of the names had been mentioned in gossip columns before. Avance pointed out that the new Prime Minister, "Tony" VARONA, in a public statement identified the new Government as the culmination of the revolutionary process.

(The Embassy feels that this comment is worthwhile because the new Government, composed as it will be of young men all of "revolutionary" background, is the first Government in Cuba of men who got their political start during the revolution against Machado. Even President Grau's various Cabinets have always contained a number of the "older group" whose careers date back to before the anti-Machado days. With the exception of Vasconcelos, all of Prio's Cabinet, however, got their start during the revolutionary early '30's.)

XR  
837.00

The Avance editorial went on to praise the statement of the new Minister of Labor, Buttari, to the effect that his greatest ambition was to give social and economic security to all factors of production and Avance noted that the Minister of Labor can practically make or break the

Cabinet

837.002/9-3048

CONFIDENTIAL

Despatch No. 805  
September 30, 1948  
Embassy at Habana.

- 2 -

Cabinet because of the economic and labor situation in Cuba today. While the Cabinet is the obvious result of unavoidable party interests, said Avance, there are new men included who give promise. Moreover, Avance stressed the statement of President-elect Prio that these Cabinet appointments are not for life and that the fate of each Minister depended upon public opinion's decision as to his worth. The further promise by the Prime Minister that constitutional process will be allowed at all times was also praised in Avance's editorial, which concluded with the statement that if each of the future Ministers takes on his job with a feeling of responsibility for his duties, public opinion will support the Cabinet and the nation will receive the new Ministers well. On September 28 Avance pleaded editorially for a "wait and see" attitude and for cooperation with the new Government. This editorial pointed out the danger of trying to conjecture what the new Government would or would not do.

Información in an editorial September 25, 1948 commenting on the new Cabinet indicated that one of the most important recent political events was Senator José A. ALEMAN's pledge of collaboration and loyalty to the Prio Government. Información, it is believed, has been receiving financial support from Aleman and the BAGA political machine and, consequently, its editorial regarding the new Government was strongly pro-Aleman and did not in fact discuss the new Cabinet officers at all.

(So far as the Embassy has been able to determine Carlos Prio has not yet recognized Aleman's right to any Cabinet position in the constitution of his Cabinet, none of the appointments to which seem to have been dictated by Aleman or the BAGA. Francisco GRAU Alsina's appointment to the Cabinet, it is understood, was the result of pressure by his mother and uncle [the First Lady and the President, respectively] not by Aleman or the BAGA. Rumor now has it that a BAGA Minister without Portfolio, Antonio FUENTES, may be appointed.)

On September 28 Información again commented on the new Cabinet, specifically attacking Dr. José R. ANDREU as being unqualified for the important Ministry of Commerce. The tone of the editorial, however, supported the Cabinet as a whole and urged that it be given a chance.

The only editorial which has sharply criticized the new Cabinet appeared in El Mundo September 25. When Prio announced his new Cabinet he made a plea that it not be judged a priori, before it had a chance to show its

effectiveness

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Despatch No. 805  
September 30, 1948  
Embassy at Habana.

- 3 -

effectiveness. This plea El Mundo seized upon as an indication that Prio was on the defensive when he announced the Cabinet.

(The Embassy notes that this is probably true. Prio's announced intention of cleaning up the Cuban Government and giving the country a good administration has always been viewed with some skepticism because of the many political obligations owed by Prio. Though probably sincere in his determination, Prio has had to look, in forming his Cabinet, to the group of men who gave him political support and who were his old student revolutionary friends. He picked the best that he could within this group.)

In reviewing the Cabinet El Mundo noted that it was dominated by men from the Autentico-Republican Alliance, as might be expected, although the presence of several persons who had collaborated with President Batista (Hevia, de Leon, Buttari and Vasconcelos) was termed significant. El Mundo went on to say, however, that it would be insincere if it reported that the names of the new Ministers had been received with enthusiasm by public opinion.

(The Embassy feels that this is again probably true. There was so much speculation about the Cabinet before it was announced that the final announcement came as an anti-climax with the better elements in Cuba probably feeling that although the Cabinet was not an especially strong one, it could have been much worse. Several of the Embassy's sources have indicated that, as a matter of fact, they think that the Cabinet is quite a good one considering the group from which Prio had to choose. These same sources indicate that as Prio frees himself more and more from President Grau's control, he can, if he sincerely desires, build up his Cabinet slowly with stronger men.)

El Mundo closed its editorial by noting that Prio has asked that his Cabinet not be judged before it has a chance to show its effectiveness, and promised to accede to this request in a patriotic spirit. On September 26 El Mundo carried the comments of its columnist Manuel BISBE on the new appointments. This editorial attacked the new Government even more strongly, alleging that the people of Cuba felt that they have been betrayed and that this Cabinet can never bring about any real reform. Grau, Nodal, Hevia, Antonio Prio and Vasconcelos are singled out for attack; Hevia, incidentally, was accused of being afraid to take on the real job of being Minister of the Treasury.

The conservative

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Despatch No. 805  
September 30, 1948  
Embassy at Habana.

- 4 -

The conservative Diario de la Marina also promised cooperation and support to the new Government in an editorial September 25, 1948. Before taking up the Cabinet itself, the editorial pointed to a number of problems needing solution in Cuba - relations between the Executive and the powers of the State, especially legislature; the question of administrative honesty, public order, and the suppression of governmental demagoguery in relations between capital and labor; the need for more secondary roads to develop agriculture; for the rebuilding of efficiency and prestige in public education, and for the revitalization of Cuban foreign policy. The editorial then discussed the Cabinet, reporting that the general impression has been favorable. The Diario pointed out that one of the most interesting things about the Cabinet was its apparent promise to return Cuba to a parliamentary form of government. The fact that a large number of the Cabinet are members of the Senate and House was considered especially significant. (Actually the Cabinet will contain 8 Congressmen.) The new Prime Minister's statement that "our government will be honest, efficient and just" was also signaled out by the Diario for comment; as was the Prime Minister's additional promise that "we will comply with and in the same way require the citizenry to respect the law." The Diario also felt that Aureliano SANCHEZ Arango was capable of coping with the chaos in which Aleman had left public education in Cuba. The editorial concluded with the promise that the columns of the Diario would be open to any constructive work and that the paper will give its sincere and disinterested cooperation to the new Cabinet, reserving, however, the right to criticize in a constructive spirit.

Possibly the keenest analysis of the public reaction to the new Cabinet was made, as is often the case, by Alerta's Raul ALFONSO Gonsé on September 27. The following is a translation of pertinent parts of his editorial:

"Public opinion has received the news of the appointment of the future Ministers of Dr. Prio with a certain disappointment. It had hoped for complete and absolute reform, without realizing that the Cabinet which will begin to govern the country October 10 must deal with a transitional period between the present situation and the one which must necessarily develop in the first year of the new Government.

"With

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Despatch No, 805  
September 30, 1948  
Embassy at Habana.

- 5 -

"With few exceptions the new Ministers are men who have already figured in the public life of the nation and the people know them. There are among them those who have earned the best of reputations, there are those who have earned neither praise nor censure, and there are those who have been soundly condemned for their errors."

Another critic of the new Cabinet is former Senator "Eddy" CHIBAS, leader of the Ortodoxo Party, who in his customary Sunday night radio talk September 26 reported his great disappointment in the new Cabinet, the naming of which he likened to the perpetration of a fraud on the people of Cuba. Chibás was especially critical of the switch of Hevia from Treasury to State, and of the naming of Vasconcelos, Antonio Prio, Rubén de Leon, Perez and Nodal. He also thought that Andreu was better qualified for the Ministry of Health. He promised to take up the qualifications in detail of several prospective Ministers in his next Sunday night talk (October 3). The most interesting part of Chibás' attack, however, was his allegation that the Cabinet, containing as it does 8 members of Congress, would be unconstitutional as Article 126 of the Constitution allows only half the Cabinet, not counting the Minister of the Interior, to be Congressmen and Prio had exceeded that proportion by appointing 8 Congressmen out of 15, the Secretary of the Presidency not being counted as a Minister (Article 155). Chibás' point seems well taken; as previously mentioned, rumors of a new Minister without Portfolio who is not a member of Congress immediately began to circulate.

The Communist daily Hoy has had no significant comment to make regarding the new Cabinet; it is, of course, violently opposed to President-elect Prio.

The Embassy's opinion of the new Cabinet was expressed in its A-1078 under reference. The caliber of the Cabinet leaves much to be desired. The sincerity of the Cabinet is untested; the sincerity of Prio is still unproven, although many persons are convinced that he will make an honest effort to do what he has promised. The Cabinet is a young one, the oldest and, incidentally, the most controversial member being Vasconcelos (57); Corona and Hevia are about 50; while Grau Alsina and Puente (Secretary of the Presidency) are both about 32. The average age of the Cabinet is a little over 42; that means that, with the exception of the oldest and youngest abovementioned,

all

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

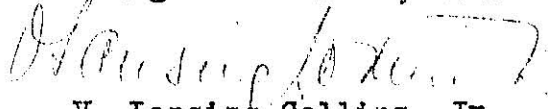
Despatch No. 805  
September 30, 1948  
Embassy at Habana.

- 6 -

all of the members of the Cabinet were about 20 years of age when Machado came to power, about 24 years of age when the anti-Machado revolutionary activity began in 1930 and about 27 years of age when they had their first taste of power after Machado was overthrown in 1933 and the first Grau "student government" took over. These men are not particularly well educated because during the time when they should have been going to college, the University of Habana was either closed or, when it was open, the students were engaged in so much political activity that little studying was being done. These men are all imbued with the "revolutionary" spirit. All of them, with the exception of Oteiza, have held previous government positions (5 have been Cabinet officers before, 2 have been Undersecretaries, 10 have been or now are Congressmen, 1 was President of Cuba for 3 days). It is therefore evident that the new Cabinet will be composed of young men but men experienced in the ways of the Cuban Government. Although many have lived abroad in exile in the 1930-1935 period (mostly in Florida, Mexico, Guatemala) only Hevia, the Minister of State, can be said to have had any real foreign experience. (He attended the United States Naval Academy and fought in the United States forces in the first World War.) The Embassy feels that, based on past experience with them, Hevia, Grau, Oteiza and Andreu will be the most cooperative; other members of the Cabinet with whom the Embassy has had no past experience, such as Varona, Febles and Sanchez Arango, may turn out to be able and cooperative. The Embassy continues to receive reports that Prio is determined to try to lead an honest and competent government; the Embassy agrees with the Habana press that no judgment should be passed on Prio or his new Cabinet until they have had opportunity to demonstrate what they mean by the promises that have been made.

Respectfully yours,

For the Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.:



V. Lansing Collins, Jr.  
Second Secretary of Embassy

File No. 801  
VLansing Collins, Jr./dts

CONFIDENTIAL