

AIR POUCH

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM AMEMBASSY, HABANA

107  
DESP. NO.

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

August 7, 1957

DATE

REF

Assigned to [unclear] U10-1 P-1

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SUBJECT: JOINT WEEKS NO. 32

Date of [unclear] CIA-7618  
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POLITICAL

1. Preparations for Elections

The Senate last week approved the electoral law to govern the elections which the Government proposes to hold in June of 1958. The bill has now been sent to the Chamber of Deputies for action. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The bill has been drafted by the Government coalition in the Congress. Since the Government has an overwhelming majority in both houses, it is certain of passage. However, the proposal for elections is unsatisfactory to the opposition in several fundamental points, and it is doubtful that the elections will be held as now planned. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

2. Revolutionary Opposition Attempts General Strike

Various opposition groups, including apparently all of the groups now dedicated to a revolutionary solution of Cuba's current political problems, attempted a nation-wide general strike on August 5 as a means of overthrowing the Government. The outlawed Cuban Communist party participated, at least without request or approval from most groups, and without forming a part of the hastily formed central organization. Throughout the country the major effort was directed at public transportation and bank employees. There were also electric power stoppages and strikes in commercial enterprises, particularly large stores such as Sears, Roebuck & Co. and F. W. Woolworth & Co. There was considerable tension and violence in some cases. However, prompt, aggressive action by Government forces and a firm, alert attitude by the leadership of Cuban organized labor caused the attempt to fail on the first day in Habana. Information from other parts of the country is sketchy, but it appears that the story is substantially the same everywhere—a somewhat disorganized and unsuccessful attempt which was faced by determined Government and organized labor opposition. Santiago de Cuba is still rebellious, but the trend appears the same. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: There were three key factors in the failure of the attempt:

- (1) Lack of any real and effective organization among the various opposition

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groups; (2) the firmly hostile attitude of the leadership of organized labor; and (3) the unwillingness of the bulk of the population to participate in an operation of questionable success. Of the three, the attitude of the labor leaders, led by Secretary General of the Cuban Confederation of Labor Eusebio MUJAL, was unquestionably the key factor. Opposition sources, in contact with the Embassy repeatedly said they had not planned an all-out attempt at this time, that they were caught unprepared by the rapid march of events stemming largely from developments in Oriente Province, and that their over-all organization had to be hastily formed. The strike attempt appears to have been partly the result of long agitation including repeated calls for token strikes - particularly on July 26 - and partly a spontaneous popular reaction to continued oppositionist activities coupled with harsh repressive measures by the Government security forces. The oppositionist groups appear determined to continue their struggle, and as a result of their recent experiences may have developed a somewhat more efficient central organization.

The Government appears to be in control of the situation for the time being, but must still contend with an increasingly hostile populace, an aggressive and determined revolutionary opposition, and most significantly with a resurgence of dissatisfaction within the armed forces which is apparently leading to conspiratorial activities. The middle ground between Government and revolutionary opposition, occupied by those who advocate peaceful resolution of the situation by elections, is being rapidly eroded, and the proponents of such action forced to the extreme positions of the contending forces. (CONFIDENTIAL)

### 3. Rebellious Attitude in Oriente Province

The situation in Oriente Province, particularly in the city of Santiago de Cuba, has many earmarks of an occupied area in increasingly open and determined rebellion. The funerals on July 31 of Frank PAIS, local leader of the "26 of July" Movement of rebel chieftain Fidel CASTRO, and his friend Paul PUJOL, shot down by the police the day before, were attended and witnessed by some 60,000 persons, and apparently triggered the spontaneous reaction which led to the attempted general strike. The great majority of businesses in the city were closed for the occasion by voluntary action of both workers and employees, and remained closed the following several days. Very strong measures by Government forces were necessary to restore a semblance of normalcy. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: Santiago in particular, and in general all of Oriente Province, constituting a third of the country in both area and population, are bitterly opposed to the present Government, and increasingly committed to a revolutionary solution of the present situation. This is the principal explanation for the success of Castro in maintaining a rebel force now said to number several hundred men in the Sierra Maestra mountains of that Province for the past 8 months. The military continue to be unable to dislodge or destroy his forces. (UNCLASSIFIED)

### 4. Constitutional Guarantees Suspended; Censorship Imposed

On July 31 the Government suspended Constitutional guarantees for 45 days. The rights suspended are those of freedom from search and arrest without cause

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and legal process, of habeas corpus, prompt trial, movement, communication, speech, press, and assembly. Censorship of press, radio and TV was imposed August 1. In accordance with legal requirements, the suspension was promptly approved by the Congress. Forty-five days is the maximum period of suspension permitted by the Constitution. It can of course be renewed by further executive and Congressional action. It remains to be seen whether this will be done.  
(UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: This action was apparently taken by the Government because of the serious situation in Oriente Province and the threat of a general strike. It is generally considered that the action was not required by the situation, and is an indication of an attitude of combined arrogance and fear by the regime. The action also effectively muzzled any favorable public reaction to Ambassador Smith's remarks in Santiago (see below), and enabled the Government to escape from a delicate situation in which an officer of the Army, Col. Manuel UGALDE Garrillo, was facing trial in civil courts for mistreatment of political prisoners. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

#### 5. Ambassador Visits Oriente; Attacked by Government

The Ambassador, together with members of the Embassy staff, visited Oriente Province from July 31 to August 3, stopping at Santiago de Cuba the first day. During a reception for him at the City Hall, the police used unnecessarily rough and violent tactics in breaking up a demonstration of women in the plaza, witnessed by the Ambassador and his group. Later the Ambassador told the press (1) that he regretted that his visit had been seized upon by some people to demonstrate and protest to their Government, (2) that he felt that "any form of excessive police action was abhorrent", and (3) that he hoped that those who had been arrested during the demonstration would be released, since the affair had been based on his presence. (Somewhat more than 100 people had been beaten, attacked with fire hoses, and forcibly driven from the plaza, and 30 jailed, mainly women.) They were released late that day. Government spokesmen bitterly attacked the Ambassador in the press, charging stupidity, incompetence, prejudice and intervention. The pro-Government Confederation of Cuban Workers criticized the implications of intervention and agitation which it professed to see in the Ambassador's remarks. The attacks, particularly by Senator Rolando MASFERRER, have continued under the censorship. Items favorable to the Ambassador, such as the Department's press release of August 5 and Secretary Dulles' remarks at his press conference of August 6, are censored. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The Government is clearly attempting to use the Ambassador as a scapegoat to cover its own difficulties and weaknesses. The attacks by Masferrer have been so vicious and scurrilous that they have led to a revulsion, and further increased the liking and respect which the bulk of the Cuban people appear to hold for the Ambassador. The Cuban Government and the people in general had formed the impression that the United States and its representatives were not following a policy of non-intervention, but rather were firmly supporting Batista and his Government, which many in Cuba and elsewhere characterize as an increasingly tyrannical dictatorship. The Ambassador's public statements since arriving in Cuba on July 15 have been aimed at clarifying the over-all policy of the U.S. and have of necessity caused bitter disappointment among Government representatives.

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## PSYCHOLOGICAL

6. Press commentaries and editorials on international affairs during the week were largely concentrated on the following subjects, listed in order of the attention given them: 1) the results of the Argentine elections; 2) the assassination of Castillo Armas; 3) ~~rupture of Soviet-German negotiations, coming German elections;~~ 4) London Disarmament Conference and Dulles participation; and 5) ~~British military assistance in the Oman rebellion.~~ Three commentators, from Avance, Diario de la Marina and Excelsior, generally considered the results of the Argentine elections for a constituent assembly to be a victory for provisional President Aramburu and a defeat for ex-dictator Peron. Peron has much money for propaganda and terrorism, stated Avance, but this election has demonstrated he does not have the people. The Argentine people, said this paper, have not forgotten the scandals, the immorality, and the other misdeeds of "peronismo". The results of this election, said Diario de la Marina, will facilitate in many ways the positive turn towards democracy which this military government has pledged for Argentina. Excelsior declared that Aramburu has emerged victorious, not only because the election results favor his reform plan, but because they have demonstrated that the boastings of the Peronistas have been just that. More than a triumph for Aramburu, said Prensa Libre the free elections are a victory for the Argentine people. Both Alerta and Pueblo, on the other hand, after a second look at the election results, observed that Aramburu and the reformists really hadn't too much cause for optimism. Pueblo pointed out the 220,000 Communist votes, a considerable increase since 1954, and noted that the Peronistas turned in over two million blank ballots making them the second largest party. If the left-wing radicals of Frondezi, with almost two million votes, should unite with the Peronistas in the presidential elections, they would be in the clear majority, warned Pueblo. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: This preoccupation with the Argentine elections may not indicate so much a deep Cuban interest in Argentina per se, as it does a deep Cuban interest in free elections in Cuba.

## LABOR

### 7. CTC Opposes General Strike

The CTC strenuously opposed the general strike call for August 5 issued by oppositionist groups. August 3 several CTC leaders went to provincial labor centers to organize worker resistance to the impending strike. In Havana similar steps were taken to thwart a general walkout and, in addition, large ads were placed in all

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the newspapers which did not appear however until August 5 and 6. These set forth the CTC's official position on the general strike which was severely condemned as against the interests of the workers and characterized as a "political" strike instigated by non-labor classes and designed to destroy the institutions of the country. The statement stressed the CTC's support of the Government and reiterated its policy in favor of national elections with "full guarantees so that majorities may decide by their vote to govern the republic". (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: In Havana the general strike was a failure. Although opposition contacts on August 4 were confidently predicting that port workers, transport workers, bank employees and several other groups mostly professional would lead a fairly effective shutdown, developments on August 5 failed to bear out these sanguine expectations. Dock workers did not respond to the strike call. Although transport workers were affected, essential transportation was not seriously interfered with. Banks opened as usual but operations lagged later in the day. On August 6, however, they were functioning normally. Several small textile plants were closed but reportedly because CTC instructions reached the workers late. Probably there were several sporadic stoppages unknown to the Embassy but, in summary there was not a single basic activity in Havana that was substantially interrupted. Failure of the strike may be attributed in large part to the overall determination and effectiveness of the leadership of the CTC, though there were other factors as noted above. The Minister of Labor on August 6 officially branded the strike a failure and thanked both employer and labor groups for their rejection of the strike call. From the beginning the CTC had made its position perfectly clear on the general strike call and in doing so had alleged that middle and upper class elements were supporting the strike. This brought forth a rash of statements by employer organizations vehemently denying the allegation and reaffirming their support of the government. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

#### 8. Affect of Suspension of Guarantees on the CTC

A large labor rally in support of the wage demands of the Federation of Commercial Employees scheduled for August 8 has been postponed as a result of the 45-day suspension of constitutional guarantees, (see above). According to a public release issued by Eusebio Mujal, secretary general of the CTC, he has been assured by the Minister of labor that all trade union elections will be held as scheduled, the government's suspension decree notwithstanding. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: There are very few union elections scheduled and none is as important as were the elections of the electric plants workers, the telephone workers, and bank employees which were repeatedly postponed because of previous suspensions of

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constitutional guarantees. In view of the pro-government attitude of the CTC, trade union activities are expected to continue without change. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

MILITARY

ARMY: General Order No. 67, 29 July 1957 of Cuban Army publicizing long awaited appointments to general staff positions created under a reorganization plan approved by the President in Decree No. 1941, of 22 January 1955. The appointments are as follows:

G-1 (Personnel) Brig. Gen. Aristides SOSA de Quesada  
G-2 (Intelligence) Brig. Gen. Martin DIAZ y Tamayo  
G-3 (Operations) Brig. Gen. Pedro RODRIGUEZ y Avila  
G-4 (Logistics) Brig. Gen. Juan ROJAS y Gonzalez  
G-5 (Inspector General) Brig. Gen. Luis ROBAINA y Piedra

Generals TABERNILLA and CANTILLO remain as Chief of Staff and Division Commander respectively. For ROJAS and ROBAINA there is only a change of title. Of the remaining three SOSA was Assesor General (Judge Advocate) and will presumably retain that duty as G-1. DIAZ reportedly will retain his command of LA CABAÑA Fortress. RODRIGUEZ moves from Adjutant General to G-3. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: This is the long awaited first step in reorganizing the Cuban Army along the lines of the U. S. Army. More re-organizational moves are expected to follow rapidly. (UNCLASSIFIED)

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