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PRIORITY

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FROM

AmEmbassy, Habana

58

DESP. NO.

TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

July 17, 1957

DATE

REF

EUR-5

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SUBJECT:

JOINT WEEKA NO. 29

OCB-2 USIA-10 CIA-16

POLITICAL

1. Politics and Elections

Both houses of the Cuban Congress met on Monday July 15, to hear the Presidential message calling that body into special session to consider the various bills drafted by the Joint Committee in connection with the proposal to hold general elections on June 1, 1958. The pattern of the session was set by the Senate, which voted to meet the first three afternoons of each week. It is expected that the session will continue for several weeks. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: Thus far, no element of the opposition has definitely agreed to participate in the proposed elections. All have put forward conditions, which they insist are sine qua non to their participation, which the Government has refused to meet. On the other hand, the Government appears increasingly firmly committed to the holding of the elections, to such an extent that it would now be extremely difficult for it to back down. GUAS Inolan, the Vice President, stated in a speech this week that the Government was determined to hold elections whether or not the opposition participated. This is a complete about-face from the position taken by the Government when first proposing the elections plan. (CONFIDENTIAL).

Pictures and personal accounts have now appeared definitely establishing that Raul CHIBAS, former head of the "Historic" faction of the Ortodoxo Party, has joined Fidel CASTRO in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. The insurrectionary opposition has been greatly encouraged by his action. Manuel BISBE has been selected by the other leaders of the faction to replace him. (UNCLASSIFIED).

Comment: CHIBAS was the strongest unifying force of the Ortodoxo Party, since his brother, Eduardo ("Eddie") was the zealot who

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established the party and forged it into a powerful voice for reform. "Eddie" is now dead, and Raul has become increasingly disgusted with the self-seeking and bickering tactics of the other leaders of the party. His abandonment of the party appears to doom it as a unified and nationally effective force. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

Senator Rolando MASFERRER, after organizing and master-minding the Government's rally at Santiago de Cuba on June 30, carried out a similar affair on a smaller scale at Chirivico (a small port some 40 miles west of Santiago, on the south coast) on July 14. This is on the edge of the area in which Fidel CASTRO's forces are claimed to be active. The meeting, in contradistinction to that in Santiago, was considered quite successful, with some 1,000 people attending. It is understood that Masferrer tentatively plans similar meetings in the near future. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: Masferrer appears to be attempting to build himself up as the obvious and unavoidable candidate to succeed BATISTA. He persuaded and bullied the Government into adopting his plan for political rallies in Santiago and other localities generally considered strongholds of opposition sentiment. The Santiago meeting was unsuccessful from the point of view of numbers participating, but the fact that it was held and went off relatively peacefully was in itself a significant achievement. The Chirivico meeting was successful on all counts. Masferrer plays two themes at these meetings: The first runs: Here we are, in the land Castro says he controls, but where is he? His second theme is a demagogic appeal to the negro and mulatto classes and to the squatters. Thus, at the Chirivico meeting he told his audience that the Government would shortly give the squatters title to the lands they occupy, regardless of the present ownership. Many of the squatters in that region are on land owned by an American company, the Cuban Land Company, and have been using both the land and timber for many years. Masferrer is consistently rather scornful of other Government figures in his public remarks. He is disliked by many of them, and the armed forces deeply resent his private force of over two hundred well-armed thugs. That group moved into Santiago before the meeting there and "assisted" the local authorities to maintain law and order. They are still there, intimidating the local citizenry and threatening bloody reprisals for any disturbances. They also policed the Chirivico meeting. The local press reported that two members of the gang on sentry duty outside the town were killed by Castro forces. Actually, some of the gang got into a drunken squabble among themselves and shot it out, with two fatalities. Masferrer is disliked and despised by many, both in and out of the Government. He is also feared, and obtains a grudging respect from those who particularly admire boldness and crude power. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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MILITARY - Negative

PSYCHOLOGICAL

The Cuban press continued to treat the recent Soviet purge as the most important news of the week. Papers like Información, Avance, and Diario de la Marina delved into Soviet history to show the part played by the purged and how the history of communism in the USSR has been a series of purges since no real opposition can be permitted under such a system. One cannot find, said Información, a single Russian leader of any importance, since the Revolution of 1917, who has not been accused of some crime against the Soviet state -- the only exception being Khrushchev and Bulganin who are now in power, and who would predict this will not also happen to them? Both Alerta and Excelsior saw the power of the Soviet armed forces behind this move to get rid of all former Stalinists, but Alerta mentioned the alleged rivalry among the Soviet generals Zhukov, Vassilevsky, and Konev, who all three made their name during World War II. Excelsior felt Zhukov was the shadow behind the new strong stand Zorin is taking at the London Disarmament Conference. The really significant thing about the whole purge, said El Mundo, was the rise to influence and power of the Soviet military which began with the need to depose of Beria and which now has decisive influence in the Kremlin. The Kremlin may still change its global strategy many times, stated El Mundo, but it will not be able to change the military structure upon which rests the Soviet policy of expansion. Khrushchev, re, b is now the indisputable dictator of the Soviet Union, said Prensa Libre, but he is distinct from Stalin who relied on the Communist Party to maintain his power, whereas Nikita must depend on the Red Army. Perhaps a new epoch has commenced in the USSR, said this paper, where the generals will be calling the tune. (UNCLASSIFIED)

LABOR

1. Rubiera Followers Win Telephone Elections

Followers of Vicente Rubiera, long time secretary general of the Labor Federation of Telephone Workers, won the elections held on July 14, by the six provincial unions affiliated with the Federation. In the Habana provincial union, the largest of all, the Rubiera ticket, headed by Manuel Gonzalez Guerra, got 809 votes, 300 better than its nearest competitor's. (UNCLASSIFIED)

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**Comment:** The elections, which were held in accordance with a compromise agreement reached by Mujal of the CTC and Rubiera of the Federation, were orderly and honestly run, and unquestionably reflect the true sentiment of the workers involved. Although Mujal publicly stated that he was neutral in regard to the factions contending for victory, it is believed that he favored Rubiera over Ramirez in spite of the fact that Ramirez, who was secretary general of Habana provincial union, had supported CTC policy which in the last six months Rubiera opposed. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY).

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*J.R.D.*