



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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No. 674

American Embassy
Habana, Cuba, September 1, 1949

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Subject: Reaction in Cuba to reported detention of ex-Army Chief of Staff Genovevo Perez Damera upon his arrival at Miami August 27, 1949.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
OFFICE OF
AMERICAN REPUBLIC AFFAIRS
SEP 9 - 1949
file 62

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that press accounts of the holding of ex-Cuban Army Chief of Staff Genovevo PEREZ Damera and his wife and daughter (age seven) by the Immigration and Naturalization Service at Miami, Florida, for a Board of Special Inquiry upon their arrival at that port on August 27, came as disturbing news to the Cuban Government which had supplied them with diplomatic passports for the journey.

The Foreign Minister spoke to Mr. ELBRICK on this subject on August 29, stating that the President of the Republic had inquired whether something might not be done to assist ex-General Perez, the impression among Cuban officials being that he was actually being held under detention by the United States immigration authorities. The Foreign Minister was informed that the Embassy doubted General Perez was under detention but that possibly the immigration authorities had requested Perez to present himself at the immigration office on Monday for a further investigation or for a decision in his case. It was stated, however, that the Embassy would endeavor to ascertain the status of his case.

This matter was taken up immediately by Mr. Elbrick with the Department of State by telephone. He spoke to Mr. Eugene DESVERNINE, the Cuba desk officer, who later informed him that Perez and his family had been permitted to enter the United States and expected to proceed to Washington. This information was at once given to Minister HEVIA who expressed considerable relief.

Cuban press reaction to Perez' reported detention has been varied, although the general theme has been that the

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treatment by the United States authorities when Perez was Cuban Army Chief of Staff was very different to that accorded him when he arrived as a private citizen. The Habana newspaper Alerta of August 29 published the following comment: "The American authorities at Miami detained Genovevo because he was not the bearer of a visaed passport. That is what one could call the 'jailer jailed' or the 'relativity of things human'. Yesterday he entered and left Yankee territory with all kinds of honors, hundreds of soldiers worked on his farm, everything was gratis for the powerful Chief of Staff, and now, in a few hours, he must pay for whatever he receives like the most modest recruit at Columbia."

The Communist newspaper Hoy of August 30 published a cartoon showing Perez arriving at Miami airport holding aloft a sign with the legend: "I am a friend of the Americans, I persecuted labor, etc., etc." Section two of the cartoon shows an angry Uncle Sam booting Perez out of the country. Editorial comment in the same newspaper referred to Perez as the "ridiculous, obese, Marshal of the Caribbean". It mentioned the existence of a gentlemen's agreement whereby any Cuban citizen "excepting those known for democratic and progressive ideas" could visit the United States without a passport, but that the agreement had no value for the ex-Chief of the Army, which meant that the ex-General and his family received worse treatment than do many other visitors of less rank or who are simply anonymous. It stated that Genovevo had humiliated himself before the Lords of the North, declaring himself an anti-Communist and placing his Army at the disposition of the Yankee war lords. It listed a series of alleged crimes committed by Perez, implying that these were committed at the behest of United States agents and stating that none of these was of any use to Perez since the United States followed its old custom of mistreating its lackeys after they are no longer of any use, adding that whenever one of these "national traitors falls in disgrace" the United States lets him go "like a hot potato". The article "reminds others who might seek to ingratiate themselves with the United States that when their usefulness has ceased, they are tossed aside without ceremony".

Prensa Libre of August 31 published an editorial, signed by its director Sergio CARBO, stating that Perez, arriving at Miami as a private citizen, had been detained by the authorities there. It explained that Uncle Sam required strict observance of his laws and that no one can enter the United States for more than twenty-nine days if he is not the bearer of the required visa, unless he

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is a high foreign dignitary proceeding on his mission or an accredited diplomat. It added that Genovevo was a "nobody" to Uncle Sam from the moment he was dismissed; the moral being "men should take care of their private personality which is a permanent thing in life over and above the official position which is fleeting and circumstantial". Carbó stated that many officials mistook the respect of others for an official position as an indication of their personal charm, finding out when that position was lost that there was nothing to fall back on; that only men with great talent and heart could develop real friendships and that Genovevo did not belong to that privileged caste. He recalled Perez' pride on receiving an autographed copy of General Eisenhower's book and of his referring repeatedly to "my friend Eisenhower", not realizing that General Eisenhower had transmitted his book not to Perez but to the Army Chief of Staff. The editorial ended: "Is not the case of Genovevo lamentable?"

While this Embassy fully appreciates the heavy responsibility of the United States Immigration Service in its application of the immigration laws and regulations, it is fortunate from the point of view of friendly relations that the Perez family was permitted to enter the United States since unfavorable action in his case would have been interpreted here as "hitting a man when he is down", an impression which would have been most unfortunate, especially view of the fact that Perez as Cuban Army Chief of Staff was invariably friendly and cooperative in his dealings with the United States.

Respectfully yours,

For the Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.:

Earl T. Crain
First Secretary of Embassy

ETCrain/dts

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Telephone
Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: September 1, 1949

SUBJECT: Removal of Cuban Chief of Staff.

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PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Jerry Hannifin, Time Magazine
CRB - Mr. Desvernine

COPIES TO: ARA - Mr. Barber
DRA
American Embassy, Habana (informally)

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Mr. Hannifin, from the local Time Magazine office, has informed me that he had a lengthy interview yesterday with former Chief of Staff, General Genovevo Pérez, at the Shoreham where Pérez is staying with his party. Mr. Hannifin said that the interview was unproductive since Pérez very deftly parried all controversial questions and said nothing of particular significance. The General impressed Hannifin as in a very happy frame of mind, and he is apparently living in luxury at the Shoreham where he has several rooms and Mr. Hannifin was able to observe several bottles of champagne on a table.

In the course of said conversation, Mr. Hannifin mentioned the fact that two U.S. service attachés were present at Ciudad Militar in the early morning hours of August 24. Pérez waved this matter aside as wholly without significance. He said that both Colonel Glenn and Colonel Schaffer were very good friends of his; that the Cuban military always kept in close and cordial contact with the U.S. military attachés, and that, whenever anything of importance occurred in the Cuban Army, it was customary to call the U.S. military attachés and even invite them over in order to give them full information. The presence of the two American attachés on this occasion, in the opinion of Pérez, was in conformity with general routine practice.

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The General also debunked the rumor to which Mr. Hannifin referred, based on a press release which appeared in a Habana daily, that the General had been involved in negotiations with Trujillo. Pérez said there was no foundation in this at all and that the press report to this effect only proves that there is a completely free press in Cuba. The General was non-committal as to future plans.

Mr. Hannifin also interviewed Ambassador Gans yesterday and the Ambassador explained the removal of Pérez in the following manner:

The officers of the Cuban Army had become increasingly hostile to Pérez because of the latter's grafting activities. This hostility had grown to such a point that there was serious danger of a coup on the part of the Army officers against Pérez or even an attempt on his life. The President became aware of this and realized that such action would be highly dangerous inasmuch as such a coup might also disturb the constitutional order and the President's own position. He, therefore, dismissed Pérez in order to save him from such a fate and to remove a possible source of danger to himself.

The Ambassador also dismissed the report that the removal of Pérez was tied up to alleged negotiations with Trujillo.

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