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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

1957 737.00-MAY DAY
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May 3, 1957
5-357

FROM AMEMBASSY, HABANA

733
DESP. NO.

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

REF Voluntary Labor Report

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5/9	ARA-4	RM/R-2 REP-2 OLI-0 G-1 U/O-1 U/O-1 CIA-15 LAB-5 OCB-1 USIA-10

SUBJECT: May First Observed by CTC

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(BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED) The purpose of this despatch is to provide the Department and other interested agencies, particularly the Department of Labor, with the essential details of the manner in which the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) observed International Labor Day on May 1.

The First of May celebration this year in Cuba had special significance in view of the unusual political and economic context in which it took place. Cuba is presently enjoying an improved economy as a result of the prosperous nature of the sugar industry. On the other hand the country is suffering from political tension which in some respects is acute. Thus what was said and done by the leaders of the CTC on May Day may provide to a considerable extent an index of the attitudes of organized labor in respect to the optimistic economic picture as well as to the uncertainty of the political situation.

Further, this year's observance of May First finds disunity in the Cuban labor movement. The important Labor Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants has been intervened by the Government as a result of differences between the leaders of that Federation and of the CTC. Threatened with intervention also is the Labor Federation of Telephone Workers because of the same difficulty. In addition, there is serious trouble between the CTC leadership and certain elements within the Labor Federation of Bank Workers.

Taking all of these factors into consideration the importance of the celebration of May Day this year need not be further labored.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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MAY 10 1957
JFK

1. Preliminary Arrangements.

Preliminary arrangements for the celebration of the traditional May First celebration were agreed upon at the meeting of the 24th National Council meeting of the CTC on April 12. At that time it was decided to observe May Day not with a parade but with a mass assembly at the Palace of Workers in Havana. Later a committee was named to work out the details. A final organization of the celebration was made April 27 when various union and federation leaders met at the CTC headquarters.

On April 30 all of the leading papers in Havana carried a full page ad signed by the Executive Committee of the CTC. This ad was entitled: "CTC Unity"

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A Message to the Workers on First of May". This message, which was fairly brief, pointed to the improved wages of the sugar workers, emphasized the need for Peace, Work and Order, noted the need for investments and the economic development of Cuba, called for a national integration of white and black workers and a fight against racial discrimination, and praised the "heroic struggle of the Hungarian people", at the same time castigating Communism as the most "ferocious form of imperialism".

This last section of the CTC message pertaining to Communism was considered particularly effective and thus it was embodied in a release by USIS Havana to all Latin American countries. Three copies of the CTC message are enclosed.

In certain sections of Havana the CTC placed large banners with slogans such as "lower the cost of living", which called upon the workers to attend the CTC mass rally at the Palace of Workers.

The Minister of Labor, Dr. Jose SUAREZ Rivas, issued a May Day resolution declaring the total inactivity, for the day, of all industrial and commercial establishments, with the exception of those needed for public service. Cafes, bars, restaurants, etc. were to be closed until four o'clock in the afternoon as were cabarets, movies and theaters. Radio and television were permitted to operate in order to transmit the commemorative acts taking place at the Workers Palace. Buses were allowed to run on partial schedule especially in order to bring workers to the assembly.

The Occasion and Proceedings.

Although scheduled to begin at 9:00 o'clock in the morning, the ceremony at the Palace of Workers did not start until about 10:15.

The huge theater in the Palace was filled with the exception of a section in the second balcony. Estimates of attendance range between 2,000 and 2,500. A large number present were white collar employees. These were mostly from the National Federation of Commercial Workers, who are making strong demands for wage increases, and from the National Federation of professions auxiliary to medicine. The bus drivers and repairmen were in prominence as were the port workers. Banners and streamers, carrying various demands, decorated the walls. Many of these also called for support of CTC policies and unity.

The ceremony was opened by the singing of the National Cuban Hymn. This really went off well, and it tended to create a contagious spirit of enthusiasm which was further enlivened by the music of a large band.

The ceremony itself was fairly simple. It consisted of seven speeches which were interspersed by the reading of telegrams from various labor organizations in Cuba. Radio announcers carried a large share of the burden of introducing the speakers.

Place of pride were given to the following who sat at the "Mesa": The Minister of Labor; Raquel Valladares of the Woolworth union; Mercedes Chirino of

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of the tobacco workers; Senora Ana Lugo, the widow of Enrique Varona Gonzalez, a labor martyr killed by Machado; Jose A. Cabarga, president of the Retirement Fund of the Maritime Workers; Dr. Leopold Pio Elizalde, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labor; Andres Saenz, official of the Ministry; Eusebio Mujal Barniol, CTC Secretary General; Prisciliano Falcon, of the Sugar Workers Federation; Facundo Pomar Soler of the Transport Workers; Javier Bolaños of the Railroad Federation; Jose Perez Gonzalez, member of the CTC Bureau of Direction, Minister without Portfolio, and also head of the Batista Workers Block; Jose A. Micheltorena of the Gastronomicos; Jesus Artigas Carbonell of the Auxiliary Medical employees; Gabriel Gutierrez Mejias and Felipe Balhuena, labor leaders.

The entire ceremony which lasted almost five hours was climaxed by the speech of Mujal ~~making~~ which he interrupted to deliver to the Minister of Labor 191 demands submitted by the various 33 federations affiliated with the CTC. This was the main business of the ceremony; and all of the speeches devolved around these demands. The Labor Minister, who was present primarily in the capacity of the personal representative of President Fulgencio Batista delivered the last speech of the day which was surprisingly short.

3. The Speeches

Esteban Rustan, secretary general of the National Federation of Commercial Workers, began the speech making. Striking a sharp economic note, he presented the demand of the retail clerks for a 20% increase in salaries and a \$90.00 minimum rate.

Javier Bolanos, secretary general of the National Federated Railway Brotherhood, said that May Day provided once again the opportunity for Cuban workers to remember the fallen workers at Chicago and to give an account of "the struggle against tyrannical governments like that of Moscow". He exhorted the politicians who were on the Bicameral Commission to find a solution to the national problems, declaring that the CTC wants peace in order to do more work. Bolaños dealt at length with the problem of the Electric plants. Highly critical of Cofiño, he declared that the first CTC intervention was made in 1947 when Cofiño was CTC secretary general. At that time Ramon Leon Renteria was dismissed and the National Federation of Maritime Workers was intervened.

Jesus Artigas Carbonell, CTC financial secretary and also an official of the auxiliary medical workers, in his speech, observed that this year there were present at the meeting many workers from the Electric Plants and telephone unions who support Oscar Samalea (anti-Cofiño leader) and Ramirez (anti-Rubiera leader). The presence of these workers, he emphasized, was just the opposite of former years when there was fear by their leaders that electric workers and telephone workers might be "contaminated" if they rubbed shoulders with the masses.

Facundo Pomar Soler, official of the National Federation of Transport Workers and of the Syndicate of Employees and Workers of Omnibus Aliados, stressed elections in the transport unions and equal pay for equal work for COA

(Cooperativa de Omnibus Alicados). He also spoke vigorously on racial integration. Facundo, who is a negro, said that there are far more negroes employed in the bus companies now than when the Communists, who always boasted of their fight against discrimination, had control of the CTC.

(Shortly after Señor Facundo finished speaking he became violently ill. He was taken to the hospital by several of his friends and the press said that he had suffered a heart attack. The Labor Attaché, however, was informed by a friend of Facundo that it was probably only his stomach from which he has been suffering recently.)

Priciliano Falcón, the secretary general of the important National Federation of Sugar Workers, gave "thanks to the Government for the manner in which it had benefitted the workers of the first industry. He emphasized that together with the pay of super production there also had been gained the restoration of the 6% which had been lopped off the zafras of 1953 through 1955. He congratulated the CTC Executive Committee for having imposed "discipline" in the case of the leaders of the Electrical Workers.

José Perez González, secretary general of the Progressive Workers Bloc (pro-Batista) and a member of the Buró de Dirección of the CTC, stressed the growing responsibility of the CTC since 1952 and recalled that he had, in that year, given assurance that Batista loyal to his origin would never defraud the Cuban labor movement, a thing that he had demonstrated. He, too, discussed discipline saying, among other things, that "we cannot vote on agreements in the CTC Executive Committee and then later in the Unions and in the street fight against those same agreements (acuerdos). For this reason, the 24th Extraordinary National Council could do no other thing than discipline those who did not comply with the agreements reached by the Central Organization.

Eusebio Mujal, secretary general of the CTC, pointed out the advantages obtained for the workers by that organization and added that the workers were happy on this May Day because of work conditions and the clear vision of the Government they were in an "epoch of economic bonanza".

Mujal said, in regard to wage demands, that the Government well understands that without purchasing power there can be no commercial or industrial prosperity. Therefore wage increases are necessary if the standard of living is to be increased. He explained that there were some employers whose "blood pressure was quickly elevated when wage increases" were asked, but afterward found that the raises had been a preponderant factor in progress.

Mujal, interestingly enough, then went out of his way, with some sarcasm, to compliment Bohemia ^{1/} for its May Day editorial which bore a strong tone of implied criticism of the CTC. The editorial had said that this was a bad year since (1) the Cuban workers were suffering from schism; (2) there would be no May Day parade; (3) the Electric Workers had been intervened; and

^{1/} Bohemia, a leading weekly magazine, is generally anti-Batista.

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(4) trade union freedoms and elections had been curtailed. Mujal conceded that Bohemia was correct in saying there was a crisis, though not large, in the CTC; but he explained that this would not have been if (1) Jose Mariade Aguilera of the bank union were not a militant of a political opposition which had received instructions from the high levels of the Orthodox Party, and this had carried the bank employees to disaster, and the CTC had had to intervene to prevent even greater ills; (2) if Rubiera were not a militant of the National Revolution Party of Pardo Llada who daily fights the CTC leadership; and (3) if Cofiño had not attacked the President of the Republic, through the CTC, for having named Oscar Samalea as President of the Retirement Fund of the Electrical Workers. The political sectarianism of these three persons not the CTC had been responsible for the disunity of the workers noted by Bohemia, which, Mujal concluded is not a "magazine exactly partial to the CTC". Mujal then asked what salary increases Rubiera had ever gained for the Telephone Workers and why Cofiño had not pressed for a lowering of the costs of electric power, which would have facilitated the industrialization of Cuba.

Continuing on the political theme, Mujal said he is not a politician. He left the PRC(A), a party which he helped to found, even though he could have been a Senator in 1954, in order to continue to be with the CTC. He maintained that just as the CTC used to applaud Grau and Prio when they deserved it, so should Batista be congratulated when he acts in a manner beneficial to the working class. Batista, he said, has helped the workers through their economic difficulties by his "prudence in the economic reconstruction of the country".

Mujal, in dealing with the Communist problem, declared that he was pleased to see the Labor Attaché present who could attest to the fact that "the Cuban workers have confidence in the anti-Communist policies of President Eisenhower who knows how to act against the Communists". He then said the best thing for the democracies is to know the feeling of the Communists, because in this way it obliges everyone to struggle against them. Mujal then quoted Roosevelt as saying "in this war, we kill or be killed". And we are not disposed to be killed, said Mujal. He then added that the anti-Communism of the CTC is famous throughout the entire world and that the CTC is also against employers or labor leaders who play along with the Communists.

Mujal announced that the CTC would ask President Batista to amend Article 70 of Decree 798 which would tighten up restrictions on dismissal.

Mujal pointed to the fact that the obligatory collection of union dues by employers had been ratified by more than 24 judgments of the Tribunal of Constitutional and Social Guarantees. (He apparently raised this issue in connection with the present efforts of the Confederation of Cuban Employers (CPC) to get an audience with Batista in order to get the present legislation on the "cuota sindical obligatoria" abrogated.) In mentioning the present CPC activity, Mujal predicted that the President would terminate it by granting the increase demanded by the commercial employees because the "country's economy can afford it".

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Mujal concluded his lengthy speech by promising that the CTC will struggle against racial discrimination and for the national integration, which is in accordance with resolutions adopted at CTC congresses and council meetings and with the Constitution of Cuba itself which guarantees equal opportunity to all regardless of race.

The Minister of Labor, Dr. José Suarez Rivas, saluted the Cuban working class in the name of President Batista, the Government, and of himself. He said never before had the workers reached such highly esteemed ends as they had "through the CTC under its courageous and skillful leadership of Eusebio Mujal".

In regard to the political problem facing the nation, the Minister said the CTC had adopted a "mature" and a "thoughtful" posture which indicated "its capacity to know how to select the best roads for itself and for the Republic". He added that in those few cases where someone did not follow the CTC policy, the directors of the CTC had secured the comprehension of President Batista and the course taken had reflected the "non-political nature of the labor movement".

The Labor Minister, in referring to intervention proceedings, declared that the origin of intervention was the need for discipline and unity. He said he was a party to intervention and that his judgment had been vindicated by history, "admitted by law and applauded by the citizenry". He explained that the labor movement is dynamic and that it would be wrong to deny to the movement the right of intervention which other organizations have.

The Minister of Labor then traced the close ties that President Batista and he had had with the development of the labor movement, citing Decrees 2605 of 1933 and 1123 of 1943 which had permitted only one central syndicate organization.

He next pointed out that this May Day coincides with a notable change in the orientation of the labor movement in that it has enrolled in the campaign to encourage investments as a means of elevating wage levels, increasing employment, and improving the standard of living for the people. He added, "for the first time in our history our government is unfolding a plan scientifically designed for the gradual and permanent development of the Cuban economy. And together with President Batista in this march to create a future less amenable to uncontrolled fluctuations, is the CTC". He cited the CTC television program as proof that the CTC has left behind, "for the good of the nation, the infantile phase of pettiness and bitter intransigence".

The Minister of Labor claimed that in the sugar industry the gains of labor has been "enormous", and he particularly pointed out that President Batista had designated Prisciliano Falcón as worker delegate to the Institute of Sugar Stabilization.

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The Minister explained that he had been called away from the speakers' table two times during the ceremony. This had resulted from telephone calls from President Batista who was listening intently to the May Day proceedings at the Palace. The Minister then announced that Batista had told him that he would underwrite the cost of construction of a building for the "union of maritime workers of Santiago de Cuba", whose four-man delegation had been introduced by Mujal from the platform. (Mujal had claimed that one member of this delegation had been a Communist up until five weeks ago.) The Minister's announcement of Batista's offer brought a tremendous round of applause.

The Labor Minister, in direct reference to Communism, said that the Government had adopted measures against Communist activities, especially "Decree 538 and Resolution 51 to prevent the Soviet infiltration into public service companies". He asserted that those who opposed these measures had done so either for "political interest or personal convenience"; and that they had accused the Government of creating a "communist bogey", when "in truth it was not a bogey, but a reality". He then gave assurance that the Government would continue its dauntless route in marking out its responsibilities and its democratic ideology.

Finally, the Minister of Labor concluded by saying the economic demands of the workers would be studied carefully and then given to President Batista who within the margins of possibility would know how to act because "man of this epoch knows--and we have learned from him--that there is no rich country without a prosperous proletariat, and that there is no happy country without a satisfied proletariat".

4. The Demands

The actual presentation to the Minister of Labor of the demands formulated by the various Federations (33) affiliated with the CTC was made during Mujal's speech, by Juan Evangelista Ramos who is the CTC official dealing with employer relations.

The portfolio presented by Evangelista to the Labor Minister contained 191 demands which covered a wide range of requests.

In general, these included:

1. Increase of wages in those sectors able to grant it.
2. Lowering of the cost of living.
3. Struggle against Communist infiltration.
4. Creation of new sources of employment.
5. Unity and discipline in respect to regulations and syndicate agreements.

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6. Protection of national industry.
7. Compliance with legislation on the "cuota sindical obligatoria".
8. Reorganization of Retirement Funds.
9. Penalty for employers who do not comply with social legislation.
10. Peaceful solution for the national political problem.
11. Creation of social security for those sectors who do not yet have it.

In view of the controversies that now exist in relation to their federations, the particular demands of the Electric Plant Workers, the Telephone Workers, and the Bank Workers have unusual interest.

For example, the Electric Workers are asking for:

- a. racial and salary equality;
- b. elimination of pro-Communist agents from the labor movement; and
- c. expansion of gas service throughout Greater Havana to create more jobs.

The Telephone Workers, among other things, want:

- a. 30% wage increase;
- b. revision of the Collective Bargaining Agreement;
- c. adjustment of hours;
- d. employees be given two weeks pay when they return from vacation.

The Bank Workers are requesting:

- a. elections as soon as possible;
- b. salary increase.

The above demands, of course, have been formulated by the pro-CTC elements in the three federations and not by the followers of Cofiño, Rubiera, and Calixto Fernandez.

One set of the 191 demands as printed in the press is enclosed. (END UNCLASSIFIED)

(BEGIN OFFICIAL USE ONLY) COMMENT: In view of the unusual events leading up to May Day this year in Havana, considerable speculation and some apprehension attended the approach of the celebration in the Workers' Palace.

The intervention of the Electric Plant Workers Federation, the threatened intervention of the Telephone Federation, a fiery exchange between Mujal and Cofiño over the weekend just prior to May Day, an explosion of a bomb at the

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CTC provincial headquarters in Santa Clara which Mujal blamed on Cofimo, and the explosion of 11 bombs on April 27 and 28 in Havana, all contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty that preceded the observance of the traditional May First.

However, in spite of all these forebodings, there were no undue incidents in connection with the celebration. Order within the Workers Palace was exemplary. A committee to keep order functioned well. Outside the Palace there was a heavy police guard, and everyone was searched before entering the auditorium. But, as far as the Labor Attaché knows, there were no disturbances whatsoever.

The Embassy was informed that no celebration of May Day was permitted in Santiago de Cuba, Oriente Province; but, on the other hand, there was a large celebration in Santa Clara.

In regard to the economic significance of this year's May Day celebration, the demands for wage increases and for a shorter workweek very clearly indicate the intent of the CTC to capitalize on Cuba's present prosperity. Although there may not be pressure for a general wage increase, it is certain that a strong fight will be made for pay raises in those "sectors that can afford it". The 30% demand being made by the Telephone Workers unquestionably reflects political rather than economic significance. It is probably based on an effort to ween workers away from Rubiera.

In regard to the political significance of this year's May Day celebration, there was a strong Pro-Batista tone throughout the whole proceedings at the Workers Palace. This was in general expressed by all speakers, and in particular by Mujal and Jose Perez Gonzalez, who incidentally proved to be the most popular of all speakers judging by attention and applause. He, of course, carried the ball all the way for Batista. Mujal neatly tried to establish the dictum - "reward your friends and punish your enemies" - but it was pretty clear where he stood. It was likewise clear from the Labor Minister's speech that Mujal is looked upon with favor by the Government. There were no grounds lacking for a mutual admiration society.

Both the Minister of Labor and Mujal, as well as the other speakers, emphasized the anti-Communist orientation of the CTC. The Minister of Labor tied his remarks to Decree 538 and Resolution 51 and justified intervention of the Electric Workers on the struggle against Communist infiltration in public service companies. Mujal on April 27, just prior to May Day, in a public statement asserted that there are "more than 100,000 Communists in Cuba" and that "numerous" labor unions have been penetrated by Red elements. He claimed that there are "about 500 C.P.'s" in the electric plants and "more than 1000" in the COA bus company.

Mujal indicated a pro-U.S. position when he stated that the CTC was following the anti-Communist policies of President Eisenhower.

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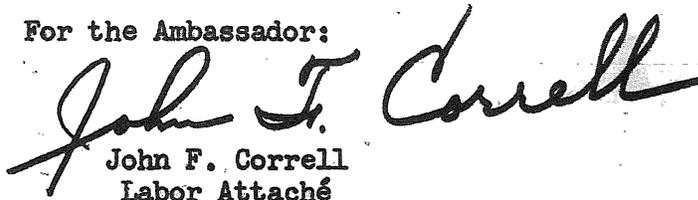
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Of interest and perhaps of some significance was Mujal's allusion to the May Day editorial of Bohemia. This may have been done to give him an opportunity to read off the names of all the labor reporters in Havana. He then asked for a round of applause for them. When the name of Mario Barrera, who allegedly is in the pay of Cofifo, was read there was a considerable cry of derision. At the end of this exercise, a friend of the Labor Attaché leaned over and said "todos son chantajistas" - all of them are blackmailers.

Aside from Bohemia, another sour note was struck in connection with May Day by Conrad Becquer, anti-CTC rabble rouser, who issued a statement that said, among other things, "this May is celebrated under the somber auspices of coercion, state intervention, outright sale of the workers demands, workers displaced in the banks, miserable wages, mockery of the sugar workers, terror among the rank and file, betrayal of the buss drivers, etc." Some of this catalogue of grievance is true, but as usual with Becquer his demogery recognizes only the negative elements in the overall picture.

Perhaps the attendance of thousands of workers at the mass celebration for Batista on April 7 robbed this year's observance of May Day of some response, but that consideration notwithstanding, the celebration this year was considered larger and more enthusiastic than that of last year, even though pro-Cofifo and pro-Rubiera elements did not participate.

For the Ambassador:


John F. Correll
Labor Attaché

Enclosures: 

1. El Mundo clipping
2. Informacion clipping

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Action ARA

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2064
May 3, 1957
9:05 p.m.

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RMR TO: Secretary of State

SS NO: 528, May 2

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SENT DEPARTMENT 528; REPEATED INFORMATION MEXICO CITY 76.
FOR STATE AND LABOR

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1. May first celebration of International Labor Day took place in Habana at CTC Palace of Workers as scheduled and without incident.
2. It estimated that at least 2000 laborers and white collar employees present for ceremony which lasted about five hours. Some observers feel May Day observance this year larger and more enthusiastic in spite fact that Cofino followers in Electric Federation and Rubiera followers in Telephone Federation as well as anti-Mujalistas among bank employees did not participate.
3. Speakers were (1) Esteban Rustan, Commercial Employees; (2) Javier Bolsanos, Railroad Workers; (3) Jesus Artigas, Medical Workers; (4) Facundo Pomar, Urban Transport Workers; (5) Priscilliano Falcon, Sugar Workers; (6) Jose Perez Gonzalez, head of Batista Workers' block and also Minister without Portfolio; and, finally, Eusebio Mujal, Secretary General of the Cuban Confederation of Workers.
4. Mujal after preliminary remarks led into main business of the celebration, namely, the presentation to Minister of Labor Jose Suarez Rivas, who present also in capacity of personal representative of President Batista, approximately 191 worker demands from the various 33 Federations affiliated with CTC. These demands primarily call for higher pay, shorter work week and more old age protection.
5. Minister of Labor Suarez Rivas accepted the entire portfolio demands and told the workers that it would be handed President Batista for careful study and decision.
6. Minister Labor who left speakers' table on two occasions explained later in his speech to workers that he telephoned by President Batista who was listening intently to proceedings at the Palace residence.

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7. Themes

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7. Themes stressed by speakers were CTC stand against communism; the apolitical nature of CTC; the new CTC orientation of encouraging investments to provide better wages and more employment; the need of controlling the rise in cost of living; and fight against racial discrimination.

8. Bolanos, Mujal, and the Labor Minister all discussed the intervention of the Federation of Electric Plants. All stated action needed not only maintain discipline and unity within CTC but also prevent infiltration Communists into public service companies by screening as required by Decree 538 and Resolution 51. A standing vote of confidence was given Mujal and Minister Labor on this issue.

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