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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DC/R

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 24, 1954

SUBJECT: Batista and Communism

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Frank Jackson, Miami

Mr. Daniel N. Arzac, Jr. (ARA:MID)

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Mr. Jackson was referred to me by Mr. Neal, to whom Mr. Jackson had been referred by Congressman Lantaff's office through H.

Mr. Jackson said he had known Mr. Lantaff, and Cuban exiles in Miami where he resides, for some time. He said these exiles are pro-American and are worried about continued American military assistance to the Batista government. He was especially worried about such assistance because there are indications of sympathy for Communism on the part of Batista.

In support of his remarks on Batista and Communism, Mr. Jackson showed me photostatic copies of 1940 election handbills, ballots and newspapers, all showing Communist Party support for Batista, and 1953 clippings concerning travel by Lazaro Peña and other Cuban Communists. He also offered to send me copies of statements by Carlos Hevia and Luis Ortega. He said he was going to leave these materials at the White House.

Mr. Jackson said a number of Cuban unions are controlled by Communists, the clandestine Communist newspaper is printed in a building owned by Batista, and the Isle of Pines was to be used as a Communist international communications center until CIA observation forced a move to Guatemala. He said no Communists are in jail or in exile.

Mr. Jackson praised highly Mr. Eliseo Riera-gómez, who he says is not pro-Prio but only anti-Batista; Mr. Jackson said this was a general position among exiles, and that Hevia or Varona, not Prio, would come into power should Batista fall. He said Mr. Riera-gómez would call me for an appointment later this week.

Mr. Jackson

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Mr. Jackson said Cuban exiles had been hard put to convince Prio not to plead guilty to Federal charges under which he is to be tried. He added that the indictment had been well timed, coming on a Friday before the Monday on which a probably successful revolutionary attempt would be launched. Prio was ready to go to jail if necessary, feeling that to do so would help his political position in Cuba considerably.

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Wellman
Mr. Arzac
D.C./R.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 24, 28, 1954

SUBJECT: Batista Government and Communism

Confidential
Files

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Dana Adams Schmidt, New York Times
Mr. Arzac, MID

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On May 24 I returned Mr. Schmidt's call to Mr. Wellman. Mr. Schmidt said that someone unfriendly to Batista had distributed a statement of allegations which he wished to check. These allegations were to the effect that the Batista regime is linked to international and Guatemalan communism. We discussed briefly this report, as well as the source of this and similar reports which are current in Washington. I told Mr. Schmidt I would be willing to give him further background information if he would drop in, and he did so on May 28. The allegations discussed were the following:

1. That Batista has been holding conferences with leaders of the Guatemalan Government. I told Mr. Schmidt this allegation was probably based on the three interviews granted by Batista not over a year ago to Guatemala's Ambassador-at-large, former President Arévalo. I added that these interviews were covered in the press, as well as the Cuban Government's official statements following each of these meetings.

2. That Cuban Communist leader Blas Roca travels on a diplomatic passport. I said it is not likely any Cuban Government would have issued a diplomatic passport to a Communist since 1947, when the communists were removed from the labor unions, unless forced to do so because of the traveller's official position.

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Roca was a member of Congress up to the time that body was suspended following Batista's coup of March, 1952. He might have conceivably had a diplomatic passport at that time and retained it. I said we have no information that Roca has travelled on a diplomatic passport.

3. That three Cabinet and "little cabinet" members are communists: Raul Lorenzo, Arsenio González and Augusto Rodríguez Miranda. I said all three are known as former communists as members of front organizations. It is charged that they are still communist or pro-communist but they deny this and the Cuban Government obviously does not believe they are.

4. That an international communist communications center was to be moved from Mexico to Cuba in April, 1954, but when the news leaked, the ship carrying the equipment was not allowed to unload, and the center is now being set up in Guatemala. I said this office has no information on this report.

5. That Cuban Communist leaders are free to travel throughout the world; Juan Marinello in January 1954 went to Guatemala and Moscow on a diplomatic passport; Lázaro Peña went to Vienna in March and is now in Russia. I said Cuban communist leaders have been free to travel, that I have no information at hand on Marinello's trip or passport and that Peña had gone to Vienna for a WCTU executive committee meeting and might well be in Russia though I have no information on this. I said Peña's departure had been extensively covered in the press and had occasioned some rather lame excuses by the Cuban Ministry of Information. However, recent public declarations by Cuban officials, reported in the press, indicate that the Cuban Government is concerned about communism. There are indications the Cuban Government does not feel it is in the best interest of Cuba for Cuban communists to receive a Cuban passport. Last week Juan Marinello's passport was lifted.

6. That two days prior to his coup in March 1952, Batista held a series of conferences with Carlos Rodríguez and Blas Roca, who had recently returned from training in Guatemala. I said I have no information.

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