

## The Auténtico Party and the Political Opposition in Cuba, 1952–57

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THE historian faces a challenge in writing about Cuba in the 1950s, a decade climaxed by the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista and the assumption of power by Fidel Castro on January 1, 1959. The dominant personality of Castro, and the controversy and emotion engendered by his rule, make it difficult to achieve a balanced interpretation of the period. Although an effort to study the events of the 1950s without focusing upon Castro, as this article attempts to do, may be misunderstood, it is important to examine other aspects of the political situation. Often overlooked is Cuba's political or noninsurrectional opposition in the 1950s, exclusive of Castro's movement, that worked for the return of legitimate government. It represented the spirit of Cuban democracy, standing for the Constitution of 1940, and functioned from the day that Batista seized power on March 10, 1952, until the Cienfuegos uprising on September 5, 1957, when Batista intensified his tyranny. The nature of the operation of this opposition and the significance of its role are important to a clear understanding of this period.

The assertion that a political opposition existed does not diminish Castro's achievement. It suggests only that more than one element caused Batista's defeat and that Castro was part of a large process. The political opposition created a climate that facilitated Castro's action and, indeed, may have enhanced his movement because of its own caution. To test this

\*This article is based primarily upon the archive of Dr. Manuel Antonio de Varona Loredó, former senator and prime minister of Cuba, and president of the Cuban Revolutionary party—Auténtico (PRC[A]) during the period treated herein, March 1952 to September 1957. The archive consists of resolutions, statements, manifestos, pronouncements, correspondence, speeches, and acts of the National Executive Committee (CEN) of the PRC(A). Unless noted, the documents making up the archive are typescripts. Photocopies of the documents are available to scholars and interested persons in the Pattee Library of the Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

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assumption, this article looks principally at one of several political parties and groups that made up the nonviolent opposition, the Cuban Revolutionary or Auténtico party, PRC(A). This narrow focus limits the conclusions that may be drawn; but because of the fortuitous availability of archival material that chronicles the PRC(A)'s activity during the period, and because of its once important position in pre-Castro Cuba, the party provides a good starting point for analysis of the fall of Batista.

The PRC(A) had its roots in the Revolution of 1933, a major event in Cuba's political history, and it exercised power from 1944 to 1952, probably Cuba's most democratic period. At the time of Batista's coup, the PRC(A) was Cuba's largest and best-organized political party. The National Executive Committee (CEN), with Manuel Antonio de Varona Loredó ("Tony" Varona) as president, acted for the party during Batista's rule. It frustrated Batista's attempts to achieve legitimacy and denounced corrupt practices and acts of repression. The PRC(A) had been damaged by political scandals; and its leader, who was also the national president, Carlos Prío Socarrás, had fled into exile without a struggle. In the months before the coup, however, the party had begun to reorganize. Tony Varona, one of the principal leaders who remained in Cuba, was untouched by scandal and had promoted party reform.

When the coup occurred, Varona was president of the Cuban Senate, enabling him to speak for the legislative branch as well as for his party. In his first statement following the golpe, Varona announced on March 13, 1952, that he was summoning congressional leaders to consider the "illegal situation" and that he would meet with the executive committee of his party for the same purpose.<sup>1</sup> The following day, the Auténtico Party called upon its members, allies, and sympathizers to stand firm in defense of the constitution and to resist the "usurper" Batista.<sup>2</sup> On the 17th, congressional leaders issued a statement in which they denounced the violent disruption of the constitutional order and the "acts of force" that prevented the Congress from meeting.<sup>3</sup> By then, Batista had taken the title of Chief of State and had assumed all executive and legislative functions. He replaced the Constitution of 1940 with a "Statute of Government," dissolved all political parties, and announced that he would exercise power until elections in November 1953.

The PRC(A) reacted quickly to these measures, with a sense of particular urgency. Since Batista sought to justify his takeover with accusations

1. Statement of "Tony" Varona, Mar. 13, 1952. *Acuerdos, declaraciones, . . . del Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del PRC(A)*. Hereinafter cited as Varona MSS.

2. Resolution, executive committee, PRC(A), Mar. 14, 1952. Varona MSS.

3. Statement, Legislative Branch, Republic of Cuba, Mar. 17, 1952. Varona MSS.

of corruption and misconduct in office, the Auténticos needed to defend Cuban democracy and explain themselves at the same time. In mid-March, Varona instructed party workers to be alert to the deceptions of the “dictatorship.” He declared that the dissolution of political parties by the de facto government had to be resisted, explaining that the PRC(A) name and emblem could not be erased by decree. He conceded that individual Auténticos had committed offenses, but stressed that these were personal acts and could not be blamed upon the party, which had been responsible for significant achievement in behalf of the people.<sup>4</sup>

Aware of the need to restore the party’s credibility, the CEN prepared a manifesto “to the nation” on April 2. The Auténticos traced their history from the party’s founding in 1934. They described their struggle to establish the Constitution of 1940, listed the achievements of the two Auténtico governments, 1944–52, and maintained that these administrations constituted “the most fertile and productive chapter” in the history of the republic. They branded as exaggerations or falsehoods charges of wrongdoing, but noted that the PRC(A) had reformed its charter in November 1951 and had nominated as candidates for president and vice-president in 1952, Carlos Hevia and Luis Casero, men renowned for their ability and respected for their integrity. Signing the document, Varona and the members of the CEN declared that force and violence could not overcome the Cuban democratic spirit.<sup>5</sup>

The CEN generally defended the record of the Auténticos, condemned the illegal action of Batista, and vowed to lead the fight to restore the constitution. Its policy was nonviolent and noncollaborationist. When Batista cancelled the elections scheduled for June 1952, and announced plans to hold them in November 1953 instead, the PRC(A) stated that it would not take part, because the regime was illegal and any elections it sponsored would be illegitimate.<sup>6</sup> The Auténticos hoped to persuade other parties to adopt this position, but encountered hostility and suspicion. They wanted especially to ally with the Cuban People’s party (the Ortodoxo party),

4. Statement of Senator Varona, printed handbill, Mar. 1952. Varona MSS. A number of studies treat the decline of the Auténticos before 1952 and the debilitating effects of political corruption upon Cuban democracy. See especially, Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 112–114; Samuel Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933–1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro* (Middletown, Ct., 1976), pp. 110–111 and 150–151; Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Cuba: The Making of a Revolution* (Amherst, Mass., 1968), pp. 109–110; and Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, 1971), pp. 737–786.

5. “To the nation,” printed manifesto, Apr. 2, 1952. Varona MSS.

6. Statement of Varona, printed handbill, May 1952. Varona MSS.

Cuba's second party, and assured its leaders that their sole purpose was the return of electoral government, not the restoration of Prío's presidency.<sup>7</sup>

The problems that the Auténticos experienced in wooing the Ortodoxos and other parties were compounded by the activities of advocates of a violent strategy. Two of the more prominent men of this persuasion were Dr. Rafael García Bárcena, a Havana University professor and chief of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), and Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who, though nominally an Auténtico and CEN member, acted independently as the head of the clandestine AAA organization (Asociación Amigos de Aureliano). The actions of these individuals and groups provoked an intensification of repressive measures against the opposition. In July 1952, García Bárcena was imprisoned for plotting against the government; Varona, Hevia, and Casero of the CEN (Auténtico) were "detained," along with Roberto Agramonte and Emilio Ochoa of the Ortodoxos, and civil guarantees were suspended for forty-five days.<sup>8</sup>

The restoration of guarantees came just in time for the PRC(A) to commemorate the anniversary of the September 10, 1933, revolution. This revolution evoked bittersweet memories for the Auténticos. They traced their origin as a party to that event, but they also recalled Batista's "first treason" in conniving with the "imperialist forces" to defeat the "government of 132 days."<sup>9</sup> During Batista's regime, Varona and the CEN issued statements on special occasions or national holidays, such as José Martí's birthday (January 28) or the commemoration of the beginning of the Ten Years War in 1868, known as the Grito de Yara (October 10).

On September 15, 1952, the terms of all senators and half the members of the House of Representatives expired. Since Batista had cancelled the elections to renew or replace these legislators, the Congress had, in effect, ceased to exist, "leaving the Republic," as Varona noted, "definitely under an illegitimate regime of force."<sup>10</sup> This fact became more stark on October 10, 1952, the anniversary day of the Grito de Yara, when, under normal circumstances, Cuba would have inaugurated a new

7. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), June 13, 1952. Varona MSS. The Ortodoxos had split from the Auténticos in 1947 over the issue of corruption and, for that reason, eschewed political pacts with other parties, especially the Auténticos. See, Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, pp. 122–130. If one accepts Farber's conclusions, a study of the Ortodoxos would add little to this examination of the political opposition. He asserts that the Ortodoxos "virtually collapsed as a crucial political force" following Batista's coup. He says the same about the Auténticos, however, only more emphatically. Idem, pp. 151–152.

8. *Hispanic American Report* (Stanford), 5 (Aug. 1952), 17, and 5 (Sept. 1952), 13. Hereinafter cited as *HAR*.

9. Statement to the people of Cuba, executive committee, PRC(A), Sept. 10, 1952. Varona MSS. The revolutionary government lasted from September 4, 1933, until January 15, 1934, when Batista forced President Ramón Grau San Martín to resign.

10. Varona, "Congress: Symbol of National Sovereignty," Sept. 15, 1952. Varona MSS.

president. Both Prío and Vice-President Guillermo Alonso Pujol sent messages from New York, recording an anticipated joyous day with sadness. Prío labeled Batista's rule a "police state" and assured Cubans that his desire to restore constitutional government stemmed from patriotic fervor, not personal ambition.<sup>11</sup> Pujol called upon Batista to recognize his error, in order to avoid a new national tragedy, and reminded the armed forces that four years earlier they had obeyed the sovereign will of the people.<sup>12</sup> In view of continuing signs of unrest, including major demonstrations by University of Havana students in April and August, the Cuban Press Bloc attempted to mediate between Batista and the political opposition.

In a front-page appeal on October 14, the Press Bloc warned that the nation was in "grave peril" and urged both sides to meet and agree upon a formula for immediate elections.<sup>13</sup> Without delay, Varona of the PRC(A) and the presidents of the Democratic, Liberal, and Cuban National parties published a joint response in which they "welcomed" the "exhortation" of the Press Bloc.<sup>14</sup> They proposed as a solution the reestablishment of the Constitution of 1940, the assumption of the presidency by the eldest Supreme Court justice, and the activation of the Electoral Code of 1943.<sup>15</sup> Batista rebuffed the mediation effort and reiterated his pledge to hold elections in November 1953, while guaranteeing all candidates full protection under an electoral code to be announced.<sup>16</sup>

When Batista promulgated his electoral code effective November 1, 1952, the CEN issued a manifesto on November 22, declaring that the PRC(A) would not participate in the process, "because it would imply a legalization of the usurper regime."<sup>17</sup> On December 7, in ceremonies commemorating the anniversary of the death of General Antonio Maceo, Varona warned about the dangers of Batista's intransigence and compared his treachery with the honorable conduct of this hero of Cuban independence.<sup>18</sup> Two days later, upon learning that Batista had also observed the patriotic holiday, Varona condemned the act as a "blasphemy." How dare he speak to the people about Maceo!<sup>19</sup>

11. Address of Carlos Prío Socarrás commemorating the Tenth of October, New York, Oct. 10, 1952. Varona MSS.

12. Address of Guillermo Pujol marking the Tenth of October, New York, Oct. 10, 1952. Varona MSS.

13. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 800.

14. "Reply of the Opposition Parties to the Exhortation of the Cuban Press Bloc," Oct. 23, 1952. Varona MSS.

15. "To the Cuban Press Bloc," Oct. 23, 1952. Varona MSS.

16. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Oct. 21, 1952. Varona MSS.

17. Manifesto, executive committee, PRC(A), Nov. 22, 1952. Varona MSS.

18. "Maceo—7th of December," executive committee, PRC(A), Dec. 7, 1952. Varona MSS.

19. Varona, "Blasphemy," Dec. 9, 1952. Varona MSS.

Despite the bold language of Varona and the CEN, Batista's electoral preparations kept the opposition off-balance and divided. A particularly bitter exchange took place between Varona and Agramonte, the Ortodoxos' 1952 presidential nominee. Urged by the Auténticos to join them in their abstentionist stance, Agramonte indicated that the Ortodoxos were undecided. He emphasized, however, that under no circumstances would they make an alliance with the Auténticos, because of that party's partisan ambition and past errors.<sup>20</sup> Varona replied to Agramonte's attack, regretting the need for it, because it "played the dictator's game."<sup>21</sup> He warned that Agramonte was using the "same poison" that had made the March 10 coup possible and affirmed that if the Ortodoxos lacked the courage to resist, they should not stand in the way of those prepared to try.<sup>22</sup> The CEN explained that the abstentionist policy was without partisan interest, "because we realize that the Cuban problem requires the effort of all and not just the Auténticos."<sup>23</sup>

Varona's persuasiveness on this issue was clouded by the activities of former Auténtico and Cuban President Ramón Grau San Martín. In December, Grau collected signatures on a petition to enable him to run for president using the Auténtico label. Embarrassed, because Grau was a founder of the PRC(A) and had achieved certain Auténtico reforms as president, the CEN faced the dual task of denouncing Grau and denying that he represented the Auténtico party. "He is joined today with Batista," the CEN stated, "in an infamous alliance against the freedom and destiny of Cuba."<sup>24</sup> His action of inscribing the PRC(A) before the Supreme Electoral Tribunal "was against the will of the masses of the party."<sup>25</sup> Varona declared repeatedly that Grau was guilty of "political piracy" in using the PRC emblem, and that he was a "collaborationist." Varona further described as "traitors to Cuba" any who made "common cause with Grau."<sup>26</sup> Grau had no official position within the Auténtico party, having split with its leadership after 1948, but many Cubans were uncertain about his role.

The Auténticos continued to be blamed for violent acts against the regime. On January 9, 1953, the police arrested Varona and held him for six

20. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 800.

21. "Reply of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona to Dr. Roberto Agramonte," executive committee, PRC(A), Dec. 20, 1952. Varona MSS.

22. Ibid. The anticorruption campaign of Eduardo Chibás, the founder of the Ortodoxos, grew so excessive that it discredited Cuban democracy along with the Auténticos. See, Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro* (New York, 1974), p. 147.

23. "To the nation," printed manifesto, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 7, 1953. Varona MSS.

24. Ibid.

25. Resolution, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 9, 1953. Varona MSS.

26. "Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona," printed leaflet, Feb. 18, 1953. Varona MSS.

hours on charges arising from a so-called Christmas Eve plot against Batista. Upon his release, Varona was warned that he would be held responsible for "future events."<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, the Auténticos planned a peaceful celebration of Martí's hundredth birthday on January 28, 1953. Proclaiming that the political philosophy of Martí was obsessed with "the love of liberty, respect for the sovereignty of the people, and the absolute dignity of the individual," the CEN stated that the Batista government "lacked the moral authority" to honor Martí. The Auténticos appealed to the people to boycott Batista's celebrations and to assemble instead at 6:00 P.M. in the Plaza de Albear, in order to march to Parque Central, where each might place a red flower before the statue of Martí.<sup>28</sup> Speaking there on the 28th, Varona lamented that the "happy" day was "sad," because of the acts of "an ambitious and irresponsible minority."<sup>29</sup>

In February, citing conspiratorial activities, Batista announced another postponement of the elections until June 1954. And then, only senators, representatives, governors, and municipal officials were to be elected. A new Congress would subsequently set the date for the presidential election.<sup>30</sup> The Auténticos interpreted this move as a victory for their abstentionist policy, noting that less than 13 percent of the eligible voters had registered under the new electoral code. Varona stated that the Auténticos would have nothing to do with the "new electoral farce," castigating it as a "vulgar effort" to seduce political leaders by tempting them with a share of the "electoral spoils."<sup>31</sup> Shortly before Batista's announcement, Varona had gone to Mexico to confer with Prío and other exiles, and to collect statements for use in a publication marking the anniversary of the March 10 coup.

In this collection, entitled "One Year of Dictatorship," the Auténticos emphasized the economic consequences of Batista's takeover. At the time, Cuba was experiencing a recession, and the Auténticos charged that misery and hunger accompanied the political crime of Batista's illegal rule. They accused Batista of undoing the gains made by labor under democratic rule, and pointed to the loss of benefits, declining wages, and unemployment. The agricultural sector was even worse, they complained, as a result of Batista's reduction of the size of the *zafra* ("sugar harvest"). According to the Auténticos, the Batista government had converted a Treasury surplus into a deficit, despite the fact that it had increased taxes. Public services were deteriorating and the wages of public employees

27. HAR, 6 (Feb. 1953), 15.

28. Speech, "To the people of Cuba," PRC(A), Jan. 24, 1953. Varona MSS.

29. Varona, "To the Cubans," printed handbill, Jan. 28, 1953. Varona MSS.

30. HAR, 6 (Mar. 1953), 13.

31. Pronouncement, executive committee, PRC(A), Mar. 2, 1953. Varona MSS.

were falling. The Auténticos affirmed that the illegitimate government was incurring an indebtedness and making expenditures without a fixed budget or public accountability, and they warned that the Cuban people would not honor Batista's illicit debts.<sup>32</sup> They urged the formation of a National Civic Front and concluded with the exhortation, "In times as these, inaction, silence, or cowardice is a crime."<sup>33</sup>

There were those who did not need exhorting. On Easter Sunday, April 5, Professor García Bárcena and a group of university students marched to Camp Columbia, the main army base outside Havana, in a vain effort to persuade the troops to rebel against Batista. The government described the act as an attempted coup, arrested García Bárcena and approximately sixty-five others, and imposed a two-year prison term on the professor.<sup>34</sup> The Auténticos charged that the regime distorted the nature of the demonstration in order "to discredit the leaders of the opposition . . . and silence the voices of protest."<sup>35</sup> Varona reiterated that the Auténticos opposed acts of violence, but noted that "they occur when the channels of law are closed."<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime, the Auténticos' call for a united front was producing results. In October 1952, Eduardo Suárez Rivas, head of the Liberal party, judging his party "too friendly" toward Batista, joined the PRC(A),<sup>37</sup> and in April 1953, former Vice-President Pujol and three of his comrades (all former senators) left the Republican party to join the Auténticos. In announcing his decision, Pujol stated that no one had a right to be a "mere spectator" in these times.<sup>38</sup> Near mid-year, leaders of the Ortodoxo party began to come around. After speaking in behalf of a National Civic Front on May 20, the anniversary of the founding of the Cuban republic, Varona flew to Montreal, Canada, for a meeting with Prío and top Ortodoxos to draft a unity statement.

The Montreal Charter, signed June 2, 1953, by principal leaders of the PRC(A) and the Cuban People's party (Ortodoxo) achieved the sought-

32. "One Year of Dictatorship," PRC(A), printed pamphlet, Mar. 10, 1953. Varona MSS.

33. Ibid.

34. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 801; HAH, 6 (May 1953), 16; and 6 (June 1953), 14. Thomas writes that García Bárcena was tortured "vilely."

35. "Concerning the alleged conspiracy of Sunday, April 5," PRC(A), printed pamphlet, Apr. 7, 1953. Varona MSS.

36. Ibid. García Bárcena may not have been as innocent as portrayed. In addition to Havana University, he taught at the War College, which gave him contacts within the military. Suchlicki, *Cuba*, p. 155. See also, Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection, 1952–1959* (New Brunswick, 1974), pp. 16–17.

37. HAH, 5 (Nov. 1952), 16; letter, Varona to Dr. Eduardo Suárez Rivas, Oct. 29, 1952. Varona MSS. Switching party loyalties, however, was nothing new. See, Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, pp. 103–107.

38. "Distinguished leaders join the PRC(A)," printed exchange of letters, May 1953. Varona MSS.



after “patriotic unity.” Some important figures were missing, including Agramonte and Grau, but the endorsement of Prío, Varona, Pujol, Hevia, and Suárez Rivas for the Auténticos, and Ochoa, José Pardo Llada, Isidro Figueroa Pontempo, and José M. Gutiérrez Plana for the Ortodoxos signified a success for the political opposition. The parties pledged cooperation, but maintained separate identities. The leaders agreed upon the following: the need to restore the Constitution of 1940; the incapacity of the Batista government to hold elections; the necessity of organizing a provisional government charged with conducting elections under the Electoral Code of 1943; and the rejection of assassination, gangsterism, and terrorism as methods of political struggle.<sup>39</sup> The responsible tone of this document failed to reflect the imminence of the turbulence that was soon to sweep Cuba.

Fidel Castro’s attack upon the Moncada barracks in Santiago on July 26 led to a general crackdown by the Batista government. Although Castro’s movement was limited in scope, Batista assumed “emergency powers” for forty-five days, under which he suspended civil guarantees, censored the media, and imprisoned opposition leaders. After a total of ninety days, Batista lifted his emergency rule, but left in effect Decree Law 997 on Public Order. Issued on August 6, this law was described then as “one of the most tyrannical decrees for abolishing freedom of expression ever devised in Latin America.”<sup>40</sup>

Tony Varona managed to elude the dictator’s dragnet by going to his hometown of Camagüey. On July 29, defying the censors, he prepared a statement in which he expressed regret over the shedding of blood at Moncada and affirmed that the Auténtico party had had no part in the affair. It occurred, he declared, because of the desperation of youth. The “main culprit” and the “only one” was Fulgencio Batista, because of his treason. Varona explained that this act, as well as others, was the expression of Cuban youth, “fulfilling its patriotic duty.” The only way to avoid such tragedies, he concluded, was through the restoration of “the permanent institutions of the republic.”<sup>41</sup> For three months after Moncada, Varona was careful but not silent. He published two leaflets in which he protested the treatment of political prisoners. He circulated them with the plea, “Do your duty: pass this along.”<sup>42</sup>

39. “The Montreal Charter,” June 2, 1953. Varona MSS.

40. *HAR*, 6 (Sept. 1953), 17. Ruby Hart Phillips, the *New York Times* correspondent in Cuba, described the stifling effect of the law on the press and public commentary. See, R. Hart Phillips, *Cuba: Island of Paradox* (New York, 1959), p. 270.

41. “Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona,” July 29, 1953. Varona MSS. Under the circumstances, this statement took courage.

42. Varona, “Shackled Freedom,” printed handbill, Aug. 10, 1953. Varona MSS; and “Letter to Col. Mendieta from Dr. M. A. de Varona,” printed handbill, Sept. 21, 1953. Varona MSS.

In response to Batista's plans to reschedule the June elections for November 1954, and to expand them to include a presidential contest, Varona sent out another flyer on September 30. In this, he castigated Batista's attempt to blame the postponement on the "painful events" in Oriente and declared that, in view of his aim to impose a unilateral solution, the PRC(A) stood pat with its position of electoral abstention.<sup>43</sup> When emergency rule expired a month later, Varona and the CEN reaffirmed this attitude. Characterizing Batista's new election plans as spurious, the Auténticos announced that they would not participate in elections that did not represent the "true sentiment" of the people, and they emphasized their support of the principle that one may not seek power while exercising power.<sup>44</sup>

By the end of 1953, the regime appeared strong. Decree Law 997 made the political opposition wary. Batista was serious about holding elections, and electioneering activity was lively at the beginning of the new year. The economy was improving, and several United States congressmen visited Havana during the "winter tourist season."<sup>45</sup> Batista's image was enhanced by Prío's problems in the United States over alleged violations of neutrality laws. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to oppose Batista's elections without appearing to be obstructionist, but Varona affirmed that the Cuban people were "alert" and would not be deceived by a "crooked maneuver."<sup>46</sup>

The Auténticos apparently won what Varona described as the "first act of the electoral comedy."<sup>47</sup> Few voters signed up during the registration period in February and March. Grau's failure to inscribe adequate numbers of voters pleased Varona, since it demonstrated who represented the "legitimate doctrinaire and historic values" of the PRC(A). He believed that the people ought now to demand the alternative proposed in the Montreal Charter, which relied upon "the free exercise of the popular will for the restitution of the democratic and institutional order of Cuba."<sup>48</sup>

Tony Varona's comments caused him to be exiled to Miami for a time. In his absence, the second anniversary of the March 10 coup passed without notice, except for a brief demonstration by University of Havana students. Concerned over defeatist attitudes in some sectors, Varona wrote to the editor of *El Mundo* to state that the Auténticos were not discouraged, because to say otherwise "would imply that the Cuban people were resigned to their fate and had given up hope of rescuing their lost free-

43. Varona, "To the people of Cuba," printed handbill, Sept. 30, 1953. Varona MSS.

44. "To the people of Cuba," executive committee, PRC(A), Oct. 30, 1953. Varona MSS.

45. *HAR*, 6 (Dec. 1953), 17, and 7 (Feb. 1954), 17.

46. Varona, "To the people of Cuba," printed handbill, Sept. 30, 1953. Varona MSS.

47. Varona, "Manifesto to the nation," Mar. 6, 1954. Varona MSS.

48. *Ibid.*

doms." He proclaimed that Cubans were not that way.<sup>49</sup> While in Miami, Varona met with Ochoa, the Ortodoxo president, and the two leaders reaffirmed the Montreal agreement, beseeching all in the opposition to form a "great patriotic alliance" for the establishment of an electoral system and provisional government capable of restoring the republic.<sup>50</sup>

In early May, Batista repealed the Law of Public Order and granted amnesty to most persons who had run afoul of it (which enabled Varona and Ochoa to return home, but kept Castro and the Moncada rebels in jail).<sup>51</sup> Batista was displaying a new confidence, as attested by North American journalist Francis McCarthy, who wrote on May 22 that "political peace seemed closer to reality than at any time since Batista seized power."<sup>52</sup>

In July, Batista formally announced his candidacy for the presidency, to which the CEN responded with a new manifesto. In this document the PRC(A) reaffirmed its decision to abstain from the November 1 elections and invited all Cubans to unite against the electoral farce of the dictatorship. It explained that its position derived from a careful analysis of the national scene and it reviewed its previous efforts in support of "patriotic gestures" to find a dignified and peaceful solution. In forceful language, the manifesto outlined the political transgressions and economic plundering by the Batista regime, but displayed a defensive attitude, insisting that its abstentionism was "not capricious."<sup>53</sup>

This defensiveness sprang in large part from the candidacy of Grau, who attacked the abstentionist position and insisted that he gave the Cuban people a choice. Varona pointed out that Grau was mistaken. The only way to oppose Batista, Varona insisted, was to refuse to have anything to do with his elections and "to force him to modify his plans and to open new possibilities for national harmony."<sup>54</sup> To think otherwise played the dictator's game and deceived the Cuban people. He resented Grau's description of abstentionists as revolutionaries. "We are not revolutionaries," Varona proclaimed. "We are abstentionists, because in this way we are serving Cuba, by affirming . . . that the precedent may not be set for a group of military men to gather in Camp Columbia and destroy the political and democratic institutions of the nation."<sup>55</sup>

49. Letter, Varona (Miami) to Carlos Lechuga, *El Mundo* (Havana), Apr. 12, 1954. Varona MSS.

50. Varona and Emilio L. Ochoa, "To the nation," printed joint statement, May 6, 1954. Varona MSS.

51. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 855.

52. *HAR*, 7 (June 1954), 17.

53. Manifesto, "To the nation," PRC(A), July 14, 1954. Varona MSS.

54. "Statements of Dr. Manuel Antonio de Varona," July 24, 1954. Varona MSS.

55. *Ibid.*

Despite these noble words, a few members of the CEN itself resigned and joined Grau's campaign. Chagrined, the Auténticos tried to discredit the former president and shame him into quitting the race. On September 10, for example, the CEN issued a statement denouncing Grau as a "collaborator in the farce" and a "contributor to the great deceit," affirming that he and his followers shared "equal responsibility" with the dictator and his clique for the present Cuban misfortune.<sup>56</sup> These attacks may have had some effect upon Grau during the campaign; he withdrew temporarily on September 24 and definitively on October 30, but the Auténticos could not forget that Batista was the main enemy.

Running a phantom candidacy, the Auténticos sought through an act of passive resistance (voter abstention) to demonstrate that Batista's rule was not viable and that in the interests of peace and honor he ought to resign. They hoped for the cooperation of all Cubans. Appealing to the business community, they asserted that the Cuban peso was endangered because of the loss, as of June 30, 1954, of \$203,233,031 in gold and dollars from the nation's monetary reserve. They blamed this circumstance upon increased military spending and administrative dishonesty, compounded by shrinking private investment and reduced business activity. The last was seen as a direct result "of the interruption of the nation's institutional order."<sup>57</sup>

The Auténticos also made the participation of the army in the Batista regime a campaign issue. They argued that the armed institution ought not risk its reputation and honor in the service of a usurper government, one not chosen by the sovereign will of the people. When Batista delivered a speech as a presidential candidate at Camp Columbia on September 4, Varona and the CEN described the act as "disrespectful" toward the men who wore the uniform of the republic. Batista had violated a fundamental duty by "involving the soldier in political debate."<sup>58</sup> Marking the Grito de Yara (October 10), Varona extolled the heroism of the soldiers of independence, "who dedicated their lives to the struggle against repression," but who sheathed their swords after the battle and submitted to civil authority.<sup>59</sup>

Despite their prolabor record, the Auténticos made no overture to the unions during the 1954 campaign, except to lament "the loss of the principal gains of the working classes."<sup>60</sup> Their erstwhile comrade Eusebio Mujal controlled the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), so long as

56. Pronouncement, executive committee, PRC(A), Sept. 10, 1954. Varona MSS.

57. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Aug. 20, 1954. Varona MSS.

58. Pronouncement, executive committee, PRC(A), Sept. 10, 1954. Varona MSS.

59. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), Oct. 10, 1954. Varona MSS.

60. Script of radio address by Varona, Sept. 26, 1954. Varona MSS.

he did not confront the government, a façade that Batista tolerated in exchange for labor peace.<sup>61</sup> The Auténticos failed to exploit this situation, never exposing Mujal's collaboration. They wound up their campaign on October 30, declaring that Batista would face the judgment of Cuba and history "with two great and indelible sins: the tenth of March and the first of November."<sup>62</sup>

Batista won the election, as expected, but he was embarrassed by Grau San Martín's last-minute withdrawal. Grau was an exasperating politician, courageous and charismatic, but erratic and unreliable, as his conduct during the campaign demonstrated. Still, Batista savored the outcome, setting his inauguration for February 24, 1955, a national holiday marking Cuba's declaration of independence in 1895. He even proclaimed the election of certain Grauista congressional candidates, whom Grau had left stranded on the ballot.<sup>63</sup>

Varona characterized Batista's election as fraudulent, the fruit of a poisonous tree, issuing from the illegal act of March 10, 1952;<sup>64</sup> but he could not ignore its impact. The Grauista congressmen chose to accept their seats and use the opportunity to work for political amnesty and the return of exiles.<sup>65</sup> The Ortodoxos, with the divisive issues of the campaign over, became reconciled, and Ochoa announced that he and his party would no longer abide by the Montreal pact. Varona was disappointed, but restrained, observing that the opposition's "principal duty" was to remain united against the usurper.<sup>66</sup> In February, he protested Batista's inauguration, declaring that the Auténticos would not recognize the validity of any act of the government.<sup>67</sup> By this attitude, Varona explained to the editor of *El Mundo*, the PRC(A) was performing its "historic role" of resisting dictatorship. He wrote that peace could be restored only through "the free and legitimate expression of the national will."<sup>68</sup> Others were trying to make that happen by different means.

Opposition leaders in Congress made headway with the amnesty issue. In a sense, Batista outsmarted himself by trying to create the illusion of legitimacy. In the honeymoon period after the elections, marked by

61. Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, p. 128; Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, pp. 156-157.

62. Statement, "To the nation," executive committee, PRC(A), Oct. 30, 1954. Varona MSS.

63. *HAR*, 8 (Feb. 1955), 21. The *New York Times* editorialized that the election was the "most potentially dangerous" in Cuba's history. See, Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, pp. 274-275. See also, Bonachea and San Martín, *Cuban Insurrection*, pp. 30-31.

64. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 28, 1955. Varona MSS.

65. *HAR*, 8 (Feb. 1955), 21.

66. "Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona," Feb. 5, 1955. Varona MSS.

67. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), Feb. 24, 1955. Varona MSS.

68. Letter, Varona to Lechuga, Mar. 17, 1955. Varona MSS.

relative political calm and bolstered by improved economic conditions, public opinion viewed the demand for amnesty as reasonable.<sup>69</sup> The demand was reinforced by the activities of the “Mambi,”<sup>70</sup> don Cosme de la Torriente. The 83-year-old leader and president of the Society of Friends of the Republic (SAR) had offered his services in the interest of national reconciliation. Yielding, Batista approved an amnesty law in mid-April that permitted political exiles to come home beginning in May. Scores of political prisoners were released at the same time, including Fidel Castro.

These events persuaded the Auténticos to adopt a more conciliatory posture. Without abandoning the noncollaborationist policy, the CEN of the Auténtico party stated on May 24 that the amnesty law “ought to begin a new stage in our political life.”<sup>71</sup> It approved a series of resolutions which encouraged Auténticos in exile to return to Cuba, authorized Varona to convoke a national convention of the party, and expressed a willingness to confer with other parties concerning a “common tactical approach” for the solution of national problems.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, Varona announced plans to convene a National Assembly of the PRC(A) on June 18, 1955, in Havana in order to demonstrate the unity and solidarity of the party and to draft a manifesto to the nation examining Cuba’s existing economic, political, and social conditions.<sup>73</sup> Varona observed that the government could prove the sincerity of its stated desire to begin “a new period of harmony” by not interfering with the event.<sup>74</sup> He did not get to make this test, because an incident occurred that caused the cancellation of the convention and a new hardening of the Auténticos’ position.

In early June, Batista’s security forces arrested Commander Jorge Agostini Villasana, the chief of the secret police under Grau and Prío, who had recently returned from exile in Mexico under the new amnesty law.<sup>75</sup> When his bullet-riddled body was discovered in a Havana street on June 9, the Batista regime claimed that he had been shot attempting to escape and accused certain Auténticos of aiding him and planning acts of terrorism. Varona denounced these claims, affirming that they were being made to cover up a “vile and repugnant crime.” In addition, he announced the suspension of the Auténticos’ national convention.<sup>76</sup>

69. HAR, 8 (May 1955), 163; Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, p. 275.

70. Popular term for an independence leader and founder of the republic.

71. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), May 24, 1955. Varona MSS.

72. Ibid.

73. Announcement, executive committee, PRC(A), June 2, 1955. Varona MSS.

74. Script of radio address by Varona, May 30, 1955. Varona MSS.

75. HAR, 8 (July 1955), 265.

76. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), June 11, 1955. Varona MSS; and Statement by Varona, June 15, 1955. Varona MSS. Domínguez argues that Batista used repression “inconsistently,” which seemed to make matters worse for him than if he had “choked off the opposition altogether.” See, Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, pp. 124–125.

Varona explained that the Auténticos acted not from a lack of spirit or courage, but from a need to confront the national crisis with responsibility and dignity and without demagoguery. It might have been popular to proceed, he conceded, but it was not worth jeopardizing the lives and physical safety of the delegates.<sup>77</sup> He alerted Cubans to the fact that, despite his party's repudiation of terrorism and violence, the dictatorship would continue to make "phony accusations" in order to justify "unwarranted persecutions" and "illegitimate aggressions."<sup>78</sup>

In the midst of this renewed turmoil, on June 29, reports arrived from Miami that Prío might return to Cuba. Taken unawares, the CEN appointed a commission under Varona to go to Miami and confer with the former president.<sup>79</sup> The group was not sure that Prío's return was a good idea, partly out of concern for his safety, and partly because he was tainted by scandal. Only the first of these thoughts could be verbalized.

After exchanging views with the commission, Prío announced his wish to come home, subject to the approval of the PRC(A). He gave as his reasons the success of "the popular mobilization" in bringing about the promulgation of amnesty, and his belief that his presence would strengthen the "active unity" of the people.<sup>80</sup> Varona related that the commission had expressed anxiety over Prío's safety. He explained that the renewed outrages of the Batista regime had "virtually invalidated the recent political amnesty," but that the commission had yielded to Prío's conviction that he could contribute to a happy outcome of the national trauma.<sup>81</sup> On July 15, the CEN approved Prío's decision to return and swore solidarity with him. It informed the nation that the former president was coming home to struggle for the unity of the political opposition.<sup>82</sup> Prío returned on August 11, promising to mobilize the people to such an extent that "the regime would have to yield before the pressure of the entire citizenry."<sup>83</sup>

With Prío back in the country, Varona offered his resignation as president of the PRC(A) and requested Prío to assume the office. "I hand you our battle flag," Varona told Prío, "which through daily perils has become more worthy, strong, and noble, deserving the respect of all."<sup>84</sup>

Prío declined to take the position, and the CEN requested Varona to

77. Letter, Varona to Sergio Carbó (editor, *Prensa Libre*), June 21, 1955. Varona MSS.

78. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), June 27, 1955. Varona MSS.

79. Resolution, executive committee, PRC(A), July 5, 1955. Varona MSS.

80. "Statements of Dr. Carlos Prío Socarrás," July 8, 1955 (Miami). Varona MSS.

81. "Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona," July 8, 1955 (Miami). Varona MSS.

82. Resolution, executive committee, PRC(A), July 15, 1955. Varona MSS.

83. News clipping of Prío press conference, Aug. 13, 1955. Varona MSS; Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, p. 276.

84. Letter, Varona to CEN, Aug. 12, 1955; letter, Varona to Prío, Aug. 12, 1955. Varona MSS.

stay on, giving him an absolute vote of confidence.<sup>85</sup> Although this ritual was probably necessary, the arrangement sought to create the illusion that Prío had no partisan motives. It was an attempt to enhance his role as the last constitutional president and leader of all Cubans.

Prío adopted the tactic of the mass meeting for the purpose of forcing Batista to hold new elections. He requested permission to speak in Havana's Parque Central on October 1 concerning national problems and ways to achieve their "bloodless and honorable solution."<sup>86</sup> Varona endorsed Prío's action and invited participation by the principal opposition figures to attend as a demonstration of nonpartisan unity.<sup>87</sup> Batista declined to let Prío use Parque Central and designated instead a tiny esplanade at the foot of Calle Compostela, alongside the docks in a grubby section of Old Havana. Undaunted, Varona declared, "any place will do for telling the truth."<sup>88</sup> To the delight of the Auténticos, the rally attracted 50,000 people, but leaders of other opposition parties stayed away.<sup>89</sup> In that respect, Prío's return was a failure, and he was eclipsed by the aged Mambi, don Cosme de la Torriente.

Don Cosme had been trying before Prío's return to mediate between the Batista government and the political opposition, in the belief that the November 1954 elections were spurious and that new general elections under free and impartial conditions were needed. Varona welcomed his intervention from the start, assuring him on June 7, 1955, that the PRC(A) was prepared to cooperate in finding a peaceful formula for restoring Cuban freedoms and rights.<sup>90</sup> To that end, and in view of Prío's disappointing performance, the patriarch decided to hold a public meeting in Havana on November 19. Along with most opposition leaders, 100,000 persons attended the rally, "comprising [until then] the largest crowd ever to assemble in Cuba."<sup>91</sup> They supported don Cosme's call for elections in 1956 and a proposal for a "civic dialogue" between representatives of the government and the opposition.

Although Batista met with don Cosme on December 28 and agreed to meet again for the purpose of discussing a civic dialogue, his regime reacted to the pressure with violence, manifested by attacks upon student demonstrations in Santiago and Havana. Varona denounced these violations of the right of peaceful assembly and doubted that the government

85. Resolutions, executive committee, PRC(A), Aug. 17, 1955. Varona MSS.

86. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Sept. 21, 1955. Varona MSS.

87. Statement, Varona, Sept. 27, 1955. Varona MSS.

88. Statement, Varona, Sept. 28, 1955. Varona MSS.

89. *HAR*, 8 (Nov. 1955), 466.

90. Letter, Varona to Col. Cosme de la Torriente, June 7, 1955. Varona MSS; see also, letter, Varona to de la Torriente, July 25, 1955. Varona MSS.

91. *HAR*, 8 (Dec. 1955), 512; Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, p. 167.



was sincerely interested in peaceful dialogue.<sup>92</sup> His suspicions increased at the beginning of 1956, when Cuban politics took a sinister turn.

Rumors circulated about a conspiracy dedicated to the overthrow of Batista that involved high-ranking Cuban army officers in league with the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo.<sup>93</sup> The fact that the report first appeared in the newspaper controlled by Batista henchman Senator (later, security chief) Rolando Masferrer, gave rise to a countercharge that it had been planted to enable Batista to eliminate a group of disaffected officers and a number of opposition politicians in a single stroke, thereby “extricating himself from the blind alley in which Cosme de la Torriente had put him.”<sup>94</sup> Allegedly, Batista planned to murder Prío, García Bárcena, and Ortodoxo leader Pelayo Cuervo Navarro and then blame the crimes on the Trujillista officers.<sup>95</sup> Sensing the possibility of a St. Bartholomew’s Day–type massacre, but also seeing a chance to embarrass the regime, Varona demanded that an investigation be made of these charges and that appropriate action be taken in the event they were confirmed.<sup>96</sup>

This exchange of charge and countercharge indicated that the political opposition was having an effect, although not entirely a favorable one, since it was strengthening the position of the hardliners among Batista’s followers who wanted to clamp down. Nonetheless, when don Cosme urged the Auténticos to meet with representatives of other parties and the government, Varona declared that his appeal had “such patriotic conviction” that the Auténticos, despite their misgivings, would not hesitate to cooperate and do what was necessary to restore Cuban democracy. He warned that the regime ran a grave risk if it were insincere, pointing out that, “the Cuban loves freedom more than any other treasure on earth and will sacrifice everything to achieve it.”<sup>97</sup>

Batista turned out to be posing, though he tried to blame the Auténticos for the failure of the civic dialogue. He celebrated the fourth anniversary of his takeover with an address at Camp Columbia in which he attacked the Auténticos for their past errors and accused them of violence and sub-

92. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), Dec. 2, 1955. Varona MSS; and, manifesto, “To the nation,” executive committee, PRC(A), Dec. 9, 1955. Varona MSS. Batista’s meetings with the SAR had the opposite effect of what he hoped. All they did was emphasize the illegitimacy of his regime. See, Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, pp. 124–125.

93. See, Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, pp. 882–885. Right-wing officers viewed Batista as too soft and admired the firm, no-nonsense rule of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.

94. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 5, 1956; see also, statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Mar. 21, 1956. Varona MSS.

95. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 5, 1956. Varona MSS.

96. Ibid.

97. Letter, Varona to de la Torriente, Feb. 20, 1956. Varona MSS.

version. In response, the PRC(A) observed that Batista spoke exclusively at military installations, and asserted that it would do him no good, because the vast majority of those in uniform could “distinguish between falsehood and truth, dictatorship and democracy, crime and virtue, and oppression and freedom.”<sup>98</sup> The Auténticos stated that they would not be provoked by Batista’s attack, and reiterated their determination to cooperate with don Cosme.<sup>99</sup> In mid-March, Batista revived allegations of a Trujillo plot, this time naming Prío as the Dominican dictator’s co-conspirator. Varona and the CEN treated the charge with contempt, citing the historical position of Prío and the Auténticos against Trujillo and all dictators. Varona went straight to the point: Batista wished to create a “smoke screen” to hide the “true cause” of the breakdown of the civic dialogue. “The patriotic and brilliant effort of don Cosme de la Torriente was frustrated by the governmental posture.”<sup>100</sup>

The collapse of the civic dialogue over Batista’s refusal to consider general elections before 1958 and the rumors of a Prío-Trujillo plot finally brought to the surface the split within the armed forces between professional and political officers that the PRC(A) had been trying to exploit.<sup>101</sup> Colonel Ramón Barquín, the Cuban military attaché in Washington, believing that Batista was bringing dishonor to the armed forces and wishing to restore constitutional authority, planned a military coup for early April. His action was betrayed by another officer on April 3, and Batista moved first, seizing the opportunity to purge the army of all officers whom he did not trust and to justify increased repression against civilian politicians.<sup>102</sup> The Auténticos reacted to these events with disbelief, accusing Batista of fabricating the coup attempt in order to eliminate those officers, non-coms, and enlisted men, “who refuse to collaborate in the infamous designs of the oligarchy.”<sup>103</sup>

The military coups, real and imagined, made the nonviolent solution all the more elusive. On April 24, the Auténticos issued a lengthy statement in which they defended themselves against charges of subversion and insurrectional activity. They reviewed their four-year effort to achieve a peaceful and honorable solution and complained that they were unsuc-

98. “A Manifesto of the PRC (Abstentionist),” printed handbill, Mar. 14, 1956. Varona MSS.

99. Ibid.

100. Varona, “Statements of the PRC(A),” Mar. 21, 1956. Varona MSS.

101. Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, p. 126.

102. See, HAR, 9 (May 1956). 173; and Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 884.

103. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), printed handbill, Apr. 6, 1956. Varona MSS. Farber notes that this purge had the effect of further alienating the armed forces from Cuban society and of rendering them ineffective against the later violent action of Fidel Castro. See, Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, pp. 168–172.

cessful because of the intransigence and brutality of the Batista government. “As long as there was the slightest hope for a harmonious agreement,” the Auténticos maintained, “our party welcomed and participated actively in conciliatory efforts with absolute good faith. However, the recent abominable crimes have inflicted a serious setback upon the chances for a noble and reasonable understanding.”<sup>104</sup> They expressed anger over the treatment of Prío, and accused the regime of harassing and intimidating the former president in order to make him “abandon his civic struggle.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite the Auténticos’ disclaimers, Prío apparently was helping to finance conspiratorial activities. On April 29, Reynol García, described as “an ambitious but unimportant Auténtico,” led about a hundred youths in an unsuccessful assault upon the Goicuría army base in Matanzas.<sup>106</sup> Although Prío insisted that he “would not send boys to certain death,” Batista put him on a plane to Miami, telling him, “either get out or go to jail.”<sup>107</sup> Varona and other CEN members were detained but not exiled, and once a forty-five-day censorship of political news was lifted, they resumed their opposition. Free from the liability of Prío, Varona reasserted his leadership and restored the credibility of the PRC(A)’s nonconspiratorial stance.

When he could speak publicly again, Varona stated that the outbreaks of April were the responsibility of “those who have restricted the exercise of freedom.”<sup>108</sup> He protested the expulsion of Prío and claimed it was done only because “he was leading important centers of the citizenry toward the reconquest of their lost freedoms.”<sup>109</sup> The preceding months had been trying, and Varona concluded with a more moderate tone, saying that the Auténticos did not want the “humiliating defeat” of men or institutions. “We only want the great victory of freedom, which is the single ingredient capable of healing wounds and injuries and of producing the longed-for peace and national harmony.”<sup>110</sup>

Batista responded to the unrest by devising a new deception designed to consolidate his hold on power. On June 30, he announced that he would not be a candidate for president in 1958 and proposed “partial” elections in 1957, for municipal offices, provincial governors, and some congressional seats.<sup>111</sup> This so-called Formula of Vento (named for the

104. Statement, “To the nation,” executive committee, PRC(A), Apr. 24, 1956. Varona MSS.

105. Ibid.

106. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 885; Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, p. 127.

107. Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, p. 282.

108. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), June 15, 1956. Varona MSS.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. *HAR*, 9 (Aug. 1956), 338.

place where it was announced) distressed Varona. He pointed out that the true formula for resolving Cuba's political crisis already existed and was well known. In the last four years, he stated, many Cubans had sacrificed their lives or well-being for the right to elect all their governing officials and, consequently, to accept anything less would be a mockery and dishonorable.<sup>112</sup> Varona wrote to don Cosme on August 23 to reject Batista's plan and present a counterproposal providing for a completely new voter registration under the absolute control of the Society of Friends of the Republic (SAR). Each political party would be represented on the registration boards, followed by general elections under a "normal system of democratic liberties."<sup>113</sup> This formula, Varona told don Cosme, represented "a new and sincere effort" on the part of the PRC(A) to achieve "a lasting and just peace among brothers."<sup>114</sup>

Although the Varona Plan, as the proposal came to be known, represented a tactical switch by the Auténticos, that is, the holding of elections while Batista remained in power, it did not accept elections under his authority. The plan merely acknowledged a *de facto* situation, in order to replace Batista expeditiously under a process overseen by a neutral party. Even so, the plan appeared to be a blunder, for don Cosme believed it would undermine his attempt to achieve an agreement before the convocation of elections. Concerned over de la Torriente's reaction, Varona assured him that the Auténticos remained united with the opposition in demanding general elections with previous guarantees and in rejecting all aspects of the Vento Formula.<sup>115</sup>

Feeling a need to explain their position and to repair the damage to opposition unity, Varona and the CEN published a "Declaration of Principles" on September 23, 1956. They advised youth to be patient, sympathizing with its "natural rebelliousness." They underscored the urgency of the restoration of Cuba's democratic system, so that the sacrifices of the martyrs of Moncada and Goicuría not be repeated. They appealed to the military, in the same spirit, affirming that the majority of the armed forces' personnel were honorable Cubans, who shared the distress and sorrow of all their countrymen. They condemned murderers and torturers in uniform, but denied that they harbored any hostility in general toward the military institution, or that they were motivated by a desire for revenge.<sup>116</sup> Exhorting the press, they urged its members "to cooperate ac-

112. Statements, executive committee, PRC(A), July 9, 1956. Varona MSS.

113. Letter, Varona to de la Torriente, Aug. 23, 1956. Varona MSS.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Letter, Varona to de la Torriente, Sept. 12, 1956. Varona MSS.

116. "Declaration of Principles," executive committee and conference of leaders, PRC(A), Sept. 23, 1956. Varona MSS.

tively in a civic campaign” to restore freedom, the respect for life, and respect for the will of the people.<sup>117</sup> They called upon business and labor to oppose the “ruinous economic policy” of the Batista regime. “Businessmen,” the Auténticos observed, “have learned the lesson that economic freedom cannot exist when political freedom has been lost.”<sup>118</sup>

Despite its moderation, the declaration irritated the Batista government, and Minister of Government Santiago Rey refused permission to the Auténticos to hold party meetings in Santiago de Cuba and Camagüey on October 13 and 14. Varona observed that the right of citizens to meet did not depend upon the “caprice” of the government and, in reference to Rey’s claim that the PRC(A) had a “suspicious posture,” declared that there was nothing suspicious about the party. “We are fighting for the eradication of the evil which is afflicting our country, and we have cooperated sincerely and earnestly with every honest effort for a peaceful solution.”<sup>119</sup> Late in October, Batista’s Council of Ministers approved the Vento Formula and imposed a permanent ban on meetings by nonparticipating parties.

The regime’s crackdown coincided with renewed acts of politically motivated violence. Around October 11, security officers probably murdered former police Captain Arsenio Escalona, who was suspected of anti-government activities.<sup>120</sup> On the 28th, a band of university students ambushed a party of military officers and their wives as they left the Montmartre, a night club–restaurant in Havana.<sup>121</sup> Varona expressed horror over these events and reminded Cubans that the Auténticos had proposed formulas for preventing “warfare among brothers.”<sup>122</sup> Sensing that the influence of the nonviolent leadership was ebbing, he pleaded with the usurper to see his error. If not, Tony Varona admonished, “you will be fully responsible if bloodshed and sorrow continue to grieve the people of Cuba.”<sup>123</sup>

The fortunes of the political opposition declined further with the death of don Cosme de la Torriente on December 8. Although the octogenarian leader had been in failing health for several months, he had provided a rallying point for the rival parties and factions making up the

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid. This appeal probably came too early, because times were good, but, as Domínguez notes, economic conditions may have had some part in Batista’s fall, especially after the economy deteriorated in 1958. See Domínguez, *Order and Revolution*, pp. 120–123.

119. “Statements of Dr. Manuel Antonio de Varona Loredó,” Oct. 17, 1956. Varona MSS.

120. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 889; see also, “Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona Loredó,” Oct. 27, 1956. Varona MSS.

121. *HAR*, 9 (Nov. 1956), 476–477; Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, pp. 283–284.

122. Statement, Varona, Oct. 29, 1956. Varona MSS.

123. “Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona Loredó,” Nov. 7, 1956. Varona MSS.

opposition to Batista. Varona mourned the fallen patriot, noting how he had sacrificed his life in the search for “a decent solution” to the Cuban tragedy.<sup>124</sup> At the time of de la Torriente’s death, the invasion force of Fidel Castro landed in Oriente Province, near Niquero. Although it would be erroneous to say that the torch of leadership passed from the one to the other, upon reflection, it stands out as a symbolic moment of change in the life of Cuba.

Varona seemed to sense the pregnancy of the moment. He was deeply moved by the outbreak of fighting and placed the blame upon the “mad behavior” of the regime. He sympathized with those who had given up hope for an honorable settlement, but felt the urgency to make one more effort for peace. “There is still time,” Varona entreated, to end “this fratricidal struggle,”<sup>125</sup> and he presented a six-point proposal, which, in addition to the usual demands for general elections, political amnesty, and individual guarantees, called for an immediate cease-fire in the Sierra Maestra that would demonstrate “respect for the life and physical integrity of the combatants.”<sup>126</sup> His appeal had no effect. Between December 21 and 26, while Castro’s fate was uncertain, the dictatorship reacted strongly to isolated incidents of terrorist bombings, and carried out reprisals that resulted in the deaths of twenty persons in various parts of Oriente.

In view of the carnage of this so-called Bloody Christmas, members of the Auténtico and Ortodoxo parties petitioned the president of the Supreme Court to put into force the guarantees established in the Constitution of 1940 and to assume control over the affairs of the nation. They condemned terrorism as a crime, but affirmed that it did not justify another crime by the agents of the government.<sup>127</sup> Signing this petition took courage and reflected true desperation; accusations of terrorist and “communist” activity marked opposition leaders for execution by vigilantes and death squads.<sup>128</sup>

This fate befell one of the petitioners, Cuervo Navarro, the president of the Ortodoxos. On March 13, a group of university students, led by student federation president José Antonio Echeverría, stormed the presidential palace in a vain attempt to assassinate Batista. In the shootout, forty-one persons were killed, including thirty-five of the attackers. Finding a document on Echeverría’s body, which named Cuervo as the stu-

124. Varona, “To the people of Cuba,” Dec. 8, 1956. Varona MSS.

125. “Statements of Dr. Manuel A. de Varona Loredó,” Dec. 8, 1956. Varona MSS.

126. *Ibid.*

127. Petition, “To the President of the Supreme Court,” Jan. 7, 1957. Varona MSS.

128. Statement, executive committee, PRC(A), Jan. 14, 1957. Varona MSS. Phillips described the agitated situation at the time and compared it with events in 1933, which she had also witnessed. See, Phillips, *Island of Paradox*, pp. 291–296.

dents' choice for provisional president, the security forces went to his home and shot him in cold blood.<sup>129</sup> Varona wrote to the leadership of the Ortodoxo party (PPC) to deplore the "abominable crime," but doubted that his protest would bring the guilty to justice. For five years, he charged, the tribunals had failed "to contain the excesses" of Batista's "thugs."<sup>130</sup> Varona declared that the dictator's brutality would not break the spirit of the political opposition and he beseeched the Ortodoxos to join with the Auténticos "against the enemies of the Fatherland."<sup>131</sup>

Batista cancelled the partial elections planned for November and suspended guarantees for another forty-five days. Betraying anxiety, he tolerated hearings by a congressional commission seeking to resolve the crisis. On April 4, Dr. Anselmo Alliegro Milá, the president of the Interparliamentary Commission, invited Varona to testify on behalf of the PRC(A). Varona declined because of the lack of guarantees and the "indiscriminate persecution" of citizens by the government. He said that it was inappropriate to talk about general elections until the regime respected "the right of Cubans to live; to live honorably; to live without fear, as is befitting citizens of a free country."<sup>132</sup>

Although Castro began to capture the headlines as the principal opposition leader by the middle of 1957, Tony Varona persisted in the belief that the "noninsurrectional" opposition could find an honorable and just means of recovering Cuban liberty. He and Dr. José R. Andreu, the president of the abstentionist wing of the Democratic party, issued a statement on July 5, in which they denied that the only choices were "either to submit to the continuist designs of the regime or to go to war."<sup>133</sup> Noting the "total failure" of the Interparliamentary Commission's peace effort, they urged all opposition parties, sectors, and groups to join in a "great civic-political front" to bring about "the true national solution."<sup>134</sup> By the end of the month, they had helped to form the United Opposition Front. In a manifesto to the nation, Varona, Grau, Ochoa, Dr. Raúl Lorenzo of the Cuban Social Party, and José Pardo Llada of the Revolutionary Nationalist party expressed their determination to achieve a state of peace and a cli-

129. Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 930. The assault on the Palace is described fully in Bonachea and San Martín, *Cuban Insurrection*, pp. 106–133. These authors feel that the death of Echeverría was a "turning point," leaving Castro as the "sole representative of the insurrection" (p. 130).

130. Letter, Varona to the National Governing Board of the PPC (Ortodoxos), Mar. 22, 1957. Varona MSS.

131. *Ibid.*

132. Letter, Varona to Dr. Anselmo Alliegro Milá, Apr. 8, 1957. Varona MSS.

133. "Statements of Drs. Manuel A. de Varona Laredo, President of the National Executive Committee of the PRC(A), and José R. Andreu, President of the Democratic Party (Abstentionists)," July 5, 1957. Varona MSS.

134. *Ibid.*

mate of public trust. They stated that they “had not rested a minute” since the republic was taken over by the usurper regime and affirmed that the rule of force could not go on indefinitely. Mourning the sacrifices the youth of Cuba had already made, they called upon the people to take heart, asserting that the Constitution of 1940 was “rich” in honorable means for reinstating a regime of guarantees and public liberties. They referred specifically to Article 149, dealing with presidential substitution, which empowered the eldest Supreme Court justice to assume the presidency and convoke general elections in ninety days.<sup>135</sup>

With this manifesto, the Cuban crisis had come full circle. Almost on the first day of Batista’s takeover in March 1952, the opposition leaders had proposed this very solution. With this manifesto, the action of the nonviolent, noncollaborationist opposition in Cuba also ended. Shortly afterward, on September 5, an unsuccessful uprising occurred on the naval base at Cienfuegos. The authorities arrested Varona and accused him of being the “intellectual” leader of the revolt. Through the “unofficial intercession” of several Latin American diplomats, he was permitted to seek asylum in the Mexican Embassy, from whence he went into exile in the United States.<sup>136</sup> For the most part, the noncollaborationist political opposition in Cuba ended with Varona’s departure. Castro’s 26th of July Movement and other insurrectional groups now became the principal opposition to Batista.

The political opposition of the abstentionist Auténticos, 1952–57, was overtaken by the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro, but it occupied a significant place in Cuban history. Primarily, it kept alive the spirit of Cuban democracy and the ideal of the rule of law. Varona and the CEN gave the Batista regime no peace. Throughout its rule, they denied its legitimacy and constantly bore witness to its violations of the basic rights of Cubans. They reminded Cubans of their lost freedoms and extolled their virtues as a people concerned with due process and the dignity of the individual. They fostered the attitude that the Batista regime was abnormal, an aberration that would pass.

In this manner, they helped to establish the expectations of the Cuban people. The criticisms of the Batista regime by Varona dealt with its illegal origin, its interruption of the institutional order, and its violation of the civil rights and political guarantees of citizens. The solution proposed by the Auténticos, along with the Ortodoxos and don Cosme, involved the reestablishment of guarantees, the creation of a neutral governmental

135. “Manifesto of the Opposition Front to the nation,” July 28, 1957. Varona MSS.

136. HAR, 10 (Oct. 1957), 466. Farber connects Varona with the Cienfuegos affair, but Bonachea and San Martín do not mention him in their longer account. See Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, p. 170; and, Bonachea and San Martín, *Cuban Insurrection*, pp. 147–152.



process, and the holding of general elections respectful of popular sovereignty. The clear goal of this opposition to Batista was the restoration of Cuban democracy and freedom. The pronouncements of the Auténticos contained few references to economic and social issues. They accused Batista of plundering the Cuban economy and charged that he ignored or set back the gains of organized labor and the Cuban worker, but they proposed no fundamental change in the economic and social order. The platforms of the individual political parties contained economic and social programs, but the resistance was of necessity nonpartisan and fixed upon the common denominator of Batista's removal. The key concept was restoration, not revolution.

These expectations help to explain the controversy that arose subsequently about the direction of Castro's movement, even the origins of the so-called betrayal theory. Moncada notwithstanding, Castro did not initiate the opposition against Batista. He began an armed insurrection at a time when moderate, political opposition seemed to be stalled after almost five years of effort. It may be argued that his movement represented more than a change in the method of struggle, but that was not immediately clear. His action fit into the context of what had been happening in Cuba and he took advantage of the atmosphere created by the political opposition. Obviously, there came a point where he became the leader of the opposition to Batista, and political leaders were forced to operate within a situation of his making. Up to the time of Batista's fall, the Cuban people expected that Cuba's next permanent government would be established in accordance with the Constitution of 1940.

Finally, the political opposition, particularly Varona and the CEN, embraced the ideal of nonviolence. The position did not stem from a lack of courage, but from the belief that a dignified solution was essential in order to establish respect for the political system and eliminate the feuding and gangsterism that had retarded Cuban democratic development. Might nonviolence have prevailed? There is no clear answer, except to note that five years is not a long time in the history of a people and that history had shown there were limits to the abuse of power in Cuba. The Auténticos and the other groups of the political opposition successfully pinned the label "illegitimate" upon Batista because of the existence of a democratic sentiment. Although fragile, Cuban democracy was real, as demonstrated by the traditional and institutional foundation of the political opposition's stand before the Cuban people.