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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM

AmEmbassy, Habana

TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DESP. NO.

February 7, 1957

DATE

REF

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SUBJECT: Cofiño Replaced by Samalea as President of Electrical Workers Retirement Fund

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The purpose of this despatch is threefold: (1) it provides additional information relative to the labor developments arising out of the replacement of Angel Cofiño Garcia by Oscar Samalea Valdes as President of the Retirement Fund of the Workers of the Electric, Gas and Water Industries; (2) it bears translations of key documents and portions of important statements which appeared in the press, especially the open letters exchanged between Eusebio Mujal Barniol, General Secretary of the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) and Cofiño, member of the CTC Executive Committee and also Secretary General of the National Federation of Workers in Electric, Gas and Water Industries; and (3) it offers a preliminary appraisal of the current rupture within the CTC leadership.

### Samalea Named President of Retirement Fund

On January 18, 1957 President Fulgencio Batista signed Decree No. 174 appointing Oscar Samalea Valdes President of the Board of Directors of the General Retirement and Social Welfare Fund of the Workers of the Electrical, Gas and Water Industries. Decree No. 174, which appeared in the Official Gazette No. 17 of January 24, 1957, named Eduardo Badell Portuondo as Samalea's alternate. The term of office for both appointees is for three years beginning January 19, 1957. (See Appendix 1 for a translation of Decree No. 174.)

Pursuant to Decree 174 Senores Samalea and Badell were sworn in their new positions on January 24th at an official ceremony which took place in the office of the Minister of Labor, and was attended by the Labor Minister as witnesses by high CTC officials.

1/ See page 3 of Embassy Despatch No. 450, Joint Weekly No. 5, dated January 30, 1957.

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On this occasion, the Minister, José Suarez Rivas, is quoted in the press as having said, inter alia, "I hope that Senores Samalea and Badell will continue the exemplary administration and orientation of the destiny of the Retirement Fund accomplished by Senor Cofiño."

Senor Samalea is quoted as having replied that he appreciated the honor done him by President Batista and that he was taking over the presidency without any spirit of revenge and would work untiringly in the administration and orientation of the fund for the benefit of the electrical workers.

Senor Eusebio Mujal, who was present at the ceremony along with several of his colleagues, explained that they were present with him because this was an occasion when "Senor Samalea, who is also a working man, is taking office and the CTC does not intervene in the appointments of the presidents of the Retirement Funds because this power is vested in the President of the Republic who appointed Senor Samalea because he is a man of his confidence".

#### Cofiño's Futile Efforts to Continue as President

Cofiño, for some weeks prior to the final action taken by President Batista, had been quietly lining up support to be renamed for another term of three years as President of the Retirement Fund. This campaign was stepped up early in January, especially after rumors abounded in labor and political circles that he would be replaced. A typical example of this, appearing in the press was a picture of a group of girl members of the Fund thanking Cofiño for all of his fine work. Among other things, the Embassy was told that an "inspired" telegram campaign was also in progress. However, as the deadline for the appointment drew near and Cofiño realized his position was in jeopardy, he initiated a frontal attack on Mujal and certain CTC leaders in the form of an open letter which appeared in the press on January 19, 1957.

In this letter, Cofiño charged, "for sometime, unfortunately, the activities of some members of the Executive Committee of our central union (CTC) in contradiction to the Agreement of Unity signed during the IX National Congress have conspired in an attempt by means which are really not the most advisable to attack our Federation and its leaders. You (Mujal) should be informed that a portion of the CTC offices has become the headquarters for an attack and a laboratory of improper action against our Federation.

Cofiño then claimed that the National Federation of Electric Plants for the past 24 years had been fighting honestly and with full discipline for the well being and felicity of all its membership which constituted one of the "most beautiful chapters of the

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Cuban Labor movement, and all of which have rebounded in rights, profits and opportunities for that sector". He continued "the result of this, in addition to our contribution to the national working classes is that through our unity, discipline and experience we have been able to reach - as not has occurred in the majority of cases -- without the intervention of the authorities nor of our colleagues in the organized labor movement, the solution of our conflicts if the constant struggle for the improvement of our class can be called a conflict.

Cofiño ended by charging that comments made by Mujal have caused "more confusion than a clarification of the relations between the CTC and his Federation".

Mujal answered Cofiño on January 20th in an open letter released to the press. In it Mujal minimized the allegation of Cofiño that there had been a violation of the Unity Agreement. He then complained that he had been attacked by partisans of Cofiño and that Cofiño had never risen to defend him; however, he said that he did not worry about such small details in union matters just as he placed no importance as to what person holds the presidency of the Retirement Fund of Electrical Workers. This, he said, is an opening freely to be filled by the President of the Republic, "over whom the syndicate movement should not exercise any moral pressure."

In answer to the last paragraph of Cofiño's letter (which accuses Mujal of confounding rather than clarifying the relationship between the CTC and the Federation of Electric Plants) to him, Mujal said "there is no confusion in the syndicate because nothing has occurred that can separate the working masses since the workers should not suffer the passions of their leaders." (See appendix 2 for the translation of Mujal's letter.)

#### Cofiño Resigns from the Bureau of Directors of the CTC

The next step in this situation occurred when it was announced in the press that Angel Cofiño had resigned his membership on the Bureau of Directors of the CTC in a letter addressed to Mr. Mujal. In this letter Cofiño again charged Mujal "with a negative policy regarding labor interests" since his designs on collective matters are "unipersonal". He said that he had been warning for some time of the damaging effects of this policy and that the internal functioning of the organizations have met not as provided in the regulations but under the convenience of the "unipersonal" policy of Mr. Mujal.

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Cofiño then cast doubt on the organic unity of the CTC and denied that his resignation could be interrupted as the result of personal matters, claiming that it is due to facts and circumstances involving developments against the electrical federation. He added that the Federation would maintain its militance in the CTC and would continue its work to seek progressive collective improvement for its members and for all labor, but "this conduct does not mean the approval of partisan methods such as inspired by the personal conduct of Mr. Mujal".

It was also announced in the press that several supporters of Mr. Cofiño had also tendered their resignations. Those who resigned were Modesto BARBEITO, Guillermo MESTRE, Manual SIMPSON SMITH and Abelardo IGLESIAS. In regard to these resignations Mujal said "I am surprised at their attitude, having accused me of not defending Cofiño for the presidency of the electrical workers retirement fund when they are fully aware of the fact that this matter is under the jurisdiction of the president of the Republic and CTC has never defended anyone". Mujal then said that the Executive Committee of the CTC would meet on the night of February 1, "to consider -- in accordance with the regulations -- the resignations presented by the leaders who follow the orientation of the general secretary of the Federation of Electric Plants, Senor Angel Cofiño.

#### Outcome of the CTC Executive Meeting

As scheduled and as publicized in the press, the Executive Committee of the CTC held a full meeting at 9 o'clock on February 1, Mujal presided at this meeting, where there was a full dress debate on the issue of whether or not to accept the resignations of 5 members. The session of the Executive was attended by 56 members out of its total membership of 66. Of the ten members who were not present 3 were in the group that had resigned.

16 different Executive members are reported to have participated in the debate. According to the press, Senores BOLANOS, MILCHOTORNA, POWELL, AGUIERRE and ARTIGAS were among those who strongly opposed the arguments for continuing in office those who had presented their resignations.

Gabrielle GASCUE Zubiaga who is a member of the National Federation of Electric Plants defended Cofiño, pointing out that the Federation would continue in the central syndicate "in order to maintain the same syndicate line being carried out by its affiliates". Senor Gascué also raised some issues in respect to the designation of Samalea as the new president of the Retirement Fund of the Electrical Workers.

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Other leaders defended the appointment of Samalea saying that he was a member of the Electrical Workers Union in which connection he had been recognized by the first magistrate of the nation -- General Batista. Further, they pointed out that three years ago General Batista had appointed Cofiño, and on that occasion the CTC and its general secretary Mujal had maintained the same attitude of impartiality and did not intervene in the naming or ratification of that choice.

Before the vote was taken, Mujal said he wanted to make it clear that his intervention in the discussion was only to interpret some of the things that had been said by the various speakers. Mujal explained, "in spite of the fact that the resignations had the character of being irrevocable, I desired that the question be debated, with the responsibility corresponding to these cases, among the representatives of the 33 federations of industries who are members of the CTC."

Mujal then called for motions presented on the resignation of Cofiño, Mestre, Barbeito, Iglesias and Simpson. The first motion was presented by the leader of the Telephone Federation (allegedly Rubiera). This motion was not to accept the resignations and that the situation be given other treatment. Only 5 people voted in favor of it.

MILCHOTARENA, then moved that all of the arguments and charges which had been made in the letters of resignations against the Executive Committee and the Secretary General of the CTC be rejected in full and that it be clarified that there had not been intervention in the naming of Samalea. This motion was approved without a single vote against it.

Nevertheless, a petition that a commission be formed and that those who were resigning withdraw their letters publicly, and if they did not do this within some days they be considered as accepted. This was rejected, getting only 8 favorable votes.

Finally, the resignations of the 5 leaders were accepted by a vote of 44 out of the 56 present.

At the meeting of the Executive on February 1, no substitutes for those resigning were designated; but it has been announced that there will be another meeting of the Executive Committee to be held in the middle part of February. The object of this meeting will be to bring about agreement of the Federations of Industries, and an accord within the sectors representing those who resigned.

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COMMENT.

No single development in the Cuban labor field since the holding of the IX National Congress of the Confederation of Cuban Workers in April, 1956 has created as much stir in the form of discussion, comment and speculation as the displacement of Cofiño by Samalea as President of the Retirement Fund of the Workers of the Electrical, Gas and Water Plants.

This event has brought into the open the deep cleavage that has existed for a very long time between Mujal and Cofiño. In a large sense, it has presented the occasion for a test of strength between these two leaders. In this sense, Mujal has clearly demonstrated his power; and up to the present, he has carried the day.

If Mujal has it in mind further to rebuke Cofiño he may attempt to take from him his international prestige as he has damaged his local position by insisting that someone else be named as the workers' delegate to the ILO Conference. For some time Cofiño has enjoyed this place of pride in leading the Cuban Workers' delegation at Geneva.

Although Cofiño's influence at the top echelon of the CTC has been sharply reduced, he, of course, still retains a formidable but perhaps not invincible position in his own National Federation of Electric Workers. With Samalea now holding the top post in the Retirement Fund, however, a new threat to Cofiño's power has been created. It is easily within the realm of the possible, that Samalea with Mujal's help will attempt to chisel away at Cofiño's job as secretary general of the Federation. Should this be the case even greater harm could be done the unity of the CTC.

In this connection, it is important to note that although five influential members of the CTC Executive had their resignations accepted, none of these resigned members withdrew their Federations from the CTC. Thus, the CTC still retains within its fold 33 National Federations.

The sensitive nature of the fight at the top of the CTC was illustrated in some respect by the decision of Sam Powell, a prominent member of the Sugar Workers, to remain in Habana for the Executive Committee meeting on February 1. He was scheduled to leave for the United States on a leader grant on that date. Instead he came to the Embassy and requested that his departure be postponed until February 4. Powell said that he did not want to be accused of running out on a tough fight and thus "just had to remain" for

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the meeting. Powell is a supporter of Mujal. According to Powell, Mujal was placed in a very unfair position by Cofiño. Powell asserts that Justo LUIS, Mayor of Habana, and not Mujal pressed the case of Samalea with Batista. When Cofiño heard this he went to Mujal for help but was turned down on the basis that the CTC could not pressure Batista on personal appointments. (An attitude that of course is incompatible with reality).

When Mujal refused to "defend" him in his effort to be re-appointed, Cofiño then (1) launched an attack on Mujal and his followers in the CTC and (2) began a furious publicity campaign of his own to build support for his reappointment. Both efforts failed, although the former resulted in splitting the CTC Executive even though Mujal held most of the important cards.

Previous Embassy reports have indicated Mujal's dislike of Cofiño. Undoubtedly this feeling has been reciprocated by Cofiño. The rivalry between the two was submerged at the IX National Congress apparently for the sake of unity, and Mujal who demonstrated his real strength at that Congress did not wish to press his power there. Nor did he want to impose it after the Congress, although he did remark that after the meeting of the ILO regional conference, which was held in Habana in September, "Cofiño would get his".

The opportunity for chastizement thus arose in the form of the appointment for the Presidency of the Retirement Fund. It was made to order for Mujal who could carry on a very "pure" line that the CTC could not intervene in appointments "of trust" directly reserved for the Presidency of the Republic. Although there is no absolute proof, there is hardly an observer who would claim that Mujal did not have influence in this appointment.

For the Ambassador:

*John F. Correll*  
John F. Correll  
Labor Attaché

Enclosures: (2) *att*

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APPENDIX I

MINISTRY OF LABOR  
Decree No. 174

Whereas: There has been placed before this Executive for his consideration, by the Presidency of the General Retirement and Social Welfare Fund of the Workers of the Electrical, Gas and Water Industries, through the medium of the Minister of Labor, a certificate of Resolution No. 861 of 1956, adopted by the Board of Directors of that Fund at its 59th meeting held with the attendance of all of its members on November 15 last, in Section One of which this Executive is asked to designate the persons who are to fill the offices of Titular Director and his Alternate, in representation of the Executive Power and who, as such shall preside over the Board of Directors of said Fund during the three year period commencing on the third Sunday of January 1957 and ending on the third Sunday of January 1960.

Therefore: In use of the powers vested in me by the Constitution of the Republic and specially by the Fourth Transitory Provision of Law-Decree No. 853 of 1953, published in the Official Gazette of May 9th of that year, with the concurrence of the Council of Ministers and on proposal of the Minister of Labor,

I HAVE RESOLVED:

First: To appoint Messrs. Oscar SAMALEA Valdés and Eduardo BADELL Portuondo, Titular Director and Alternate, respectively, in representation of this Executive, to preside over the Board of Directors of the General Retirement and Social Welfare Fund of the Workers of the Electrical, Gas and Water Industries during the three-year term beginning on the third Sunday of January 1957 and ending on the third Sunday of January 1960, both inclusive.

Second: The Minister of Labor is charged with the fulfillment of this Decree which shall take effect on publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic.

Done at the Presidential Palace, in Havana, on this 18th of January 1957.

(Official Gazette No. 17 of January 24, 1957)

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APPENDIX 2

MUJAL ANSWERS COFIÑO

"The Secretary of the CTC believes that the workers should not suffer the consequences of the passion of their leaders. The situation is taut."

The following is the text of Mujal's letter:

Mr. Angel Cofiño Garcia  
General Secretary of the Federation of Electric Plants  
City

Dear Cofiño:

From your letter which I received early yesterday, I am picking out a few paragraphs that need clarification.

First: In my letter there was no reference to or criticism of the Federation of Electric Plants; nor can it be admitted that there are leaders of the Central Union (CTC) who are molested by your success since the history of the majority of the leaders of the CTC goes along with the best that can be found in Cuba and abroad. Nor did I make any reference to your activities in the Electric Retirement Fund.

Second: The agreement on syndical unity of the Ninth Congress may have its defects and perhaps some colleague in a personal manner may have attacked you as well as some of your members; but neither the General Secretary of the CTC nor the Central Union are responsible for that and nothing can be attributed to me as being against that unity. On the contrary, all my actions have been to encourage it and strengthen it, not only failing at times to see but even forgetting unfair accusations, slander and insults, without having the voice of a single electrical leader raised to do justice to the leaders of the CTC. Therefore, I reject in the most fraternal manner possible any blame against the Central Union and its leaders that may be gathered from your letter.

Third: It is not possible to admit that the agreement on syndical unity might be broken or criticized by the appointment of one person or another as President of the Retirement Fund of the Electrical Workers. To insist on this, as you do in your letter, creates confusion; no leader of the CTC - a thing that I have honorably made clear - will bring up the question that the agreement of syndical unity was for these purposes. No, everyone knows this

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in order that sectarianism should not separate us. And to know this is the best guarantee in the CTC as well as in the National Federations of Industries; in other words, so that we might maintain the labor movement aloof from partisan political tempests and storms.

It is not possible that at this time when there are no internal union conflicts for you to make such statements since the appointment of any President of any retirement fund -- an appointment that is placed freely in the hands of the President of the Republic -- cannot be the subject of discussion, because such positions, since they are positions of trust, cannot be sought; and to bring up this question is exercising moral coercion against the Chief Magistrate of the Republic.

Finally: My letter put matters in their proper place inasmuch as nothing has happened in the syndical field which can lead us into confusion. Those that are losing their heads are doing so because God wishes to lose them. I should not close my letter without wishing that you have an open mind on everyone, on myself and on yourself. Let us not waste time in sterile discussions. The workers in general trust their leaders but should not suffer their passions.

Fraternally,

Eusebio Mujal Barnion  
General Secretary of the CTC

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