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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, HABANA

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DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

March 1, 1956

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	3/7	CIA-7, LAB-5, ARMY-4, NAVY-3

SUBJECT: Non-Mujalista Labor Leaders Group to Safeguard Their Positions at Coming CTC Congress and Elections.

Summary: A number of labor leaders, headed by COFINO and RUBIERA, leaders of the Electric Power and Telephone Workers respectively, and Marco A. HIRIGOYEN, a leader of the Priio oppositionist labor faction, have decided on common action in preparation for the CTC National Congress scheduled to be held in April. The Conrados—BECQUER and RODRIGUEZ—recently suspended from their positions in the FNTA as a result of their "rebellion" in the December sugar strike, and Cruz PEREZ, fired from his job as Secretary-General of the CTC Provincial Federation in Camaguey for supporting them, have tried to join the group, Becquer declaring that MUJAL must go and that Cofino should succeed him as CTC Secretary-General. These developments are widely interpreted as presaging a battle for the CTC leadership. The Embassy believes, however, that while Hirigoyen and the Priistas are disposed to fight such a battle, Cofino, Rubiera, and their followers, who bring the greatest organizational strength to this grouping, are interested only in insuring that they retain a certain number of positions in the new leadership to be elected at the CTC congress. Mujal seems to interpret these latest developments similarly.

On the evening of February 16 a group of labor leaders, chiefly from the Electric Power Plant and Telephone Workers' Federations and from the Priista oppositionist labor faction, met at the Electric Power Workers' offices to map out a common strategy for the CTC national congress and its attendant election for new CTC officers and issued a public statement on their views.

It would be well to note that this grouping of labor leaders can scarcely be called new, since, as Washington is informed, Angel COFINO, Secretary-General of the Federation of Electric, Gas, and Water Plant Workers' Federation, Vicente RUBIERA, Secretary-General of the Telephone Workers' Federation, and Marco A. HIRIGOYEN, of the Priista labor faction (the three are also members of the CTC nine-man Bureau of Direction) have been working together more or less loosely in labor matters since at least mid-summer. It should also be noted that the group which met on February 16 and issued its declaration did not include any of the labor leaders,

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all of some importance, who were suspended or fired from their positions with the National Sugar Workers' Federation (FNTA) or with the CTC as a result of their rebellious activities in connection with and following the sugar strike of the end of last year.

The statement issued after the February 16 meeting was signed only by those attending it who were also members of the CTC Executive Committee, and a consideration of who they were (in addition to Cofiño, Rubiera, and Hirigoyen) helps in an understanding of the significance of the meeting and of the statement that issued from it:

Followers of Cofiño:

Guillermo MESTRE, Secretary-General of the Habana Provincial Federation of the Electric Plant Workers.

Abelardo IGLESIAS, Secretary-General of the Habana Construction Workers' Union, the largest in the Construction Workers' Federation. Iglesias is in continual rivalry with the Mujalista leadership of the Federation though not entirely hostile to Mujal himself.

Modesto BARBEITO, Secretary of Organization of the CTC. Though Secretary-General of a small shoeworkers' union, Barbeito also receives a salary from the Cia. Cubana de Electricidad. He is in his CTC job as a Cofiño man.

Buenaventura LOPEZ Lopez, an official of the Electric Power Plant.

Gabriel GASCUE Zubiaga, also an official of the Electric Power Plant Workers.

Followers of Rubiera:

~~Ignacio GONZALEZ Tellechea, Secretary of International Affairs~~

Ignacio GONZALEZ Tellechea, Secretary of International Affairs of the CTC and of the National Maritime Workers' Federation, as well as Secretary-General of a small ship repairman's union. Also, President of ORIT. He holds his CTC post as a Rubiera man. Considering himself sentimentally a Grausista, Tellechea (as he is better known) has refrained from political activity in the last few years, even desisting from going into the Movimiento de la Nación with Rubiera.

Manuel ZORRILLA, Rubiera's right hand man, officer of his federation, and with him active in the MN. Secretary of Economic Policy of the CTC, which he holds as a Rubiera man.

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Carlos RUBIERA, Vicente's Brother and Secretary for Work
of the Telephone Workers' Federation.

Isidro ESTEVEZ Herrera, official of a paper workers'
union and a Rubiera follower.

Priistas:

Cesár LANCIS, Secretary General of the Medical Travelling
Salesmen's Federation, who was in exile with Prío at
the time of the political amnesty.

Mario MENDOZA, an official of a union of workers at an
Habana market, Secretary of Propaganda of the CTC,
and one of Hirigoyen's closest followers.

The declaration these men signed consisted of five points:

- 1) A call to the Telephone Workers to come back to the CTC fold
and for this purpose to consult with the Electric Plant Workers
in accordance with the resolution of their congress under which
they suspended relations with the CTC.
- 2) Calling attention to the fact that labor progress was harmed
by the failure to call union assemblies to choose represent-
atives to labor events (meetings, congresses, etc.)
- 3) A call for unity by all workers in labor matters.
- 4) To promote "an atmosphere of true respect for the rights of
all workers" at union meetings and assemblies and at the
IX CTC Congress, with the elimination of all interventions.
- 5) Proclaiming that these decisions and the task of carrying
them out will be free of political sectarianism and aimed only
at raising the morale of the working people.

The meeting and declaration have been pretty generally interpreted as
meaning that the powerful labor leaders involved are out to overthrow Mujal.
Hirigoyen, in informing the Embassy on the matter, categorically declared that
the object was to form a slate headed by Cofino for Secretary-General of the
CTC. However, after further scouting, the Embassy doubts if such is the
actual intention of Cofino and Rubiera and feels that by this time Hirigoyen
doubts it also.

In the first place, it will be noted that the declaration certainly does
not call for opposition to Mujal, although it does criticize him by implication
since he is identified in the public mind with the interventions and the hand-
picking of union delegates that the declaration wishes to see eliminated and
regards as harmful to the labor movement. In fact, one newspaper headlined

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its report of the meeting and declaration as merely presaging the return of the Telephone Workers to the CTC.

Secondly, Cofiño and Rubiera have not appeared eager to have their new movement joined by Conrado RODRIGUEZ, Conrado BECQUER, Jorge CRUZ Perez, Anibal ALVAREZ and the other labor leaders who were dismissed from their FNTA and CTC positions as sugar strike "rebels."

A day or two after the February 16 meeting, Becquer called on Cofiño and had a long talk with him. Becquer came out proclaiming Cofiño to the press as his choice for new Secretary-General of the CTC and saying that the cry must be "Fuera Mujal de la CTC" (Out of the CTC with Mujal.) But Cofiño nor Rubiera has reciprocated with any gesture of welcome for the Conrados and their fellow martyrs, despite their emphasis on ending the interventions.

Lastly, a well-placed and acute CTC observer gives to the Embassy an explanation that seems to fit all the facts. Cofiño, it runs, has no desire to head the CTC with all its headaches and its round-the-clock, Sunday-to-Saturday calls on its Secretary-General's energies. Cofiño, the source says, gets a salary of \$3,000 a month and has juicy perquisites; and he enjoys considerable power in the CTC and the country. All that Cofiño is after is maintaining his position by getting good jobs for his lieutenants in the CTC, thus keeping them at levers of power and at the same time loyal to himself. Rubiera, he says, is only interested today in political advancement; but to maintain and gain political strength he must maintain his strength in the CTC and thus, like Cofiño, keep his men in the right positions there.

The foregoing explanation seems amply confirmed by Gonzalez Tellechea's explanation of what has been happening, which while expressed in entirely different words fitted the same analysis. Tellechea said that it was not sought to replace Mujal but merely to insure that as the result of the elections there was democratic representation in the CTC leadership. Mujal was in favor of only one candidacy being presented to the CTC congress, but just as when there were elections for a democratic parliament all parties were entitled to representation, so on a single candidacy, Cofiño, Rubiera & Co. thought, there must be representation for the minorities also. This (noble goal) was what the group was seeking to achieve at the CTC Congress.

Immediately after hearing Tellechea's account of the Cofiño-Rubiera intentions, the Embassy's labor officer had the chance to hear Hirigoyen discuss the situation with Tellechea, when the former walked into the latter's office. Hirigoyen had expected the group to hold a meeting the night before, which had not materialized. Tellechea explained that Cofiño had been in the interior and could not attend a meeting in Habana. In answer to a further question from Hirigoyen, he said he did not know when the meeting would take place. Hirigoyen said that he was holding assemblies with his followers every night, working on the common mission. These meetings, it came out, he is able to hold in the Workers' Palace itself. He commented that it was being said that Cofiño did not want to head a slate against Mujal and

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inquired of Tellechea if Rubiera would. When Tellechea evaded the question, he said that Crisol had just come out with an interview from Rubiera in which he said he did not think the IX Congress would actually be held. (This was Crisol for February 29.) Hirigoyen ended by declaring that regardless of what the others did, his people were determined to have an alternate slate to Mujal's and if necessary he would head it himself. (Thus repeating what he told the Embassy some months ago: see Embassy despatch 466 of 12/30/55.)

Later that day Hirigoyen told the labor officer on the phone, in some disgust, that he did not know what Cofiño and Rubiera planned or when the group they and their people had formed with his people would meet again. In any event, he affirmed, as he had told Tellechea he would head a ticket himself if Cofiño and Rubiera were not disposed to oppose Mujal.

As to Mujal's attitude: it has not been possible to speak with him for some time; but it is in his nature to make accommodations with other labor leaders such as have already given them places on the Bureau of Direction and in the secretariats of the CTC: witness the current incumbencies in the Bureau of Direction not only of Cofiño, Rubiera, and Hirigoyen but also of Jose PEREZ Gonzalez, the leader of Workers Bloc of The Presidents' Progresista party and, in the secretariats, of their followers—Mujal, of course, practically single-handed doing all the work.

That his attitude in the present instance is the same as it has been in the past seems borne out by a statement he made on the day following the enunciation of the declaration of February 16. As if understanding either that he was not really faced with a challenge to his position as Secretary-General of the CTC, or that, if so, he would handily placate those behind it, Mujal asserted that the union and federation elections that had taken place had all been democratic and that all interventions that had taken place had been agreed to by the federations (i.e. federation executives) either unanimously or by majority. He then ended: "the fraternal spirit should prevail in our decisions, and so far as I am concerned unity of purpose and of action will always find me disposed to give the most disinterested battle."

It must also be recognized that Cofiño and Rubiera are fully aware of the importance of the CTC Secretary-General being able to work with the government. This Mujal has clearly demonstrated that he can do. It is hard to imagine that Cofiño or Rubiera would want to run the risk of someone else's—above all, in these times, themselves—starting that job afresh.

In this connection it should be remarked that Pérez González and his Workers' Bloc amply demonstrate through their silence that the government is not interested in having Mujal turned out of the CTC leadership.

It should be mentioned that even before the February 16 meeting Cofiño had announced that Acción Sindicalista Independiente (ASI), the group he organized some years ago but which has been practically dead for the last two, would hold a congress on March 24 in preparation for the CTC Congress. Since the February 16 meeting Cofiño seems to have gone right on preparing his

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strength through ASI as though the February 16 grouping were strictly circumstantial. During the week of March 5 Cofiño was in the interior reactivating ASI, and it was notable that he had little, if any, contact with the Conrados or their followers, and made no significant public appearance nor any statement with them.

In brief, Cofiño and Rubiera, the only labor leaders with real organizational and financial strength behind them who are thought of as anti-Mujalista--although Cofiño, at least, might more properly be called non-Mujalista--do not appear disposed to do any more at the forthcoming CTC Congress than maintain their present positions in the Bureau of Direction and in the secretariats. A consideration of the circumstances surrounding their meeting of February 16, despite the presence there of Hirigoyen and Prietas undoubtedly totally opposed to Mujal, reinforces this conclusion.

For the Ambassador:

Vinton Chapin
Counselor of Embassy

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