

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 17, 1959

SUBJECT: Labor Situation in Cuba.

PARTICIPANTS: Professor Robert Alexander, Rutgers University
CMA: Mr. Wieland, Director
RPA: Mr. Stephansky, Labor Adviser

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Professor Alexander was sent by the AFL-CIO to Havana to observe and report on the labor situation. He will be writing a report based on about sixty-eight conversations he had between January 10-16. We took advantage of his participation in the ARA Background Conference to get the following report on his visit.

As of now the July 26 Movement dominates the labor situation. While there are few seasoned national leaders, apparently there is a large number of local labor leaders, many of whom had been in the underground.

On the national level, the seven 26 of July representatives of the Frente Obrero Nacional Unido (FONU) are in fact the top 26 of July labor leaders. Of these, the two most important seem to be David Salvador and "Cabrera" (Cabrera is a nom de guerre - his real name is Octavio Iloit). Alexander feels that "Cabrera", who comes from a railroad union background, is more intelligent and experienced and less intransigent than Salvador. On two important questions, for example, Alexander found "Cabrera" with a better outlook than that of Salvador. On the matter of the CTC's future relations with ORIT, Salvador stated that the CTC would disaffiliate. "Cabrera", on the other hand, stated that the ORIT affiliation should continue. On the matter of permitting older, experienced labor leaders to run again for office in their unions (leaders like Marco Antonio Hirigoyen, Angel Cofiño, Vicente Rubiera, for example) Salvador held firm on the line that only if they had been 26 of July partisans would these older leaders be

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permitted to run for office. This would, of course, rule out the anti-Batista leaders who were aligned with other revolutionary factions. "Cabrera", on the other hand, felt they should be permitted to try to regain their former posts, regardless of their revolutionary-faction adherence. Alexander reported that Cofiño, Rubiera and Hirigoyen, all seasoned anti-Communists, could stand a chance to win back their old unions if given the opportunity.

The time-table for the reorganization of the CTC runs as follows: Right now, FONU groups have taken receivership of all the national unions. Elections will be held very soon in the local sections. These will be followed by elections in the national unions, and finally, elections in the CTC. The reorganization ought to take place within 1-3 months.

As of now, the Communists control the maritime, transport and tobacco workers unions, and have a significant foothold in the textile and hotel and restaurant workers' unions. The Autentico section of the FONU has withdrawn, and will not participate in any national union or local section of FONU where Communists are in control or where they are on the interventor committees. Depending on how this tactic works out, the control of the CTC after reorganization takes place, appears now to shape up with the 26 of July in the leadership, with either Salvador or "Cabrera" as top leader. The Autenticos can be the next most powerful group, then the Communists.

Alexander indicated he was optimistic, despite the obvious difficulties ahead, on the final outcome. He stated that he was more optimistic than our Labor Attaché. He thought it would be advantageous for the AFL-CIO to send a representative - but not Serafino Romualdi, who is not welcome at this time.

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