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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM : AmEmbassy, Habana

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DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

June 5, 1957

REF : Voluntary Labor Report

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25 For Dept. Use Only	ACTION Rep-2 RMR-2 oli* 8 Jo-4 G* 1 6-7	DEPT. N F O OTHER	Cia* - 12 Lab* 5 USIA* 10
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SUBJECT: Labor Chronology re Intervention of the Labor Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants

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There are enclosed ten copies of a "Labor Chronology" which registers the main developments prior to and following the government's intervention of the powerful Labor Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants on April 12, 1957.

The drama of this intervention may well become a classic in Cuban labor history. The importance of the personalities involved, the clash of interests, the national as well as international implications of the Cuban habit and procedure of intervening labor organizations are among some of factors which emphasize the significance of the intervention in the labor field.

Of broader significance, of course, is the fact that the intervention has occurred during a period of great political stress in Cuba. To separate the sheer labor elements from the political aspects of the intervention is a task well nigh impossible.

Readers interested in filling in the details of the events developed in the "chronology" are respectfully referred to the Embassy's various despatches and telegrams sent to the Department in connection with the intervention.

DECLASSIFICATION DATE 9/28/80

PER Hanson OFFICE CDL For the Ambassador:FADRC FOI CASE NO. 7400179 PetrasJohn F. Correll
Labor AttacheEnclosure: As stated
Distribution:

3 copies to the Department of Labor

2 copies to the U.S. ILO Delegation, Geneva

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REPORTER

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--- LAFOR CHRONOLOGY ---

Herebelow is a chronological treatment of the major developments in the conflict that has been present between the leadership of the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) and the Cofiño leadership in the Labor Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants (LFEWGP).

The Chronology begins on January 18, 1957 with the appointment of Oscar Samalea Valdes to the Presidency of the Retirement Fund of the Electric Workers, which was the first open rupture projected on the national scene. The Chronology continues through the intervention of LFEWGP by the Government. And it ends with the departure on May 31, for the ILO Conference in Geneva of Angel Cofiño Garcia, deposed Secretary General of the LFEWGP.

A significant aspect of this inter-trade union conflict resides in the fact that it occurred during a period of acute political tension, thus adding greatly to the complexity and uncertainty of the overall national concern.

1. January 18..... President Batista signed Decree No. 174 naming Oscar SAMALEA Valdes to replace Angel COFIÑO Garcia as President of the General Retirement and Social Welfare Fund of the Workers of the Electric, Gas and Water Industries. The Decree appeared in Official Gazette No. 17 of January 24, 1957; and it provides for a three year term of office.

2. January 19..... Cofiño issued a public letter charging CTC Secretary General Eusebio MUJAL with creating disunity in the Cuban Labor Movement.

3. January 20..... Mujal answered Cofiño also in a public letter accusing him of being incensed because he was not re-appointed as president of the Retirement Fund. Mujal then stated that this office is an "opening freely to be filled by the President of the Republic, over whom the syndicate movement should not exercise moral pressure".

4. January 24..... Samalea was sworn in his new position at a ceremony at the Ministry of Labor, attended by CTC officials. Cofiño, who had held the office for nine years, did not attend.

Cofiño, Modesto BARBEITO, Guillermo MESTRE, Manuel SIMPSON and Abelardo IGLESIAS submitted their resignations from the CTC Executive Committee.

5. January 25..... The Minister of Labor, Dr. José SUAREZ Rivas, called Cofiño and his supporters to tell them that "rumors that he would intervene the Electric Plants Federation were false".

6. January 26..... Mujal publicly announced that the CTC had not asked for intervention.

7. February 1..... The CTC Executive Committee accepted the resignations of Cofiño and four of his followers by a vote of 44 to 10. 56 out of the total 66 members of the Executive Committee were present.

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8. February 14 and 15..... Cofiño issued paid statements in the press indignantly denying that electrical workers were in any way connected with the terroristic activity being carried on to interrupt light services. Cofiño condemned such activities as "criminal acts".

Samalea responded, claiming Cofiño's assertions were "untrue and hypocritical". He said that a bomb had even been placed on his doorstep and Cofiño had made no protest.

9. February 20..... Samalea issued another paid letter in the press, accusing Cofiño "of admitting into the Cuban Electric Company a group of well known gangsters and communists, thus endangering the stability of the Electric Workers' Federation."

10. March 2..... The Ministry of Labor issued a resolution, dated March 4, 1957, requiring prior authorization by the Ministry before "any activities of a labor nature, whatever nature thereof they may be, shall be started."

The effect of this was to cancel all impending trade union elections, one of which was the Electrical Workers scheduled for March 7.

The Minister's Resolution was issued pursuant to the suspension of constitutional guarantees which were extended on March 2, 1957 for another forty-five days.

11. March 7..... It was announced that Ignacio TELLECHEA Gonzalez would head the Cuban Workers' ILO delegation. He replaced Cofiño who had been Cuban Workers' Delegate for 9 years. Cofiño still holds a place on the ILO Governing Board.

12. March 12..... The Minister of Labor announced Decree 538 signed on March 8. This Decree requires all new personnel for public utility companies to be screened for communist sympathies and activities.

13. March 13..... An attack was made on the Presidential Palace to assassinate General Batista. It failed but 40 people were killed in the attack.

14. March 19..... The Minister of Labor issued Resolution 51 to implement Decree 538. Both measures were strongly supported by the CTC; and they were repudiated by the Labor Federations of (1) the Electrical Workers and (2) the Telephone Workers. The two Federations complained that they were not consulted about the new enactments and further, that they had no voice in naming persons to represent the Federations on the Screening Committee.

15. March 24..... Calixto SANCHEZ Whyte, Secretary General of the National Aviation Federation was given safe conduct to the airport after admitting complicity in insurrectionist activities. He was escorted to the airport by Eusebio Mujal and several other labor leaders.

16. March 25..... The CTC named its representatives as well as those from the Federations to serve on the screening committee.

17. March 28..... The National Council of LFEGWP announced its decision to disaffiliate the Federation from the CTC and to ratify this action by a referendum vote. Ostensibly this action stemmed from the CTC's support of Decree 538 and Resolution 51.

18. March 31..... The Minister of Labor cancelled the above action and suspended the referendum, declaring it "null and void and without any legal effect whatsoever".

19. April 4..... The LFEGWP formally opposed Resolution 51 which implements Decree 538.

20. April 7..... The CTC participated in the huge mass rally to congratulate President Batista on his escape from injury during the March 13, attack.

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21. April 12..... The National Council of the CTC, called into extraordinary session, voted to suspend for two years the trade union rights of Cofiño and 17 other leaders of the LFEGWP. Reasons given for suspension included public disobedience to the decisions taken by the CTC directing bureau; lack of discipline with regard to resolutions adopted by majority vote, specifically the decisions of March 25, of the Executive Committee; "indiscipline of the persons hereby suspended in connection with Communists not only as shown by conduct but by opposition to Decree 538 as well as by disobedience to the steps taken in favor of national integration and against race discrimination by the CTC."

The CTC cited articles 15 and 54 of its Constitution and the resolutions of the 9th National Labor Congress as basis for taking disciplinary action against LFEGWP.

Out of 251 persons present at the meeting only one vote was cast against the action; however, the Electric, Telephone, and Bank Federations were represented only by fraternal delegates and they came from anti-Cofiño elements.

22. April 12..... The Minister of Labor issued orders for the intervention of the LFEGWP which included appointment of a "provisional governing board" that was empowered to supervise elections within 90 days.

23. April 13..... Cofiño announced that he had two alternatives: (1) accept, in cowardly fashion, the disintegration of his organization; or (2) resist the "arbitrary" decisions. A sitdown strike ensued. Some arrests were made; but the sitdown continued.

24. April 16..... The CTC Executive Committee voted (1) to extend the intervention to the provincial electric unions; (2) to dismiss the workers' delegates from the Retirement Fund Board; and (3) to hold elections for the representative of retired workers on the Fund's Board.

25. April 17..... Cofiño was arrested and shortly thereafter released. He ordered his followers to desist from their protest and to remain peaceful throughout the Easter holidays. He announced that he would discuss the entire subject on April 22 with the Prime Minister.

April 22..... The Prime Minister stated publicly that he knew nothing whatsoever, except what he had seen in the papers, about Cofiño's appointment with him. No interview was held.

26. April 27 - 29..... At a CTC meeting of all the trade unions of Habana Province, Mujal accused Cofiño and Vicente Rubiera, Secretary General of the Telephone Workers, of developing a terrorist plan "to intimidate the government, the CTC, and the workers of the electrical sector". He also accused Cofiño elements of setting off a bomb at the Center of the syndicate of Santa Clara Province. In turn, Cofiño and Rubiera said Mujal was throttling trade union rights and rising dictatorial methods.

27. April 28..... José AYNAT, CTC candidate defeated Francisco BRETEAN, Cofiño candidate in the election for the representative of workers already retired on the Retirement Board.

29. May 1..... At the CTC "May Day" celebration, with over 2000 workers in attendance, Cofiño was attacked by several speakers and the CTC Executive Committee position was fully endorsed.

30. May 3..... President Batista signed Decree No. 1045. Based on Article 4 of a former Decree (No. 2605 of November 7, 1933), the new decree excludes supervisory and professional personnel of the electric companies from union membership. Approximately 500 employees of the Cuban Electric Company were affected by Decree No. 1045.

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31. May 5 - 11..... Cofiño and Rubiera tried unsuccessfully to get government authorization to hold a meeting. They officially protested when a baseball game they had planned was cancelled by the authorities who had learned that over 10,000 tickets had been given out to workers in the electric plants, telephone company and banks so that they could use their presence at the game for the purpose of a mass demonstration. Cofiño's radio program was also taken off the air by the authorities.

32. May 14..... Cofiño staged a "lightening meeting" in front of one of the offices of the Electric Company to protest the dismissal of one of his followers, Manolo CASTRO, as head of the Workers Welfare Fund. This was followed by a "brazos caídos" (sit-down strike) in the offices and shops of the Electric Company. There were some arrests and some dismissals.

33. May 15..... The Minister of Labor declared that any action, whatever be its nature, that suspended or interrupted public service in the electric company was "illegal." He instructed the company to dismiss anyone engaged in such activity.

34. May 16..... The telephone workers staged a fifteen minute "symbolic" protest strike to show solidarity with LFEGWP. No services were interrupted.

35. May 18..... Cofiño announced that the "brazos caídos" would continue and that it would take the form of a general strike by electric, telephone and bank workers "only when there is no other road to follow".

36. May 20..... The CTC (1) supported the decision of the anti-Cofiño elements in LFEGWP to replace every worker or employee who was not working normally by May 21, and (2) denounced the sitdown as "a strike to provoke a revolution in order to destroy President Batista and the present CTC Executive Committee".

37. May 21..... Originally beginning as a combination sitdown-slowdown, the protest turned into a walkout and extended throughout the Republic. Although the CTC denied it, it was known that President Batista would intervene personally in the dispute. The provisional governing board began to make substitutions for absent workers. There were several arrests announced. Although offices and shops of the electric company were shutdown there was no interruption of electric power. This service was maintained only through the presence of soldiers in the producing plants.

Late afternoon it was announced at the Presidential Palace that Lt. Colonel José Figarola Infante had been named "Military Supervisor" and "personal representative of the Executive" to restore normal operations by whatever means necessary.

38. May 22..... Colonel Figarola took over and announced that workers must return by midnight May 23, or be dismissed. Several hundred persons (about 2000, it is estimated) besieged the provisional governing board to fill the jobs of striking workers.

39. May 23..... There was a strong drift back to work. Cofiño, who was in hiding, ordered the strike to continue. He severely castigated provincial leaders who had decided to have their followers return to work.

40. May 24..... It was estimated that at least 95% of the workers were on the job; however, at the request of Samalea, Colonel Figarola extended his return-to-work ultimatum until May 27.

41. May 27..... Operations were normal. At noon, Cofiño declared the strike a failure and asked everyone who had not done so to return to their jobs. He gave as the reason for the strike failure that many workers could not keep in contact with their leaders and thus had to abandon the protest.

42. May 28..... At 2:10 A.M. the main conduits of the Habana plant of the Cuban Electric Company were blown up by persons as yet unknown. To dynamite the plant, the terrorists tunneled under the consolidated cables from a nearby house. Certain sections of Vedado and most of old Habana were without electric power for more than 48 hours. The explosion, which was one of the most dramatic in Cuban history, prevented the printing of newspapers; closed many shops and business firms; and affected telephone service.

43. May 31..... Cofiño departed for ILO Conference in Geneva. He was escorted to the airport by an official of the Ministry of State and by his lawyer. Prior to boarding the plane, Cofiño said he was leaving the country under the protection of the ILO; and that he would press charges of the tragic Cuban workers' situation before world labor organizations.

Travelling on the same plane to Geneva were two members of the Cuban workers delegation: José PEREZ Gonzalez, and Ignacio TELLECHEA who said: "I assume Cofiño knows the ILO regulations and will not contest the delegation appointed by the CTC Executive Committee".

Later Mujal publicly stated: "It is probable that some people supported by Cuba's enemies will attack Cuba and the CTC during the conference. To meet such possibilities our representatives have documentary proof that the CTC has applied the regulations, statutes, and resolutions of the National Congresses".

Elections in the LFEGWP is are scheduled for late June, under the supervision of the Provisional Governing Board.

Prepared by the Labor Attaché