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PRIORITY

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM

HABANA

671

DESP. NO.

TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON:

April 10, 1957

DATE

Action Assigned to 12PP2R

REF

Action Taken

DEST

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Date Joint Weeks No. 14 for State, Army, Navy and Air Departments
from SANA

Action Office Symbol

(UNCLASSIFIED) TRIBUTES TO BATISTA. Representations from

various economic sectors followed one another to the Presidential Palace during the week ending April 6th. On April 5th alone a group called to repudiate the March 13th attack against the Palace and to express their satisfaction that the assassination attempt had failed. Climax of the week's events was the monster demonstration of April 7th when approximately 150,000 persons -- estimates ran from 100,000 to 300,000 -- from Habana and the interior, some from the easternmost end of the island, gathered in the square before the Palace to pay tribute to BATISTA. The President was accompanied by his wife, his oldest children, and members of the Cabinet. He spoke briefly, as did Vice President Rafael GUAS INCLAN, Labor Leader Eusebio MUJAL, Senator Maria GOMEZ Carbonell, City Councilman Pedro ALOMA and David GRILLO. Police and soldiers were stationed on the surrounding rooftops to guard against trouble and especially against possible sniping at BATISTA but there were no incidents of importance at the Palace. Unidentified persons tried to cause panic by placing 50 caliber bullets inside mattresses in hotels in the Palace area and setting the mattresses on fire, but although there was at least one explosion the police easily controlled the situation.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The visits to the Palace by representatives of the economic sectors were not spontaneous (WEEK 14, April 3, 1957). Another source has confirmed that the persons who called on BATISTA not only were discreetly advised to do so but their names were carefully recorded at the Palace. The rally of April 7th was thoroughly planned and well organized. Large newspaper advertisements appeared urging the people to attend and thousands of dollars were spent on transportation to get the people to and from the Palace. Politicians made boastful statements to the press concerning the numbers of their followers who would gather at the Palace to be counted. There was no apparent pressure on labor, but Cuban Government employees were told to be there -- their names were checked off at gathering points -- and at least one private firm was told to send

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a delegation. Nothing significant was said by the speakers at the rally; the importance of the gathering was mainly psychological. It showed that BATISTA, in spite of opposition charges that the majority of the people are against him and that he is unable to maintain law and order, can still command a terrific turnout. The rally was a demonstration of might and control rather than a vote of confidence, but its very size could not fail to impress the opposition as well as the uncommitted and politically apathetic masses.

(UNCLASSIFIED) JOINT CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE. The Joint Congressional Committee established to study peaceful solutions of Cuba's political problems agreed on its administrative procedures and heard its first witness on April 8th. The witness was Autentico leader and former President Ramon GRAU San Martin who expressed confidence in the outcome of the committee's efforts and stated his group's platform, which includes general elections in November, 1957, restoration of constitutional guarantees, reestablishment of the 1943 electoral code and a political amnesty. Jose PARDO Llada, of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), appeared on April 9th and told the committee that the PNR want establishment of effective guarantees, including a political amnesty, and general elections at the earliest possible date. The Executive Council of the Ortodoxo Party -- formerly headed by the late Pelayo CUERVO Navarro -- has stated it will not appear before the committee. Dr. Manuel DE VARONA and Dr. Jose R. ANDREU, leaders respectively of the unregistered factions of the Autentico and Democratic parties, also informed the committee they would not appear to testify.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The committee is still receiving heavy press coverage and there are almost daily statements of optimism by some and of pessimism by others. Many Government leaders have insisted recently that there can be no question of any amnesty at this time, that the present troubles spring largely from the last amnesty granted by the Government in 1954. The Embassy continues to feel that it is unlikely that a solution acceptable to all will result from the committee's efforts.

(UNCLASSIFIED) ANTI-COMMUNIST CONGRESS POSTPONED. The Anti-Communist Congress scheduled to be held in the Capitol on April 14, and 15, 1957 has been postponed for approximately one month.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. The Embassy understands that the Congress, initially proposed by Senator Rolando MASFERRER, may be postponed indefinitely. Minister of the Interior REY has informed an officer of the Embassy that plans for the Congress will remain in abeyance until the CTC (Cuban Confederation of Labor) decides to sponsor it. The Embassy believes that in view of its many differences with Masferrer the CTC may delay its decision for some time.

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(UNCLASSIFIED) SUGAR. Cuban sugar production through March 31, 1957 was 3,577,937 Spanish long tons of sugar and 159,231,339 gallons of blackstrap molasses. This compared to a production of 3,224,145 Spanish long tons of sugar and 145,268,806 gallons of blackstrap molasses on the same date last year. While production through March 31, has increased 354,000 tons over 1956, it should be remembered that the 1957 crop is, to all intents and purposes, unlimited while the 1956 Cuban sugar crop was restricted to 4,600,000 Spanish long tons. Currently the 42 mills which have stopped grinding report their production to be 60,000 tons under their authorized quotas.

(UNCLASSIFIED) RICE. Although no public announcement has been made the Cuban Minister of Commerce, through April 1, 1957, has authorized additional imports of low-duty rice in the amount of 163,000 bags. Of this amount, approximately 130,000 bags had been shipped. This increase is in addition to the 3,298,500 bags of low-duty rice authorized each rice-quota year, which ends June 30. Sources close to the Embassy advise they expect that a minimum of 265,000 pockets of low-duty rice will be authorized during the current rice-quota year.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

(UNCLASSIFIED). Once again it was Suez and the Middle East that, more than any other single international subject, occupied the attention of Cuban editorialists during the past week.

Both Pueblo and Información commented on Nasser's statement to visiting U.S. editors that both the Suez and Aqaba waterways are in Egyptian territory and that Israel would not be allowed to use the canal. Whether just or unjust, stated Información, Egypt has this sovereign right; but she also has an obligation to the UN, which stopped the attack against her, to strive for a peaceful solution to the Palestine problem. This paper concluded pessimistically that only a magic formula could now solve the complex problem of the Middle East.

Pueblo, in commenting on Nasser's statement, said there should now be no doubt toward whose side Nasser was leaning. As to Nasser's statement that the U.S. was trying to starve the Egyptians while the Soviet Union was trying to help them, Pueblo said that while this was obvious propaganda for Soviet consumption, never before had Nasser so openly showed his pro-Soviet sympathies.

Alerta commented that the Suez and the Middle East are one problem, and for a lasting solution all the conflicts in the area must be considered together. The same pressure that was applied on Israel which resulted in her withdrawal could now be applied to Egypt to get her to resolve fairly the Suez problem, stated this paper.

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Israel's warning that she will not be satisfied until her ships are allowed through the canal was dealt with in a commentary by Excelsior. It is doubtful that such a warning will result in Washington making greater demands on Cairo, felt this paper, as it is a U.S. policy to win over as many Arabic countries as possible.

ARMY

(UNCLASSIFIED) The following change of assignments in the Cuban Army were effected by Decree signed by President Batista on 9 April 1957: Brig. Gen. Martin DIAZ y Tamayo was relieved as Commander of Rural Guard Regiment No. 1 "MACAO", at Santiago de Cuba and appointed new Commander of the 7th Army Regiment "MAXIMO GOMEZ" at La Cabana Fortress in Habana; Brig. Gen. Pedro RODRIGUEZ y Avila was relieved as Adjutant General of the Cuban Army and named new Commander of Rural Guard Regiment No. 1 "MACAO"; Brig. Gen. Luis ROBAINA y Piedra was relieved as Inspector General of the Army and appointed Adjutant General; Colonel Juile SANCHEZ y Gomez was relieved as Commander of 7th Army Regiment "MAXIMO GOMEZ" and designated Commander of Rural Guard Regiment No. 5 "MARTI" in Habana, replacing Colonel Damase SOGO y Hernandez who was relieved as Commander of Rural Guard Regiment No. 5, and assigned to the Adjutant General's office of the Army in Ciudad Militar. (Official Use Only) Note: Cuban Army advises these changes still subject to confirmation.

(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. DIAZ y Tamayo's transfer has been expected since trouble began in Santiago de Cuba on 30 November 1956. His actions on and since that date seemed to please the Santiagueros but not the Army General Staff. RODRIGUEZ y Avila will probably be a ruthless Commander in Oriente and is not expected to do much to endear the BATISTA regime in the hearts of the natives there. The other transfers mentioned are not too important.

NAVY

(UNCLASSIFIED) CHANGES IN KEY POSTS. The Official Gazette of 9 April 1957 published the following personnel transfers: CDR Cesar DOCAMPO Garcia is relieved as Chief of Naval Aviation and is ordered as Chief of the Oriente Naval District with Headquarters in Santiago de Cuba replacing Capt. Mario RUBIO Baro. Capt. RUBIO, in turn, takes over Naval Aviation from Cdr. DOCAMPO. Capt. Roberto COMESANAS Rodriguez is relieved as Chief of the North Naval District with Headquarters in Habana by Capt. Nicolas CARTAYA Gomez who is presently the Cuban Naval Attaché to Mexico. Capt. COMESANAS relieves Capt. Joaquin P. VARELA Canesa as Chief of the South Naval District with Headquarters at Cienfuegos.

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(CONFIDENTIAL) COMMENT. These changes constitute a complete "shake-up" in Naval District Commanders. Capt. COMESANAS was formerly the Chief of the South Naval District in Cienfuegos (March 1952-March 1955). On several occasions he told the Naval Attaché that he much preferred that post to the one in Habana. On 20 March the Naval Attaché had a long conversation with Capt. CARTAYA who was on leave from Mexico City. There was no mention of a transfer although it was ascertained that CARTAYA's family had returned to Cuba with him. There had been rumors of a "swap" between the Chiefs of the North and South Naval Districts. However, the actual change involving these two commands was not a "swap". The transfers of Capt. RUBIO and Cdr. DOCAMPO came as a complete surprise. Capt. RUBIO has been Chief of the Oriente Naval District since October 1953 but it was not considered likely that he would be transferred due to the troubled condition in Oriente. He was the "strong man" who was sent down to take over the Navy Command in Oriente after the attack on Moncada Barracks in 1953. Capt. RUBIO is not a Naval Aviator. CDR. DOCAMPO has been Chief of Naval Aviation for only nine months. He has been very upset since the loss of a Cuban Navy PBY last week. There were rumors that he would be relieved of Naval Aviation for medical reasons. His transfer to command of the Oriente Naval District will most likely result in a promotion to the rank of Captain.

AIR - Negative


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