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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM AMEMBASSY, HABANA  
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

REF

April 10, 1956  
DATEFor Dept.  
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SUBJECT:

Joint Weeka No. 15 for State, Army, Navy and Air  
Departments from SANA.

(UNCLASSIFIED) CONSPIRACY WITHIN ARMY DISCOVERED: ARRESTS AND COURT MARTIAL. It was announced on the evening of April 3 from Camp Columbia that a conspiracy had been discovered within the army and the plotters arrested. (Embassy's Despatch No. 720 of April 6, 1956). Allegedly the latter had been spreading reports, to attract adherents, that BATISTA planned to resign and leave a military junta in his place in order indefinitely to postpone elections. The arrests had been going on that afternoon and evening, but all was perfectly calm in Habana and no special security measures were taken even at Camp Columbia itself, where most arrests apparently were made. It was explicitly stated that no civilians had been involved.

Within 24 hours the names of 12 arrested officers who would have to stand trial were announced, headed by Col. Ramon BARQUIN, Military Attaché in Washington. Others were Lt. Col. Manuel VARELA, Commander of a tank battalion, and three majors, captains, and lieutenants. Later the name of another lieutenant was added. Other officers and some non-commissioned personnel were arrested; of these some were questioned and released, others were dismissed from the army, retired, or induced to resign by the end of the week; some presumably were still being held and investigated. Trial by public court martial began at 8:00 a.m. on April 9, concluding at 1:00 a.m. the next morning. Seven of the accused pleaded guilty to the main charge but not to the "specifications", which included the intent to assassinate President Batista. The revolution was to have started April 5. The prosecution asked for six years' imprisonment, the maximum under the law. Sentence was to be passed on April 10.

(CONFIDENTIAL) Comment. This evidence of unrest among reputable and influential officers of the army is perhaps the most damaging blow the Batista government has sustained since coming to power. Lukewarm public support and the opposition of certain political groups have come to be taken for granted, but now has been added the element of dissension within the army, on whose support it was always assumed the regime could confidently count.

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REPORTER

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Batista's prompt and effective action, however, has preserved his full control of the situation.

(UNCLASSIFIED) POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. The political scene continued relatively quiet, mainly, it is probable, as a result of the interest and expectations aroused by the discovered army plot. During the week politicians close to the President intimated that he would be willing to see the Civic Dialogue resumed. Others, similarly placed, mentioned the possibilities of Batista having talks direct with Dr. Cease DE LA TORRIENTE. On the TV Ante la Prensa program Vice President Guas did not see why opposition leaders might not talk directly with Batista. Queried by the press, GRAU and PRIO responded that they would be glad to do so. Despite the futility of all past efforts to achieve elections through the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, Grau filed with it an appeal for general elections this year.

Raúl CHIBAS, as leader of one branch of the Ortodoxos, charged that the army plot (see above) was a frameup of the government to get decent officers out of its way. From Miami another Ortodoxo leader "Millo" OCHOA announced that he would finally come back to Cuba.

Candido DE LA TORRE, Marco HIRIGOYEN and the others charged with plotting with the help of foreign funds continued in jail, as did also Pelayo CUERVO. On a writ of habeas corpus, the Supreme Court ordered the lower court to continue to hold Cuervo but instructed that it might properly release him if at his next hearing his accusers again failed to appear.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) CUBAN-DOMINICAN RELATIONS AND VISIT OF AMBASSADOR DREIER TO HABANA. The Cuban senate on April 9 passed a resolution similar to that already passed by the House of Representatives authorizing the Executive to break relations with the Dominican Republic, if all other efforts to obtain satisfaction in the dispute with that country failed.

Ambassador John C. DREIER spent the Easter weekend in Habana seeing what he might accomplish, as United States member on the Inter-American Peace Committee, towards settling the dispute. He found both Acting Minister of State GUELL and President Batista adamant against the suggestion that Cuba formally deny the charges issued by General HERMIDA against General TABERNILLA, and then declare the issue closed if the Dominican Republic accepts the denial. The Ambassador was able to satisfy himself, however, that the Cubans are aware of the importance of timing in this entire matter and that they may, when the opportunity presents itself, favorably consider some settlement other than that which they have themselves already proposed.

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(UNCLASSIFIED) NEW ORLEANS SYMPHONY TOUR: LABOR OBSTACLE TO TRAVEL. The New Orleans Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra began its Latin America tour under the President's Fund Program with four highly-successful concerts in Cuba, two in Habana on April 3 and 4 and one each in Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba on April 5 and 6. All concerts were well attended and received excellent reviews. Audiences were so enthusiastic that three and four encores were played each night. A total of 6,500 persons attended the four concerts.

The 87-piece orchestra was stalled at the Habana airport for more than six hours on April 5, the innocent party in a heated dispute between Pan American World Airways and the Compañía Cubana de Aviación over the handling of charter flights within Cuba. PAA argued that the stops within Cuba were non-traffic in character and therefore did not involve the principle of cabotage. The Cuban Government refused to accept this view but, over strong objections by Cía. Cubana, gave PAA a special flight permit because of the cultural nature of the visit, and the interest in it of the United States Government. The airport workers, however, refused to service the two chartered PAA planes and threatened to close entirely the Habana airport if PAA insisted on making the flights within Cuba. As a last minute expedient, Cubana flew the orchestra free of charge to Camaguey, Santiago and on to its next stop at Kingston, Jamaica, where PAA picked up the charter again.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. Cía. Cubana de Aviación apparently inspired the strike by the Federation of Aviation Employees in an effort to maintain a narrow and rigid interpretation of non-traffic stops and of cabotage. PAA on the other hand had sought to use the occasion for establishing a wider interpretation. The Embassy intervened to obtain the flight permit on the special grounds, and intervened again in an effort to keep the orchestra moving. Cía. Cubana's provision of free transportation to end the deadlock came after neither the Cuban government, nor even Cía. Cubana, could influence the workers toward ending the strike.

Army, Navy, Air

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