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CUBAN INTERNAL SITUATION

Background for Dissidence

By the beginning of 1961, the Castro Government was strong enough to move toward extending its control in a variety of ways which it knew would increase popular disaffection and resentment. The regime, having already confiscated most major firms, large farms, and organized a peoples' militia to counter-balance the army, was now ready to further extend its power over the economic, social, and personal life of the individual Cuban.

Security Controls. In January 1961, the creation of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, a block-warden type of informant system, placed practically every Cuban citizen under the watchful eye of a State informer. This was added to an already effective system whereby agents of the G-2 (the secret police) worked with the National Revolutionary Police in every city and town, while, in the rural area, mobile rural police units, cooperating with the G-2 and the militia, covered the countryside. The Cuban security apparatus, under the direction of local Communists and with the guidance of Soviet Bloc intelligence officers, gave evidence of developing into a sophisticated intelligence organization. The creation of an additional, wholly

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self-contained G-2 control, under the direction of a Bloc intelligence officer, represented a further development of a police state apparatus.

Labor. Organized labor, which under Batista had achieved a position of wide political and economic influence, was by mid-1960 under Communist control, and the workers were becoming increasingly restive under the new restrictions and obligations. Employees now worked longer hours for less pay. For example, the sugar workers, who began the harvest in January, 1961, were ordered to work 16 hours a day at 50% reduction in salary. They also served in the militia without pay. They "voluntarily" contributed their leisure time and part of their salary for governmental projects. They were controlled by limitations on job transfers and travel restrictions from city to city.

Youth. The opening in February, 1961, of child nurseries (for ages one to six) and the formation in April, 1961, of a militant Association of Pioneers (for ages seven to thirteen), which added to the youth organizations already in existence, placed virtually every youth in the one-to-twenty-five age category in the hands of a government-controlled youth organization, where they could be indoctrinated with revolutionary zeal for the regime and weaned away from parental and religious influence.

Education. The much-publicized educational program for the year 1961, in which illiterates are to be taught to read and write from Communist-oriented primers, by teachers, many of whom are teen-agers who have spent three to six months in the Sierra Maestra undergoing Communist indoctrination, was presented by the regime as a magnificent step forward and 1961 was officially proclaimed the "Year of Education." The training of such

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teachers began in late 1960 in order to despatch them in April, 1961, to all corners of the island seeking out the illiterates. Many realistic Cubans viewed the movement as a means of subjecting the illiterate peasant, the only remaining uncontrolled and the most individualistic element of the population, to indoctrination and to the informer system. The older, professional teachers became increasingly apprehensive that their positions under the Communist-dominated education system would soon be taken over by these young pro-regime teachers.

Economic. The creation in March, 1960, of an economic czar, Che Guevara, merely served to emphasize the centralized control of the economy. The Urban Reform law of October, 1960, in practice left the State the real owner of all rental property and, in the rural sector, the collectives and peoples' farms were approaching the Soviet pattern.

Other Factors. The intensification of indoctrination through all possible media during work and leisure hours left the average Cuban with virtually no escape from governmental propaganda. The regime's disregard for objective justice and the rule of law, the drum-head execution of young counter-revolutionaries, and the increased virulent attacks on the Catholic church and clergy were further causes of discontent. The economic deterioration which resulted in shortages of such essentials as soaps, fats, salt, eggs, rice, and beans were adding to the general picture of unhappiness.

#### Position of Communist Party in Cuba

A further source of opposition to the regime was the increasing awareness that the Communist Party had in effect taken over Castro's

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revolution and the regime had identified itself with the Sino-Soviet Bloc. Diplomatic relations had been established with every Bloc country except East Germany; economic and trade agreements with the Bloc countries left Cuba economically dependent on the Bloc, and the shipment of Bloc military equipment (estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 tons in the fall of 1960) created further ties. The number of Bloc technical and military advisers and instructors in Cuba was reported to number at least a thousand. Cuba had signed protocols covering cultural-scientific cooperation with almost all the Bloc members, and the traffic between Cuba and the Bloc had reached considerable proportions, with several groups arriving and departing each week. Some hundred of Cuban students had left for Iron Curtain countries, and arrangements were being announced for Bloc professors to replace dismissed or resigned Cuban university professors. Cuban "front" groups (labor, student, youth, women) had established relations with their Bloc counterparts and previous ties of organizations representing these population sectors with Free World movements were dissolved.

#### Locale of Discontent

By February, 1961, several sources had estimated that the percentage of the population now disenchanted with the Castro regime had reached as high as 60%. The middle class, largely urban centered, offered the most nearly solid resistance to the government. It was this class that had brought Castro to power and accordingly was first aware of the dangers of the regime's political course. It was furthermore the most affected by the deteriorating economic conditions. Certain elements of the middle class--students, labor, professional, and the Catholic hierarchy--were the most active opposition.

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By early 1961, the only mass support for the regime came from the lower class, both urban and rural, principally led by those who had already received or hoped to receive some benefits from the government. However, decreased wages and income even in the lower class added to the feeling of dissidence. While the lower class were not to play an active opposition role comparable to that of the middle class, their anti-regime contribution was substantial. For example, the Escambray guerrillas could not have survived as long as they did without the help of an estimated 10,000 peasant sympathizers.

#### Active Resistance

Guerrilla Activity. While there were many evidences of dissidence within Cuba during the early months of 1961, the most dramatic was the continuing guerrilla warfare waged against the regime by several hundred men in the Escambray Mountains. Led by such men as Evilio Duque and Osvaldo Ramirez, former Castro army officers, the guerrillas withstood from early December, 1960, the assault of some 40,000 Castro militiamen. Although there were few pitched battles, the siege tactics of the militia, which cut the guerrilla's supply links with civilian sympathizers resulted in such attrition that organized resistance in that area was virtually ended by mid-March, 1961. The four principal guerrilla leaders were forced to give up the struggle. Two of them, Duque and Ramirez, went into hiding in Habana and two others, Edal Montiel and Joaquin Bembibre, managed to reach the U.S.

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Other guerrilla activity during this period was reported from all areas of Cuba, with the exception of the Isle of Pines. In most instances, the guerrilla bands consisted of small groups, led by former Army officers, who had deserted from garrisons and taken to the hills. The size of the groups varied from fifteen to twenty men up to a reported 800 (the Alfonso Guevara band in Oriente Province).

Regardless of numbers, they were considered to be significant manifestations of discontent, since only desperate men would rebel in the face of overwhelming numerical strength of the Castro militia and in view of the fact that those who rebel on an island have no friendly border to cross when the going becomes difficult. In February, 1961, the following anti-Castro forces were reported from the various provinces:

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|----------------|---|
| Las Villas:    | 3-400 in Escambray under various leaders<br>100 near Corralillo near Benito Campos<br>180 near Yaguajay under Armando de Ortego |
| Camaguey:      | groups of unknown size near Los Negros  |
| Matanzas:      | groups at Cascajal, Pedro Mayabon, and San Jose de los Ramos<br>group of 80 near Jaguey Grande under Pena and Ramon Gonzalez    |
| Pinar del Rio: | 150 in Sierra del Rosario   |
| Oriente:       | 800 under Alfonso Guevara   |
| Habana:        | discussed below   |

These figures, it should be noted, represent the most conservative strength estimates and fall far short of the numbers frequently reported.

Activity in Habana. The chief center of anti-regime dissidence was in the city of Habana, where the leaders of the several resistance organizations maintained their headquarters. These organizations operated

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separately and except for their common hatred for Castro and his henchmen had no agreed program amongst themselves. This did not prevent practical cooperation, however, and the political differences which divided the exile groups in the U.S. lost their sharpness inside Cuba. The most effective internal organizations, as judged by their ability and willingness to carry out operations were the Movimiento Recuperacion de Revolucionario (MRR), the Movimiento Democratico Revolucionario Cristiano (MDC), and the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE). The DRE was actually a branch of the MRR, and the MRR and the MDC in Habana tended to become indistinguishable from each other.

Another resistance element of significance consisted of the members of several unions. The refinery workers, bus workers, and electrical workers in particular, whose leadership had been systematically purged by the regime to make way for men more dedicated to the Communist rule

The 700 to 1,000 active resistance fighters in Habana engaged primarily in acts of sabotage and in the dissemination of propaganda materials. The sabotage, while at times spectacular as in the burning down of the largest department store in the city and the extensive damage to a major television station, was largely of the nuisance variety and had little effect on the regime's key installations. Its counterpart in the countryside was the burning of sugar cane fields. While this was extensive, losses were minimal, since burnt cane can still be processed, and the effect was mostly psychological. Besides sabotage and some random shooting frays, there was a good deal of nuisance bombing, so much so that it came to be considered a nightly occurrence by early April, the peak of such activities.

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Several attempts were made on the major power stations and the water distribution system of Habana was considerably damaged, but these had the effect of only temporary inconvenience to the regime. While none of these sabotage actions were significant in themselves, they were evidences of considerable dissidence with a potential for more meaningful action once supplies of military equipment were made available and more trained agents infiltrated. It might also be pointed out that although many of the top leaders of the internal resistance fell into the hands of Castro's G-2 at the time of the invasion, the organizations were well enough established to provide replacements for those leaders and to carry on.

Opposition organizations A great number of resistance organizations claimed to have a following in Cuba. A compilation, dated October, 1960, revealed the existence of approximately 200 resistance groups, a great many of which were believed to be little more than paper organizations. Of those which were not, the most significant non-Batista organizations were combined in the Frente Revolucionaria Democratica (FRD), which was the chief political coalition until the formation of the Revolutionary Council led by Dr. Miro Cardona. Two organizations which made extensive claims to resistance assets within Cuba deserve special note. One, the Unidad Revolucionaria (UR), appears at this time to have based its claims on the adherence to it of the chief guerrilla leaders of the Escambray. Since those leaders were also claimed by many other organizations, the validity of the UR claim cannot be determined. The second organization, much in the recent news, was Manolo Ray's Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo (MRP), frequently referred to as the group with the best and most widespread

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clandestine underground in Cuba. Whatever the truth may be on that score, the MRP failed to conduct any significant resistance activity, claimed as its own work known to have been performed by others, and passed up opportunities for concerted action. Manolo Ray reportedly once said he would prefer to save whatever assets he had for the struggle for power after Castro.

#### Estimated Resistance Strength

It was estimated in March, 1961, that there were from 2,500 to 3,000 persons in Cuba engaged in active resistance against the Castro regime. It was further estimated that a well-organized, well-armed force, successful in securing a lodgement on Cuban soil, would receive the active support of 25% of the Cuban populace and would be opposed, at the maximum, by no more than 20% of the people. Of the remaining 65%, the majority would adopt an attitude of neutrality until such time as there was a strong indication of which side had the better chance of victory. The figure of 2,500 to 3,000 of active fighters, it was believed, would expand at least ten times that size once the lodgement was successful to which they could rally. The word "lodgement" was used in the military sense as meaning "the occupation and holding of a position in hostile territory."

#### Impact of Invasion Failure

The failure of the invasion was accompanied by mass arrests, the setting-up of checkpoints, curfews, and other controls which had the effect of stifling the resistance almost entirely. Committees for the Defense of the Revolution proliferated the island. At least 50,000 persons--and some reports indicate over 200,000--were herded into prisons and concentration camps. The effect of these measures plus the psychological impact

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of the failure of the invasion forces (which included the cream of the anti-Castro youth) have so demoralized the resistance that it is impossible to estimate its present strength or the time it will take to build up an effective internal force. The blatantly Communist nature of the regime as revealed in its recent announcements and repressive actions have undoubtedly aroused resentment among Cubans who heretofore were either pro-Castro or neutral. The foreign embassies and legations in Habana are bulging with persons who have sought political asylum. A key problem for the resistance in the future will be that of finding reliable anti-Castro leaders willing to remain in Cuba.