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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

EMBASSY, Habana

FROM

DESP. NO.

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

November 10, 1954

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(UNCLASSIFIED) ELECTION RESULTS. For a day or two after the elections on November 1, the Army General Staff maintained an organization for the speedy assembly of returns from the polling places throughout the country. The last bulletin of this organization gave Batista 1,244,813 votes to 181,399 for Grau in 7,896 precincts out of 8,321 (with polling places in eight precincts not having functioned).

The Superior Electoral Tribunal, up to November 8, had released official returns on the voting for president and vice president in only a trifle more than two-thirds of the precincts. These gave 889,497 votes for Batista and 144,287 for Grau. At the same time the Tribunal announced that in 694 of the 1376 precincts in Havana the voting for mayor had been 121,900 for Justo Luis DEL POZO, the coalition candidate, and 24,663 for Nicolás CASTELLANOS, the Auténtico candidate.

(UNCLASSIFIED) GRAU DEFENDS ACTION AND REQUESTS ELECTIONS BE ANNULLED. Grau continued to defend his action in withdrawing from the elections. His position is that he asked for no new guarantees but only for the enforcement of those he demanded from the beginning: return to the owners of all electoral carnets and the immediate count of votes for presidential candidates. The first he claims was nullified by force when the armed forces seized carnets and otherwise intimidated the citizenry. The second he alleges was vitiated when the Auténtico rank and file were prohibited from checking the count at the voting places. He avers that withdrawal was forced on him by his opponents when he was denied postponement of the elections for a "very short time" to permit restoration of the "climate indispensable to elections".

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Under Grau's directions, the Auténtico representative before the Superior Electoral Tribunal submitted a petition calling for the annulment of the elections. The evidence supporting the petition consisted almost entirely of six or seven press reports, including a couple of magazine pictures of polling places where the voters were few; a report of the abduction of an electoral inspector in Oriente, a case in which the imprisonment of the accused military responsible has already been ordered by a civil court; a report of the incident involving two American newspapermen (Weeka No. 44); and a report of a denunciation of fraud in Oriente by a political figure who since denied making any such charge. The report affirmed that the "repetition" of these incidents "in the whole country is notorious". The Tribunal refused to accept the petition, ruling that the charges should be made at the proper time and in the proper court in accordance with the Electoral Code.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. While it may never be known just how favorably or unfavorably the 1954 elections compare for honesty with previous Cuban elections, it can be said that (1) in any case the vote was overwhelmingly for Batista and (2) that the evidence presented by Grau first to justify postponement of elections and then their annulment could readily have found counterparts in previous elections and in itself was flimsy. Evidence suggesting this last is found in Grau's own querulous pronouncement, reported by Avance, that in considering postponement of elections the Superior Electoral Tribunal should not have demanded "absolute and irrefutable proofs" like a criminal court but should have acted as an administrative tribunal "to administer justice in electoral matters". The best commentary on Grau's unconvincing stand is that his followers, if not denouncing it outright as some few did, at least are far from vociferous in upholding it.

(UNCLASSIFIED) WILL AUTÉNTICO CONGRESSMEN ELECT TAKE OFFICE?

The question that has been engrossing political observers since the elections is whether the 18 Auténticos elected to Congress as minority Senators and the few who were elected as members of the House of Representatives will actually take office. Grau at first proclaimed that whoever took office would be expelled from the party and later, presumably in the face of difficulties in expelling members of the party hierarchy, declared that such congressmen would represent only themselves and not the Auténtico party. The consensus is that most of the Auténticos elected will take office. A variety of reasons support this view: not all the Auténtico leaders endorsed Grau's action in withdrawing from elections, taken without the concurrence of the party's ruling body; some "presumably" elected Auténticos have openly expressed opposition to Grau's course; most spent considerable amounts on their campaigns and would be unwilling to see this investment go down the drain; some prominent Auténticos, like Eduardo SUAREZ Rivas, are recent converts to Grau and their personal interests and ambitions might overcome loyalty to Grau and his edicts; and the majority of the Auténticos are

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elected Auténticos are being very reticent about their intentions regarding taking office.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. The Embassy inclines to the belief that most of the Auténticos involved will find one or another good reason to ignore Grau's injunction and will take office. On the face of it such action by several of the most prominent leaders of his party would at least lead to a lessening of Grau's authority in the Auténtico party, if not to undermining his position or causing a decided schism within the party.

(UNCLASSIFIED) OTHER OPPOSITION REACTION TO ELECTION. The abstentionist opposition, represented by Roberto AGRAMONTE of the "fundamentalist" Ortodoxos and "Tony" VARONA in Havana and ex-President PRIO in Miami of the Prío Auténticos, and José PARDO Llada, erstwhile advocate of the "negative vote" for Grau to combat Batista, were unanimous in adopting a "we told you so" attitude. They charged that the elections were the "fraud, farce and hoax" they had always said they would be and incapable of legitimizing Batista's de facto regime. In a Bohemia interview Prío said Batista had a two-fold purpose in proceeding with the elections: to legitimize his government and free himself of the influence of his "accomplices or military allies". The first, added Prío, the "November 1 farce" could not do and the "military allies were indispensable not only to stage this farce thanks to violence and terror but also to maintain the dictator in power". Grau was pictured by all the above as having been forced to come around to their view of the elections but, despite his withdrawal, he did not escape criticism and condemnation for "having played Batista's game" right up to the last moment.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. Anti-Batista elements will exploit to the limit the fact he was practically unopposed by Grau in the elections and will try to demonstrate that there was no popular mandate. There are a few signs that the Prío Auténticos are hoping that Grau will be discredited and will thus afford them an opportunity to regain a position of speaking authoritatively for Auténticismo. Calls for "unity of opposition" are being again heard although it cannot be perceived that the elections have done a great deal ~~to~~ to dissipate the personal and ideological differences that have made such unity impossible since March 10, 1952:

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UNCLASSIFIED) SLOW RETURNS AND CHARGES OF ELECTORAL FRAUD.
The "scrutinizing boards" of the various municipalities are very slow in checking the returns from the precinct voting places. This has resulted in delay in official returns and the best that can be said for any candidate for municipal councilman or federal representative or senator is that on the basis of incomplete and unofficial returns he is "presumably" elected. This delay features in heated charges being made of fraud involving changes of ballots and other irregularities. These charges are coming mostly from Coalition candidates. Prominent among the complainants are Ramón VASCONCELOS, director of Alerta and possibly defeated senatorial candidate in Havana Province, and Rolando MASFERRER, director of Tiempo and "presumably" elected senator from Oriente Province. The latter has virulently attacked Anselmo ALLIEGRO, PAP leader in Oriente Province, for scandalous fraud and promises to air his grievances in the Senate to be convened. The Coalition members are careful in their charges to make it clear that they are referring to the handling of congressional returns, fraud in which is decried as casting reflections on the validity (unquestioned by the complainants) of the returns for president, vice president, provincial governors, and mayors.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. Allowance must be made in considering these charges for the traditional "right to squawk" of unsuccessful aspirants to elective office in Cuba. Nonetheless, such evidence as is available tends to point to fraud in certain areas in connection with the congressional elections, fraud which was undoubtedly facilitated by the widespread refusal of Auténticos to act on precinct boards, thereby removing a deterrent to juggling returns or falsifying ballots.

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(UNCLASSIFIED) BOHEMIA TO BE PRINTED IN MEXICO CITY. Miguel QUEVEDO, owner of Cuba's leading weekly magazine Bohemia, has leased a printing plant in Mexico City to publish all export copies. The Mexico City plant will print Bohemia for the United States, Mexico, Central America and the several South American countries in which the magazine is sold. The Habana plant will print only for Cuba. Bohemia's weekly circulation, constantly increasing, is now up to 280,000 of which some 150,000 copies are exported. Bohemia professes a strictly independent policy. It is strongly pro-Ortodoxo and clearly anti-Batista, however, and not infrequently has anti-United States as well as anti-Communist articles. It is expected that with the impetus of the Mexico City production Bohemia will be able to step up its circulation still further.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. It is not believed that political significance attaches to this move which to all appearances was motivated by considerations of publishing and distribution savings.

(UNCLASSIFIED) LABOR MINISTER'S STRONG STATEMENT ON WORKER DEMANDS. On November 5 Minister of Labor NUNEZ Portuondo issued a statement with reference, he said, to declarations appearing in the papers since the elections aimed at the adoption of measures "which would affect the national economy, hurt the productive classes and (which) disregard the situation through which our economy is passing because of external economic pressures." He charged that with elections coming up in the various unions certain labor leaders were making impracticable demands and asserted he would approve no demagogic measures that would aggravate the country's situation. He appealed to the workers' patriotism to apply restraint in their demands.

(OFFICIAL USE ONLY) Comment. The Minister's statement seemed to be provoked chiefly by a call from one union leader for the passage of a law-decree that would make compulsory the payment of one month's wages or salary as a Christmas bonus this year. While some annoyance with the statement has been expressed to the press by individual union leaders, there has been no official comment on it as yet from the CTC. The question arises whether the Minister's statement presages a stiffer attitude towards labor on the part of the government following the elections. The probability may well be, however, that the Minister was not speaking on a basis of long-term considerations.

(UNCLASSIFIED) RAILWAY SEEKS TO LAY OFF A THOUSAND WORKERS. The Ferrocarriles Consolidados (Consolidated Railroads) issued layoff notices to a thousand employees. The layoffs will have to be effected through the usual legal procedure with the railroad seeking to demonstrate to the Ministry of Labor that it is necessary to restore the company's solvency.

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HABANA (OFFICIAL USE ONLY) ^(Classification) Comment. More than 90 per cent of the company's receipts go to meet its payrolls. Its earlier efforts to cut wages were unsuccessful. A Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) source says he does not think the CTC can oppose these layoffs in view of the notoriously poor financial condition of the company. The Embassy is not yet informed of the attitude of the Railway Workers Brotherhood, which is certain to come under rank-and-file pressure against the layoffs. *

(UNCLASSIFIED) FIRST BOND ISSUE FOR ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN. ~~XX~~ Legal formalities for the issue of the first 100 million pesos worth of bonds to finance the Government's 350-million, four-year "Economic and Social Development Plan," were completed on November 5 with the execution of a public deed of issue at the Presidential Palace. The Plan aims directly at relieving unemployment and increasing national production. This first 100-million-peso issue will be used to refund the outstanding public debt instruments relative to the purchase last year of the United Railways and to the ports-improvement program, to continue the ports program, to overhaul the public and armed forces telecommunications systems, and for other as yet unspecified projects.

(UNCLASSIFIED) U. S. ELECTIONS. Habana newspapers uniformly hailed the United States elections as a splendid example of orderly, democratic electoral process--a model of political maturity--and viewed the results as auguring well for Latin America, especially in the economic field. Most writers saw in the elections the promise of abandonment of what they termed the protectionist attitudes of the Republicans and a return to the spirit of the Good Neighbor Policy, with more liberal economic policies in relations with Latin America. Diario de la Marina proclaimed the Democratic victory as cause for optimism in Cuba and new hope for favorable sugar legislation, and observed that the GOP was showing signs of returning to "economic aggression against friendly countries." The paper recalled that Cuba was more prosperous and enjoyed a more reciprocal understanding of mutual basic problems under the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. El Mundo said that the results reflected the decline of the GOP and hoped the Democrats would now take a fresh approach to the Cuban sugar quota. Diario Nacional said the Eisenhower administration now must have a new orientation toward a more liberal domestic and foreign policy, and the first evidence of this change may be evident at the Rio economic conference. Excelsior warmly welcomed the results, since "the Republican Congress never viewed Cuba's problems in the proper perspective."

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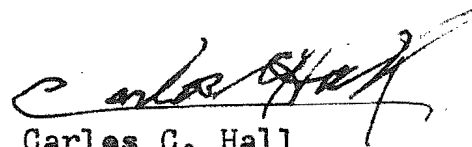
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Excelsior said that the GOP has worked against the best interests of Cuba every time it has been in power. More cautiously, Alerta hoped that the Democratic gains would cause a change in United States foreign policy but said that the results were too close to indicate a definite repudiation of the Eisenhower administration. Prensa Libre, Tiempo, and Alerta all predicted that the elections foreshadowed a Democratic victory in the 1956 presidential race.

Army, Navy, Air

Negative

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