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Verna

17 March 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with Carlos PRIO Secorras, 16 March 1961

1. This meeting came about as a result of contacts made on behalf of PRIO with Representative Harold Cooley by one Herbert C. Hathorn, a Washington lawyer. The request had been made for PRIO to see the DCI but it was ultimately decided that PRIO would talk with [redacted] instead. Arrangements for the meeting were made by [redacted] and it took place in the Marriott Hotel. At my request I met with PRIO alone.

2. PRIO began the discussion in the manner of Cuban politicians with a long recitation of his political history given for the purpose of establishing him as a champion of democracy, opponent of dictatorship, and great patriot. In consideration of the fact that PRIO is generally regarded as one of the worst "malverandores" in Cuban history, it is a wonder his tongue didn't turn black as he spoke. Moving more to specifics, he expressed his concern over the manner in which Cuban exile affairs are being handled. He said he was particularly worried that the military forces a) are too small and b) the ignorance of the Cuban leaders of the military aspects was most demoralizing. He then at great length referred to the inadequacies of the principal political figures who are in control of exile affairs. While he spoke rather well of most of them on a personal basis, he challenged such people as YARONA on the basis of his lack of popularity and RAY on the basis of his inexperience and radical views. PRIO repeated several times his opinion that there are only two men who enjoy a wide popular following in Cuba. These people are Fidel CASTRO and PRIO Secorras. When this statement was challenged, he said that while others exiled such as RAY for example could point to sizeable resistance organizations which he could not match since he was not involved in organized resistance, he, PRIO, is a national figure of great reputation who enjoys the confidence and respect of the whole Cuban people. He said that while the Autentico Party is no longer a living, going organization, the spirit of the Party remains in Cuba and its many thousands of former members are still loyal to him.

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3. PRIO said that he was not here to ask anything of the United States Government, but judging from the trend of his statements he clearly was here to promote himself. On the other hand it seems to me entirely possible that PRIO himself did not ask for this interview and that this may have been Mr. Hathorn's idea which he sold to Mr. Cooley.

4. While the meeting was long and PRIO spoke a great deal, his opinions, observations, and information so exactly followed the pattern of Cuban political harangues against U. S. policy which has often been reported, there is little purpose in reporting them here. For the most part I maintained silence and did not indicate great knowledge of any of the matters about which PRIO was speaking. I mentioned several times to him that my only purpose in being there was to listen to what he had to say, and accepted with thanks the information he provided. I think PRIO, although realizing that his audience was at a lower level than he had hoped for, probably will not press further for contacts with CIA. This, however, may not be true of his American sponsors and it is anticipated that they will request that the DCI or other U. S. Government officials receive PRIO.

5. I suggest that we firmly hold the line against further CIA contact with PRIO, and, to the extent we are able, dissuade other Government Agencies from seeing him. I think it can be safely said that PRIO is a widely discredited Cuban politician, who represents much that was reprehensible in former Cuban Governments and is a ghost of a dead era in Cuban politics. As we know, people like PRIO, who gain access to high U. S. Government officials, frequently are guilty of misrepresentation of those contacts for political advantage. To give PRIO at this particular time any peg on which he could lay claim to being well received by the U. S. Government which might in important circles be misconstrued as some form of U. S. support, could be extremely damaging.

B. E. Reichhardt
AC/WH/4/OPS

Orig - C/WH/4; C/WH/4/PA; C/WH/4/PROP; C/WH/4/P&PUB.
1 - 261 PRIO Socorro, Carlos
1 - WH/4/BA/MU