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for Teichman briefing

V. MONTECRISTI GROUP
(Agrupacion Montecristi)

A. General

The Agrupacion Montecristi is a small group composed of wealthy Cuban professional and businessmen, predominantly lawyers and economists. Established about 1952 shortly after Batista's coup d'etat, it is one of the oldest of the anti-Batista groups and was involved in the April 1956 abortive Army revolt led by Colonel Ramon Barquin.

On 20 July 1958, the agrupacion Montecristi signed the Caracas Unity Pact (the unification agreement signed by representatives of all the groups in opposition to Batista), and formed a part of the Civic Revolutionary Front (Frente Civico Revolucionario - FCR). During the Batista regime, it served as a support mechanism for revolutionary activity inside Cuba. Its main functions as a support mechanism were to collect funds to finance the revolution and to provide economic and political guidance to the FRC. About one million pesos (one million US dollars) were collected to support the fight against Batista. Because of the economic, professional, and social position which the group represents in Cuban society, it exerted considerable influence on the political and economic decisions of the FCR. It also sent military observers to the Sierra Maestra and to the Sierra del Escambray during the fighting.

In 1957, Justo Carrillo Hernandez became the group's representative in Miami where he cooperated with the 26 of July Movement under the terms of the Caracas Pact. In late 1958, the group, while still cooperating with the 26 of July Movement, began planning independent military activity against Batista in conjunction with the military group headed by Barquin, then imprisoned on the Isle of Pines as a result of his participation in the abortive coup of 1956.

In January 1959, Barquin, released from prison by the revolutionary forces, assumed temporary command of the Cuban Armed Forces. He was replaced in this post by Fidel Castro and subsequently by Raul Castro Rus, and was relegated to unimportant military duties, probably because of the 26 of July Movement's fear of his independence and military following.

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C. Activities Designed to Counter Castro Policies

Since Castro's assumption of power in Cuba, the Montecristi group has followed a policy of participating in the government for the purpose of exercising a restraining influence on Castro. Even before the fall of Batista, the group did not think that Castro and his radical ideas were the solution to Cuba's problems. But any plans to sabotage Castro's program, the group felt, would serve no useful purpose and would only make a bad situation worse. So it was decided instead to attempt to influence government policies and to serve as a brake on some of the more radical policies of the Castro government. Although Carrillo criticized Castro's methods in June 1959, he did not consider it feasible at that time nor was the group prepared openly to oppose Castro.

The Montecristi group became alarmed in August at the situation, particularly with regard to Cuba's present economic problems and the growth of Communism. By October the group abandoned hope it could exercise a moderating influence on Castro and reportedly began a clandestine resistance movement, while its members in the government carefully maintained an appearance of complete loyalty to Castro.

Resistance plans included the following:

1. Col. Barquin's acceptance of leadership of resistance movement.
2. Anti-Communist propaganda campaign from outside Cuba.
3. Withdrawal of Montecristi members from government at opportune time.
4. Ultimately, a coup or revolt by anti-Communist sectors of armed forces.

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In 1939 Marquez Sterling was elected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention from Sabana Province. Following Dr. Grau San Martin's withdrawal from the presidency of the Convention, Marquez Sterling was elected to fill the position. Thus he presided over the drafting of the Constitution of 1940 which is in force today.

When Batista assumed the Presidency in 1940, he appointed Marquez Sterling Minister of Labor. In 1943 he was designated Minister of Education but resigned within twenty days due to what he describes as his inability to obtain approval of his program. He then withdrew from active politics until joining with Eduardo Chibas in the formation of the Ortodoxo Party.

Beyond the statement of the FPL party program the Embassy is not familiar with the political views of Marquez Sterling. A biographic report dated January 1940 indicates that he holds rightist ideas and is friendly toward the United States. Files for the period 1945 to the present show that his name has been associated with several communist or communist front activities. The FPL party platform dated August 21, 1957 may be described as moderately liberal. It denounces communism, together with nazism, fascism and other totalitarian doctrines, and points to the need for strengthening diplomatic ties with the United States, as well as the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

Marquez Sterling is a tall, thin, and distinguished looking gentleman. He is described as a very intelligent, cultured and well-read person. He reads English well, but claims he has difficulty in speaking it. He is married to Silvia Dominguez and has two children. His religious affiliation is not known.

He claims he does not drink or smoke. The Embassy's biographic file indicates that he has suffered from tuberculosis. Following Castro's victory, he went into exile.

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C. Assessment of Current Strength and Influence

Sanchez describes the Triple A as a civic association to be converted into a political party as soon as the constitutional provision for this type of organization is put into effect. His group is small, well-organized, but has little mass following. It does not represent a really important or significant political force. Some reports have indicated the possibility that he may return to the Autentico Party. Sanchez, however, claims he has plans to increase the scope and strength of the Triple A by incorporating other groups into his organization.

According to Sanchez, the Triple A currently is expanding throughout the country and is getting recruits from the old autenticos, from people who first started political life in the 26 of July, some few from the Ortodoxos, and also from the ranks of those who are completely new to political activity. His group has not attracted the support of former followers of Batista who joined the 26 of July in considerable numbers. These he describes as people who had no positions of public responsibility under Batista, but because they essentially favored a strong-man government, they supported Batista and now support Castro for the same reason.

According to Elier Rodriguez Amaro, Assistant Publicity Director, and Sr. Gonzalez, Secretary of Acts, the Triple A has been extending its activities throughout the island and has established local groups in towns and cities in most of the provinces. It has also established a labor commission and claims some influence in the labor movement, particularly in the construction and gastronomic trade union federations. Sanchez emphasizes, however, that as long as the Castro government remains in power, no political group which is not with the government can win a majority in the labor movement.

Although the Triple A has little mass following, it possesses a cadre of intellectuals and has the capability of providing a small opposition. The group has made efforts to organize and extend its activities, has published a few pamphlets to date, and has requested US assistance in developing its opposition capability.

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BARQUIN Lopez, Ramon Col.

Col. Ramon Barquin Lopez was born in Las Villas province, Cuba, on 12 May 1914. He graduated from the Cuban Military Academy in 1940. He attended the U. S. Army Strategic-Intelligence School in 1943. In 1945 he served as technical advisor to the Cuban delegation to the Chapultapee Conference and in 1946 was named director of the Superior War College of the Cuban Army. In 1948 he became Chief of the Intelligence Section of the Army General Staff. In 1949 he was assigned to the Inter-American Defense Board in Washington. He subsequently became Cuban Military Attache in Washington and served in this position until April 1956 when he was arrested by the Batista government as the leader of a military plot and sentenced to six years imprisonment. In January 1959 Barquin, released from prison by the revolutionary forces, assumed temporary command of the Cuban Armed Forces. He was replaced in this post by Fidel and subsequently by Raul Castro Ruz, and was relegated to unimportant military duties, probably because of the 26th of July Movement's fear of his independence and military following. In May 1959 he was virtually exiled by appointment as roving ambassador in Europe, based in France. Because of his connections with the Montecristi group, his popularity, and influence with the military, it is believed that should the Montecristi group enter the political arena, Barquin would play an important and influential role.