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9 January 1961

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT : Meeting with Dr. Manuel "Manolo" RAY

1. Prior to departing from Washington on 1 January 1961, I was instructed by Tracy Barnes to contact Dr. RAY in Miami. I was instructed to assure RAY:
 - A. That "we" personally hold him in high regard and that while "we" are not backing any individual or group in the political sense, we do have sympathy with his program and his aims.
 - B. That "we" are prepared to render him whatever material assistance he needs and can feasibly use. That while the mechanism of the Frente would have to be used for the delivery of such materials, since no other mechanism for this purpose presently exists, this did not mean that Dr. RAY need be beholden to the Frente.
 - C. That we understood he is planning to return to Cuba. We feel that this would be a wise move, and consequently urge him to do so. In this connection we are prepared to offer him a communicator and other similar assistance so that he can maintain contact with his people.
2. I had planned to see RAY on his return from Puerto Rico on the afternoon of 3 January 1961, but the imminency of a break of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba compelled me to return to Havana on the morning of 3 January 1961. Consequently, my meeting with RAY was postponed until last evening when an appointment was made through WISSINGER to meet with him at the latter's apartment.
3. Our meeting lasted approximately three hours - roughly from 7 to 10 p.m. We covered a wide range of subjects, the highlights of which I shall try to cover in succeeding paragraphs.

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4. HIS TRIP TO SAN JUAN. He made only passing references to his trip to Puerto Rico. He mentioned that he had a very fine talk with Gov. UNOZ Marin for whom he expressed great admiration. Several times during the evening's session he indicated that he would like to see the future Cuba follow the path of Puerto Rico and West Germany in its economic development. He also said that he had conferred with ex-President of Costa Rica, Dr. Jose FIGUERAS, whom he found very preoccupied with respect to future developments in Latin America; the influence which CASTRO still exerts on the minds of great numbers of people. RAY commented that while almost all of the government now see CASTRO for what he is, a cynical dictator, there are many, many people who still view him as a popular leader who is trying to help his people. Much more in the propaganda line is necessary he said to present CASTRO to the people in a truer light. In this connection he said that the MRP hopes within the next three weeks or so to acquire broadcasting facilities in Costa Rica, Venezuela, and perhaps acquire a ship from which propaganda could be disseminated.
5. ATTITUDE TOWARD THE FRENTE. RAY feels that the Frente has little to offer the people of Cuba for the future. For example, he said, there is great discontent in the Cuban Rebel Army which could be exploited if these dissident elements could have some assurance that they were laying down their lives for a worthwhile cause. RAY does not feel that the action and composition of the FRD inspires such confidence. He did not mention any names specifically among the FRD which would represent a "return to the past" but he did say that one of the Executive Members (head of a department, I believe is how he put it) had been a big time contractor during BATISTA's regime and that when RAY took over the Ministry of Public Works under President URRUTIA, he learned that this same contractor had previously presented a bill and collected 300,000 pesos for a public works project which was never undertaken. Instead of having the man jailed, RAY said that he as Minister of Public Works merely insisted that the job be done. He commented that he (RAY) would now probably "have to pay for this." I presume he meant that this particular person will eventually seek some type of personal revenge. RAY also said that "one of the five" members of the FRD confided to him that he is not happy but there is little he can do about it because "he is there." RAY repeated some of the usual criticisms of the FRD - "high living," petty politics, "everybody receiving a salary," and the "obvious fact" that the U.S. Government is picking up the tab. This he said was fine with the MRP because it was causing disillusioned Cubans within and without Cuba to turn to the MRP as the only hope. He was quite frank in stating that while he is willing to "cooperate" with the Frente, he did not want the MRP to become identified in the Cuban mind with the Frente, and thus itself become discredited through "association."

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5. PROBLEMS WITH THE DROPS. When I told RAY that we were prepared to provide him material support and that while much of this material support would have to be delivered by the Frente mechanism this would not necessarily make him beholden or place him under obligation to the Frente, he smiled and said that this is what I say, but this is not the way it works. Thinking he was referring to some incident in the past, and not the immediate present, I said that I was sure he would now find that this is how it works. He then told me that he had been negotiating for an air drop to a group in the Escambrays, that Mr. B. had come down and he thought their differences had been pretty much resolved, and Mr. B. had told Mr. NEVEDO that there had been a meeting of minds, et cetera, and with everything all set for the drop, he is - at the eleventh hour (he said "three days ago") told that the arms must bear the sticker of the Frente, otherwise "no arms." He said that this was absolutely unacceptable to him. He said he did not insist or particularly ask that the arms be identified with "MRP" stickers, so therefore he could not see any justification for insisting that the arms bear the FRD label. He said that his group has done all the operational planning for the drop, couriers have gone back and forth between Havana and the Escambrays, maps have been drawn up, DZ's have been arranged, and now he is told that the equipment which he had been told was being supplied to his group must bear the label of the rival "FRD." It is obvious that while we say that we look upon the Frente as a non-political grouping of various opposition groups, RAY looks upon the Frente as the political organization of Tony VARGONA and I personally do not feel sanguine that any amount of explanation will change his thinking in this regard. Here, and elsewhere during our conversation, I noted a certain amount of intransigence and lack of tolerance on the part of RAY which does not bode well for the future, unless he can be made to realize that his group and following are not the sole repository of virtue, honesty, competence and good intentions. RAY is an idealist. He dreams of a democratic Cuba, free of corruption, ruled by men who are selflessly dedicated to the promotion of the general welfare. When I said to RAY that Tony VARGONA and other leaders of the FRD would say that they too stand for these things, he again smiled and said: "The curious thing is that they do not come out and say unequivocally that they stand for these things. Instead they say we are Cubans - we are not Englishmen, we are not Americans, we are not Germans - we are Cubans." What they mean to say, he went on, is that selfishness, some corruption, et cetera, is part of the Cuban make up and that this being the case it is unrealistic and impractical to think that Cubans can aspire to a democracy based on integrity and fiscal honesty such as we have in the United States, or England, or other more advanced democracies of Western Europe. He feels that the people of Cuba yearn for such a democracy and they do not see the chance of fulfillment in the composition of the Frente. Therefore he wishes to embody in the MRP those men whose

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reputations are clean - he kept referring to Felipe Pazos, as an example - and thus hold out to the Cubans in Cuba a hope of better days to come - and to provide them a cause for which to fight. Without a will to fight on the part of the people of Cuba, he said, CASTRO will never be overthrown. The will to fight does not exist on the scale that is needed to achieve success. The Frente is completely incapable of providing the inspiration from which such a will can stem. Consequently, it is up to the MRP to inspire the confidence of the people by bringing together those persons and elements whom the people trust and who are not identified with the corrupt past. The people of Cuba, he said, cannot stand another disappointment. Their hopes must not be raised again, only to suffer another betrayal.

7. PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. I brought up the subject of a provisional government, a government in exile, but prefaced my remarks by saying that I was only expressing my personal views. I said: "Don't you feel that the problem of whose sticker goes on the air drops, and who gets credit for this or that, would be resolved if an Assembly of Opposition Groups were to meet and to democratically elect a provisional government, composed of honest, competent men of unimpeachable record, which would represent all the diverse opposition groups and which would raise the hopes and provide the will to fight to the Cubans in Cuba who are uncertain and confused with respect to the future?" He said he was opposed to a coalition government made up of representatives of various political parties as a provisional government because he was sure such a government would not be able to provide the united, honest, non-partisan type of leadership which will be required following the fall of CASTRO. He would prefer a government of "integration" rather than a government of "coalition." By that he said he meant that the best qualified men would be asked to serve their country in an apolitical capacity. That these men would be measured by their experience, competence, reputation, etc., and little or no concern should be given as to their political affiliations. A government composed of such men would quickly win the respect of the Cuban population; these men could get on with the job of reconstructing the country, completely subordinating partisan political considerations, since such men would not be politically ambitious. Moreover, a government composed of such outstanding men would win the confidence of foreign countries which would be more disposed to grant loans which will be an urgent necessity from the very start. So far as the government itself is concerned, it would be apolitical. The various political parties and their leaders would be free to prepare for the coming elections - whether they be in 6, 12 or 18 months, at which time the Cuban people in free elections could decide which political party it wanted to govern the country.

I asked RAY who would select these men. And at what juncture of the struggle against CASTRO would a provisional government appear. He was a little fuzzy - probably intentionally - on this point. He clearly indicated that some work had already been accomplished on the matter

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of announcing lively candidates. He said there would be some in coming weeks. I asked if this was to be a MRP show - or whether the leaders of the FRD and other Cuban elements would be consulted. He indicated that this was the plan - that general agreement would be sought - and that all groups would be free to suggest candidates. However, he felt it was quite possible, for example, that the FRD could suggest candidates who would not meet the strict standards that would be set and would have to be rejected. He was not clear as to who would exercise this power of veto - but I gather that he felt that the MRP which represents or will represent (in his mind) the party which commands the greatest respect within the country, would exercise this prerogative. As I say, he was a little fuzzy on this point - he may not have wished to tip his hand, or he may have felt that it was a little premature for him to discuss this matter at greater length.

8. CONSTITUTION OF 1940. I said to RAY, "I understand you do not want to retain the Constitution of 1940." He smiled at this. He said this question has been put to him before. Often belligerently. However, he said, each time that he has explained why he feels that the Constitution must be rewritten he has ended up convincing the person in question that certain features of the Constitution of 1940 are either unworkable, undemocratic or obsolete. He said few of the people who get worked up over the Constitution have ever read the Constitution and therefore do not know what they are talking about. He said the Constitution is not like the American Constitution which sets out its precepts in general terms and covers basic questions of government. The Cuban constitution is a long, rambling document that often goes into minute details of rules and regulations which have no place in the basic law of the land. First, he said, he wanted to make it absolutely clear that he "loves" those provisions of the Constitution which guarantee individual liberties, private property, etc. However, there are other parts of the Constitution which are impracticable. With respect to Agrarian Reform, he pointed out, the Constitution requires immediate payment in cash. He said in no country of the world has an agrarian program been carried out with immediate cash payments. Not only does the government not have the money to carry out such a program, but if it did it would result in inflation and a serious dislocation of the economy. The electoral laws, he said, are very complex, and those relating to apportionment of the Congress can only result in corruption. I remarked: "You mean they are written in such a way that they invite corruption?" He said: "More than that, they force corruption." He said under the present set-up one has to either be a millionaire or be able to borrow 200,000 pesos (and thus accept commitments) in order to be elected to congress. He said he would like to see this part of the Constitution written along the American lines. Also, he said the laws relating to the raising of revenue are archaic. He said that in order to acquire money for a given program, a specific tax must be applied designed to

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to provide that money. He said that what is needed are fewer taxes, but more general taxes which will provide the revenue needed without the necessity of a hodge-podge of tax bills. He said that Felipe Pazos, Rulo Lopez Fresquet, and other experienced finance men agree that this part of the Constitution must be revised. I said: "Why not amend the Constitution rather than rewrite it?" He replied that this was a possibility, but that it would be more practicable to write a workable Constitution providing all the guarantees of a democracy but omitting a lot of the irrelevant and unworkable features of the current one.

9. HIS PERSONAL PLANS. I said I understood that he was planning to return to Cuba and asked if this was correct. He said he and others of his group plan to return at the appropriate time but first he wanted to be sure that he had nailed down certain political and support matters here. He said he was hopeful that the "political" considerations - which he indicated (without clarification) - were going quite satisfactorily - would be satisfactorily concluded in "two weeks or so." WIESINGER asked: "Do you mean after 20 January?" RAY smiled but made no reply. He said that he had hoped that he had settled the matter of the logistical support when he talked to Mr. B last, but it now appears that it is not settled and that they may have to return to Cuba without this support. He said he was leaving for New York on 9 January and would remain there until Saturday, 15 January. He said he could be reached through Raul CHIBAS. I told him that I thought he should return, as soon as he could, and that we were prepared to assist him in every way possible, including providing him with a communicator. He said we had already trained a communicator for his group who had been infiltrated into Cuba and he wondered where that man was at the present time - whether in Havana or the hills. Neither I nor WIESINGER could enlighten him on this point, except to say that he was safely in Cuba.
10. During the entire interview, with one exception, RAY was his usual quiet, soft-spoken self. However, he did show emotion when he asked me if I thought someone was trying to sabotage his efforts to supply the resistance groups in Cuba. For example, he first brought up, and it was most obvious that it is a matter of great concern to him, the matter of the plans, maps, etc., for the MRP action against the Isle of Pines. He said a carefully coordinated plan had been laid on. That BARQUIN discussed it with "Jimmy." That BARQUIN asked "Jimmy" if the map and other papers could be delivered in Cuba within 48 hours. "Jimmy" assured BARQUIN that they could and BARQUIN handed them over. RAY said that BARQUIN erred in doing this as they had their own facilities for transmitting the papers. The papers never arrived at their destination, nor have they ever been heard from again. As a consequence, a plan of great importance had to be abandoned, and an irreplaceable opportunity lost. He was extremely agitated when he talked of this matter and although WIESINGER and I attempted to assure him that he was not being sabotaged and that there were no "communists" trying to frustrate his activities, he nonetheless is

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worked up on the issue and will not be content until he has a satisfactory explanation. Now, he says, he is confronted with the delay in the air drop to the people in the Escambrays. "Do you think someone wants these men wiped out for some reason or other and that this is why these unacceptable conditions are placed at the last minute?" He was assured nothing could be farther from the truth, but still this is a concrete example of his belief that he has not received the support that he has been lead to believe he will receive.

11. MRP INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION. We discussed briefly the MRP intel group being organized under WIESINGER's guidance. We pointed out that little progress had been made due to the fact that BARTIN - RAY's designee for the job - had so many other responsibilities that he could not give this matter his undivided attention. RAY laughed and said that BARTIN has been given no other responsibilities, but that he has sought out other responsibilities on his own which are time taking. He promised to think about this and was agreeable to assigning a "shirt sleeve" type of operator to work with WIESINGER on the nuts and bolts. The name of Nicolas MENDOZA was suggested by the undersigned (in prior consultation with WIESINGER) as a person of considerable intelligence and drive and endowed with a willingness to carry out orders. Nicolas, who is a brother of one of RAY's closest men, Ignacio MENDOZA, was acceptable to RAY and he asked WIESINGER if he could ascertain Nicolas' present whereabouts so that he could be propositioned on the subject.
12. The meeting broke up after ten o' clock. It was cordial throughout and I feel cleared the air a little although it settled no matters of consequence. I told RAY I was going to Washington on Monday and, after consultations, might wish to see h'm again. He said he would welcome another get-together and that I could reach him through CHIBAS during the current week.

[James A. Noel] 03