

V. CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (CRC) : NEW ORLEANS CHAPTER

(216) Nine days after the assassination of the President, the U.S. Secret Service began an investigation into the activities of Lee Harvey Oswald during his residency in New Orleans.(1)

(217) Oswald had been arrested there in August 1963 while distributing Fair Play for Cuba literature. Some of his leaflets had the address 544 Camp Street stamped on them. The Secret Service endeavored to determine if Oswald maintained an office at this address.(2)

(218) During the course of its investigation, the Secret Service ascertained that the New Orleans chapter of the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) had occupied an office at 544 Camp Street for about 6 months during 1961-62. At that time, Sergio Arcacha Smith was the official CRC delegate for the New Orleans area. The Secret Service also learned that Arcacha Smith had been fired from his position by the Miami CRC headquarters in early 1962, allegedly because he did not have the confidence of the New Orleans Cuban exile community. Luis Rabel replaced Arcacha Smith and moved the CRC offices to his home.(3)

(219) At the time of the Secret Service investigation, another Cuban exile, Frank Bartes, headed the New Orleans CRC delegation and maintained offices in his home in Metairie, a suburb of New Orleans.(4)

(220) After an extensive investigation by the FBI and the Secret Service regarding the possibility that Oswald rented office space at 544 Camp Street, the Warren report concluded there was no evidence that Oswald ever maintained an office at that address.(5)

(221) This material only pertains to the committee's attempt to ascertain if any activities of the CRC had any relationship to Oswald's activities in New Orleans.

(222) The Committee questioned the first New Orleans delegate to the CRC, Sergio Arcacha Smith.(6) He told the committee that he arrived in Miami in August 1960 and, at the request of Antonio de Varona, a director of the CRC, agreed to establish a chapter of this group in New Orleans. Arcacha Smith was initially afforded free office space in the Balter Building; he later rented space at 544 Camp Street.(7)

(223) During his tenure as head of the New Orleans delegation, Arcacha Smith endeavored to raise funds by selling CRC bonds, and was instrumental in organizing several rallies to promote the cause of the Cuban exiles.(8)

(224) Arcacha Smith said he had never seen Oswald in New Orleans and, from what he had read, Oswald was not even in that city at the same time Arcacha Smith lived there.(9) When he was relieved of his official position with the CRC in early 1962, Arcacha left New Orleans.(10)

(225) Arcacha Smith's replacement, Luis Rabel, assumed the delegate duties in January 1962 but, he told the committee, found it necessary to resign by October of that year because his job entailed extensive traveling. (11) During his short tenure, Rabel said he organized several rallies and brought in prominent Miami speakers to inspire the New Orleans Cuban exile community. (12) Other than going to the Camp Street address to remove office materials left there by Arcacha Smith, Rabel said he had no connection with the building and never saw Oswald in New Orleans. (13)

(226) Frank Bartes, former president of Consolidated Railroads in Cuba, (14) became the third designated delegate of the New Orleans CRC chapter. He reported the activities of the group regularly to the FBI (15) and was primarily concerned with solicitation of monthly pledges from Cubans for the purchase of arms for their countrymen actively engaged in the fight against Castro. (16) He reported that he had purchased an M-2 rifle with collections and displayed it at an October 1963 meeting for "psychological reasons." (17) Bartes said, however, because of the rate of collections at that time, the group was able to send only enough money to the Miami CRC headquarters to purchase one gun per month. (18)

(227) On November 15, 1963, a CRC meeting was held at Gallier Hall. Antonio de Varona was invited to come to New Orleans to speak to the Cuban exiles and bolster their morale. (19) He stayed at the home of Agustin Guitart, (20) uncle of Silvia Odio.

(228) Bartes told the committee he headed the New Orleans delegation until the CRC was dissolved in 1964. (21) During his tenure, he said, he maintained the CRC office in his home. (22) He could not recall ever having visited the 544 Camp Street office maintained by Arcacha Smith in 1961-62. (23)

(229) After Carlos Bringuier and Oswald had been arrested in a street scuffle, Bartes appeared in court with Bringuier. (24) Although not a CRC member, Bringuier was respected by Bartes and it was as a show of support that Bartes appeared at Bringuier's hearing. (25)

(230) After the hearing, the news media surrounded Oswald for a statement, Bartes said. At this point, Bartes got into an argument with the media and Oswald because the Cubans were not being given an opportunity to present their views. (26) He also spoke to an FBI agent that day, warning that Oswald was a potentially dangerous man. (27) Bartes declined to identify the agent to the committee, saying only that he had had frequent contact with him during this period of time. (28) Bartes said he had no other contact with Oswald. (29)

(231) The evidence would seem to indicate, therefore, that the New Orleans chapter of the CRC had no relationship with Oswald other than the brief encounter with Bartes, and in no way was officially involved in any activities that touched upon those of Oswald.

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REFERENCES

- (1) Secret Service report, "Lee Harvey Oswald," December 9, 1963, Secret Service No. CO-2-34,030 (JFK Document 003759).
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) *Ibid.*
- (4) *Ibid.*
- (5) "Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy" (Washington, D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 292 (hereinafter Warren report).
- (6) Staff Interview of Sergio Arcacha Smith, July 7, 1978, House Select Committee on Assassinations (JFK Document 010458).
- (7) *Id.* at pp. 12, 45.
- (8) Deposition of Luis Rabel, May 11, 1978, House Select Committee on Assassinations, pp. 23, 47 (JFK Document 009080).
- (9) *Id.* at pp. 21-22.
- (10) See ref. 1, p. 4.
- (11) See ref. 8, Rabel deposition, p. 45.
- (12) *Id.* at p. 41.
- (13) *Id.* at pp. 127-128.
- (14) FBI report, January 20, 1965 (JFK Document 006305), Item 9).
- (15) *Ibid.*, items 1-8.
- (16) *Ibid.*, items 3-4.
- (17) *Ibid.*, item 4.
- (18) *Ibid.*
- (19) *Ibid.*, item 5.
- (20) *Ibid.*
- (21) Staff interview of Frank Bartes, March 15, 1978, House Select Committee on Assassinations, p. 2 (JFK Document 007252).
- (22) *Ibid.*
- (23) *Id.* at p. 7.
- (24) *Id.* at p. 17.
- (25) *Ibid.*
- (26) *Ibid.*
- (27) *Ibid.*
- (28) *Id.* at p. 18.
- (29) *Ibid.*

