

VII. MOVIMIENTO DEMOCRATA CRISTIANO (MDC)

(247) After Castro's assumption of power in 1959, it became evident to many Cubans that political parties were being suppressed and the 26th of July Movement was being infiltrated by Communists. This political atmosphere gave rise to the creation of underground organizations such as the Christian Democratic Movement of Cuba (MDC). (1) Proclaiming the doctrine of Christianity as its foundation, the MDC published a manifesto in March 1960 (2) denouncing communism and strongly advocating the free enterprise system. (3) One of the founders of the MDC, 35-year-old law professor Dr. Jose Ignacio Rasco, was elected head of the organization (4) and immediately criticized the violence prevalent in the Castro regime. (5) This public criticism produced pressure on him to leave Cuba and he arrived in Miami on April 22, 1960. (6) By June, Rasco had allied himself and the MDC with the Frente Revolucionario Democrático (FRD) (7) and thus became one of the five original exile Cuban leaders brought together by the U.S. Government to form the nucleus of a Cuban government-in-exile. (8)

(248) After the Bay of Pigs invasion, the MDC split into factions. (9) Rasco remained head of the largest faction and organized delegations in Miami, New York, Chicago, Venezuela, and Cuba. (10) The clandestine faction operating in Cuba was led by a Cuban who used the alias "Lucas." (11) When this Cuban arrived in the United States in October 1961, he presented his credentials to the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC), claiming he was the representative of the MDC movement in Cuba. (12) Council president, Dr. Miró Cardona, accepted him into the CRC hierarchy. (13) The "Lucas" faction remained with the council but its role was ineffectual because the Cuban eventually failed to hold the group together. (14)

(249) The "Rasco" faction of MDC had as its military chief an independently wealthy young Cuban, Laureano Batista Falla. (15) Free spirited and under no financial pressures, Batista Falla organized and partially financed the infiltration attempts of the MDC. (16) It was one of the most active and effective underground groups in Cuba during the early 1960's. (17)

(250) At that time, most underground groups worked together, sharing supplies and information. (18) Nevertheless, the repressive measures of the Castro regime after the April 1961 invasion caused members of the Cuban underground to live in fear of discovery and made intergroup liaison extremely risky. (19) Despite the inherent dangers, the underground movements of the MDC and Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo (MRP) worked jointly for an all-out sabotage effort in the fall of 1961. (20)

(251) The "Batista" faction of the MDC (so named after the youthful military chief rose to the position of president in 1962) (21) entered into similar cooperative alliances with other exile groups for

the purposes of propaganda, sabotage, and supplying the Cuban underground. Many MDC members joined the Cuba Committee in 1962, which was formed to counteract the propaganda of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a pro-Castro organization in the United States.(22) The MDC and the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE) worked together to formulate plans for an underground organization to infiltrate Oriente Province.(23) The active operations between the MDC and other anti-Castro groups peaked in the year 1963. One involved the MDC, the Movimiento Insurreccional de Recuperacion Revolucionaria (MIRR), and the Movimiento Recuperacion Revolucionaria (MRR). In April, Frank Sturgis, Miami-based soldier of fortune, supplied information that Batista Falla, Orlando Bosch Avila, Manuel Artime, and Alexander Rorke were jointly planning an airstrike over Havana on April 25.(24) According to Sturgis, the strike was to originate from an airstrip in Puerto Rico and the target was a sugar refinery.(25) The bombs were homemade, assembled by Batista.(26) Rorke announced publicly that the strike had taken place as scheduled, which took the other planners by surprise.(27) Sturgis claimed the strike was still in the planning stage and financial backing had not been completed.(28) This incident created a stir and resulted in an intensive FBI investigation of Rorke's allegation.(29) Since Radio Havana, contrary to usual policy, made no immediate protest over the bombing,(30) the FBI concluded that Rorke's story was probably untrue(31) and, according to Sturgis, merely a publicity stunt.(32)

(252) In early June 1963, the MDC made a unity pact with Comandos L, in which Comandos L was to provide training and assistance in military intelligence and the MDC was to provide three small boats and a team of men to infiltrate Cuba.(33) The MDC also made a pact with Dr. Carlos Prio Socarras, former President of Cuba, who donated \$50,000 to the group for military aid in return for its promise of political support.(34)

(253) Richard Rudolph Davis, a Cuban alien,(35) had a peripheral association with the MDC through his contact with Batista Falla in the summer of 1963. This association was noted in book V, "Final Report of the Senate Select Committee To Study Governmental Operation."(36)

(254) Davis was residing in New Orleans and, although not an MDC member, claimed to have once been a "coordinator" for the group and the New York Police Department.(37) He was a friend of Batista Falla and contacted him because, he said, Batista Falla was in a position to recommend men in the Miami area who needed work.(38) Davis claimed he could provide employment for a small group of Cuban emigres. He said he had entered into a business deal with geologist David L. Raggio and a wealthy, rightwing New Orleansian. Gus de LaBarre, forming the Guatemalan Lumber & Mineral Corp.(39) It was their intention to train the Cubans on some land in Lacombe, La., to which De LaBarre had access through his nephew Frank de LaBarre.(40) After a necessary training period, the group was to be sent to Guatemala to cut mahogany trees, he claimed.

(255) A group of about 18 Cubans did arrive in New Orleans in the summer of 1963. Leading them was a well-known Cuban exile,

Victor Paneque,(41) who used the military code name of "Comandante Diego."(42) Paneque was closely associated with Batista Falla in the military activities of the MDC.(43) Davis admitted later to the FBI that the men had arrived dressed in khakis(44) and thought that they were to receive military training.(45)

(256) In the latter part of July 1963, the FBI conducted a raid on property near that of the "lumber company" training camp. The Bureau seized a cache of dynamite and other explosives.(46) This raid, according to Davis, unnerved his trainees, and they elected to return to Miami.(47)

(257) A somewhat different version of this episode comes from Gus de LaBarre's nephew and attorney, Frank de LaBarre, who first related his story in 1966 to his former law school classmate, Jim Garrison.(48)

(258) De LaBarre said his "Uncle Gus" had introduced him to Davis, whom De LaBarre described as a "floater." They came to see De LaBarre about drawing up articles of incorporation for the Guatemalan Lumber Co. and that is when he says he learned of their plans to bring unemployed Cubans from Miami to train as lumberjacks. Uncle Gus sent provisions to the exiles on a daily basis and solicited money for food and clothing from friends and relatives.(49)

(259) Although he suspected that military training was being conducted at the camp, Frank de LaBarre said he did not pay much attention to the activities of the group. When he heard on his car radio that the FBI had seized a cache of ammunition at a house in Lacombe, however, he immediately called his uncle. Although receiving assurances that the lumber group was not involved, De LaBarre called the officers of the corporation together and insisted that the Cubans be taken out of there. Davis told him that the Cubans did not want to leave, whereupon De LaBarre said he had to do some real "brainstorming." He rented a Hertz ton-and-a-half truck and instructed Davis to take it to the camp and tell the Cubans "that the invasion is on." Davis complied, and the Cubans loaded their gear, jumped in the truck, and were brought to the Greyhound bus terminal in New Orleans. Each was given a one-way ticket to Miami plus a small amount of cash and told they would get their orders when they reached Miami. Looking as though ready for war, with knapsacks and guns bulging from under their clothes, they boarded the bus. De LaBarre said that was the last he saw of them.

(260) The last he heard of Davis, he said, was in 1964 when one of De LaBarre's friends reported he had gone into business with Davis and was left with a lot of bills.(50)

(261) Other than providing the manpower for the training camp, Batista Falla was not involved in this episode or was the MDC as an organization.

(262) Concurrent with his involvement with leaders of other exile organizations, Batista Falla was dealing with foreign governments in an effort to gain support for his faction of the MDC. After the World Congress of Christian Democrats in Strasbourg, France, two officials of a foreign political party conferred with the MDC in Miami.(51) According to one of the officials, his country, after months of study, had decided to help finance the MDC, not because they were

particularly fond of them, but felt once Cuba was liberated the Cubans would have a moral superiority over the rest of Latin America.(52) (263) Another offer of help came from an official who provided the MDC a base for operations in that country.(53) Another Latin American official allegedly also offered to make a base available for the MDC and provide it with personnel and supplies.(54) Recognizing that these Latin American bases of operation were important to the MDC, Batista Falla nonetheless preferred to work out of the Miami area. Its proximity to Cuba, good facilities for operating boats and the availability of a large number of Cubans to serve as mechanics and do other necessary labor made Miami more desirable than the Latin American facilities.(55) The major drawback in Miami was the presence of U.S. Government officials determined strictly to enforce the Neutrality Act and other Federal statutes.

(264) U.S. Customs raided MDC headquarters in Miami on April 21, 1964, and confiscated a large cache of arms and ammunition.(56) Undeterred, the MDC simply relocated the military section in separate headquarters, continued to store materials for infiltration and attack missions against Cuba,(57) and conducted study courses in military training and theory.(58) In July, Batista Falla and Victor Paneque infiltrated men and equipment into Cuba to form a nucleus of guerrilla bands that, once they got adequate arms and ammunition, planned to go into the mountains of Cuba.(59)

(265) The MDC eventually suffered the fate of other anti-Castro organizations: Increasing difficulty in financing infiltration and sabotage missions, and intensive surveillance by U.S. authorities determined to limit their activities. The organization's activities gradually declined. Batista Falla eventually gave up his anti-Castro activities, moved to Washington, D.C., and received a doctoral degree in political science.(60) In the spring of 1970, he moved to Venezuela.

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- (35) J. F. K. Document 012981.
- (36) Final report, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, Book V (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975). The group of Cubans connected with the Guatemalan Lumber Co. project is identified as the same group arrested when the FBI raided and seized dynamite on property in Lacombe, La. It should be noted that the FBI raid occurred on July 31, 1963, at property owned by William J. McLaney, whereas the Guatemalan Lumber Co. trainees were on property owned, according to Frank De LaBarre, by a friend of his. Although De LaBarre did not mention the name of the owner, the FBI report from Miami, Bufile No. 2-1821, sec. 33, lists the names of the Cubans arrested on McLaney property; Victor Panque was not among them (Book V, p. 12).
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