EDUARDO CHIBÁS:

THE INCORRIGIBLE MAN OF CUBAN POLITICS

By

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Abstract

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There is ample evidence to suggest that Eduardo Chibás (1907-1951), despite never having been president, was of primary importance to Cuba's political system in the years 1940-1952. As a congressman, senator and presidential candidate who was also the island's most popular radio commentator, Chibás was afforded an excellent opportunity to alter government policy and shape public opinion. Specifically, Chibás denounced what he saw as the vices and inadequacies of Cuba's fledgling democracy, especially corruption in public office. By all accounts, Chibás was a man of unquestioned probity. Unlike his political rivals, who gained financially from their elected positions, Chibás' economic position declined – leading him to sell the family residence, built by his father, to pay for his 1948 presidential campaign.

Chibás' participation in Cuba's 1933 revolution, which overthrew the dictatorial government of Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), and in the mass strikes of 1935, which opposed Fulgencio Batista's first military regime (1934-1940), enhanced his public stature and lent him further political credibility. Moreover, the scandal-plagued Auténtico administrations of Ramón Grau San Martín (1944-1948)

and Carlos Prío Socorrás (1948-1952) fell far short of the Cuban public's expectations – helping to swell the ranks of Chibás followers. Through personal charisma and media savvy Chibás revived the prospect of efficient and transparent governance through a renewal of the nation's institutions led by his *Ortodoxo* party. These hopes were dashed suddenly when Chibás shot himself three times in the stomach during his broadcast of August 5, 1951. His death 11 days later deprived the island of its most admired politician.

In the short term, Chibás' influence was felt in the fact that the two major candidates for the 1952 presidency were Roberto Agramonte (Chibás' ex vice presidential candidate), and Carlos Hevia – both of whom were honest, albeit un-charismatic, figures. Hevia was only the third most popular politician in his own (*Auténtico*) party according to opinion polls. His nomination thus owed a great deal to Chibas' strident attacks on malversation. On the other hand, the disappearance of Cuba's most popular and magnetic politician surely facilitated the military coup, headed by Fulgencio Batista, that took place a mere seven months after Chibás' suicide.

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Introduction

The Centrality of Eduardo Chibás in Cuban Politics, 1940-1952

There is ample evidence to suggest that Eduardo Chibás, despite never having been president, was of primary importance to Cuba's political system in the years 1940-1952. Aside from being a congressman and later a senator, he was also the island's most popular radio commentator – which afforded him an excellent opportunity to shape public opinion. Chibás used this forum for self-promotion but also to denounce what he saw as the vices and inadequacies of Cuban politics, especially corruption in public office. By all accounts, Chibás was a man of unquestioned probity. Even his enemies admitted as much.[1] Moreover, Chibás' public stature and credibility were enhanced by his participation in Cuba's 1933 revolution, which overthrew the dictatorial administration of Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), and in the mass strikes of 1935, which opposed Fulgencio Batista's first military regime (1934-1940). Through personal charisma and media savvy he raised expectations among many Cubans that economic prosperity, national sovereignty, personal security and efficient and transparent governance were possible through a renewal of the nation's institutions led by his *Ortodoxo* party. Founded in 1947, the *Ortodoxo* platform called for economic independence, political liberty, social justice, constitutionalism and an insistence that the government remain free of political pacts or coalitions. The party was also closely associated with Chibás' crusade against malfeasance. This program attracted a diverse

[1] "En Cuba," *Bohemia,* May 30, 1948, 56. Specifically, ex-president Fulgencio Batista, who was hardly a Chibás ally, admitted that while other *Auténticos* had asked him for money or favors while he was in office, Chibás had never done so.

following, including middle class sectors, rural laborers, urban workers and Afro-Cubans. The first three groups were disappointed by the successive *Auténtico* administrations of Ramón Grau San Martín (1944-1948) and Carlos Prío Socorrás (1948-1952). Among other things, the middle class was disgusted with *pistolerismo* by so-called "action groups" with ties to the Auténticos. Rural laborers felt betrayed by the *Auténticos'* abandonment of its rehabilitation program, which had promised new schools, cement floors in each *bohío*, sanitary latrines and good wells.[2] Many urban workers were disappointed by the Auténticos' failure to substantially improve the nation's hospitals. Afro-Cubans maintained a large presence in the *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP), or Communist party, but were otherwise largely unaffiliated with any of Cuba's larger parties.[3] Chibás actively recruited them, emphasizing his personal friendships with two popular Afro-Cuban boxing champions, Kid Chocolate and Kid Gavilán. Of course, all the above constituencies also responded to Chibás' denunciations of government corruption – which he described on the radio every Sunday evening.

To date, analysts of Cuban political developments in the 1940s and early 1950s have not reached a consensus concerning Chibás. For instance, the sociologist Marifeli Pérez-Stable has minimized his importance, asserting that Chibás focused more on catchy slogans than pressing issues such as economic diversification, industrialization and defense of national sovereignty.[4] This criticism

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[2] William S. Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution' and the Presidential Elections of 1948," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (Feb. 1951): 43.
[3] Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 44.
[4] Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50.

is not entirely accurate. As a presidential candidate in 1948, Chibás necessarily devised a host of campaign mottoes – the most famous of these being *vergüenza contra dinero* (shame versus money). These were part and parcel of his attempt to generate opprobrium against corrupt politicians. Moreover, Chibás had repeatedly emphasized the need for national sovereignty since his days as a student revolutionary. In a 1933 public speech, for example, he condemned "great foreign monopolies" along with their "indigenous servants" and concluded that the revolt currently underway sought not merely to depose Gerardo Machado but also to "change…the economic structure of the regime."[5] In 1949, while a senator, Chibás was briefly jailed for accusing the administration of Carlos Prío of giving preferential treatment to the U.S. owned Cuban Electric Company. On the other hand, Chibás did not extensively address the longstanding problems of sugar monoculture and the island's lack of industrialization. However, this was no guarantee he would have ignored these issues had he been elected president. For example, the political scientist William Stokes notes that in 1948 Chibás presented the "longest and most detailed" party program of any candidate. This indicated a willingness to confront the nation's ills. At the same time, the *Ortodoxo* platform was remarkably similar to that of the *Auténticos*.[6] This reflected the fact that many *Ortodoxo* leaders, including Chibás, were ex-*Auténticos* who felt their former party had abandoned its platform in favor of personal enrichment and opportunistic political alliances. Thus, *Ortodoxo*

[5] Luis Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás, el Adalid de Cuba* (México: Editorial Jus, 1955), 193.
[6] Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution,'" 72.

promises to reform the electricity sector,[7] to improve the nation's hospitals, to subsidize native entrepreneurs, to build more schools and to better the lot of the island's *guajiros* implicitly depended on the honesty of its leadership.

The political scientist Jorge Domínguez dismisses the impact of Ortodoxo "reformist moralizing" as a "peculiarly middle-class concern."[8] He argues that this was because the bourgeoisie formed part of the political elite and had media access, where the topic was often discussed, but there was no substantial commitment to structural reforms. However, a May 1951 poll in *Bohemia*, Cuba's most popular magazine, indicated that Chibás, apparently with multi-class support, was the leading candidate for president in all six of Cuba's provinces.[9] In addition, the heretofore dominant Auténtico party was sufficiently worried about the potency of corruption as a political issue to nominate Carlos Hevia, an honest but reportedly non-charismatic man, as its candidate in the 1952 presidential election. Domínguez also repeats the charge (which has come from various quarters)[10] that Chibás' unrelenting criticism had the effect of "weakening the entire system" of Cuban democracy.[11] This claim is rather unconvincing. After all, *Auténtico* malfeasance was the primary reason why Cubans questioned the legitimacy of their government. For instance, Cuban peasants who were promised cement floors in their *bohíos*

[7] "Los Candidatos Presidenciales Opinan Sobre El Grave Problema de la Electricidad," *Bohemia*, May 23, 1948: 67, 74. Among the proposals were nationalization of the island's electricity sector, a 50 percent reduction in tariffs and extension of service into rural areas – which he believed was essential to agrarian reform.

[8] Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 113-114. Specifically, Domínguez cites figures for the party's appeal under the leadership of Roberto Agramonte, who succeeded Chibás after the latter's suicide and was far less charismatic.

[9] *Bohemia*, May 20, 1951: supplement, 8-9.

[10] See Jaime Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba, 1920-1968* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1969) and Eduardo Suárez Rivas, *Los Días Iguales* (Miami: n.p., 1974) among others.

[11] Domínguez, *Cuba*, 114.

(according to the *Auténtico* platform) knew quite well, independently of Chibás, that their situation remained unchanged. The same could be said of urban middle class Cubans, who were shocked by *pistolero* violence in broad daylight by action groups associated with the *Auténticos*.[12] Perhaps the most forceful challenge to this view is provided by University of Havana students, who were arguably Chibás' most devoted followers and who were among the few who offered to defend the government from the March 1952 coup headed by Fulgencio Batista and the military.

On the other side of the spectrum, the historian Charles Ameringer asserts that Chibás was a "people's champion" who represented the "outraged conscience of the nation" and almost certainly would have been elected president had he lived. Of course, Cubans were receptive to such a figure because the *Auténtico* party had squandered nearly all its credibility during the *Auténtico* administrations of Ramón Grau San Martín and Carlos Prío. In addition, while allowing that Chibás exposed *Auténtico* corruption, Ameringer also notes that the *Ortodoxo* chief had a tendency to exaggerate or even fabricate charges. Despite this shortcoming, he concludes that Chibas' death left "a great void" that was exploited by Batista and the military when

[12] Perhaps the most notorious case was the Orfila incident in the city of Marianao on September 15, 1947. In this instance, Emilio Tro who headed the National Police Academy but was also chief of the Union Insureccional Revolucionaria (UIR) and Mario Salabarría who was in charge of the Police Bureau of Investigations but also a member of the Movimiento Socialista Revolucionaria (MSR), used the forces under their command to conduct a battle over the course of several hours which resulted in the death of Tró and four others. Both men were Grau appointees. Moreover, the battle was broadcast live over the radio, embarrassing the Auténticos and giving rise to shock and revulsion among the island's citizens. Hugh Thomas notes that, "This pointless bloodshed caused a scandal even in the blasé Cuban society, hardly reassured by the thirty-year gaol (sic) sentence imposed on Salabarría, or by the realization that one of the most important gangster leaders was not removed from the scene. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 755.

they overthrew Cuba's elected government in March of 1952.[13] In a similar vein, the historian Luis Aguilar describes a "clamor" among the Cuban public for honest politicians during this era. He suggests Chibás was the embodiment of their ideal, dubbing him the "champion of many popular aspirations." He also portrays Chibás' suicide as a "staggering blow" which was a factor that enabled Batista and the military to seize power.[14] The recently deceased Cuban exile novelist, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, also shared this opinion. He concluded that Chibás' death "deprived the opposition of their natural leader" and plunged his party and the country into "chaos," greatly facilitating the takeover by Batista and the military in 1952.[15] This view, which casts Chibás as almost a *sine qua non* of Cuban democracy does not fully take into account the political and economic ills that plagued the island. Perhaps closest to the truth is an opinion expressed by Stokes, who, referring to the 1948 election writes:

> There is the strongest evidence that Cuban political opinion desperately desired the "Revolution" (of 1933) to mean, at least, fundamental departure from the venality, corruption, and fraud so characteristic of Cuban colonial and republican politics. The evidence is seen in the great support given to Chibás, whose almost sole campaign asset was rectitude and integrity and passionate insistence on honesty in government. His cries for genuine revolution, to begin in this area, released emotional enthusiasm in all classes, and he rallied many of Cuba's great men to this cause.[16]

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[13] Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience,* 145,165.
[14] Luis Aguilar. *Cuba 1933, Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 244.
[15] Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994), p. 143. Specifically, Cabrera Infante writes that, "With his death Chibás had deprived the political opposition of their natural leader and had left his party in a chaos greater than the one the Republic was in then. So, some months later, Batista carried out his infamous, fateful *coup d'état* that was both bloodless and easy because President Prío chose not to resist, his bags always at hand."
[16] Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution,'" 77.

This statement presents Chibás not as an empty sloganeer or apostle of democracy but as a genuine reformer who desired to renew Cuba's faltering political system. Clearly, the evaluations of Chibás' role in Cuban politics are highly debatable and hence ripe for in-depth study.

As a political biography this study will also be concerned with Chibás' ideological evolution. Currently, this aspect is not entirely clear – especially in the years before he entered the university and what influence his family and socioeconomic background had on his way of thinking. His father, Eduardo Chibás y Guerra, was a wealthy engineer and *hombre de negocios* who had produced the maps of San Juan Hill used by Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War. He had also been Secretary of Public Works in the short-lived administration of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in 1933. His mother, Gloria Ribas y Agramonte, was a niece of Eduardo Agramonte, Secretary of Foreign Relations during Cuba's first war of independence (1868-1878). In keeping with his family's status, Chibás attended the elite Colegio de Dolores in Santiago and later on, when his parents moved to the capital, finished his secondary education at Belén, a prestigious Jesuit institution. Chibás also traveled in Europe and the United States and belonged to the Havana Yacht Club, the social center for the capital's elite. Chibás, like many members of his generation, was profoundly impacted by the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. While a University of Havana student, he became involved with the radical, anti-Machado Directorio Estudantil Universitario (DEU). His anti-government activities led to significant periods in jail and exile between 1927 and 1933. After the fall of Céspedes, Chibás personally nominated Grau for

president on behalf of the students. During Grau's brief first term as president, Chibás outlined his thinking in a slew of public speeches. The revolution of 1933, he claimed (as have a good number of contemporary Cuban scholars and politicians), had not been a mere revolt of the type that had occurred with regularity during the republic's first three decades. Rather, this was a new development and part of an ongoing process that sought to fundamentally change Cuba's political system. Specifically, Chibás railed against foreign monopolies, which, in his view, enriched themselves and a few corrupt politicians at the nation's expense. Chibás would revisit this theme repeatedly throughout his political career, perhaps most famously in his criticism of the U.S. owned Cuban Electric Company in 1949. To be sure, the foreign domination of Cuba's economy between 1902 and 1933 was high on the list of grievances for Cuba's student revolutionaries – Chibás included, although his rhetorical fluency helped make him more visible than many others. Chibás was also an avowed anti-communist, at least in part because that party had collaborated with Batista in the late 1930s and also because he viewed international communism with the same foreboding reserved for U.S.-style imperialism.

* * *

Chibás initially emerged as a leading politician and *Auténtico* party spokesman after his election to Congress in 1940. Founded in 1934, the *Auténticos* were a multi-class, reform party that rejected both Soviet-style communism and imperialist capitalism much like the Peruvian *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria*

Americana (APRA) led by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre.[17] The *Auténtico* platform emphasized nationalism, socialism and anti-imperialism. In its early years, the party opposed Batista's first military regime through both political and violent means but by 1939 had resolved to pursue a peaceful course. Above all, *autenticismo* derived legitimacy from two factors. First, its core leadership had participated in the struggle to oust Gerardo Machado in 1933. Second, its *jefe máximo*, Ramón Grau San Martín, had briefly served as president that same year (before being overthrown by Batista) and issued a series of popular decrees which, among other things, legalized labor organizations, set price caps on electricity prices and required that all businesses maintain a labor force that was at least 50 percent Cuban. By 1947, however, a group of disaffected *Auténticos* led by Chibás believed the party had abandoned its ideals and decided to form a new organization. Specifically, they were disillusioned by the administration of Ramón Grau San Martín, which had been accused of corruption and mismanagement.[18] From a personal standpoint, Chibás was also disappointed that Grau had bypassed him as

[17] Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience*, 12. Also relevant here is the famous quotation by Haya de la Torre, "¡Ni con Washington ni con Moscú!," indicating his desire to find a path for Latin America independent of these two ideologies.

[18] The charges of corruption came from all quarters of Cuba's society and political spectrum. Francisco Ichaso, one of the founders of the ABC, described Grau's last year in office as "one of the most corrupt periods in the history of the Republic." Francisco Ichaso, "El Proceso Auténtico," *Bohemia*, June 26, 1949: 87. In November of 1947, University of Havana students, among them Fidel Castro, announced a "war against government graft." Rolando E. Bonchea and Nelson P. Valdés, eds., *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947-1958,* vol. 1 of *Selected Works of Fidel Castro* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1972), 132. Moreover, government malfeasance was hardly limited to 1947. Chibás himself had written a letter to Grau in January of that year listing a litany of complaints, chief among them the corruption of government ministers and advisors – notably Inocente Álvarez the ex-minister of commerce who had reaped tremendous profits in Cuba's barter deals with other Latin American countries in 1945, César Casas, the present minister of commerce who Chibás accused of dealing on the black market and José Manuel Alemán, the notoriously sleazy minister of education, whom, Chibás claimed, was embezzling funds while schoolchildren were deprived of their lunches. Luis Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 476-477. In January of 1949, shortly after Grau had vacated the presidency, "Lawsuit 82" was submitted to the Criminal Panel of the Supreme Court, alleging that Grau and his ministers had embezzled 174,241,840.14 pesos.

the party's presidential candidate in the 1948 election. Chibás ultimately competed in that contest as head of the *Ortodoxo* party, winning 16 percent of the vote despite having only a year to prepare and a rudimentary organization to support him. The Ortodoxo symbol was a broom, reminding voters of its intention to sweep away graft and inefficiency. In order to give himself and his fledgling organization a feisty popular image, he set up the *Ortodoxo* headquarters in the old gymnasium of Eligio Sardiñas – the popular Afro-Cuban boxing champion better known as Kid Chocolate. He apparently also hoped to win support from the substantial Afro-Cuban community in this manner.

Another constituency targeted by the *Ortodoxos* was the rural poor, who had initially benefited from new schools along with expanded school lunch and health programs under Grau's first education minister, Luis Pérez Espinós, (1944-1946) an honest man. A lavishly funded Ministry of Education[19] made such things possible but also tempted dishonest ministers to use the money for their own purposes. The most notorious of these was José Manuel Alemán, its head between 1946 and 1947, who embezzled a substantial portion of the ministry's budget and filled its payroll with ghost employees or *botellas.*[20] A similar situation prevailed in the Ministry of Public Health, where expenditures were at an all time high during Grau's

[19] Inciso K (Clause K) of Law Number 7, April 15, 1943 along with Decree Number 3603, December 13, 1943 mandated a nine-centavo tax on each sack of sugar produced, all of which went to the Ministry of Education.

[20] Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience*, 34-35. Specifically, he notes that, "Alemán did not invent thievery in the Ministry of Education, but he would raise it to unprecedented levels." This is partially borne out by the fact that illiteracy levels for students ten years of age or over remained static, at 23.6 percent, even as education spending represented one quarter of the national budget in 1947. More importantly, Auténtico ministers, when they did spend on education, neglected rural areas, where the illiteracy rate was 41.7 percent. In Oriente province, a future Ortodoxo stronghold, the illiteracy rate reached 49.7 percent.

administration even as hospitals remained in short supply. The grandfather of Reinaldo Arenas, the late 20th century Cuban exile novelist, was perhaps typical of Chibás' rural supporters. The old man was a peasant from Oriente province who felt "great respect" for the *Ortodoxo* leader's anti-corruption campaign and bought a radio so he could listen to his "hero." The broadcasts may have helped convince him that Cuba's politicians were "delinquents."[21] The urban lower class also felt the sting of decrepit schools and badly managed hospitals, attracting them to Chibás, who promised to channel government monies toward honestly administered public services. Another group targeted for party appeals was Havana's middle class, especially given their revulsion to gangland style shootings (many in broad daylight) by "action groups" associated with the Auténticos. Lastly, there was the island's youth, especially University of Havana students, who, according to the political scientist Jaime Suchlicki, considered the *Ortodoxo* leader their "idol."[22]

Chibás' Sunday evening radio broadcasts (1943-1951) were the highest rated on the island, confirming his reputation as the most admired politician in Cuba. Richard Pack, a *New York Times* correspondent, characterized them as, "a half-hour of verbal fireworks" from a man who was by turns, "reporter, crusader, gossip and muckraker." Pack acknowledged that some Cubans disapproved of Chibás' antics and deemed him "a clown, a demagogue or worse." Even so, "Eddy," as he was known, not only "puts on a good show," but was also scrupulously honest at a time when corruption was widespread in Cuban politics.[23] On the whole, Chibás coupled

[21] Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* (Barcelona: Fábula Tusquets, 1998), 52.
[22] Jaime Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba,* 56.
[23] Richard Pack, "Report from Havana," *The New York Times,* April 28, 1946, II, 7.

personal magnetism with pleas for probity and accountability in government, socioeconomic reform and Cuban nationalism. At times, Chibás was able to address all these issues at once – as in the case of the U.S.-owned Cuban Electric Company. During a 1949 broadcast, Chibás accused the Supreme Tribunal of Justice of taking bribes after the court refused to overturn a 70 percent increase in electricity prices. This imbroglio proved an ideal opportunity for Chibás, who inveighed against judicial malfeasance, unfair rate hikes and a predatory foreign monopoly all in the same breath. As a result, he was jailed for defamation, which appears to have enhanced his reputation still further. Chibás, predictably, lost no time exploiting the situation, proclaiming, "I'll proudly go to jail to defend the (Cuban) people."[24] Evidently, many Cubans were convinced that he was the ideal leader. A May 1951 poll in *Bohemia* thus showed Chibás to be the most popular of all potential presidential candidates – more than 10 percentage points ahead of his nearest challenger and the favorite of all the nation's social classes.[25]

From a personal and psychological stanpoint, Chibás was considered somewhat eccentric. His nickname was "el loco," or the crazy one – in part because of the intemperate remarks that helped popularize his radio program and the recklessness with which he made public accusations. Such impetousness was also reflected in his private life, which reportedly included eight duels. Of course, Chibás'

[24] "Por defender al pueblo iría a la cárcel con orgullo." *Bohemia.* March 6, 1949: 46.
[25] *Bohemia*. May 20, 1951: supplement, 8, 10. Among other things, the *Bohemia* poll broke down the support of various presidential candidates by social class. Chibás was the leading contender among four distinct groups of varying degrees of wealth and prestige. The first, which included business owners, managers, executives, professionals and sub-professionals gave him 34.63 percent of their support. For the second group, which included office workers, middle class employees and shop assistants, the rate was 33.81 percent. In the third group, listed as "workers," Chibás led the poll with 29.05 percent. The fourth and most humble of the groups, which counted domestic servants and other "minor" professions, gave him 24.34 percent of their prospective votes.

sense of drama, his inclination toward rashness, and sincere desire to inspire his countrymen were united in his final act, a mélange of the personal and political, which involved shooting himself in the stomach while broadcasting. He allegedly had intended for the shot to ring out over the air, at the end of his weekly show, but he had exceeded his allotted 25-minute slot and listeners instead heard an advertisement for Café Pilon. Moreover, there is a dispute as to whether Chibás intended to take his own life or whether he merely sought, in bizarre fashion, to shift attention away from a dispute with Education Minister Arturo Sánchez Arango. Specifically, Chibás had publicly accused Sánchez Arango of stealing funds appropriated for supplies and school lunches in order to invest in Guatemalan real estate. This charge was based on rumor and in fact Chibás had unwisely attacked one of the most honest men in Prío's cabinet. On the evening Chibás shot himself he had promised to furnish proof for his allegation but, as none existed, may have sought to settle the debate (and win sympathy) with an extreme gesture. Sánchez Arango, in his 1972 memoir, claimed Chibás had attempted to do just that, performing a mere "simulation of suicide" which involved a careful calculation of the wound's location so as to cause a grave (though not fatal) injury.[26] Chibás, in fact, survived for eleven days afterward – which lends a measure of credence to Sánchez Arango's assertion. Also this action, albeit excessive, does not appear inconsistent with Chibás' penchant for stunts, his history of erratic behavior, and gnawing fear of losing ground in the polls.

[26] Arturo Sánchez Arango, *Trincheras de ideas...y piedras* (San Juan: Editorial San Juan, 1972), xi.

Seven months after Chibás died, Batista and the military overthrew Cuba's elected government. The connection between these events is a matter of much speculation. It also raises an essential question that must be addressed by any political biography: namely, what is the importance of the individual in history? In particular the degree to which Chibás was central to Cuba's political system between 1940 and 1952 warrants a more thorough analysis – especially given the evidence that suggests he was indeed highly important. This is relevant not only in light of the 1952 coup but also in assessing whether an honest, competent politician could have confronted Cuba's shortcomings and maintained the viability and prestige of an elective, democratic system. Is there reason to believe Chibás would have been capable of mitigating the island's deep-rooted ills of corruption, economic inequality and over-dependence on sugar had he been elected president? Clearly, the movement headed by Chibás addressed genuine Cuban concerns – namely government corruption, the economic divide between urban and rural dwellers, insufficient or shoddy public services, gangsterism, and predatory foreign monopolies. More than any contemporary politician, he condemned these problems and proposed to resolve them though renewal of the party system and reform of the nation's institutions. Such measures were by no means a panacea. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that genuine reform would have restored a great deal of confidence in Cuba's government and dimmed enthusiasm for radical solutions proposed by Batista and the military.

THE WEAKNESS OF CUBAN POLITICAL PARTIES

AND PERVASIVENESS OF POPULIST TACTICS

This study will also briefly analyze the role of Cuban political parties from the inception of the Republic into the 1950s in order to establish the degree to which they were influential political actors or primarily vehicles for personalistic politics. In this manner, the nature of the Cuban political system and Chibás' influence within that arena will be clarified. The political scientist Forrest Colburn, among others, has deemed political parties the "weakest link" in Latin American democracies.[27] More specifically, he notes that, "with limited exceptions, political parties in Latin America are not institutionalized, they are not stable, they do not have roots in society, they are not independent of ambitious leaders, and they are not democratic in their internal organization."[28] This echoes the analysis of the Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz, writing in 1919,[29] who lamented the island's "lack of a regulatory law regarding the internal organization of political parties and absence of guarantees of legality of their interior activities" and a "lack of renewal of the directive elements."[30] William Stokes, commenting on the situation in Cuba shortly after the 1944 election, pronounced the island's peaceful transfer of power and minimal evidence of fraud at the polls to be admirable developments. Even so, he noted that "(t)he parties continued to hover around personalities, the alignments and shifts in the coalitions responded to partisan profit rather than principle and program, (and)

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[27] Forrest Colburn, *Latin America at the End of Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 37.
[28] Ibid.
[29] At the time of the writing, Ortiz was a member of the Liberal Party and member of Cuba's House of Representatives – affording him an insider's perspective on the island's political malaise.
[30] Fernando Ortiz. "La crisis política cubana sus causas y remedios." *Orbita de Fernando Ortíz.* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1973), 103.

the campaign featured wordy and windy defenses of honor rather than intelligent analyses of economic, political and social issues."[31] In short, weak political parties dominated by individual charismatic leaders were frequently the norm between 1902 and 1952 – a development that stifled reform, encouraged corruption and muffled new voices and ideas in Cuban politics. Chibás was representative of this trend as well, to a certain extent, which was one reason why his party lost a great deal of effectiveness after his death.

During the Republic's early years (1902-1933), the political sphere was controlled by two political parties, both dominated by military veterans from the independence struggle. According to the historian José Hernández, this is because the United States desired to "keep Cuba quiet" after re-occupying the island between 1906 and 1909. As a result, the author claims the United States was willing to "tolerate" the domination of Cuban politics by former military men.[32] Consequently, José Miguel Gómez, an ex-general of Cuba's war of independence, controlled the Liberal Party until his death in 1921. After that, his friend and former Secretary of Government, Gerardo Machado, became the paramount figure in the party until he was ousted by a nation-wide revolt in 1933. Machado not only dominated his own party but also used his initial popularity as president, as well as co-optation and coercion, to win the submission of Cuba's political elite. Thus, in 1926, the

[31] William S. Stokes. "The Cuban Parliamentary System in Action, 1940-1947." *The Journal of Politics.* Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 1949): 351-352.
[32] José M. Hernandez, *Cuba and the United States: Intervention and Militarism, 1868-1933* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

Conservatives and the smaller Popular Party agreed to "patriotically"[33] work together with Machado in an arrangement known as *cooperativismo.* Thus, Luis Aguilar noted that, "for all practical purposes, Machado had no political opposition."[34] Similarly, the Conservatives were a virtual fiefdom of Mario García Menocal, another ex-general from the independence war, until his demise in 1941.

Jorge Domínguez argues that the United States-Cuba relationship changed, after the 1933 revolution, from imperialism to hegemony. As such, the United States was no longer concerned with Cuba's "details of internal rule." Rather, its priority was maintaining the "stability of the system as a whole," especially as that system benefited the United States economically (through trade) and politically (through diplomatic loyalty). Hence, the United States focused less on the merits of individual leaders than whether they would uphold the system.[35] Fulgencio Batista, the army sergeant who ruled behind the scenes between 1934 and 1940, was careful to cooperate. Under him, the island's political parties were relatively tame. For example, in 1936 he permitted a presidential election with candidates from the Liberals (Manuel de la Cruz), Conservatives (Mario García Menocal) and Republicans (Miguel Mariano Gómez, son of José Miguel) competing for a highly circumscribed office. Gómez, in a flawed vote, was victorious largely due to Batista's backing. However, he was replaced within a year because of an unwelcome

[33] Wilfredo Fernández, "Los nuevos horizontes," *Heraldo de Cuba*, December 9, 1925, 2. Fernández, who was a leader of the Conservatives, wrote that Machado's programs were so good for Cuba that, "true opposition was unpatriotic."
[34] Luis Aguilar. *Cuba 1933, Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 58.
[35] Jorge I. Domínguez. *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 54.

tendency to "seriously challenge" Batista.[36] When Batista ran as a civilian in the presidential election of 1940, which he won, he forged alliances with the Democratic Party (formerly the Conservatives) and the newly legalized Communists – offering both the perks of proximity to power in exchange for their support. Nevertheless, in 1944, Ramón Grau San Martín, a former University of Havana professor, was elected president as head of the *Auténticos*. He had led this party since its formation in 1934. This was quite appropriate as much of its original membership had been idealistic University of Havana students who, like him, had opposed and helped topple the dictatorship of Machado (1928-1933). Although Cuba's 1940 constitution barred re-election, Grau considered this possibility throughout his term but finally settled for a handpicked successor, Carlos Prío.

As a result of an administration characterized by nepotism,[37] corruption, *pistolerismo* and personal enrichment, Prío had severely eroded his party's credibility – providing Chibás, as head of the *Ortodoxos* with an excellent opportunity to win the presidency in 1952, implement his reform program and establish his party as a powerhouse in Cuban politics. His suicide, however, proved to be a particularly crushing blow. In part, this was because the Ortodoxos, as a relatively new organization, depended on Chibás' personal popularity rather than on a well developed party apparatus. After his death, Chibás was replaced on the *Ortodoxo* ticket by Roberto Agramonte, his cousin and running mate from 1948.

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[36] Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2001), 33. Specifically, he challenged Batista over perceived military interference in civilian affairs.

[37] Prío's brother Antonio was named treasury minister despite having no qualifications for the position.

Agramonte, a former sociology professor and vice rector at the University of Havana was a man of integrity, like Chibás, but he had a bland personality and very little personal connection with the Cuban populace. Nonetheless, he led in the polls and, as the U.S. historian Charles Ameringer notes, a win by Agramonte would have been "a personal victory for the martyr Chibás" had Batista and the military not staged a coup three months before the scheduled presidential election.[38]

* * *

This study will also analyze the degree to which populism permeated Cuban politics and was used by Chibás as a mechanism to increase his influence and impose his political program. Populism and populist tactics have long been a mainstay of Cuban politics, both during the years 1940-1952 and before. Along with Batista and Grau, Chibás operated in what the historian Michael Conniff describes as the "heyday" of Latin American populism.[39] This period, which roughly spanned the 1940s through the 1960s, was distinguished by increasing democratization and expansion of the franchise in the region. This was certainly true in Cuba, where the Constitution of 1940 upheld democracy and guaranteed the vote for women. Of these three, Grau and Chibás hew closest to Conniff's definition of populists as leaders who had charismatic relationships with mass followings and who won elections regularly.[40] Grau, who was constitutionally barred from a second term, left office diminished by scandal. Chibás, who was elected to the Cuban congress in 1940 and the senate in 1944, had perhaps reached the height of his popularity

[38] Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience,* 175.
[39] Conniff, Michael L., ed., *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 11.
[40] Ibid., 7.

shortly before committing suicide – especially as his reputation for probity made him seem a perfect foil to Carlos Prío. Conniff also mentions the increasing role of "new media." This, in fact, is the realm where Chibás exceeded the reach of all previous Cuban politicians. Radio had debuted in Cuba in the 1920s and was widespread by the 1930s but no one other politician had exploited this medium to greater effect. Chibás was in many ways ideally suited to the airwaves, especially given his verbal pyrotechnics and apparent ability to read the public's mood. Moreover, an examination of Chibás' innovative use of radio as political theater will contribute to the general understanding of Cuban and Latin American populism during the mid 20th century.

POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

A political biography must take special care not to overstate its subject's talents, accomplishments and influence while at the same time offering an accurate assessment of the individual's impact. This is especially pertinent given the pervasive tendency to lionize "great men" of Latin America generally and Cuba specifically. Hagiographies or favorably distorted portraits of Latin American icons abound, ranging from Columbus to Cortés and Bolívar to Castro. Nor are such treatments necessarily a relic of distant eras. For example, the British historian Matthew Restall has drawn attention to the persistence of the "great man" treatment accorded Cortés, among others. He notes that *Conquest: Cortés, Montezuma and the Fall of Old Mexico*, an account published in 1995 by the historian

Hugh Thomas, includes a "glorification" of the Spanish conquistador and "an endorsement of the myth that a few great and exceptional men made the Conquest possible."[41] Further, lest Thomas be dismissed as something less than a "serious" scholar, Restall also points out that the historian Charles Gibson, a widely respected specialist of colonial Latin America, was not immune from such characterizations. *Spain in America*, published in 1966, portrays Cortés as an "exception" and "archetype" even as much evidence exists to suggest otherwise.[42]

In Cuba, a common variation on the "great man" theme involves premature death – leaving unanswered questions as to what might have been. The island's greatest example (and exemplar) of this phenomenon is José Martí, who died during the stuggle against Spain for independence.[43] The reverence that Cubans of all political persuasions feel (and have long felt) for Martí can be summed up in his sobriquet, "El Apóstol." The religious overtone of this nickname is neither metaphorical nor accidental for he is quite literally the national secular saint. As such, a diverse collection of figures including Batista, Grau, Prío, Castro and certainly Chibás claim to have been guided by his writings.[44] The journalist Carlos Alberto Montaner aptly sums up the situation, asserting that "to deny Martí would be to renounce an ingredient – perhaps the basic one – of Cuban-ness."[45] This being the case, biographers of Martí have been faced with a monumental challenge. Jorge

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[41] Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.
[42] Ibid., 19.
[43] Another figure, of almost equal acclaim and popularity is Antonio Maceo, who also died in the war and is known as Cuba's greatest military genius.
[44] John M. Kirk, ""From 'Inadaptado Sublime' to 'Líder Revolucionario': Some Further Thoughts on the Presentation of José Martí." *Latin American Research Review.* Vol. 15, No. 3 (1980): 127-147.
[45] Carlos Alberto Montaner, *El pensamiento de José Martí.* (Madrid: Plaza Mayor Ediciones, 1971), 4.

Mañach, the public intellectual and onetime *Ortodoxo*, is representative. His 1933 biography, entitled *Martí el Apóstol*, is duly and unsurprisingly awestruck. He thus concludes that, "Seldom has the personality and work of a man been so consubstantial with the will of a whole people."[46] Post-revolutionary works on Martí have been distorted as well but in a different fashion. According to the literary analyst John Kirk, the early goal was to use Martí to "justify" the revolution while later on conciliating his views with those of Marxism became the primary object.[47] Owing to these considerations, a first-rate biography of Martí remains elusive.

Unlike Martí, who is universally beloved but diversely understood, Cuba's current "great man," Fidel Castro, is a highly polarizing figure. On one hand, he is an icon within Cuba and to left-leaning sectors in Latin America and the world at large. The journalist and Castro biographer, Volker Skierka, described how Castro's celebrity in Argentina was such that his appearance at Nestor Kirchner's 2002 inauguration easily overshadowed the event. Also, during his stay in Buenos Aires, a speech meant for 800 invited guests quickly turned into an open-air affair attended by tens of thousands of eager listeners.[48] At the same time, Castro is absolutely reviled by large portions of the Cuban exile community and United States officialdom among others. The historian Luis Pérez, related in 1994 that a seething anti-Castro "genre" had long since become "a veritable cottage industry" within the United States, where a continuous stream of works dismiss him as a madman,

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[46] Jorge Mañach. *Martí: Apostle of Freedom,* (New York: Devon-Adair Co., 1953), 363.
[47] Kirk, "From 'Inadaptado Sublime,'" 140-141.
[48] Volker Skierka, *Fidel Castro, A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), xvii.

megalomaniac or menace.[49] Nevertheless a handful of interesting biographies have also appeared. These include *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* by the recently deceased freelance writer Tad Szulc and *Castro* by the historian Sebastian Balfour. Szulc's book, published in 1986, is distinguished for its abiding interest in Castro's ideological evolution. In particular, he traces Castro's contacts with the Cuban communists in the pre 1959 and early revolutionary period. Balfour's more recent work (1995) describes Castro and his revolution as eminently adaptable. This quality rather than any set of quasi-mystical powers, he argues, has been paramount in maintaining his rule for nearly five decades. From a biographical standpoint, Balfour demonstrates some skill in placing Castro in perspective. The Cuban leader's cleverness is given full due (for example, his genius in the manipulation of national symbols – especially Martí) but never hyperbolized. His faults, among them persistent economic mismanagement, are not minimized either.

Eduardo Chibás, while far from approaching the status of Martí or Castro, has nonetheless been the subject of a "great man" style hagiography. Luis Conte Agüero's *Eduardo Chibás: el Adalid de Cuba*, published in 1955, represents the only in-depth biography of Chibás in any language. Conte Agüero, a journalist and close friend of Chibás, had been first secretary of the *Ortodoxo* party. As with Mañach in 1933, he was perhaps seeking a Cuban hero in the midst of brutal dictatorship – in this case, that of Batista (1952-1958). While this book is a valuable source, it is also unabashedly reverential, referring to Chibás at times as, "the greatest of all

[49] Luis A. Perez, Jr., "Review of *Fidel Castro* by Robert E. Quirk," *The American Historical Review.* Vol. 99, No. 5. (December 1994), 1786-1787.

Cubans."[50] Given the impact of Chibás on Cuban politics during the 1940s and early 1950s, it seems clear that new scholarship in this area is warranted and would contribute to a fuller understanding of the era. Further, this study will attempt to more accurately assess Chibás' actual impact on the evolution of the Cuban political system.

In addition to Conte Agüero's book, a host of smaller volumes and essays have addressed Chibás and his place in Cuban politics. Elena Alavez Martín, a professor at the Escuela Profesional de Periodismo "Manuel Márquez Sterling" in Havana, has produced two short volumes on Chibás. The first, from 1994, is less than 70 pages in length and provides a skeletal, approval-laden outline of the Ortodoxo leader's career. This was followed eight years later by *La ortodoxia en el ideario americano*, which details the party's struggle against corrupt Auténticos. As with Conte Agüero, the author is not above bouts of admiration. Ramón Rodríguez Salgado's 1998 essay, entitled *Ortodoxia chibasista: nacimento, liderazgo y acción de un movimiento politico* denounces Chibás' "retrograde" anti-communism, but also praises his strong support of national sovereignty, economic independence, political liberty and social justice, which the author claims the Cuban revolution has attained. More recently, in 2001, the historian Frank Argote-Freyre produced a brief article entitled, "The Political Afterlife of Eduardo Chibás: Evolution of a Symbol, 1951-1991." Here, the author examines how the *Ortodoxo* leader passed from icon of various anti-Batista factions in the years 1952-1958 to revered martyr of the early revolution (1959-1961) and finally to diminished status over the next three decades

[50] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 798.

due to the regime's increasingly communist orientation and a new generation of heroes, especially Che Guevara.

Useful albeit cameo portraits of the *Ortodoxo* leader can also be found in Samuel Farber's *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba*, Jorge Domínguez's *Cuba: Order and Revolution* and Luis Aguilar's *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution*. None of these address the evolution of *Chibasista*-style Cuban populism nor do they treat more than superficially the *Ortodoxo* party's formation, the degree to which it was dominated by Chibas' personal popularity and the consequences for its future after his death. There are also quite a few publications of varying quality by politicians, literary figures and other notables of the era. For example, *Los días iguales*, a memoir by the former Liberal party head Eduardo Suárez Rivas sheds some light on the political machinations of the era – especially regarding *Auténtico* malfeasance. *Mea Cuba*, a collection of essays by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, offers details surrounding Chibás' suicide and its aftermath.

* * *

The methodology to be used in establishing Chibás' centrality to the Cuban political system during the years 1940-1952 will involve analysis of his legislative program, radio show, party activities and administrative style. Chibás was a congressman (1940-1944) and senator (1944-1948, 1950-1951) and his legislative contributions, including bills he proposed or supported will indicate his importance in shaping the island's politics. Another factor to be examined will be the influence Chibás wielded as the nation's most popular radio personality. Specifically, Chibás was able to focus the attention of his listeners on the issues of corruption and

gangsterismo. He emphasized that these problems (both of which undermined the government's legitimacy) were resolvable by committed reformers and put them at the forefront of Cuban political discourse. Thus, a 1951 *Bohemia* poll noted that 8.53 percent of respondents claimed "*mala administración*" as the worst aspect of Carlos Prío's term in office while another 2.2 percent mentioned "*gangsterismo*."[51] This, in turn, encouraged political parties (particularly the ruling *Auténticos*) to put forth candidates untainted by corruption. An examination of the way in which Chibás cultivated various sectors (i.e. blacks, rural dwellers, the middle class and urban workers) of Cuban society will provide a sense of his ability to mobilize support and generate enthusiasm for his program and the extent to which this led to changes in Cuba's political sphere. Finally, Chibás' talent for administration must be addressed. As previously noted, he was a man of probity who never embezzled, took kickbacks or abused any position of authority he attained. In order to posit Chibás as a potentially successful reformer, however, it will be proven that he possessed a knack for delegating authority to those who not only shared his ethics but also were efficient, talented and politically savvy. Such individuals, were they to become the norm at the head Cuba's institutions, could very well have inspired renewed faith in the government. In this sense, an analysis of Chibás' tenure as *Ortodoxo* party chief (1947-1951), where he wielded executive power, will yield essential clues about him as an administrator.

[51] "¿Cualés son las peores obras o medidas del Gobierno del dr. Príо?," *Bohemia,* May 20, 1951: supplement, 9.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The dissertation consists of ten chapters, beginning in May of 1947 just before Chibás founded the *Ortodoxo* party and ending with his death by a self-inflicted gunshot wound in August of 1951. Chapter 1 opens with a description of the tribulations and eventual suicide of Havana mayor Manuel Fernández Supervielle. This tragedy offers a useful lens though which to view both Chibás and Cuba's political culture. Supervielle, who had promised to build a new aqueduct for Havana, killed himself after the project was repeatedly blocked by President Ramón Grau San Martín. Grau, who nurtured hopes of re-election, viewed the aqueduct as a potential threat to his popularity. This was no simple matter of personal rivalry, however. Under Cuba's 1940 constitution, Grau was prohibited from seeking another term but nonetheless organized a discreet campaign to modify the rules. This proved to be one of many instances in which Cuba's laws were ignored or dismissed by the men who helped craft them. Chibás attempted to check this tendency by stirring public outrage during his popular radio broadcasts. In this case, Supervielle's suicide also was one of many factors that pushed Chibás to found the *Ortodoxo* party. Chapter 2 describes Chibás' messianic political style and his close relationship with Cuba's poorest citizens. It also follows his attempts to build a viable political organization. From the beginning, *Ortodoxos* were beset by factionalism – especially between realists like Pelayo Cuervo, who proposed to reform the island's politics by uniting the flawed and often highly corrupt political opposition and idealists such as Rafael García Bárcena, who believed the party should stand alone. Chapter 3 analyzes the preparations for Cuba's 1948

presidential election by all the major parties and an attempt by army chief Genovevo Pérez Dámera to interfere in the political process. The role of Cuba's courts in upholding electoral law is also explored. Chapter 4 details Chibás' frenetic and innovative presidential campaign in which he attempted to defeat his rivals through radio appeals and theatrical speeches rather than a political machine or vote buying. Given the mass defection of realists, Chibás also firmly situated himself in the idealist camp. Chapter 5 examines Chibás' strong electoral showing, good for third place overall, in which he garnered more than 300,000 votes. It also covers the early days of Carlos Prío's presidency, which was flawed but represented a genuine improvement. For example, Prío sought to work with Cuba's legislative branch rather than ruling by decree. Chapter 6 looks at Chibás' crusade against the United States owned Cuban Electric Company, which landed him in prison when he accused a judge of taking bribes from the company to ensure it could continue to charge exorbitant rates. Chibás was largely jailed at the president's behest as a means to keeping him off the radio, where his criticism damaged Prío's popularity. Chapter 7 explores Chibás' fight to keep the government from negotiating a loan with United States banks. Cuba had a long history of borrowing money on onerous terms from United States lending institutions and he felt this placed an undue burden on the nation's economy and compromised the island's sovereignty. Further, he charged that much of the cash was either embezzled or funneled into political campaigns meant to keep the government in power. Chapter 8 finds Chibás weakened by a diaphragmatic hernia, which required two surgeries to correct. Nonetheless, Chibás decided to test his popularity by running for an open senate seat against a disliked

but well-heeled government sponsored candidate. Chibás' resounding victory, which was achieved almost entirely without campaigning as he was often confined to his bed, proved the limits of political machines and vote buying. Another popular *Ortodoxo* radio broadcaster, José Pardo Llada, followed in Chibás' footsteps and was elected to congress by a wide margin. Chapter 9 highlights an attempt by President Carlos Prío to abridge free speech in Cuba by invoking the so-called "gag decree" against Chibás' radio broadcasts. As the 1952 elections loomed, he hoped to damage the *Ortodoxo* leader by looking for any pretext to disrupt his popular show. A peaceful protest organized by Chibás against the decree was violently dispersed by the government. Chapter 10 treats an attempt by Cuba's courts to hold ex President Grau responsible for his administration's corruption. The process was scuttled by President Prío, who feared his brother Antonio would also be among those indicted. The chapter's primary emphasis, however, is on Chibás' polemic with Education Minister Aureliano Sánchez Arango. This dispute led the *Ortodoxo* leader to shoot himself in the stomach – a wound which eventually proved fatal. Besides serving as an endpoint to Chibás' life, this suicide also heralds the end of an era as democracy in Cuba outlasted him by less than seven months.

Chapter 1

"As Long As Any Cuban Suffers, I Will Fight For Him"

By spring of 1947, the mayor of Havana was frustrated, perplexed and contemplating drastic measures. Having been elected on a platform of bringing water to the parched capital city, Manuel Fernández Supervielle had failed and his constituents were irate. Upon being recognized in public, chants of "*agua*" trailed him relentlessly. During trips to the cinema, he sat apart from the crowd so as not to be seen and if his image appeared on a newsreel it was greeted with derisive whistles. Even Havana's merchants, whom Supervielle had saved from a series of onerous taxes in his former post as treasury minister, turned their backs on him. Presiding over the celebration of Retailer's Day, in the lush gardens of the Tropical brewery, the mayor was greeted by angry demands that he fulfill his pledge to build a new aqueduct.[1]

Supervielle was a proud man who took these slights to heart. His campaign, marked by the slogan, "Havana will have water!" had aroused a genuine fervor – especially as the city, with a population of 600,000, contended with a water supply suited for 150,000.[2] Now, a short while later, and despite his lengthy career as an honest and conscientious politician, Havana's denizens assumed he was a fraud and a liar. Even so, he was not the sort to complain or welter in pity. At times, Supervielle attempted to explain his predicament but always did so privately. One

[1] "En Cuba, Duelo," *Bohemia,* May 11, 1947, 43.
[2] Humberto Vázquez García, *El gobierno de la Kubanidad* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2005), 316.

such case was on Sunday, April 20, when, accompanied by a group of municipal employees, he visited a hospital where the chief of the city's education department was convalescing. Finding himself among a sympathetic crowd and perhaps responding to some gentle prodding, he began recounting the details of his ordeal.[3] He confessed that his friend Ramón Grau San Martín, Cuba's president and a fellow member of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (*Auténtico*), had persuaded him to leave his post as treasury minister and run for mayor. After taking office in September of 1946, everything initially proceeded smoothly and with the president's full support. Grau's enthusiasm was such that he once kept Clinton P. Anderson, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture waiting (and hungry, as Anderson had been invited to dinner) for two hours while he and Supervielle examined preliminary plans for the aqueduct.

Once the blueprints were finalized, Supervielle estimated the cost to be six million pesos.[4] He then contacted José Morell Romero, president of the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund, who had offered to finance the aqueduct.[5] Morell Romero not only considered lending to the city a good investment, he confessed to unhappily presiding over 21 million "unproductive" pesos.[6] The two quickly reached a verbal agreement and then considered the legality of their proposed

[3] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 104-106, Archivo Nacional de Cuba (Hereafter ANC). Armando Mier Vega and Rafael Fernández Núñez, both of whom were present at the hospital where Supervielle spoke, reproduced his words from memory just over two weeks later. A slightly different account of the situation also appears in, "en Cuba, Municipio," *Bohemia,* January 26, 1947, 38-39.

[4] The Cuban peso during this period was interchangeable with the United States dollar.

[5] Financing the aqueduct through a loan from the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund had been the centerpiece of Supervielle's plan, in large part for nationalistic reasons. President Grau had devised the refrain, "An aqueduct without concessions and with Cuban money," in response to a previous proposal under the mayoralty of Raúl García Menocal (1943-1946), who was a Democrat, and which called for concessions and foreign funding.

[6] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 104, ANC.

transaction. Supervielle, who was a lawyer before entering politics and had been an elected member of the constituent assembly that drafted the island's constitution, devised a formula by which the loan would agree with the city's legal code. The following day, Supervielle arranged a meeting with Grau, Morell Romero and Jesús Menéndez, president of the National Federation of Sugar Workers. Menéndez expressed approval, saying that water was always a good business and the aqueduct would represent "another triumph for the working class."[7] As everyone prepared to leave, Grau, who had been silent until then, warned in his smiling, affable manner that the loan presently being negotiated did not fulfill "specific requirements" of the constitution and urged them to be careful. According to Morell Romero and Menéndez, the mayor turned "intensely pallid" upon hearing these words and for good reason.[8] Instantly, the project was thrust into political quicksand. First, a commission of legal experts was convened to examine the issue. After they assented, Grau convoked a committee of engineers to inspect the aqueduct's blueprint for design flaws. When none were encountered, the president contracted a panel of financiers to analyze the cost. Finding no irregularities, Supervielle once again approached Morell Romero. In the intervening two months, however, the president of the Sugar Workers' Retirement Fund had developed a case of cold feet. Claiming the loan was now "a very big responsibility," Morell Romero deferred to the assemblies of workers, tenants and landowners that governed the fund.[9] When

[7] Ibid, 105.
[8] "En Cuba: Municipio," *Bohemia,* January 26, 1947, 39.
[9] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 105, ANC.

two of these delegations attached unreasonable conditions to their consent, Supervielle was forced to abandon this avenue.[10]

At various points during Supervielle's monologue, his listeners suggested he make a declaration that would clarify the facts. The mayor replied that he preferred not to harm anyone nor did he wish to hinder the country's progress. As treasury minister, he had witnessed the negative effect of scandals on Cuba's economy. At the same time, Supervielle repeatedly wondered why he had been made mayor if he was only going to be thwarted. He also groped for an explanation as to why Grau, whom he had believed to be a close friend, had changed his mind suddenly and so completely. While the president's behavior was surely vexing, both the mayor and his sympathizers were wrong to imply his harassment in the street was the result of an ignorant citizenry. For example, *Bohemia,* the nation's most popular magazine, reported on every stage of the negotiations.[11] A piece appearing on January 26, 1947 informed readers not only of Grau's reservation regarding the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund but also of shady dealings in the municipal council, where opposition aldermen demanded a "slice" of the six million pesos earmarked for the project in exchange for their support.[12] The public was even aware that the "municipal first lady" had suggested her husband visit a blood bank as a way of

[10] The tenants' assembly approved the loan on the condition that Cuba's legislature pass a law establishing a Tribunal of Accounts. This, obviously, was outside of Supervielle's control. The landowners' delegation also desired something from Cuba's legislators. They demanded that the Sugar Workers' Retirement Fund, which had been established by presidential decree, must be formalized by an act of Congress. Supervielle was powerless here as well. The workers' delegation, perhaps swayed by the enthusiasm of Jesús Menéndez, approved the loan without reservations.

[11] *Bohemia's* weekly circulation at this time was 140,000. Subsequently, the magazine conducted a study in urban and suburban areas revealing that approximately six people read each issue. When *Bohemia's* rural subscribers were taken into account, the number of total readers each week was "conservatively" estimated to be more than one million, or 20 percent of Cuba's population. See: "Un Survey de *Bohemia* Sobre Sus Lectores Adultos," *Bohemia,* March 7, 1948: 58-59.

[12] "En Cuba, Municipio," *Bohemia,* January 26, 1947: 38.

drumming up positive publicity. Cubans were later notified that Supervielle had deceived them even in this small endeavor. After being photographed by the Havana newspapers with his shirtsleeve rolled up, the mayor refused to have his blood drawn on account of his fragile health.[13]

As Supervielle wrestled with mounting disappointment, he was acutely aware of the looming first anniversary of his election. With the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund off limits, the mayor had no choice but to court foreign companies. At the same time, these would almost certainly not pass muster with a president who had sloganeered to the tune of, "An aqueduct without concessions and with Cuban money." Nevertheless, Supervielle entered negotiations with a series of overseas ventures, including Frederick Snare Corporation of the United States and a Canadian investment company, but each time he demurred before a deal could be reached. On a different occasion, the mayor apparently considered a loan from the owner of the building where he lived – perhaps believing the man, who was Cuban, was preferable to a foreigner. The feverish, semi-distracted state of Supervielle's dealings led a *Bohemia* correspondent to write that, "In municipal circles, there is speculation as to the identity of the next fortunate mortal who, within a week's time, will enter into negotiations with the mayor, with the objective of beginning the eagerly awaited aqueduct, although it's suspected the mayor will accommodate whomever crosses his path next."[14]

Two weeks after that Sunday in April, when Supervielle had unburdened himself before some of the few people who still sympathized with him, he awoke

[13] "En Cuba, Política: Ni sangre ni agua" *Bohemia,* April 6, 1947: 35.
[14] "En Cuba, Municipio: Supervielle el Irresoluto," *Bohemia,* May 4, 1947: 41.

early and appeared bathed and clean-shaven in his garage at around 7:40 a.m. There, as usual, he encountered Sergio Álvarez – the policeman assigned to protect him since his days as treasury secretary. "Sergio," said the mayor in a playful tone, "you carry a revolver I don't like. It's old and ugly. Show it to me. One day, I'm going to give you a new one."[15] Álvarez disarmed the pistol, a .38 caliber, and handed it over. Supervielle briefly examined the weapon, insisted again it was not to his taste and told Álvarez to call for a police car as he had an errand that required attention. Álvarez, who was seated next to the mayor, asked for his gun, saying he felt uncomfortable going out into the street unarmed. Supervielle returned the weapon, watched Álvarez insert the magazine, and then snatched it from him. Before Álvarez could respond, Supervielle quickly shot himself in the chest. Later on, as the mayor's corpse was laid out on a city hospital's operating table, two letters escaped from his jacket pocket: one addressed to the judge of instruction, the other to his wife of 18 years. The former was dated May 2, two days before his suicide. "I deprive myself of life," it read, "because in spite of my efforts to resolve the problem of water in Havana, multiple inconveniences and obstacles have been placed in my way, making it impossible, and this implies for me a political failure and leaves unfulfilled the promise I made to the people."[16]

Among the first to arrive at Supervielle's residence in the plush suburb of Miramar was Eduardo Chibás, accompanied by his friend and political confidant, Luis Orlando Rodríguez. They, along with two reporters who had preceded them, listened as Aurelia Palacios, the mayor's grief-stricken widow screamed, "Grau is

[15] "En Cuba, Duelo," *Bohemia,* May 11, 1947: 42.
[16] Ibid.

responsible! He's the only one responsible for Manuel's death!" She then looked at Chibás and said, "You know everything. You have to awaken the people. You have to open their eyes."[17]

* * *

Eduardo Chibás cut a unique swath in Cuban politics. Eddy, as he was widely known, was a 39 year old *Auténtico* senator. He also happened to be the island's most gifted orator, a bona fide radio celebrity and budding messianic figure whose followers often compared him to Jesus Christ.[18] His Sunday evening broadcasts regularly topped the popularity charts, often surpassing the island's famed *radionovelas*.[19] Richard Pack, a *New York Times* correspondent, characterized Chibás as a "reporter, crusader, gossip and muckraker" who treated listeners to a weekly half hour dose of "verbal fireworks."[20] The show offered more than mere entertainment, however. Chibás urged his audience to expose examples of injustice or corruption and every week letters poured in from all corners of the island. "As long as any Cuban suffers," he reminded listeners, "I will fight for him." For this reason, Supervielle's widow pinned her hopes on Chibás, adding that some city

[17] Ibid., 42-43 See also Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 502. When President Grau arrived at the Supervielle residence shortly thereafter, he told the mayor's wife, "Señora, the nation has lost one of its most illustrious sons. You were a great help to him." Without missing a beat, she replied, "And you helped him to end up like this."

[18] For example, a letter to Chibás by Jorge González Rojas, of Havana, stated, "I admire your bravery, courage and incorruptible dignity and I'm sure that just as God chose Jesus Christ to save Christianity from the wave of perverts that exploited it, He has chosen you to realize a similar labor in Cuban politics." Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 34, Expediente 1089: 1, ANC. Another Chibás admirer sent him a poem, the opening lines of which read, "Like Jesus Christ, you tell the truth to men without scruples." Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1094: 155, ANC.

[19] The first *radionovelas* in Latin America were written and produced in Cuba during the late 1930s.

[20] Richard Pack, "Report from Havana." *The New York Times,* April 28, 1946, II, 7.

council members had demanded $5000 apiece in exchange for supporting the aqueduct.[21]

More to the point, it was no secret that Chibás had lately suffered troubles of his own with Grau.[22] In 1944, Grau had won the presidency in what many considered the cleanest elections Cuba had ever held. Chibás, who gained a senate seat in the voting, termed Grau's restoration, "the glorious journey." During the campaign, Grau's adherents had so effusive and greeted him with such ebullience that he suffered broken bones in his right hand, which came to be known as the "hand made sick by popularity."[23] He was also inundated with brief, laudatory poems called *décimas*. In one, a female admirer from Santa Clara declared: "In the end, Grau, who could possibly arrive in your presence and explain the impatience

[21] "en Cuba, Duelo," *Bohemia,* May 11, 1947, 43. See also, Conte Agüero, 503.

[22] Chibás first met Grau as an impressionable 17 year old when they were both passengers on a luxury steamship. Eddy, a recent high school graduate at the time, had been set to spend three months in Europe with his parents and younger brother, Raúl. Grau, who was 20 years older, already boasted a lucrative medical practice along with a professorship in physiology at the University of Havana. During the next two decades, they fashioned a close personal and political relationship. In 1927, Grau backed the *Directorio Estudiantil Universitario* (Student Directorate) of the University of Havana in its opposition to the "reform" of President Gerardo Machado y Morales (1925-1933) that extended his term and provided for his illegal re-election. As a result, he endured intermittent jail and exile during the next six years but also became the idol of many university students. Chibás returned the favor by nominating Grau for Cuba's presidency on behalf of the Student Directorate on September 8, 1933. By this time, the island was in turmoil after Machado's ouster on August 12 and the overthrow of the United States sponsored successor government of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes on September 5. Grau's brief first presidency, known as the "100 days" (despite lasting 127), formed the basis of his future political career. During this period, he issued a series of popular decrees that enshrined the eight-hour day, minimum wages for cane cutters, voting rights for women, autonomy for the University of Havana, a 45 percent reduction in the price of electricity and a mandate that half of all workers in agriculture, commerce and industry be Cuban citizens. Grau was deposed on January 18, 1934, but his decrees, few of which had been implemented due to the government's weakness, remained his calling card. In the decade that followed, when Fulgencio Batista ruled Cuba first as a military strongman (1934-1940) and later as a democratically elected president (1940-1944), the frustrated promise of Grau's tenure grew in the imagination of many Cubans. For this, the former physiology professor owed a considerable debt to Chibás, his most charismatic and popular disciple.

[23] José Pardo Llada, "Gestos, manías y hábitos de nuestros hombres públicos," *Bohemia,* May 4, 1947: 10.

with which the People await you?" [24] According to *Bohemia*, the new president's inauguration set off "an explosion of popular jubilation never before seen in Cuba."[25] Grau thus entered office a near mythic figure, almost more ethereal than human, and in this sense he was certain to disappoint. What no one expected, however, was for the ex physiology professor to prove so tolerant of corruption and contemptuous of the island's constitution. On January 19, 1947, Chibás addressed a 12-page letter to his friend.[26] He urged Grau to end the re-election campaign being waged on his behalf by government functionaries, to fire corrupt ministers and send them to the courts for trial and crush the black market that raised the cost of living and made wealthy men of dishonest officials.[27] The re-election effort was particularly galling for Chibás on two accounts. First, Cuba's 1940 constitution, which both men had a hand in crafting as members of the constituent assembly, strictly forbade the practice and Grau's own *Auténtico* party had proposed the measure, which had been approved unanimously.[28] Second, Chibás harbored presidential ambitions of his own and longed to correct his erstwhile master's mistakes. In any case, Grau ignored the missive even as many of his policies sowed anger and distrust among Cubans who had expected great things from him. Thus, an editorial in the weekly

[24] Quoted in Vazquez Garcia, *El Gobierno de la Kubanidad,* 62.
[25] "En Cuba, "Balance," October 10, 1948: 107.
[26] Chibás also sent his letter to the newspapers. On January 21, 1947, *Diario de la Marina* printed it in its entirety.
[27] The fact that Chibás now criticized Grau for fomenting the black market represented a complete about face. During a broadcast of April 15, 1945, he had strenuously defended Grau's system for supplying Cubans with basic foodstuffs. He also excoriated Santiago Rey Perna, a Republican senator from Las Villas, for lacking the moral authority to criticize Grau – especially given his poor record as former governor of that province. Three days later, Chibás and Rey fought a saber duel in which the former was lightly wounded on the forearm and back.
[28] Although the constitution forbade consecutive re-election, ex presidents could run again after they had been out of office for eight years.

magazine *Carteles* declared, "Never has a government defrauded the faith of Cubans so rapidly and radically as that of Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín."[29]

On March 1, 1947 a bloc of pro-Chibás *Auténticos*, known as the *grupo ortodoxo*, met in Senator Pelayo Cuervo Navarro's home to discuss the formation of a new political party. By this time, Grau had renounced re-election but those present were certain he would take revenge. In their view, remaining within the fold would be "political suicide."[30] Nevertheless, Chibás promptly shocked everyone by asserting that the right "historical juncture," had not yet presented itself.[31] Cuba's political sphere was fragmented, with no party attracting more than half the island's votes in presidential polls. As head of a new entity, Chibás reasoned, he would require pacts in order to win the presidency. This would entail diluting the prospective party's platform just as the *Auténticos* had done in 1944 when they allied with the Republicans.[32] Chibás thus told the group, in what would become one of his political hallmarks, that he was interested more in "ideology without pacts than pacts without ideology."[33] Aside from an attachment to the organization he had helped build, Chibás also believed the *Auténticos* were capable of winning the presidency without coalitions if they chose the right candidate, namely himself, and jettisoned the party's crooked elements.[34] Eight days later, on his radio show,

[29] "El Gobierno y la denuncia de Chibás," *Carteles,* January 19, 1947: 25.
[30] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 488.
[31] en Cuba, "Política: Conflicto Emocional," *Bohemia,* March 9, 1947: 40.
[32] As part of the deal, Grau's vice-president, Raúl de Cárdenas, was a Republican.
[33] "En Cuba, Política: Conflicto Emocional," 40.
[34] On July 14, 1946, the provincial assembly of the Auténtico party in Oriente, the largest and most populous of Cuba's six provinces, proclaimed Chibás their choice for the presidential nomination in 1948. This had been arranged beforehand, with Chibás' knowledge, by Emilio Ochoa, the Auténtico party president of Oriente. That evening, Chibás addressed a grateful speech to his supporters via

Chibás likened the *Auténtico* party to a warship lashed by a tempest, leaking water and infiltrated by enemies. What, asked Chibás, are the responsibilities of loyal crewmembers under such circumstances? They must denounce traitors and struggle to save the boat along with the ideals it represents regardless of the consequences. Amused by this allegory, a *Bohemia* reporter noted that Chibás had "turned himself into a mariner, whose love of the sea rivaled Sinbad."[35] In a less metaphorical moment, Chibás announced that forming a new "political instrument" and heading a coalition of the island's other parties would almost surely guarantee him the nation's highest office in 1948. Even so, he declared, "I am unwilling to exchange my historic position in Cuba's revolutionary movement for the presidency of the republic."[36] On the other hand, Chibás continued associating with the *grupo ortodoxo* – whose leaders set a date for leaving the party. Manuel Bisbé, a congressman, professor of Greek and one of Chibás' closest friends assured them Eddy would join after resolving his "emotional conflict."[37]

While *Auténtico* bigwigs viewed the man known as *el loco* (the crazy one) with mistrust, the *grupo ortodoxo* wondered when Chibás would realize, as Bisbé had said, "the impossibility of continuing in the party."[38] Hence, each new development became a test of Chibás' loyalties and intentions. On March 17, *grupo ortodoxo* senators drew up a motion to interpellate Grau's sleaziest cabinet members: minister of education, José Manuel Alemán and minister of commerce,

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radio in which he claimed his popularity coupled with that of the party would guarantee a "definitive and crushing victory" without pacts or coalitions. See Conte Agüero, 445.

[35] "En Cuba, "Política: Chibás el Marino," *Bohemia,* March 16, 1947: 43.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "En Cuba, Política: Conflicto Emocional," 40.

[38] "En Cuba, Política: Conflicto Emocional," 40.

César Casas. Asked whether he would add his name, Chibás agreed on two conditions. First, the motion must not attack the *Auténticos* as a party and second, no politicians from other parties would be asked to sign. If the *grupo ortodoxo* hoped Chibás would see the futility of his situation, this was indeed a shrewd tactic. In 1945, when Inocente Álvarez submitted to a seven-hour interpellation and Cuba's chamber of representatives subsequently voted "no confidence," Grau was indignant and resisted removing him. When Álvarez did finally bow to calls for his resignation, Grau flouted the island's semi-parliamentary system by making him foreign minister shortly thereafter. Zeroing in on Alemán and Casas would almost certainly lead to similar contempt – especially as the president considered Alemán his "best minister."[39] Though the *grupo ortodoxo* did not intend the motion as a ruse to lure Chibás, its members surely realized the potential symbolism. After all, Chibás and Alemán were nearly perfect foils.

Eddy joined the *Auténticos* in 1938, before the party was allowed to function legally in Cuba and could offer members little aside from persecution. Alemán, on the other hand, had been a Democrat and career civil servant in the ministry of education who supported Grau's opponent in 1944. Elevated to education minister in 1946, the erstwhile chief of budgets and accounts quickly padded his briefcase. When that was full, he employed a suitcase. With his ill-gotten gains, he acquired a *finca* 12 miles south of Havana and prime Miami real estate for starters.[40] Alemán

[39] "En Cuba, "Balance," *Bohemia,* October 10, 1948: 125.

[40] Alemán purchased the *finca* America, formerly the domain of ex president José Miguel Gómez (1909-1913) – another distinguished figure in the annals of Cuban political corruption. Gómez, affectionately known as *el tiburón* (the shark), was a general in the war of independence and dominated the island's Liberal party until his death in 1921. He entered the presidency with little

was no garden-variety grafter, however. Besides lining his pockets, he used the ministry's funds to become a major power broker within the *Auténtico* party.[41] In this respect, the ministry of education proved an ideal plaything. Its budget was swollen beyond that of other ministries by a nine-centavo tax on each bag of sugar produced, the result of a law passed on April 5, 1943. Known as *inciso K* (clause K) for the section of the law's first article that mandated the tax, it was designed to finance the hiring of new professors, teachers and other necessary personnel. Alemán diverted a substantial portion of this money toward *Auténtico* candidates in 1946, helping the party gain a majority in congress and, fatefully, the mayoralty of Havana. With an eye toward the presidential poll in 1948, Alemán launched an all-purpose political fund known as BAGA (Bloque Alemán-Grau Alsina) in conjunction with Grau's favorite nephew, Francisco Grau Alsina. Chibás, who had taken note of these activities, taunted Alemán over the airwaves – accusing him on December 12, 1946 of stealing the breakfasts of schoolchildren. Being dressed down in this manner before a nationwide audience was undoubtedly embarrassing for Alemán, but the education minister inoculated himself against such attacks by charming the president.

As a longtime bureaucrat, Alemán was adept at cultivating vastly different masters. During Fulgencio Batista's presidency (1940-1944), he served minister of education Anselmo Alliegro – helping him pillage *inciso K* from its inception. Under

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money and exited a millionaire, albeit one who takes care of his friends. This gave rise to a refrain that played on his nickname, "El tiburón se baña pero salpica." (The shark bathes but splashes).

[41] Alemán's rise within the party was nothing short of meteoric. Having joined the Auténticos only after Grau's victory in 1944, he had become the party's president in Havana by December of 1947 and won a senate seat in 1948. In the sort of irony that abounds in Cuban politics, Chibás occupied this seat two years later after Alemán's death from Hodgkin's disease.

Grau, who loathed Batista for toppling his government of the "100 days" in 1934, Alemán radically changed course. References to Batista's civic-military schools were scrapped. He demolished the Cangrejeras military barracks on the western edge of Havana and replaced it with a polytechnic school named for Paulina Alsina, Grau's widowed sister in law, who was Cuba's "First Lady." Alemán also encouraged Grau's re-election hopes. This endeared him to the austere ex physiology professor who eschewed cigarettes, alcohol and even snacks between meals but devoured flattery with abandon. Alemán consolidated his position in the party by taking indirect control of the armed action group known as *Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario* (MSR). This outfit was one of numerous self-styled *grupos de acción* with ties to the Autenticos. After Grau won the presidency, these violent organizations sought government positions and pursued deadly rivalries among themselves. They also engaged in lucrative rackets, such as monopolizing the sale of textbooks at the University of Havana.[42] Alemán utilized the MSR as a private army to bully detractors[43] and forcibly shut down schools, especially out of the way rural institutions. In this manner, he increased the available resources for his own purposes.

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[42] Thomas, *Cuba*, 743. The University of Havana was an ideal place for the action groups as it was off limits to the police. On the other hand, Cuba's various police and security forces were themselves often run by members of action groups during Grau's presidency, so they flourished outside the university as well. For example, the chief of Cuba's *Servicio de Investigaciones* was Mario Salabarría, a friend of Grau and member of MSR. Havana's police chief, Fabio Ruiz, belonged to MSR's bitter rival, *Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras* (ARG). Ruiz was made police chief in exchange for ARG support in the 1944 elections.

[43] On November 20. 1946, Senator Emilio Ochoa of the *grupo ortodoxo* submitted a motion to investigate irregularities at the polytechnic school of Holguín, his hometown. Alemán responded by sending "employees" of the education ministry to the Capitolio building armed with pistols and machine guns. By a strange coincidence, the senate lacked a quorum on that day.

On April 8, 1947, the senate voted to interpellate Alemán and Casas. Chibás had prepared for this eventuality by asking listeners to send examples of government corruption. One letter, signed by 31 parents and neighbors of two nearby rural schools in Las Villas province, declaimed their children's lack of paper, pencils, books, desks and blackboards. As "one of the purest men of our republic," the authors begged Chibás to tell the education minister to "SPEND MONEY ON SCHOOL MATERIALS" because local children "HUNGER FOR TEACHING."[44] Rolando Roque of Guara in Havana province claimed the right to an education in his town was a "sarcasm" given the absence of textbooks, seats, desks and water filters in the school.[45] Manuel Barruecos of Bayamo informed Chibás that the education minister was closing the Rural Normal School in order to rob the money designated for its upkeep. In addition, he described the recent visit of a group of MSR gangsters "pantomiming" the role of school inspectors.[46] In Calabazar de la Habana, the locale of Alemán's recently acquired *finca*, residents noticed that instead of finishing construction on a nearby school, workers and supplies were now being transported to the education minister's property. The author of this letter closed by urging Chibás to "fall with zeal upon the thieves."[47]

César Casas, the minister of commerce, was a less sinister figure than Alemán but his toleration of Cuba's black market profoundly angered many citizens. The intermittent scarcity of goods such as rice, lard, flour, meat and milk had originally begun in 1942, when the United States entered World War II. Now, more than a

[44] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 58, ANC.
[45] Ibid., 56.
[46] Ibid., 37.
[47] Ibid., 26.

year after the fight had ended, Cubans continued to endure shortages and black market prices. Responding to complaints, ministry officials denied the existence of a black market and, rather indelicately, grumbled that Cubans were "eating too much."[48] Casas qualified these assertions, saying no "organized" black market was in force.[49] Everyday Cubans knew otherwise and eagerly detailed their experiences for Chibás. One letter described how a treasury ministry employee bought 350 sacks of cement at the officially controlled price of 98 *centavos* and subsequently sold them for three *pesos* each on the black market.[50] The man, named Andrés Plumas, was a recent hire and confessed to a friend that his longer serving colleagues were entitled to far more than that. Esther Pérez, a fervid Chibás supporter from Carlos Rojas in Matanzas province, lamented the lack of rice in his[51] town because of a common trick employed by wholesalers. This involved billing shopkeepers for one quantity while delivering a much smaller amount. As a result, local stores faced with a dilemma: break the law and sell items at higher than the official price so as not to lose money or avoid vending them altogether. For good measure, Pérez added that the town's children did not receive their school breakfasts nor did they have sufficient educational materials.[52] Another missive reported that the chief of Santa Clara's office of commerce and his second in command controlled supplies of the city's basic items and sold them for exorbitant

[48] Jacinto Torras, "¿Terminarán en 1947 la crisis de abastecimiento y la bolsa negra?," *Bohemia,* January 26, 1947: 29.
[49] José Pardo Llada, "La bolsa negra." *Bohemia,* January 19, 1947: 42.
[50] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 72-73, ANC.
[51] This is not a typographical error. Esther Pérez, who regularly corresponded with Chibás, reminded him in a postscript not to forget that he was a "señor," particularly as previous responses had been addressed to Señorita Esther Pérez.
[52] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 12-13, ANC.

rates on the black market. As a result, both rice and soap were unavailable at official prices. Noting that the Grau administration had "turned out worse than we thought," the author deems himself a "Chibás *Auténtico*" and praised the *grupo ortodoxo*.[53]

Worst of all, the sordidness of Cuba'a black market underbelly, teeming as it was with dodgy functionaries and wholesalers, was only half the story. The government's official policy of price controls for foodstuffs such as rice, lard and flour, all of which were largely imported, amounted to subsidies for foreign producers. Rather than assisting overseas farmers, a wiser tactic would have been to stimulate domestic markets – particularly for rice, a Cuban staple suitable to the island's terrain. This was especially imperative now, while sugar prices were high, so that Cuba would have other options when profits inevitably dropped. After all, sugar growing rivals such as the Philippines, whose capacity had been largely destroyed during World War II, would not stay down indefinitely. Many of these points were outlined in a memo drawn up for Chibás on April 12; four days after the interpellations were approved. The document also censured Alemán for sporadic distribution of school breakfasts and the building of showcase schools next to Cuba's *Carretera Central* (Central Highway) while rural inhabitants languished in want. Taking into account the gravity of these offenses and the vast resources at Alemán's disposal, it warned that the senate's obligation to examine and analyze the education ministry was "not to be delegated."[54] Chibás had no intention of shirking

[53] Ibid., 81.
[54] Ibid., 50. Entitled "Memorandum para el Sr. Chibás," this document contains minor editorial changes in Chibás' handwriting, suggesting he read it carefully.

this responsibility, nor did many of his fellow legislators, especially those from other parties who were placed at a disadvantage by Alemán's campaign contributions.

At the same time, both ministers were determined to resist appearing before the senate. Prior to the vote, Alemán and Casas informed the president they suffered from stage fright. Upon learning of the motion's approval, Grau refused to honor it but seemed far less concerned with protecting his ministers than ridding himself of congress altogether. Notified by senate president Miguelito Suárez Fernández that the upper chamber was exercising a constitutionally sanctioned prerogative, Grau, wearing his characteristic smile, responded with the following anecdote:

> Truly *amigos*, the constitution is charging me for more than the amount on the bill. At this moment, I'm remembering something very suggestive. A short while after assuming the presidency of the republic, I passed through Luyanó [a working class Havana neighborhood] on the way to Varadero [a beach resort 85 miles east of the capital] and noted a horrible smell emanating from a tallow factory. The next day, I called the minister of health and asked him to close it but he told me he couldn't do that because the factory was functioning in accordance with the constitution and the laws. A short time afterward, I again passed through Luyanó and the horrible odor still bothered me. This time, I called Lieutenant Colonel Hernández Nardo and instructed him to take some men along and close the factory immediately without any further explanation. Acting with great efficiency, he shut down the factory and said only that he was acting on orders from above. Right now, the congress is bothering me a great deal because it too smells horribly. It's a center of foul smells...[55]

The following Sunday, Chibás repeated this story on his radio show, spreading the "tallow factory of Luyanó" to an even wider audience than those who read about it in *Bohemia.* The island's cartoonists happily joined the fray as well. For example, a

[55] "En Cuba, Crisis: Un Foco Pestilente," *Bohemia,* April 20, 1947: 45.

sketch by Juan David portrayed Grau and the Republican senator Guillermo Alonso Pujol speaking to each other behind gas masks.[56]

Tensions were exacerbated on April 21, when MSR gunmen loyal to Alemán fired shots into the *Capitolio* during an evening senate session dedicated to resolving the crisis with Grau. Two days later, as the senate awaited him, Casas sent word that he would not attend his interpellation. In response, Chibás submitted a motion of no confidence against Grau's entire cabinet, which was duly approved, as the only way to defend the senate's "legislative sovereignty."[57] Even as this was humiliating, Grau was favored by a provision in the constitution excusing his new cabinet from interpellation for one year. Once again flouting the document he helped draft, Grau elevated deputies in each ministry and made no secret of his intention to restore the original cabinet when the senate recessed. On May 2, when the no confidence vote became official, Prime Minister Carlos Prío Socarrás termed Casas' refusal to appear before the senate as "legal and legitimate."[58] For Prío, a lawyer, senator and former delegate to the constituent assembly, this statement was understandable only in the context of his own presidential aspirations. Even as Grau had relinquished his re-election campaign, it was clear he (and not the party assembly) would choose the next *Auténtico* presidential nominee. Thus, the prospect of Chibás rescuing the party from the likes of Grau and Alemán seemed increasingly remote.

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[56] Ibid., 48. The following week, David produced a cartoon entitled "Precaution" in which Grau sported a clothespin instead.
[57] "En Cuba, Crisis: Casas no asiste al Senado," *Bohemia,* April 27, 1947: 45.
[58] "Senadores Auténticos estiman que tiene caracter transitorio el Gabinete recien designado," *Diario de la Marina,* May 3, 1947: 2.

On the other hand, the president's high-handedness was unpopular. As Chibás had attempted to collect signatures for his no confidence motion, Eduardo Suárez Rivas, a Liberal senator, exclaimed that those who refused would "look like idiots" before the public.[59] Grau, who once averred that his government represented "the combat of virtue against vice,"[60] now preferred to defy the constitution rather than rendering two widely disliked and corrupt ministers.[61] Two days after this crisis had been resolved, essentially by sidestepping the legislative branch, Havana's mayor shot himself in the heart. Supervielle, who had been derided in the press and on the streets up to moment of his demise, instantly became a martyr. During his broadcast that evening, Chibás characterized the mayor's death as a "desperate scream of alert in the midst of political confusion."[62] He also reminded listeners of the *Auténtico* congressman (and unconditional Grau supporter) Segundo Curti's attempt to pass a law that would place the aqueduct under central government control because the mayor was a "failed, inept and incapable public servant."[63] The next day a crowd of 4000 composed of all social classes squeezed into Havana's Colón cemetery to attend his burial. A reporter from *Diario de la Marina* called the ceremony, "one of the most well attended in recent memory."[64] A *Bohemia* correspondent noted that Supervielle's suicide was "taken

[59] "En Cuba, Política: Vamos a Firmar Para Complacer al Presidente," *Bohemia,* May 4, 1947: 43.
[60] Miguel de Marcos, "¡Se cansa uno!," *Bohemia,* January 5, 1947: 52.
[61] The depth of anger against Casas in particular cannot be overestimated, particularly as shortages and exorbitant prices affected all Cubans. On January 21, 1947, an anti black market demonstration took place in front of the presidential palace. Grau, who addressed the crowd, was met with whistles, catcalls and insults when he referred to the government's policy of supplying basic goods.
[62] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 503.
[63] Ibid.
[64] "Fue Imponente Manifestación de Duelo el Entierro del Alacalde Habanero Dr. Manuel Fernández Supervielle," *Diario de la Marina*, May 6, 1947: 1.

by the people in general as an act of protest in favor of honest politics against the habit, too frequent among elected figures, of scorning the needs and necessities of the community."[65] This was an obvious jab at Alemán and Casas, both of whom treated the "community" with disdain, stole with impunity and enjoyed the president's favor. Although Grau delivered a glowing eulogy, Supervielle lacked the president's full support even in death. The national government, unlike that of the city, did not declare an official day of mourning nor were the flags of the presidential palace, the prime minister's office[66] or the foreign ministry flown at half-mast. The administration's most pressing concern was to keep the multitude's palpable anger from bubbling over. As such, a police cordon restricted access to the mausoleum and the cemetery was lined with uniformed and plain-clothes officers. The government also cancelled eulogies slated to be given by figures representing the mayor's family and Havana's city hall, alleging a shortage of time. However, this decision smacked of nervousness and fear.

Chibás, who had zealously campaigned for Supervielle in 1946 and dubbed him "Super-votes," was ideally placed to understand the frayed relationship between mayor and president. After all, Chibás had once coveted the mayoralty for himself but yielded to Grau's preference for Supervielle. The president purportedly chose Supervielle because the post required an administrator rather than a

[65] "En Cuba, Duelo: Un hombre de honor," 43.

[66] Shortly after Supervielle's suicide, Chibás received a letter from someone who had been present at the house of the new mayor, Nicolás Castellanos. According to this account, one of the guests suggested that celebratory drinks were in order. However, Castellanos responded that, "this is a time of pain rather than one of joy." Moments later, Carlos Prío, the prime minister, appeared shouting and applauding. He allegedly yelled, "There is no reason for sadness!" and addressing the new mayor's wife he cried, "Bring some champagne to celebrate as this is a great day for us!" See Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1097: 95, ANC.

politician. Most likely, Supervielle's middling popularity caught Grau's eye more than his efficiency or managerial skill as treasury minister. In terms of power, the Havana mayoralty paled only before the presidency and Grau, who cherished the idea of re-election, desired a weak candidate. Supervielle, who had twice run unsuccessfully for a congressional seat, was ideal. Even so, the prospect of bringing water to Havana aroused such passion that Supervielle became a sensation. He defeated his two opponents in a landslide and immediately set to work on the promised aqueduct. Supervielle also began mentioning himself as a presidential candidate. If he succeeded in supplying the water *habaneros* so desperately yearned for, his popularity would have skyrocketed, making him a formidable force and natural contender for Cuba's highest office. Hence, Grau effectively squashed the financing for Supervielle's aqueduct in late January 1947, a decision he refused to reverse even after the mayor publicly supported the president's re-election campaign the next month. Nor was this the first time Grau had played politics with the city's water supply. In August 1944, as president elect, he rejected a scheme by then Mayor Raúl García Menocal because the proposed aqueduct called for the use of foreign capital.[67] Supervielle was also not the first *Auténtico* to have his career derailed for becoming too popular. Grau's first education minister, Luis Pérez Espinós, was forced to resign in 1945 because his success in adding new classrooms and expanding the school breakfast program was considered threatening.[68]

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[67] Chibás, who was Grau's chief propagandist at the time, framed opposition to Mayor Menocal's aqueduct in fiercely patriotic terms. During his broadcast of August 27, 1944, Chibás asserted that, "Cubans must rid themselves of their colonial mentality, shake themselves free of defeatism, feel proud of their country and march forward with their foreheads raised, toward the conquest of Cuba's economic independence." See Conte Agüero, 322.

[68] Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience,* 33.

When Chibás took to the microphones on Sunday evening of May 11, he was ready to cast off what his friend Luis Conte Agüero called "the psychological conflict."[69] He began his address by revisiting Supervielle's death. The mayor's suicide note, he mused, was reminiscent of a "patrician from the legendary age of Roman greatness."[70] He contrasted this document, which avoided accusation or recrimination, with the "sordid meanness" of those responsible for his demise.[71] Chibás also reminded his audience that the flag adorning the presidential palace fluttered at the top of its mast, "challenging public opinion" and smirking at the man whose poignant fate "destroyed thousands and thousands of hearts."[72] Following this prelude, Chibás devoted the remainder of his 25-minute show to yet another unfolding tragedy. The same underhanded characters, led by Grau, who had driven Supervielle to end his life had also irreparably harmed the *Auténtico* party. This damage could not be reversed because the party's national, provincial and municipal assemblies, which represented rank and file delegates, no longer possessed any influence over the current government. Chibás pointed out that the national assembly had not been convoked a single time since Grau had taken office in October of 1944. Declaring that, "The crisis of the government produces a crisis in the party, which in turn gives rise to a crisis in the Cuban revolution," Chibás signaled his readiness to found a new party based on the original *Auténtico* ideals of economic independence, political liberty and social justice.[73]

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[69] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 505
[70] Ibid., 504.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 504.
[73] Ibid., 506.

The following Thursday, *grupo ortodoxo* members and their sympathizers met in the *Auténtico* Youth headquarters on the corner of *Neptuno* and *Amistad* in the *Centro Habana* district. They represented an impressive display of Cuba's political elite, including six of the nation's 54 senators, nine of its 127 congressman, the governor of Matanzas province and the mayors of Bayamo, Holguín and Victoria de las Tunas. Younger notables in attendance included 19-year-old Natasha Mella,[74] daughter of Julio Antonio Mella, the magnetic student leader and founder of Cuba's Communist party. His assassination in 1929 converted him into one of the revolution's first martyrs. Also present was 20-year-old Fidel Castro, then a law student at the University of Havana. Chibás opened the proceedings saying, "We can't rebuild the party from within but don't want to be accused of being impulsive or acting out of personal ambitions."[75] He thus proposed that Grau be given 72 hours to convene the *Auténtico* national assembly, in front of which the *grupo ortodoxo* would accuse him of betraying the party's founding principles. This proposal was approved unanimously. Later on, Senator Millo Ochoa submitted a motion, also approved unanimously, to name a committee charged with establishing a "new political force."[76] On May 18, two hours after the deadline for a response from Grau had passed, Chibás ascended his radio pulpit and launched the organization. He described this entity, so freshly born it lacked a name, as a refuge

[74] Far from being a bystander, Natasha Mella was named to the 10-member committee charged with officially forming the new party. She was the youngest member of the group (although three others were in their 20s) and the only woman. However, her surname was among the most recognizable in Cuba and possessed undeniable power. She was also strikingly beautiful, a trait inherited from her father – whose good looks were immortalized in the photos of his lover, the Italian photographer Tina Modotti.
[75] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 508.
[76] Ibid.

for Cuba's honorable politicians. "In a party," Chibás proclaimed, "fundamental ideas are very important but also essential are the men charged with putting them into practice. The world's most beautiful program, backed by empty speakers or a group of delinquents will never be able to win over public opinion or the people's enthusiastic support."[77]

Asked by a reporter for his opinion, Grau dismissed the new party as *ortofónicos* or noisemakers. However, there was no denying this represented yet another black eye for the man viewed as a messiah less than three years earlier. In an article entitled "Unhappy Doctor," *Time* magazine's Cuba correspondent summed up Grau's abrupt fall from grace:

> Despite good times and a boom in sugar, Cubans were griping last week. From scrubby street gamins in Havana's *Barrio de Colón* to the panama-hatted businessmen in the *Manzana de Gómez*, they panned Grau for the high price of lard, the scarcity of beef, the roaring black market. There were demands in the press for his resignation. *Habaneros* tell the story of the Camagüey man who had been badly beaten up for talking about Grau. "Did you say very bad things about him?" asked a sympathetic cop. "No, I praised him, and then a mob attacked me," said the victim. Currently the most popular Cuban is Senator Eddy Chibás, ardent duelist and once Grau's close friend, who fills the air every Sunday night with rasping radio attacks on "the Government of dishonesty and indignity."
>
> What had happened to Grau? Was he not the man who was going to clean up Cuba after Batista? During his dramatic 127 days' presidency in the 1933 revolution, many of Cuba's most progressive laws were enacted. On taking office again in 1944, Grau said: "There is nothing wrong with Cuba that an honest administration can't cure." To show his good faith, he publicly declared the extent of his fortune ($231,512 in cash and securities, plus real estate). But graft did not stop—for in Cuba no one man can stop it.

[77] Ibid., 510.

> In nearly three years of the Grau administration, 58 political murders have been committed; just two men have been arrested and none convicted…And Grau, the professed democrat, governs by decree just like Batista. He has an alliance with the Communists that all but the Commies deplore. His attempt to seize for the Government the differential between the 1947 and 1946 sugar prices has alienated 50,000 sugar growers and a large part of his *Auténtico* Party. "Never in the Republic's 45 years," said Sergio Carbó, another ex-Grau man, "has a Government squandered so much, robbed so much, or deceived the people so much."[78]

In addition to the above misdeeds, Grau had subverted his party's rank and file by ignoring *Auténtico* assemblies. Well meaning *Auténticos* who were horrified by the depredations of José Manuel Alemán and César Casas thus had no recourse for reforming the party. In addition, rather than allowing an open competition for his successor, Grau first tried an illegal re-election campaign and subsequently decided to handpick the party's next presidential candidate. Such calculations had condemned Supervielle to failure and suicide and Chibás, who was Cuba's most popular politician, to exile in a new outfit. This set the stage for something new in the island's political sphere. Chibás, whose new organization would not have the time to place deep roots before the 1948 elections, would attempt to win office with a new brand of politics based on his fantastically popular radio show and his intense emotional bond with Cuba's workaday citizens.

[78] "Unhappy Doctor," *Time,* June 9, 1947, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,779060,00.html

Chapter 2

"Shoot Me in the Heart, the *Ortodoxos* Need a Martyr"

As a young revolutionary in early the 1930s, Eduardo Chibás often imagined the possibility of martyrdom – dying nobly, after horrendous torture by Machado's agents. In 1935, after being apprehended for inciting streetcar operators to join anti-government strikes, Chibás believed he would be murdered and told Batista's police, "if I'm going to die, I want my last words to be for the Cuban revolution."[1] Instead, he spent six months imprisoned in Havana's *Castillo del Príncipe*. There, Chibás learned that Antonio Guiteras had been killed by the military while attempting to flee Cuba on May 8, 1935 – an act he called, "the worst of (Batista's) crimes."[2] Guiteras, like Chibás, had been a member of the 1927 Student Directorate and also served as Grau's interior minister during the "100 days" government. A man of legendary incorruptibility and incandescent charisma, Guiteras founded the violent anti-Batista group *Joven Cuba* in 1934. His foiled plan had been to raise and train an army in Mexico capable of overthrowing Batista's regime.[3] Guiteras' death at the age of 28 provided the revolution with its most prominent martyr. Four and a half years later, Chibás narrowly escaped the sacrificial pyre himself. On November 13, 1939, two days before elections to the constituent assembly that would draft Cuba's new constitution, an unknown man shot Chibás in the chest. As

[1] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 217.
[2] Ibid., 220.
[3] Guiteras, in fact, already had $300,000 with which to fund this venture. These funds were the result of *Joven Cuba's* kidnapping of Eutimio Falla Bonet, heir to a wealthy Cuban family, in April of 1935. For a description of this act see Frank Argote-Freyre, *Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 179-180.

he was being taken to the hospital, Chibás told the driver, "If I die, it will be for the revolution. Vote for Grau San Martín."[4]

By the 1940s, Chibás also began to consider himself a potential savior. This notion was reinforced by the effusive reactions of supporters, whose letters often characterized him as the island's salvation. Every week, Chibás received missives from the likes of América González de Martínez, a Havana resident who asserted that, "you are the only salvation of our fatherland and all the evils we suffer."[5] Julián Padrón, also of Havana, wrote, "I consider you the only pure one among all our politicians."[6] Twenty-two year old Armando Hernández of Batista's hometown of Banes in Oriente province, revealed that, "I am ready to defend you under any circumstances because you are the only defender of us Cubans."[7] In a sense, he represented the hopes of Cubans frustrated by Grau. However, Chibás was a unique politician who distinguished himself from contemporaries in two important respects. First, he developed an easy and genuine rapport with the needy. As the eldest child of an affluent family this did not come naturally. However, Chibás began visiting poor neighborhoods and sounded out *maniceros* (peanut sellers), fruit vendors and others he met on the street. Pastorita Núñez, who grew up in the humble Pocitos section of Marianao (a Havana suburb) and later joined the new party's Women's Wing, watched him course through the area on numerous occasions. "While other politicians stopped by to purchase votes," she said, "Chibás

[4] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 268.
[5] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 34, Expediante 1089: 71, ANC.
[6] Ibid., 52.
[7] Ibid., 94.

penetrated the masses and practiced the truth."[8] At the same time, practicing "the truth" was not always initially appreciated and was occasionally met with incredulous disbelief. Chibás' secretary, Conchita Fernández, recalled that,

> As many people were accustomed to appearing before politicians with their identity cards in their hand, when they came to see Eddy they asked for scholarships for their children, a hospital bed for a sick relative, things like that, and they offered their identity cards in exchange. When he said he wouldn't accept them – and he did the same thing when money was offered – people didn't understand and it was necessary to explain himself many times.[9]

Of course, Chibás tried to help whenever possible, often referring cases to his personal physician and friend, Pedro Iglesias Betancourt or buying textbooks for impoverished secondary school students. However, he did so without asking for identity cards – which could later be converted into votes. This approach sought to peck away at the edges of an ingrained and highly corrupt political culture. Just as important, Chibás could not possibly assist every worthy petitioner but he offered the defrauded and downtrodden a voice over the airwaves each Sunday. This gave rise to the commonly repeated refrain, "I'm going to tell Chibás."[10]

Hearing their hero denounce venal officials or injustice not only provided a measure of solace but also raised hopes that better times lied ahead. This was the second respect in which Chibás surpassed fellow politicians. His weekly broadcast

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[8] Interview with Pastora Núñez, June 3, 2007.

[9] Pedro Prada, *La secretaria de la República* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2001), 118.

[10] Those who "told" Chibás also included more privileged victims of injustice such as ex foreign minister Inocente Alverez, who met with Chibás in February of 1947. Álvarez revealed that his recent resignation was linked to his unwillingness to support Grau's re-election campaign and accused the current administration of being the "most corrupt in the history of the Republic." Given Álvarez's well-publicized venality during his time as a public servant, this charge was nothing if not ironic. He was also angry with Grau for collecting Álvarez's resignation letter via Cuba's U.S. ambassador Guillermo Belt rather than doing so personally. On Sunday, February 9, Chibás duly revealed these piquant tidbits over the air. See "En Cuba, Doble Duelo," February 16, 1947: 40-41.

consistently garnered an audience several times greater than any other political offering. A survey conducted by the Cuban Advertisers Association measuring listeners in Havana and its outskirts recorded a 45 percent share for Chibás' show in June of 1947, the highest rating for any program in the island's history with an estimated 550,000 listeners throughout Cuba.[11] This was more than double the usual share, which Chibás took as a sign that, "the people are with the opposition."[12] However, the show soon returned to its previous levels, which were still among the highest in Cuba. Between January 11 and January 31, 1948, Chibás' show had a 22.22 share. The second most popular commentator was Salvador García Agüero of the communist station *Mil Diez* with 9.75 percent. The third place *Auténtico* program mustered only a 3.41 share. A subsequent survey, taken between March 5 and March 18, 1948 favored Chibás by an even wider margin. This time, his 21.35 rating was slightly lower but far outpaced García Agüero's 6.77 and the *Auténticos*' 5.65. Moreover, Chibás' show was one of only three in Cuba that topped 20 percent during this period – the other two being *radionovelas* (radio soap operas).[13]

In Cuba, Sunday evenings belonged to Chibás just as Sunday afternoons pertained to baseball and Sunday mornings were in some quarters consecrated to God. Well before his 8 p.m. broadcasts, throngs gathered to wait for Chibás at his apartment in the art deco López Serrano building in Havana's Vedado district. When he appeared, the multitude would accompany him on foot to the studios of radio station CMQ. Invariably dressed in a suit and with a cigarette tucked between

[11] "Inician mañana trabajos para las adhesiones," *El Crisol,* June 16, 1947. Aside from *El Crisol, Alerta* usually published the entire transcript of Chibás' radio transmissions.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "El Ultimo 'Survey," *Bohemia,* April 25, 1948: 56.

his fingers, he would chat with the crowd, which included friends, fellow politicos and admirers. At the end of the six-block journey, a cadre of close associates or party members followed him inside and surrounded him as he addressed the country. In cities across Cuba, those without radios flocked to hotels or the homes of friends so they could listen. Those who inhabited rural areas sometimes walked several miles to the nearest radio. Filiberto Porven of Cortés, a village in Pinar del Río province, wrote Chibás to say that 800 people arrived at his house every Sunday to hear him and confessed that those present would applaud, "as if you were there in person."[14] After the 25-minute broadcast, Chibás would exit and once again encounter a group lingering, eager to speak with him about the broadcast on the way back to his apartment. Throughout Cuba, adherents addressed letters to Chibás later that evening or the next day. Some opted for telegrams. Many of these reflected the inchoate grammar of Cuba's humblest citizens. For instance, José Zamora of Manzanillo in Oriente province wrote, "*estamos escuchando su oracion todos los domingo donde nosotro i todo el pueblo cubano conose que es uste la unica esperanza de esta nación*," (we listen to your speech every Sundays and wee and the entire Cuban people no that yoo are the only hope of this nation).[15]

These dedicated Chibás supporters, who expected him to one day save Cuba as its president, now had a new political home. On May 19, 1947 the fledgling party's national committee voted Chibás its president and 23-year-old Luis Conte Agüero as secretary. The next order of business involved a name. Chibás sought the advice of Fernando Ortiz, Cuba's most renowned scholar and a friend of his late

[14] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 34, Expediente 1089: 155, ANC.
[15] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 34, Expediente 1090: 66, ANC.

father. He had also hoped the 66-year-old Ortiz would join the party, adding a patina of experience and wisdom to a group drenched in youth. Ortiz respectfully declined to sign up, claiming he was too elderly, but gladly offered his opinion. He counseled that the words *Ortodoxo* and *revolución* should be avoided as the former lacked "emotional resonance" and the latter had been so abused by current politicians as to sound like a "synonym for criminality and impudence" to most Cubans.[16] In the end, these words were heeded but only partially. Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, a former student leader and friend of Julio Antonio Mella,[17] proposed the new organization's name – *Partido del Pueblo Cubano (Ortodoxos)* or PPC (O). The freshly minted Cuban People's Party also required an insignia. This need was resolved through a nationwide contest launched by Chibás during his radio show, which promised 100 pesos to the winner. Eventually, the party opted for a convoluted design incorporating a palm tree, a peasant's hat and a wheel with 20 gears on the outside (one for each year of revolutionary struggle, beginning in 1927) and six spokes on the inside (for each province in Cuba). However, the PPC quickly became known for its unofficial emblem, a broom, symbolizing its determination to sweep away graft.

Aside from Ortiz, Chibás courted other influential figures that could help swell PPC ranks. These included the popular Afro-Cuban pugilist Eligio Sardiñas, known as Kid Chocolate. A former junior lightweight, Sardiñas gained acclaim as the

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[16] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 34, Expediente 1089: 174, ANC.

[17] Shortly before Mella was assassinated in Mexico City, Fernández Sánchez wrote his friend a letter from exile in New York warning that, "…according to the news I heard on the day I left Cuba, both of us need to take every precaution. In Mexico, Cuban revolutionaries are carefully watched. It is said that someone has recently left Cuba who means to take drastic measures against you…" See Ana Cairo, ed., vol. 2. *Mella: 100 años* (Habana: 2003), 396.

first Cuban to win a world boxing championship in 1931. In a shrewd public relations gesture, the *Ortodoxos* renovated his old gym and utilized it as their headquarters. Sardiñas demonstrated his approval by attending the inaugural ceremony on June 2. The *Ortodoxo* chief noted that the venue would be used to train "our revolutionary muscles in order to knockout corruption and sleazy politicking."[18] In addition, Chibás enlisted Jorge Mañach, a founder of the anti-Machado ABC party and Batista's foreign minister in 1944. A Harvard graduate, professor of philosophy, leading literary critic and regular contributor to *Diario de la Marina* and *Bohemia*, Mañach was an intellectual heavyweight second only to Ortiz. In an open letter to Chibás, Mañach argued for unified opposition to the *Auténticos* along with a specific program, writing, "Denouncing the present is not sufficient; what's needed is a vision of the future."[19] He then listed the aspirations of Cubans in minute detail and urged Chibás to devise a plan to satisfy them.

> They want an end to incompetence and greedy public servants; they want the rule of law, that courts are respected and respectable, that some day a dishonest "big fish" goes to jail; they want indispensable public services which they've been asking for since the Republic was founded: buses, schools, houses, land, hospitals, water; they want the education and health ministries to be administered transparently; they want a national bank and if possible a merchant marine; that our diplomats serve well and are well paid; that the state uses modern technology; they want true social justice rendered by the courts and commissions interested in equality and not a bribed oligarchy on one side and demagogic class warriors on the other; they want the political bureaucracy and useless army reduced to a minimum as both eat up too much of the national budget and decrease the State's ability to invest and each individual Cuban's ability to work for his own financial independence; they want the salaries of some public servants reduced so that such work is no longer an avenue to riches and that other state employees, conversely, be paid more as their

[18] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 512.
[19] Jorge Mañach, "Carta a Chibás," *Bohemia,* May 18, 1947: 41.

> services are essential and their earnings an embarrassment; they want a revision of the tax system; they want an honest police force that can put an end to gangsters and drugs; they want to modify the electoral system so that those who represent the people in office are effective rather than mercenary. [20]

"All this and a bit more," concluded Mañach "is what you need to clearly say…"[21] Despite the difficult task at hand, he was optimistic.

Chibás also lured Federico Fernández Casas, a Republican senator and sugar magnate. He represented a sensible but potentially risky catch. For a party starting from scratch with limited funds, Fernández Casas offered credibility and deep pockets. In addition, his defection dealt a blow to the *Auténticos*, given their alliance with the Republicans. On the other hand, Fernández Casas possessed a reputation, like many landowners, for using shady means to evict peasants from their property and acquire it themselves. Specifically, Fernández Casas had ousted Eusebio Maceo, a descendant of Cuba's most revered general from its wars of independence. Chibás himself had exploded with indignation over this fact during his broadcast of May 21, 1946. Adding Fernández Casas to the party could potentially damage its image among small farmers or rural dwellers. At the same time, Fernández Casas had committed himself to agrarian reform – advocating small landownership. Chibás allowed that while he and Fernández Casas had strongly disagreed in the past, the Republican senator's political behavior had always been "transparent and honest."[22] More importantly, Fernández Casas conducted a straw poll among the workers at his sugar mill and 868 out of 991 expressed a preference for Chibás. Sensing the

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "En Cuba, Un Republicano Menos," *Bohemia,* June 15, 1947: 46.

Republicans would reap a popular backlash for supporting their coalition partners, Fernández Casas followed the prevailing winds.

The *Ortodoxos*' momentum was further boosted on July 12, 1947, when the ABC party voted to dissolve itself and join Chibás. As the smallest of Cuba's political entities, the ABC would not deliver a mother lode of votes – having gained a mere 66,607 in the 1944 elections.[23] Still, the group possessed bona fide revolutionary credentials from its days as a clandestine, anti-Machado terrorist society.[24] Its incorporation was very much a feather in the *Ortodoxo* leader's cap. Chibás almost surely saw a parallel between the present and the late 1930s when the *Auténticos* absorbed various revolutionary organizations such as *Joven Cuba*. Then again, the persistent roll call of individuals, committees and now parties that switched to the PPC, which by now had become a staple of Chibás' weekly broadcasts, created its own dilemma. The growing and ever more varied *Ortodoxo* constituency was a testament to Chibás' popularity but also a potential stumbling block. Shortly after the ABC party was brought on board, Chibás received a call from his longtime friend Ramón Miyar.[25] Miyar, who was secretary general of the University of Havana and a member of the *Ortodoxo* National Directorate, expressed alarm at the influence of

[23] *Diario de la Marina,* July 18, 1944.

[24] According to Luis Aguilar, "by the end of 1932 every important functionary of the government was forced to live in fear and seclusion" as result of terrorist actions perpetrated by the ABC and Student Directorate. See Luis Aguilar, *Cuba 1933,* 126. Among those students involved in violent anti-Machado activities was young Eddy Chibás, who once stored 245 packets of dynamite and nine bombs in his father's Ford.

[25] Miyar served as one of Chibás' seconds during his first ever duel, in 1937, against Carlos Font – a medical student and member of the communist leaning *Ala Izquierda.* Font had published attacks against Chibás in *Línea*, the organization's mouthpiece. The duel was fought with pistols at a distance of 25 paces in a secluded area of Havana's posh Miramar neighborhood. When Chibás, whose poor eyesight was legendary, opened fire, the bullet nearly hit his other second, Justo Carrillo, in the head. Carrillo, the future chief of Cuba's Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank, was understandably unnerved and promptly declared the duel over despite Chibás' objections. See Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 236-240.

the ABC's ex president Joaquín Martínez Sáenz. Chibás quickly reassured him but this was by no means an isolated incident. In fact, the deepest fissure existed within the original *grupo ortodoxo*. Many of its leading figures, including Pelayo Cuervo, Agustín Cruz and Millo Ochoa, favored political pacts. Chibás, along with Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Manuel Bisbé among others, adamantly opposed them.[26] He believed the *Auténtico* program had been watered down by its alliance with the Republicans. Further, Chibás held Cuba's "traditional" parties, the Liberals and Democrats, in contempt. Machado, after all, had been a Liberal and the Democrats, heirs to the pre-1933 Conservative party, had collaborated with him.[27]

Regardless of the aversion felt by Chibás, pacts were a basic element of Cuban politics.[28] Had Grau's tenure been less disappointing, the *Auténticos* could reasonably have stood alone in during the elections of 1948. However, Chibás had been the only high ranking party member to advocate this option. For the *grupo ortodoxo*, shunning pacts would essentially mean renouncing legislative power. According to a 1943 electoral law, the nine senate seats allotted to each Cuban province were apportioned by coalition – with the winner gaining six and the second place finisher taking three. Between March and May of 1947, while Chibás

[26] Among those who backed Chibás on this issue were Manuel Bisbé, Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Leonardo Fernández Sánchez along with the party's youth leaders Luis Conte Agüero and Orlando Castro.

[27] Aguilar, *Cuba 1933,* 58. In 1926, all of Cuba's political parties decided to work together in support of Machado. This was known as *cooperativismo.* The effect, notes Aguilar, is that "for all practical purposes, Machado had no political opposition."

[28] In 1940, Fulgencio Batista won the presidency heading a seven member coalition even as the *Auténticos* obtained 20,000 more votes than any single party. Four years later the *Auténticos* were an electoral juggernaut, more than doubling the vote count of their nearest rival. Even so, they would have fallen short without Republican backing.

stood apart from the *grupo ortodoxo*, Cuervo plotted a pragmatic course for the renegades. On March 23, 1947, *Bohemia* reported that he hoped to capture the *grupo ortodoxo's* leadership, to formalize it as a new party and "immediately" negotiate an alliance.[29] The benefit of this strategy was indisputable. Without Chibás, the *grupo ortodoxo* would lose substantial popularity. However, it could still attract sufficient voters to play a decisive role in 1948. Ochoa controlled the *Auténtico* party machinery in Oriente province and his brother, Guarro Ochoa, was mayor of Holguín – a mid sized town the region. Cuervo was widely admired in his native Havana and would win plenty of votes there.[30] Given these circumstances, the new party could strike a deal guaranteeing spots on the opposition ticket for many of its prominent figures. Indeed, maintaining a senatorial contingent was a practical way to ensure the *grupo ortodoxo* could continue promoting a more ethical and constitutional brand of Cuban politics.[31]

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[29] "En Cuba, Política: No me Preocupan las Posiciones," *Bohemia,* March 23, 1947: 47.

[30] In 1946, the Mexican daily *Siempre* published a comparison of the senatorial vote two years earlier. Chibás received 126,381 votes, more than any other Auténtico senatorial candidate. However, Pelayo Cuervo was close behind with 123,905. Both men also appeared on the Republican ballot as well, and if these votes are added, Cuervo actually attracted more votes than Chibás. See Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 415.

[31] Unquestionably, Cuervo's plan also accommodated his personal ambition. Nor was he the only *grupo ortodoxo* member who was loath to voluntarily pass four years on the sidelines. Even so, he was more immune to accusations of opportunism than any of his pact friendly peers. Cuervo began his public career in 1935, at the age of 32, when he served as education minister in the cabinet of President Carlos Mendieta. A lawyer by training and Democrat by affiliation, he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Havana in 1936 but was elected to Cuba's 1939 constitutional convention on the party slate. The next year, Democratic chief Mario García Menocal struck a deal with Batista before the 1940 polls.[31] In exchange for his support, Menocal would choose the coalition's candidates for vice-president, mayor of Havana, three provincial governorships and 12 senate seats. After an avalanche of protests by rank and file adherents, the party leadership vacillated over whether to accept Batista's terms, to consider a counteroffer from Grau or to enter the elections solo. Many objected to Batista's embrace of the communists and his insistence that they remain part of the alliance. Cuervo was heavily invested in this decision, as the party's municipal assembly had once again nominated him for mayor of Havana. Backing the pact with Batista would all but ensure him the post and he thus initially endorsed the ex general. However, he subsequently changed his mind and resigned from the party on March 20, 1940. Another prominent Democrat who bolted over this issue was

When Chibás decided to leave the *Auténtico* fold in May of 1947, this boosted both the new party's prospects and its isolationist faction. The doubling of Chibás' radio show rating and seemingly limitless possibilities of the *Ortodoxos* as they added prestigious figures from all walks of Cuban society soothed but did not eliminate friction between the two camps. Chibás himself maintained cordial relations with Cuervo, who regularly spoke as a guest during his broadcasts and other likeminded *Ortodoxos* such as Agustín Cruz. The same did not always hold among the party faithful, especially those ardently devoted to Chibás. Hence, Pastora Núñez remembered Millo Ochoa with contempt as belonging to the PPC's "political portion" and Cruz as someone who "was mainly interested in winning."[32] In the same vein, during a meeting of the *Ortodoxo* organizing committee, Pelayo Cuervo chastised an overzealous young devotee saying, "We are building a political party, not a Jacobin sect." Another of the youthful attendees replied that if they were interested in "moderate language" they could join the Democrats or Liberals.[33] Nevertheless, *Ortodoxo* unity was buoyed by the party's momentum along with continued *Auténtico* mismanagement and scandals.

On May 18, 1947, the archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Manuel Arteaga, condemned Cuba's black market during his homily and deemed those who monopolized or speculated in basic goods to be "doubly criminal."[34] In doing so he served as an unwitting warm-up act to Chibás, who inaugurated the *Ortodoxo* party

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then president of the Havana Bar Association, Manuel Fernández Supervielle – who told the press that supporting Batista would betray his principles and political values. In forsaking the Havana mayoralty in 1940, Cuervo cemented his reputation as a politician of conscience.

[32] Interview with Pastora Núñez, June 3, 2007.

[33] "En Cuba, Política: Secta de Jacobinos," *Bohemia,* July 27, 1947: 53.

[34] "En Cuba, Pastoral: La Bolsa Negra Excomulgada," *Bohemia,* May 25, 1947: 42.

later that evening and proclaimed it a bulwark against this sort of tawdry profiteering. The cardinal's rebuke also stung administration officials who continued to deny the black market's existence and dismissed protests against price gouging organized by leftist figures as Marxist shenanigans. Another embarrassment arrived in early June, when the so-called "*Capitolio* diamond" mysteriously appeared on President Grau's desk more than 14 months after having been stolen. The jewel had originally been set in the floor of the Capitol's *Salon de Pasos Perdidos* (Hall of Lost Steps) and marked point zero for determining distances to all parts of Cuba. Since vanishing on March 25, 1946, it had simultaneously caused a sensation and vexed Havana's notoriously incompetent police. The diamond's sudden resurfacing, without apparent explanation, incubated all manner of conspiracy theories. A persistent rumor was that José Manuel Alemán paid 5000 pesos for the gem and stealthily placed it in Grau's office.[35] On the other hand, the cartoonist José Roseñada forsook hearsay in favor of outright mockery. His drawing showed a man reading the headline "*Capitolio* Diamond Returned to Grau" and laughing uncontrollably.[36]

During his June 8 radio show, Chibás noted that, "Other stolen objects…may appear on Grau's desk but what will not return is the faith of the Cuban people."[37] He also accused César Casas of "clandestinely" running the commerce ministry

[35] Enrique de la Osa, "El robo del brillante del Capitolio," *Bohemia,* June 8, 1947, reproduced in *Bohemia Digital*,
http://www.bohemia.cubasi.cu/2006/mar/03/sumarios/historia/brillante-capitolio.html.
[36] José Roseñada, *Diario de la Marina,* June 3, 1947: 4.
[37] "Me injurían por dinero, dice Chibás," *Alerta,* June 9, 1947, Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 198: 13, ANC.

despite the senate's no confidence vote.[38] Chibás' foremost concern, however, was the increasingly acrimonious relationship between himself and his former mentor. He began by revisiting his long years of devotion to Grau and how he had often risked his life to defend him. Believing Grau embodied the "ethical principles" of Cuba's 1933 revolution, he had spared no effort to make him president and once Grau had gained the nation's highest office, Chibás asked for nothing in return. [39] "Never," he told his audience, "has any political leader in our country had such a loyal and disinterested supporter as I was for Dr. Grau San Martín. All Cuba has been a witness to this."[40] Even so, continued Chibás,

> Little by little, day by day, he who for 20 years was the living symbol of our ideals was becoming converted before my very eyes into an idol of mud. What a profound tragedy I've had to live through during the past few months! Long sleepless nights assaulted by doubts in which my conscience struggled with the factual evidence! Nevertheless, faced with illegal dealings of all kinds perpetrated by the government, faced with the re-election campaign, faced with the gigantic fraud that Grau has represented both for the revolution and the Cuban people, I felt an enormous disappointment that easily overshadowed my original devotion.[41]

Certainly, none of this was news. The wrinkle was that Grau had decided to retaliate against Chibás' accusations by resorting to dirty tricks. In particular, a man came forward alleging he had a letter in Chibás' handwriting inciting him and others to throw stones in Cuba's chamber of representatives in 1945. This story, which appeared in many Havana dailies, represented an attempt to remind Cubans why Chibás was unfit for high office. He was *el loco*, an impulsive firebrand who could

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

not be trusted. Chibás assured his listeners he had never corresponded with the man and dared the president to make the letter public. He also deemed the campaign against him "the vilest ever waged against someone in our country in its forty years as a republic."[42] Rhetoric of this sort energized Chibás' unconditional supporters, who allowed their leader was crazy but only as an honest politician among thieves and a truth teller among slanderers.

In mid June, Grau reappointed José Manuel Alemán as education minister. Writing for *Bohemia*, Enrique de la Osa noted the "all powerful" Alemán was also sure to emerge as a top *Auténtico* leader during party reorganizations in October and might even snatch the presidential nomination.[43] In any event, Grau's decision surprised no one, least of all Chibás, who opined during his June 22 broadcast that such "arbitrary conduct" was now typical.[44] For instance, Grau's habit of replacing congressional laws with presidential decrees debilitated the very institutions he had helped create seven years earlier. Moving on, Chibás warned, "the most gigantic 'affaire' ever realized in Cuba's 45 years as a republic" was afoot and must be stopped.[45] This involved a reputed price manipulation on the 300,000 tons of sugar Cuba was annually authorized to sell outside the United States market. Theoretically, the difference between the price paid by the Cuban government for homegrown sugar and the amount it earned on the open market was allotted for socially useful projects such as roads or rural schools. In an echo of the barter deal

[42] Ibid.
[43] "En Cuba, Volvió al Ministerio," *Bohemia,* June 22, 1947: 45. See also Enrique de la Osa. *En Cuba Primer Tiempo, 1947-1948* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2004), 86.
[44] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 198: 27, ANC.
[45] Ibid., 29.

scandal of 1945, Chibás charged that Carlos Prío, Alberto Inocente Álvarez and José Manuel Casanova were planning to inflate the price of refining 100,000 tons of sugar destined for Latin America and pocket a hefty profit. The remaining 200,000 tons would be sold to a firm in New York with ties to the government. This company intended to sell its sugar on the black market at a fabulous gain. In all, Chibás estimated the Cuban people would be cheated out of 22 million pesos. The basis for this accusation was a piece in the June 22 edition of *Bohemia* outlining the scheme and how it could be prevented. However, the article made no mention of specific ringleaders. This was Chibás' doing. Álvarez and Casanova were logical suspects as both had been implicated in the 1945 brouhaha involving overseas sugar sales. Chibás' judgment was also skewed by his personal dislike for Casanova, a Liberal senator and sugar tycoon who headed the Cuban Sugar Stabilization Institute.

Conversely, Carlos Prío had once been a friend and fellow revolutionary, lending a particular bitterness to their falling out. As a member of the 1930 Student Directorate, Prío had engaged in terrorist activities against Machado's regime and was repeatedly jailed. In 1932, he and Chibás stood trial together for throwing a bomb at a Havana streetcar. Prío was a founder of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico)* in 1934 and even coined the party's name. After the mass strikes against Batista failed a year later, Prío directed the party's armed wing, known as the *Organización Auténtica*, until 1938. By any indication, Prío's revolutionary credentials were impeccable. As a two-term senator from Pinar del Río who served as Grau's prime minister and labor secretary, Prío was also a leading candidate for the *Auténtico* nomination. Like Chibás, Prío had been dismayed by

Alemán's influence in the party. In 1946, he attended a meeting with other party leaders in which they confronted Grau over his allegiance to the education minister.[46] Usually, however, Prío opted for toadyism as the surest way to maintain Grau's good will and thus secure the nomination. Hence, Prío defended the indefensible César Casas. Needless to say, this did not endear him to Chibás. At the same time, Chibás often forgave political differences (as he had with Federico Fernández Casas and Jorge Mañach[47]) but could not abide those who enriched themselves in public office. Chibás knew Prío had become affluent since entering politics. Skimming cash off the sugar differential was one of many lucrative avenues open to him.[48]

The day after Chibás' broadcast, Prío accused him of slander and demanded a duel to satisfy his honor. Casanova also chimed in, calling him "the clown of scandal."[49] Chibás responded to the former in a four-page letter typed on senate stationary. He pronounced himself satisfied at having "rendered a service to my country" and asked Prío why he had "systematically opposed" efforts in the senate

[46] Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience,* 36. The meeting was hosted by Alberto Inocente Álvarez and attended by Prío, Miguelito Suárez Fernández, Segundo Curti, Lincoln Rodón and other party notables. According to Álvarez, they told Grau, "it was either them or Alemán" and the president chose his education minister. Álvarez, who was foreign minister, resigned his post in protest.

[47] When Chibás was named to the Cuban delegation of the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War in Peace in 1945, Mañach had argued against his appointment. This was because Chibás wanted to keep Argentina from participating in the upcoming San Francisco conference in April of that year that would establish the UN. While Chibás despised President Juan Domingo Perón as a dictator, Mañach believed Latin American unity should be the most important concern.

[48] Chibás was acutely aware of the constant financial temptations faced by public officeholders. In 1944, two Chinese Cubans approached his secretary, Conchita Fernández, and told her to let Chibás know he could take $300 per day if he would allow them set up an illegal gambling den. He was indignant when he learned of the offer but knew such proposals were common.

[49] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 515.

to investigate "irregularities" in the government's overseas sugar sales.[50] Chibás found it "strange" that every time the matter was raised in the upper chamber, Prío withdrew *Auténtico* senators loyal to the administration – thereby ensuring the lack of a quorum.[51] He further challenged Prío to demand an inquiry into their respective finances. Chibás claimed it would prove "very interesting," especially as Prío had neglected to declare the extent of his wealth upon accepting a position in Grau's cabinet as all *Auténticos* had promised.[52] In any event, this was no mere political disagreement, but rather a very personal and rancorous quarrel. Moreover, the feud was part of a wider battle encompassing Prío's older brother Paco as well, who was also a senator from Pinar del Río province. On April 19, Paco Prío had snuck up behind Chibás in the *Capitolio* and punched him in the neck. This led to a brawl shortly thereafter in the senate and a saber duel on April 27 in the *Capitolio's* Hall of Arms (*Sala de Armas).* Chibás, who prepared for the encounter by practicing with a swordsman in the University of Havana, wounded his foe twice before an audience of Cuban legislators, after which a doctor stopped the duel.[53] As with Carlos Prío, the crux of their dispute involved venality. Specifically, Chibás accused Paco Prío of links to the Italian American mobster Lucky Luciano, who had lived in Cuba between September 29, 1946 and March 19, 1947. In fact, when Paco had hit Chibás, he shouted, "Lucky Luciano sends you this!"[54] As for Carlos Prío, his

[50] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 3, Expediente 99: 148-149, ANC.
[51] Ibid., 148.
[52] Ibid., 150.
[53] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 494. Chibás' choice of seconds was telling at this delicate moment in his political career. At a time when he was insisting he was and always would be an Auténtico, Chibás chose the two most prominent leaders of the *grupo ortodoxo*, Pelayo Cuervo and Emilio Ochoa.
[54] Ibid., 491.

previous friendship with Chibás ensured their exchanges would drip with bile. Responding to the *Ortodoxo* leader's missive, Prío referred to him as "vermin" and informed Chibás that, "I value my honor above my life and will risk the latter with you."[55] On July 13, a day after the ABC party fused with the *Ortodoxos*, Chibás and Prío touched swords in the *Sala de Armas*. The minister of labor avenged his brother by wounding Chibás on the right elbow and cheekbone, perhaps because Eddy could not find the time to train beforehand.

As Chibás persisted with his strategy of needling *Auténtico* leaders, the PPC welcomed two more high profile defections. Roberto Agramonte, Chibás' cousin and Cuba's ambassador to Mexico, resigned his post in late July and enrolled the following month. He was joined by Aurelio Álvarez de la Vega, a senator from Camagüey province, veteran of the island's independence war and erstwhile member of the *grupo ortodoxo*. Meanwhile, Chibás and Pelayo Cuervo supervised the final stages of the party's legal certification process with the Superior Electoral Tribunal.[56] With official status looming, Chibás planned a grand ceremony in Havana's *Parque Central* to formally inaugurate the party. The *Ortodoxo* leader, who possessed a keen eye for symbolism, initially chose August 12 – the anniversary of Machado's resignation. However, a torrential downpour foiled this design. August 30 was then agreed upon until the *Ortodoxos* realized this was the feast day of Saint Raymond, the president's namesake. To celebrate the event then would obviously

[55] Ibid., 515.
[56] Among other things, this required submitting a list of at least 50,000 members and presenting a suitable emblem. The latter involved some difficulty as the Superior Electoral Tribunal rejected the PPC's initial insignia, which featured a torch. Acceptance followed only when a palm tree was substituted in its place.

bode poorly. Thus, the occasion was slated for Sunday, September 7. When the date arrived, Chibás telephoned the National Observatory and inquired whether rain was in the forecast. He was informed that a squall could never be ruled out during the island's rainy season. Chibás, who saw the handiwork of Grau or *inciso K* in every crack and crevice, wondered if they were trying to addle him with a phony weather advisory. In the end, there was no thunderstorm but rather a constant drizzle that desisted just before the gathering started at 9 p.m. Chibás told the crowd he always knew the *Virgin de la Caridad,* Cuba's patron saint, would clear the skies on behalf of the PPC, Cuba's peoples' party. The meeting, which lasted five hours, featured a parade of speakers – including the party's newest catch, Aurelio Álvarez. The senator quickly established his *Ortodoxo* bona fides, saying he hoped the nation's gangsters would not be offended by his references to "government gangsters" because even among the former a few "decent people" could be found.[57] Not to be outdone, Chibás, speaking in the wee hours of the morning, offered to renounce his aspiration for the presidency if Grau would accuse his "delinquent functionaries" before Cuba's courts."[58]

Eight days later, serendipity bestowed a timely and unexpected bounty. At 3 p.m. on September 15, a massive gunfight broke out in the Havana suburb of Marianao. The point of contention was an arrest warrant, delivered by Mario Salabarría, head of the Bureau of Special Investigations and meant for Emilio Tro, director of the National Police Academy. Tro was wanted for the murder three days earlier of Raúl Avila, the chief of police for the health ministry. Even more so than

[57] "En Cuba, Política: El Mitin del Partido del Pueblo," *Bohemia,* September 14, 1947: 47.
[58] Ibid.

Cuban politics, the island's myriad police forces were a repository of enmities and violent rivalries. This was because Grau had filled their ranks with members of the island's thuggish action groups as a reward for their help during his election campaign. Salabarría and Avila, for example, were members of the *Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario* (MSR), which doubled as the personal army of Grau's pal Alemán. Tro, on the other hand, founded the *Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria* (UIR) in 1946 after serving in the United States military during World War II – where he earned a Purple Heart. While Salabarría and Tro were friends of the president, they detested each other. Tro accused Salabarría of profiting from the black market. Salabarría viewed Tro as an upstart. On September 5, assailants had fired 60 bullets into Tro's automobile. The UIR leader was unhurt, as he had not been inside. Shortly thereafter, Avila was shot to death in a Vedado bodega. Afterward, Avila's widow testified that Tro and Luis Padierne, another UIR member, had appeared armed and on her doorstep in search of her husband. As a result, an arrest warrant for Tro was issued on September 13.

Two days later, Salabarría crammed a pair of cars with his men and headed toward the home of Antonio Morín Dopico, the Marianao police chief – who lived in a prosperous district known as Orfila, after a nearby store of that name. Tro, Padierne and a few other UIR deputies had arrived there earlier to eat lunch. As Salabarría's group approached, one of the cars crossed in front of the house and began firing. Thus began a pitched battle in which Salabarría's men buffeted Dopico's residence with machine gun fire and those inside responded with their own weapons, hoping to buy time until help could be located. The Cuban public was

aware of this ghastly incident from the beginning thanks to Germán Pinelli, a well-known reporter and radio announcer, who provided listeners with a live blow-by-blow account from the scene. In addition, the cameraman Guayo Hernández of Cuba's *Noticiero Nacional* (National News) recorded everything on film. Two hours into the clash, a UIR contingent secured an audience with Paulina Alsina, Grau's highly influential sister-in-law, who told them the president had ordered the army to intervene. Grau himself was not receiving visitors owing to an illness that had left him feverish and 20 pounds lighter than usual. Tro also telephoned another UIR lieutenant, instructing him to visit the Columbia military barracks on Havana's outskirts and request assistance. This led to the dispatch of a mechanized troop unit to the area. General Ruperto Cabrera promptly gave those inside 10 minutes to hand themselves over and pledged to safeguard their lives. Tro and his comrades rejected the offer, probably because Salabarría and his men remained present. After the house was bombarded with tear gas, figures appeared in the windows waving white cloths and shouting for the police to hold fire as women and children would be exiting. Morín Dopico was the first to emerge, carrying his injured 10-month-old daughter. They were immediately whisked away to the military hospital. It was now approaching 6 p.m. and Cubans were riveted by this ongoing spectacle as they returned home from work or milled about their living rooms. The next to appear was Morín Dopico's pregnant wife, Aurora Soler Amor, accompanied by Tro. As hundreds of thousands listened intently, expecting a reasonable finale to an unreasonable situation, they were shocked to find the police had murdered first Mrs. Morín and then Tro, whose body was riddled with 18 bullets. Hence, the man

who was fond of boasting, "I don't ask any quarter because I don't give any quarter," ultimately received none. By day's end, Salabarría was under arrest, the military was in control of the police and the *Auténtico* party's reputation was in tatters.

The following week, Grau was universally berated. Every major publication denounced the government and graphic photos of the dead were splashed across Cuba's newspapers and magazines. *El Mundo,*[59] one of Havana's most respected dailies wrote:

> What has the president of the republic reaped with his ineffective behavior? Three years ago he was the popular idol, the smiling hope of a nation anxious for administrative honesty, a civilian government, the realization of the incomplete program genuinely drawn up in (the constitution of) 1940. Today, he contemplates unpopularity, he looks on as his powerful party has split, he must ponder the vibrant, admonitory voices raised against him in congress without a single member coming to his defense, he must confront how badly people react when they see his image during newsreels at the cinema and (ever since the events at Orfila) he should perceive how other forces are gaining popularity, ones in which the Cuban people previously never would have placed their faith.[60]

In the senate, *Auténticos* attempted to avoid a session devoted to Orfila by staying away en masse and hoping a quorum would not be reached. This strategy was thwarted by the party's coalition partner, the Republicans, who appeared in deference to public opinion. The first to speak was Pelayo Cuervo, the *Ortodoxo* senate delegation's recently designated leader. He claimed the previous day's events had "filled our society with panic" and underlined that Morín Dopico's wife, Tro and the other four who lost their lives had been killed after handing themselves

[59] *El Mundo*, for example, was honored in 1943 with the Maria Moors Cabot Prize for outstanding journalism in Latin America and the Caribbean. This prize, which has been offered since 1938, is the oldest international award in journalism. Within Cuba, *El Mundo, Diario de la Marina* (another Cabot prize winner) and *Alerta* were considered the nation's most prestigious newspapers.
[60] "Ineludible Rectificación," *El Mundo,* September 19, 1947, reprinted in "Comentando la Actualidad," *Carteles,* September 28, 1947: 55.

over. [61] At this point Chibás interrupted, waving a copy of *Información* with its pictures of the slain Mrs. Morín and her injured 10-month-old daughter, Miriam. He reiterated that the government was incapable of guaranteeing the safety of women and young children – both of whom had been respected "even during the worst epochs of terror in Cuba."[62] He also accused Grau of fomenting chaos as a pretext for a coup that would perpetuate him in power. The Liberal senator Eduardo Suárez Rivas drew a round of applause among his peers and also in the visitor's gallery after declaring his party would never enter a pact promoted by the erstwhile doctor of physiology. In the chamber of representatives, the *Auténticos* were dismayed to learn that one of their own was preparing to embarrass the party. Guillermo Ara, an *Auténtico* congressman from Manzanillo told all who would listen that, "I was there and saw everything. Those people were massacred after surrendering. They left with their hands in the air and were shot repeatedly."[63] In this case, however, the *Auténticos* achieved the dubious victory of preventing a quorum even as Ara's words were reprinted in the press.

On September 17, General Genovevo Pérez Dámera invited Havana's newspaper directors to view footage taken by Guayo Hernández – the National News cameraman who was present at Orfila. In doing so, the army chief known as *el gordo* (fatso) was making some calculated mischief. The day before, Interior Minister Alejo Cossío del Pino had issued a decree banning the film, which he

[61] Enrique de la Osa, "En Cuba, Policía: El drama en el Senado," *Bohemia,* September 21, 1947. Reprinted in de la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo*, 176.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. Ara was hardly an impartial observer given his close ties to UIR.

deemed "a not very edifying spectacle."[64] Nonetheless, two Havana cinemas had briefly shown the movie before it was suppressed. With an eye toward his Sunday broadcast, Chibás had wangled a screening in the Columbia military barracks as a guest of Colonel Oscar Díaz, the military official investigating the affair. By the time Pérez Dámera convoked his audience of journalistic honchos, the film had ostensibly been prohibited. Nonetheless, he explained that he wanted them to see for themselves that Orfila had been an "assassination."[65] He judged Salabarría the prime culprit and revealed the purportedly honest police chief was hiding $14,000 in his shoes when he was arrested. Unlike the press or opposition politicians, Pérez Dámera did not believe the ordeal reflected poorly on the president. The 37-year-old general owed his spectacular rise to Grau and bore him no grudges.[66] On the other hand, he abhorred José Manuel Alemán and Orfila provided an exquisite pretext to move against him. The education minister's links to MSR rendered his country estate fair game and on September 20, troops arrived for a surprise inspection. Later on, Pérez Dámera invited reporters to examine the colossal stockpile of arms found there, which included enough bombs, machine guns and 50-caliber bullets to fill 13 trucks. Viewing this impressive stash, an irreverent correspondent wondered whether "a single book or modest coloring pencil" had turned up.[67] In fact, Alemán had been collecting weapons for a clandestine

[64] Ibid., 174.
[65] Ibid., 175.
[66] When Grau was inaugurated in October of 1944, Pérez Dámera held the rank of major. During the following six months he was promoted five times. In choosing to elevate a young officer Grau sought to bypass more established figures with close connections to Batista. Also, he was almost certainly looking for someone whom he could control.
[67] Enrique de la Osa, "En Cuba, Un Plácido Retiro Bucólico," *Bohemia,* September 28, 1947, reprinted in de la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo,* 191.

expedition against the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. Entrusted by Grau with planning and financing the venture, this represented yet another repository of the funds meant for Cuba's schoolchildren. In response to this newest outrage, the senate voted no confidence against Alemán on October 1 – after which Grau named him minister without portfolio.

By then, Chibás had publicized the most gruesome portions of the proscribed Orfila tapes. He related that Tro had been murdered while trying to carry a wounded and very pregnant Mrs. Morín back into her house. He then described how one of Salabarría's "jackals" approached the injured Mrs. Morín, placed his machinegun against her swollen belly and pulled the trigger.[68] Chibás also seized upon the money hidden in Salabarría's footwear and asked, "How many pairs of shoes are needed to hide the millions of pesos robbed by functionaries of the present government, beginning with the president of the republic himself?"[69] This statement echoed a supporter from Camagüey who wrote Chibás to express outrage at "police chiefs that carry the people's money in the soles of their shoes like delinquents."[70] These wanton bits garnished the *Ortodoxo* leader's argument that Grau had always tolerated abuses by the army and police. Chibás recounted that he had broken with Grau in 1933 shortly after it became clear the military would not be held responsible for killing the student Mario Cadena. For good measure, he

[68] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 198: 64, ANC.
[69] Ibid., 66.
[70] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente, 1091: 235, ANC.

added that Carlos Prío maintained close ties to MSR chieftain Orlando León Lemus – who had offered to make Prío senator in exchange for his "services."[71]

Two days after the broadcast, Eddy's friend Ignacio Mendoza typed him a letter. Mendoza had been a bomb making student revolutionary during the early 1930s like Chibás and Carlos Prío. In 1932, he devised a parcel bomb that killed the police chief of Artemisa – a town 33 miles southwest of Havana.[72] Mendoza planned to blow up Machado as well but the plot was foiled and he landed in jail. Currently, he was a broker specializing in the Cuban stock market and the New York Coffee and Sugar Exchange. He was also an *Ortodoxo*. As Chibás and the party reveled in its largest public relations victory to date, Mendoza warned against relying too heavily on scandal mongering. "You were perhaps the one who contributed most to clarifying the facts (regarding Orfila)," he wrote, "but that won't be enough in the future as your principal theme." He reminded Chibás that, "sympathy for you is incalculable and the people consider you honorable, valiant and civic-minded but there are many doubts about your ability to govern and many point out that you have never occupied an executive post either in private business or public office." He thus urged Chibás to "demonstrate that you can organize a government." [73]

The *Ortodoxo* leader's most immediate challenge, however, would be the upcoming party reorganizations, scheduled between October 5 and October 19. By law, Cuba's political entities were required to hold a registration drive every two

[71] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediante 198: 63, ANC.
[72] The town of Artemisa was of great symbolic value to the revolutionaries as it was the scene of a massacre by Machado's soldiers on May 19, 1930. On that day, members of the opposition Unión Nacional held a meeting there – an act the government considered illegal. An army lieutenant attempting to close down the proceedings was shot and afterwards troops opened fire on those assembled, killing eight and injuring several dozen.
[73] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1092: 19, ANC.

years and enlist a minimum of 50,000 members. In practice, the ritual represented a zealous competition to induct the largest possible number of supporters. Incumbency allowed the *Auténticos* to buy affiliations with government largesse or to enforce them among federal employees, who could be laid off for placing their lot with rivals. For this reason, they were expected to lead the field. At the same time, hopes were high among *Ortodoxos* for a strong showing. Many were encouraged by *Bohemia's* projection that they would dispute second place with the Liberals. The Liberal senator Eduardo Suárez Rivas believed Chibás to be in such an enviable position that he confessed, "You know where I'd like to be right now? With the *Ortodoxos*."[74] Nevertheless, the PPC's rudimentary political network suggested impending disappointment. The *Ortodoxos* had little or no presence in many parts of the island – especially rural areas. They were also periodically short of campaign materials. Thus, an *Ortodoxo* from Cienfuegos who wanted to publish Chibás' photo in a local magazine was informed that none were available. An adherent from Punta Alegre in Oriente province who requested party propaganda was similarly denied. Hence, Chibás could hardly have been shocked when a town councilman from Camagüey province conveyed that the local *Ortodoxo* effort was "in a state of disorganization" and that "our adversaries are taking advantage of the situation."[75] He added that Miguelito Suárez Fernández, the *Auténtico* senate president, had paid *Ortodoxos* in Santa Cruz del Sur to switch sides. In the town of Florida, the *Auténtico* mayor and congressmen were spending "immense quantities" of money and offering "hundreds" of education ministry jobs as inducements to join them. Chibás received

[74] "En Cuba, "Política: Suárez Rivas Habla," *Bohemia,* October 12, 1947: 48.
[75] Ibid., 1.

similar reports from other areas. Two *Ortodoxos* from the sugar mill town of Coliseo in Matanzas province related that Chibás boasted "an extraordinary majority of sympathizers" in the area but the party lacked a "natural organizer."[76] Blanca and María Rodríguez of Paradero Lugareño in Camagüey province wrote, "Many here in our town who sympathize with you and your candidacy have signed up with the *Auténticos* only because they are government employees and otherwise they would be fired."[77] In a similar vein, an *Ortodoxo* from the town of Manaquitas in Las Villas province disclosed that workers seeking jobs on a local highway construction project had to first hand over their identification cards.

As the affiliation period drew to a close, the *Ortodoxos* finished fifth among Cuba's political parties with 164,705. Only the Communists signed up fewer members. Although Chibás was not at fault for the party's rudimentary organization or *Auténtico* chicanery, his nonchalance about the process raised eyebrows. In a letter of October 6, Federico Fernández Casas expressed surprise that Chibás did not mention the registration drive during the previous day's broadcast. "I don't know how much importance you concede to the event," he stated, "but undoubtedly this is our first great test and we should render a supreme effort to prove before public opinion, even those who doubt us, our enormous popular backing."[78] Three weeks later, Chibás told listeners the registration drive was a "mere formality"[79] The goal had not been to compete for the most adherents but to engage the minimum 50,000

[76] Ibid., 28.
[77] Ibid., 164.
[78] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1092: 83, ANC.
[79] "Habló el Senador Chibás Anoche de Distintos Tópicos," *El Crisol,* October 27, 1947, from Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 198: 105, ANC.

as the rules demanded. An all out attempt would have diverted the party's energies from other objectives. He had insisted that *Ortodoxo* legislators remain in Havana and attend congressional sessions, thereby demonstrating commitment to constituents unlike the chronically absent politicians of other parties.[80] Chibás also believed the PPC's internal structures required further refinement and attention, which could not be accomplished if its leading figures were scattered throughout the island in pursuit of memberships.

The registration drive galvanized the opposing *Ortodoxo* camps as never before. Rumors swirled about possible defections – including Pelayo Cuervo. Millo Ochoa informed the press that prospective coalition partners must back Chibás for president. However, this was impractical given the party's unimpressive numbers. Factional tempers flared during a conference of the PPC National Directorate on October 29 when Aurelio Álvarez urged the party to join a unified opposition and Rafael García Bárcena, the philosopher and University of Havana professor, pushed for autonomy. Chibás attempted to soothe the party's divisions. During his broadcast of November 9, references to *Ortodoxo* independence were conspicuously absent. In their stead, Chibás repeatedly stressed "unity."[81] However, anti pact zealots quickly ignited another furor. Believing a commission of PPC lawmakers

[80] During 1947, Cuba's senate only managed to celebrate 15 of 34 regular sessions and 3 of 6 extraordinary sessions due to a lack of quorum. During this time a total of 10 laws were approved. Of these, five eventually landed on the president's desk. Grau, who preferred to rule by decree, vetoed all of them. Cuba's chamber of representatives fared even worse. Seven ordinary sessions and 2 extraordinary sessions took place out of a proposed 32. The result was six laws passed. Enrique de la Osa noted that Grau, like Batista before him preferred to keep Cuba's representatives sidelined because they were theoretically in charge of Cuba's budget. See "En Cuba, Congreso: Una Legislatura Fracasada," *Bohemia,* December 28, 1947: 64.

[81] "Habló Anoche por Radio el Senador Eduardo R. Chibás," *El Crisol,* November 10, 1947, from Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 198: 116, ANC.

charged with resolving internal disagreements was a vehicle for deal making, they sent a letter to Chibás accusing him (and them) of behaving like traditional politicians and violating the party's constitution. Shortly thereafter, the commission directed a letter to Chibás signaling its intent to resign in the face of what they considered unfair attacks. Yet again, an effort was devised to bring the two sides together. Represented by Cuervo, Ochoa and Agustín Cruz, among others, the pact friendly group met with so-called "activists," including Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Rafael García Bárcena on November 21. They were set to gather the next day but Chibás asked them to cancel, as he was busy composing his radio address.[82] This turned out to be an appeal for independence, in which Chibás argued that necessary "reforms" would be diluted by pact inspired "transactions." He deemed the PPC's internal squabbles "very natural" for a party that was democratic by nature and counted a wide base of support. These words had barely left his lips when he undermined them with a strident rallying call. "Let the sell outs and weak spirits go!" he shouted. "The strong will stay and continue to fight!"[83] Understandably, the *Ortodoxo* lawmakers were rankled by the name-calling and irked by their leader's failure to consult with them beforehand. Some also wondered whether he was fit to be party president.

On December 4, Chibás convened the *Ortodoxo* legislators and pleaded his case behind closed doors. If the party stood apart, he claimed it could "capitalize on the neutral masses" frustrated by the *Auténticos* and pessimistic regarding the

[82] "En Cuba, "Política: Independientes, no Aislacionistas," *Bohemia,* November 30, 1947: 55.
[83] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 198: 140, ANC. The final phrase was apparently a last minute addition as it appears in Chibás' handwriting below the typewritten text.

opposition. In a three-way race those who were most deserving of public confidence would be victorious.[84] This reasoning convinced no one. Chibás was reminded that on other occasions he had agreed to discuss deals with certain opposition parties. He allowed this was true but said he had done so only to please party members whom he respected and considered friends. "At bottom," he confessed, "I never agreed with it."[85] Two days later, Cuervo and Joaquín Martínez Sáenz published a public response on behalf of the PPC's senators and congressmen. One section advanced their view that independence played into the government's hands. Hence, "Without an integrated national force capable of defeating Grauism at the ballot box, all the eagerness for renewal demanded by public opinion would be frustrated and the present chaotic situation accentuated with tragic consequences for the country."[86] Another portion was directed toward Chibás. Specifically, "We oppose all personalist or dogmatic postures and maintain, with a profoundly democratic spirit, that only the party's national assemblies, elected with the votes of its members, can determine the political line in accordance with majority opinion."[87] Moreover, all signs indicated that more was at stake than a mere political discrepancy. In a conversation with friends, Agustín Cruz expressed exasperation with Chibás' "complete absence of political tact."[88] He was referring to the recent suggestion that *Ortodoxo* legislators were open to an agreement with Batista but could just as easily have been responding to Chibás' allusion to sell outs and weak

[84] "En Cuba, "Política: El Lápiz de Chibás," *Bohemia,* December 14, 1947: 47.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

spirits. Cruz, who had put himself at risk in 1936 by opposing Batista's ouster of President Miguel Mariano Gómez, was particularly annoyed by the implication. On December 9, while waiting in the airport for a flight to New Orleans, Cruz joked with a hint of malice that he chose that destination rather than Florida so as to avoid whispers of a meeting with Batista, who maintained a residence in Daytona Beach.

The atmosphere was further poisoned as delegates to the municipal assemblies weighed competing party platforms. In Havana, the epicenter of *Ortodoxo* popularity and home turf to Cuervo and Chibás, allegations of dirty tricks and bribery were bandied on both sides. The final vote, taken on December 14, favored independence but Cuervo vowed to contest the outcome in court. He also offered an exceedingly bitter statement to the press saying, "If Chibás were a statesman, it would be worthwhile to defend the idea of political independence to the end. But he is nothing more than a rabble-rouser, a demagogue incapable of realizing anything constructive. I would never dare propose him as the opposition candidate for president."[89] The following week, Cuervo accused Chibás of hypocrisy. Speaking to a *Bohemia* reporter, he divulged that the *Ortodoxo* leader's stubbornness on the issue of pacts was of recent vintage. When the first party documents were drafted, the original PPC position called for "no pacts of any type." According to Cuervo, he brought this to Chibás' attention and they discussed its potential ramifications. He then claimed the Ortodxo chief and his staunch ally Manuel Bisbé agreed to modify the statement to "pacts lacking in ideology."[90] In reality, this was hardly a smoking gun. As Cuervo knew, the phrase had long been a

[89] "En Cuba, "Política: El Copador Copado," *Bohemia,* December 21, 1947: 98.
[90] "En Cuba, "Política: Es un Especie de Savanarola…," *Bohemia,* December 28, 1947: 61.

Chibás favorite. Moreover, Chibás had always spoken of "pacts lacking in ideology" to denigrate so-called electoral "understandings" rather than to leave the door open for them. The salient aspect of Cuervo's interview had less to do with the charges leveled than the very public and highly spiteful manner in which he and Chibás had fallen out. A month earlier, Cuervo had signed a letter to Chibás, "your affectionate companion and friend."[91] Now, Chibás hurled barbs at him on the radio and he replied with insults in the press.

While this carried on, Chibás attended the provincial assembly in Camagüey province on December 28. The event took place in the home of Ramón Pereda Pulgares, the popular doctor and Chibás ally who had died in a tragic automobile accident seven months earlier.[92] Almost immediately, Eddy clashed with the pact friendly Aurelio Álvarez. Early on, Chibás asked permission to speak about the party's "internal situation."[93] Álvarez, whose stentorian voice was amplified by a megaphone, interrupted him, saying, "I would like to remind Senator Chibás that the purpose of this meeting is only to elect the local executive committee and designate delegates to the National Assembly."

"Don't forget," responded Chibás, "that I'm president of the party and you are my delegate."

"Right now, I'm not your delegate," snapped Álvarez, "I'm the master of ceremonies."[94]

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[91] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 35, Expediente 1093: 174, ANC.
[92] The widow of Pereda Pulgares, Ofelia Kouri remained a prominent member of the PPC and played a prominent role in the party's Camagüey delegation.
[93] "En Cuba, Política: Balas y Votos," *Bohemia,* January 4, 1948: 44.
[94] Ibid.

Chibás relented after this exchange but only temporarily. He asked a sympathetic delegate to request a one-hour recess, which was eventually granted. As the proceedings paused, Chibás attempted to address the delegates. Once again, Álvarez objected. Ignoring him, Chibás stood on a chair and began pontificating. This ignited a fistfight among the opposing factions. During the ensuing melee, gunshots were fired – one of which nearly hit Chibás in the head. The *Ortodoxo* leader promptly jumped on a nearby table, pointed to his chest and exclaimed, "Shoot me in the heart, the *Ortodoxos* need a martyr!"[95] Having shocked the crowd into silence, Chibás finished orating even as the smell of gunpowder wafted through the air. Afterward, the Camagüey senator José Enrique Bringuier addressed the crowd. Asserting that, "the *Ortodoxos* without Chibás are a fortress without a flag," he offered his ten delegates in favor of the independent line.[96] These votes would have ensured victory for the pro Chibás side but the *Ortodoxo* leader rejected them, much to the astonishment of Aurelio Álvarez and his supporters. Admitting to "moral scruples," Chibás claimed he preferred to lose the province to dealmakers within the PPC rather than relying on a deal himself. The *Bohemia* reporter covering the event noted that Chibás had repudiated a "pact lacking in ideology" even within his own party."[97] The *Ortodoxo* leader also said that Álvarez, "in spite of his reactionary tendencies, his strident nature and involvement with old politics, is a respectable elder, a veteran of the independence war, an old combatant in the struggle against

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] "En Cuba, Política: Balas y Votos," *Bohemia,* January 4, 1948: 45.

Machado and Batista and an honorable man at bottom."[98] According to Luis Conte Agüero, Chibás also distrusted Bringuier and had no desire to see him lead the delegation. As an ex Democrat whose uncle, Federico Laredo Brú, had been Batista's presidential front man between 1936 and 1940, Bringuier stirred Chibás' suspicions about so-called traditional politicians. [99] On the other hand, Havana was now the only province with a pro Chibás majority.

Chibás was now in the awkward position of being marginalized within the party he had recently founded. Nearly every *Ortodoxo* who held elective office opposed him and his momentum, which had crested following the Orfila massacre, had all but dissipated. Unable to sidestep Cuba's established political rules, Chibás had instead endangered his position as *Ortodoxo* president. In the coming months, he would continue to build his popularity by capitalizing on *Auténtico* missteps and inciting his supporters over the radio.

[98] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 546-547.
[99] Chibás was right to question Bringuier's commitment to the party. Just over a month after the Camagüey assembly, he abandoned the PPC.

Chapter 3

"Chibás Will Always Win. You Will See Why."

On January 4, 1948, *Bohemia* published an opinion poll regarding the attitudes of Cubans toward past and present leaders. One query asked residents of Las Villas province to name the best and worst president in the island's history. Ramón Grau San Martín topped the list as Cuba's greatest chief executive, with 36 percent. However, many factors tempered this seeming endorsement of the ex physiology professor. For one thing, 17 percent fingered him as the nation's poorest president, more than Fulgencio Batista and second only to Gerardo Machado. In addition, among Cubans in their 20s and 30s, Grau was the only president they had known who never ruled as a dictator, strongman or figurehead. Another possible indictment of Grau was the fact that Tomás Estrada Palma, elected as Cuba's first president in 1902, was deemed the best ever by 13 percent of respondents. Obviously, few Cubans remembered Estrada Palma's term in office but his reputation for probity emphasized the desire of many for honesty. Grau's tenure was also impugned by a question asked in four of the island's six provinces, namely whether Cubans intended to vote for the *Auténtico* coalition or an opposition candidate in the June elections. Respondents chose the latter in Havana, Oriente and Las Villas – the country's three most populous provinces. Furthermore, in Havana 36 percent said they would vote for the opposition against only 19 percent for the

government. At the same time, between 18 and 20 percent of the respondents confessed to being undecided.[1]

Bohemia was owned by Eddy's former schoolmate, Miguel Ángel Quevedo.[2] He received an advance copy every Thursday, a day before the magazine reached subscribers or newsstands. Chibás assuredly perused these figures with interest as they suggested a united opposition could defeat the government. They may have inspired his self-described "master stroke" three days later in which he proposed, during his broadcast, to back a candidate without links to traditional parties (i.e. the Liberals or Democrats) if that person counted the support of Cuba's "neutral masses."[3] The man Chibás had in mind was Miguel Coyula, a respected veteran of Cuba's independence war who was free of party ties and served as editor of the Havana daily *El Mundo.* Chibás' timing was also influenced by knowledge of a seeming agreement between the Liberals and *Ortodoxo* legislators. Now that Chibás lacked the delegates for independence at the upcoming PPC National Assembly, his primary goal was to ensure no bargains were struck with Liberals or Democrats. Regardless, PPC lawmakers pursued contacts with members of the opposition. Prior to the National Assembly, Millo Ochoa, José Manuel Gutiérrez and Emeterio Santovenia met traditional party representatives in the home of Liberal senator Eduardo Suárez Rivas. As they gathered, Gutiérrez (an ex Liberal himself) argued that any alliance must offer a detailed plan including guarantees that Cuba's

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[1] Raúl Gutiérrez. "El Pueblo Opina Sobre el Gobierno Actual y los Anteriores de Cuba," *Bohemia,* January 4, 1948: 28-29.

[2] Chibás and Quevedo were classmates at Havana's prestigious Colegio de Belén. The Jesuit-run school was considered Cuba's top secondary institution.

[3] "En Cuba, Política: Problemas, Más Problemas," *Bohemia*, January 11, 1948: 44-45.

legislature be allowed to function as envisioned under the 1940 constitution. Later on, Gutiérrez mused before a group of friends from his home province of Matanzas that the PPC's "great tragedy" involved having a leader capable of uniting the opposition but who resolutely eschewed "reasonable conduct." "It's almost as if (Chibás) were under the influence of a pernicious being!" he exclaimed.[4] Jorge Mañach, in his weekly *Bohemia* column, offered a more nuanced critique. "The grace and difficulty of politics," he counseled, "consists in knowing how to use impure elements of reality for the purest ends possible." He also asked acerbically if Chibás meant to "irradiate" his politics, whether all those who followed him would be "angels."[5]

On January 22, the *Ortodoxo* National Assembly was convoked in the old ABC party headquarters in Havana.[6] Chibás entered the event serenely despite being outnumbered. Two days earlier, he had been given a powerful trump card when the PPC assembly from Havana ratified the independent line. This limited the possibilities of dealmakers because, according to the Electoral Code of 1943, alliances required unanimous assent among a party's provincial assemblies. The pact friendly faction nonetheless asserted itself, choosing Millo Ochoa to supplant Chibás as party president. During his address, Chibás urged followers not to be resentful. He also cautioned against interfering with the assembly, especially as nothing of substance had been decided yet. On the other hand, Chibás warned that if

[4] "En Cuba, Política: La Gran Tragedia," *Bohemia,* January 25, 1948: 49.
[5] Jorge Mañach, "La conciliación ortodoxa," *Bohemia*, January 25, 1948: 42.
[6] With his usual penchant for symbolism, Chibás initially hoped to convene the National Assembly on January 28, the birthday of Cuba's national martyr and independence hero José Martí. However, the date was moved forward due to objections from those who wanted to resolve the party's business sooner.

the PPC attempted to reach an understanding with traditional parties, he and his adherents would "denounce the traitors."[7] Predictably, news of Chibás' diminished position was the subject of much speculation among Cuba's politicians. Alejo Cossío del Pino, the *Auténtico* legislator and former interior minister deemed him "alone" and "defeated."[8] His Communist colleague Blas Roca thought otherwise. He replied:

> Chibás will always win. You will see why. 'Eddy' is popular for two reasons: his invariable attack against administrative immorality and his disgust, no less constant, with political crimes. He can never resort to old politics in order to retain his senate seat, something he doesn't really need anyway. Were he to do such a thing, he would lose his place in history. Whether the government or the opposition triumphs in the next elections, Chibás' position remains the same. Regardless of which *Auténtico* candidate claims the legacy of shady deals and errors of the present regime, he will have 'Eddy' as an incorruptible critic. If Núñez Portuondo (the Liberal party candidate) is elected at the head of a coalition, the same thing will happen because they are parties based on money and compromises directed not by the men who lead them but by the system that keeps them in line. Embezzlement will continue and Chibás will fight it. He is, definitively, the inheritor of the mystique the people created for Grau and he will keep growing politically even though he won't return to the senate for its next term. Grau was never a senator and his popularity increased every year because he remained the living reserve of his opponents' errors.[9]

Cossío and Roca were speaking in the *Capitolio's* marble encrusted Hall of Lost Steps. Aside from being fellow members of Cuba's chamber of representatives, they knew each other from the time when their parties were coalition partners. The Communists formed part of the *Auténtico*-Republican congressional alliance between November 1945 and September 1947.[10] This had been a quintessential

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[7] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 550.
[8] "En Cuba, Política: El Permanente Chibás," *Bohemia,* February 1, 1947: 47.
[9] Ibid.
[10] The Republicans were a conservative party that extolled traditional values, the family, social order and Christian morality among other things. Needless to say, they were very much an anti-Communist outfit. When Grau brought the Communists into his government, party president Gustavo Cuervo

"pact lacking in ideology" meant to build a legislative majority. When the deal no longer served Grau's interests, he authorized a campaign to purge the Communists from positions of influence.[11] Thus, Carlos Prío, his red baiting labor secretary helped the *Auténticos* seize control of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos* (Confederation of Cuban Workers). This umbrella organization of the island's unions had been Communist led since its inception in 1939.[12] The loss was compounded when Prío briefly shut down the Communist newspaper *Hoy* and its radio station *Mil Diez* in response to the party's calls for strikes and protests. Arguably, the worst was yet to come. On the same afternoon Chibás was dethroned in Havana, the Communist legislator Jesús Menéndez had been shot to death by an army captain in Manzanillo. This incident had been the initial focus of Cossío and Roca's conversation in the *Capitolio* – where the deceased's coffin was publicly displayed on January 25.

In addition to being a congressman, the 36-year-old Menéndez had also directed the National Federation of Sugar Workers. This union competed for membership and prestige with *Auténtico* sugar worker unions run by Emilio Surí

Rubio resigned but his successor, Guillermo Alonso Pujol, maintained the alliance. Even so, the Republicans were ambivalent partners throughout Grau's term and many figures, such as Federico Fernández Casas, expressed strong doubts. For the most part, Alonso Pujol tried to quell such discontent by demanding a larger share of government patronage.

[11] *Auténtico* antagonism toward communism was longstanding and characterized many former members of the Student Directorate, including Carlos Prío and Tony Varona. This hostility was aggravated in 1938, when the Communists struck a deal with Batista to legalize themselves while the *Auténticos* remained outlawed and persecuted. At the same time, as the *Auténticos* gained power and popularity, their ranks were swelled by ex communists such as Eusebio Mujal and Angel Cofiño.

[12] On July 16, 1947, Chibás addressed a letter to *Diario de la Marina* director José Ignacio Rivero to dispel rumors that his party was going to pact with the Communists. However, he also addressed the recent *Auténtico* takeover of the Confederation of Cuban Workers, writing, "We don't want the Communists to control the CTC but neither do we desire this control to fall into the hands of a group of unscrupulous politicians who are unconditionally loyal to the government and largely unconnected to the working class." See: Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 5, ANC.

Castillo. Before being killed, Menéndez had been coursing through Oriente province and negotiating on behalf of laborers at various sugar mills – a task of particular importance as January was the month when harvesting began. Menéndez had been joined in this effort by two companions, Paquito Rosales, a Communist member of Cuba's lower house and Manuel Quesada, a union organizer. According to these two, they had been headed toward Bayamo where they hoped to convince a mill administrator to accept collective bargaining. The first leg of their journey involved an excursion to Manzanillo, during which they were approached by Captain Joaquín Casillas Dupuy. As the train neared the station, Casillas informed Menéndez and Quesada of his intent to detain them pending an investigation over whether they had broken the law. When Menéndez reminded him that he enjoyed parliamentary immunity as guaranteed by the constitution, the captain shouted, "Let the chamber protest if I violate your parliamentary immunity and if I violate the constitution, I do so under my responsibility! Regardless, I'm taking you in dead or alive!"[13] Shortly thereafter, the train halted. Before exiting, Menéndez reiterated that he was not subject to arrest and would thus not accompany Casillas to the military barracks. When Menéndez reached the platform, Casillas withdrew his pistol and shot him in the back. This version was strenuously denied by army chief Genovevo Pérez Dámera. Appearing before the press, he declared that Captain Casillas had been assaulted and opened fire in self-defense.[14] The general added that:

[13] "En Cuba, Crímen: 'Yo te Dije Que Ibas Vivo o Muerto,'" *Bohemia,* February 1, 1947: 43.
[14] An official investigator sent by Grau concluded that Menéndez fired at Casillas before being killed. However, this assertion is dubious given that the train carriage behind Casillas showed no evidence of wayward bullet holes.

> Mr. Menéndez, taking advantage of his congressional immunity and abusing it, both as a legislator and as a communist, was not only inciting sugar workers to strike in order to paralyze the harvest but was also encouraging the army and the police to rebel, arguing that they too were poorly paid. [15]

Despite such protestations, the weekly magazine *Carteles* reported that nearly every media outlet and political leader characterized Menéndez's death as an "assassination."[16] In his January 25 broadcast, Chibás denounced the killing as "an outrageous crime" and "a brutal and deliberate attack by the government against the working class, parliamentary immunity, the congress and constitutional order."[17]

At a minimum, the Menéndez killing represented yet another affront against Cuba's beleaguered rule of law, especially as Grau refused to discipline his army chief and Captain Casillas remained an officer in good standing.[18] Nor was this an isolated incident of the military overstepping its authority. Five days before Menéndez was shot, General Pérez Dámera issued a statement criticizing two recent rulings of the island's Superior Electoral Tribunal. These allowed the results of a political party's provincial and municipal assemblies to be appealed. Pérez Dámera claimed the process could result in public disorder and warned the military would

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[15] "Comentando la Actualidad," *Carteles,* February 1, 1948: 20. Pérez Dámera's original statement appeared in the Havana daily *Información.*

[16] Ibid.

[17] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 550-551.

[18] The day after Menéndez was killed, the Communist lawmakers Juan Marinello, Blas Roca and Joaquín Ordoqui were received in the presidential palace. Roca asked Grau to dismiss General Pérez Dámera and to remove Captain Casillas from his post so he could be tried in a civilian court. Grau repeated the military argument that Casillas was an exemplary soldier and warmly defended his army chief. Nonetheless, he promised the legislators that justice would be pursued. However, neither Pérez Dámera nor Casillas suffered any consequences during his administration. Casillas would eventually be executed for Menéndez's death in 1959 during the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro.

remain alert against anyone who "tries to mock the people's free expression."[19] To this, the Havana daily *El Siglo* issued a wry response in keeping with the views of many journalists.

> In our judgment, we believe the army chief has addressed something that is none of his business. It is said that General Pérez Dámera has given himself the airs of a referee and savior. He has built himself up as the supreme judge of the electoral process and has romantically taken on his shoulders the generous task of saving us in case someone plots our political ruin. To this we reply, 'Dear Lord, save us from the saviors.'[20]

Sergio Carbó, director of the newspaper *Prensa Libre*, asserted that Pérez Dámera's remarks were aimed at Miguelito Suárez Fernández – the *Auténtico* presidential aspirant who was disputing the party's provincial assembly result in Camagüey.[21] Although Suárez Fernández had won the delegations in his native province of Las Villas and in Matanzas, Grau resented his periodic insubordination and opposed his efforts to win the party's nomination. Unlike Carlos Prío, who supported Grau's refusal to present the education and commerce ministers for interpellation in April of 1947, Suárez Fernández had resigned as senate president in protest. Grau had scant tolerance for those who defied him, preferring instead the sycophancy of Prío

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[19] "En Cuba, Ejército," *Bohemia,* January 25, 1948: 44.
[20] "Incoherencias y Genovevancias," *El Siglo,* January 28, 1948, reprinted in "Cómo Opina Nuestra Prensa," *Carteles,* February 8, 1948: 40.
[21] The *Auténtico* provincial assembly of Camagüey is a useful primer on rough and tumble nature of Cuban politics during this period. Although the pro Grau faction narrowly outnumbered that of Suárez Fernández, the latter held his representatives back to avoid a quorum. Needing only one delegate to validate the vote, a Suárez Fernández supporter was persuaded to attend by his *Grauista* brother-in-law. Before being able to do so, he was kidnapped – forcing the assembly to be rescheduled for December 30. For the second session, an official vote would require only a majority of delegates rather than 60 percent. Even with a victory seemingly assured, Grau's adherents, led by Senator Tony Varona, left nothing to chance. The new assembly's location was sent to each representative via special delivery mail. However, only Grau supporters received the correct address. This ensured a unanimous albeit dubious result and led Suárez Fernández to file an appeal with Cuba's superior electoral tribunal.

and José Manuel Alemán. Given Grau's opposition and his control of the party machinery, Suárez Fernández hoped to rely, as Chibás once had, on his popularity among the *Auténtico* rank and file. This was a remote prospect, as the *Auténticos* were no more respectful of their own party's constitutional structures than those of the nation. On January 25, the political comic strip, *El Reyecito Criollo* (The Little Cuban King) deftly lampooned the rivalry between Grau and Suárez Fernández. This serial appeared every week *Bohemia* and satirized the president, who always appeared in regal garb. In the first frame, Suárez Fernández sneaks up behind Grau and yells "Uh!" startling him. However, the president responds by brandishing a pole topped by a life-sized head of General Pérez Dámera and shouting "Uh!" back at Suárez Fernández, causing him to flee in fear.[22]

Celebrated in late January, the *Auténtico* national assembly was a tightly scripted affair. Representatives from the pro Suárez Fernández provinces of Las Villas and Matanzas were excluded. As the outcome was known in advance, delegates sipped liquor or soft drinks in a bodega across the street instead of showing their faces inside party headquarters – located on Fifth Street and Avenue A in Vedado. When their presence was required, they appeared briefly, signed any necessary documents and returned to their half filled glasses. After the proceedings concluded, a group was sent to the presidential palace to inform Grau he had been re-elected as party president. While this result had no immediate consequences for the *Auténtico* hopefuls, Carlos Prío and Pepe San Martín were the obvious beneficiaries. San Martín, the minister of public works was widely considered the

[22] "El Reyecito Criollo," *Bohemia,* January 25, 1948: 44.

star of Grau's cabinet. Known affectionately by the masses as "Pepe *Plazoleta*" (Pepe Town Square) for the construction projects he had distributed evenly throughout Cuba, he also was lauded for being an honest public servant. Even Chibás considered him a "good functionary."[23] San Martín also happened to be the president's cousin. This was a potentially decisive advantage in a country whose politics oozed with nepotism. After all, Batista's younger brother Panchín was mayor of Marianao and would win Havana's governorship in 1948. Raúl García Menocal, whose father Mario had ruled the Democrats, was Havana's mayor between 1940 and 1946. Ricardo Núñez Portuondo, the Liberal presidential nominee did not owe his position directly to relatives but his surname was certainly a factor. His father, Emilio Núñez Rodríguez was Cuba's vice president during the years 1917-1921 and a famous general from the island's independence wars. Even the *Ortodoxos* were not immune. Chibás would eventually opt for a running mate with blood ties, tapping his cousin Roberto Agramonte. In this climate, many politicians and commentators therefore assumed San Martín would represent the *Auténticos*.

José Manuel Alemán may have lacked the glittering record of San Martín, the revolutionary credentials of Prío and the charisma of Suárez Fernández but was nonetheless briefly convinced he could maneuver himself into Cuba's presidency. The *Auténtico* slush fund maven and current minister without portfolio was hardly an ideal candidate due to his fear of public speaking and scandalous management of Cuba's school system. On the other hand, within the last two years he had risen

[23] "En Cuba, Política: Vamos a Firmar Para Complacer el Presidente," *Bohemia,* May 4, 1947: 43.

from an obscure government employee to become a dominant figure in Cuba's largest political party. The distance between his present situation and the presidency must have seemed far shorter than the one he had already traveled. He thus summoned Republican senator Guillermo Alonso Pujol to one of his country estates for advice. Alemán confessed to his closest political ally a desire to "win the elections in any way possible, including with military backing."[24] However, army assistance was doubtful given the hostility of General Pérez Dámera. Further, the "monarch of *inciso* K" was hampered by an opinion poll that appeared on January 18 in which he finished a distant third as the hypothetical *Auténtico* candidate – trailing Núñez Portuondo by nearly 22 points and Chibás by six.[25] The same query showed San Martín, Prío and Suárez Fernández to be far more competitive against the opposition. Alonso Pujol thus listened politely but without encouragement. Following a three-hour discussion with Grau, Alemán withdrew his bid and declared himself for Prío.

While this development appeared to indicate a preference on Grau's part, the president continued to withhold his endorsement. Even as his term wound down, Grau seemed loath to step aside and reluctant to anoint a successor until the last possible moment. While the president's attitude vexed his party, Chibás was convinced something sinister was afoot. In a conversation with Raúl García Menocal

[24] "En Cuba, Política: Crucigrama," *Bohemia,* February 1, 1948: 48.

[25] The sobriquet was a favorite of Enrique de la Osa, who also referred to Alemán as "*el cacique de BAGA*" (the chief of BAGA), after the acronym for his ill-gotten political fund and the "ex minister of school hunger" in reference to his practice of embezzling funds meant for school breakfasts. While de la Osa was obviously biased, his views agree with Cuban public opinion. The combination of Alemán's dismal performance as a public servant and Chibás' relentless focus on his corruption greatly damaged his image. For the opinion poll, see Raúl Gutiérrez, "En Camagüey y Las Villas Ganará el Gobierno Según Sea Su Candidato Presidencial," *Bohemia,* January 18, 1948: 53.

on February 9 he said, "It seems to me there won't be any elections. All the running around and discussions about pacts are a waste of time as Grau seems more inclined each day to remain in power through a *golpe de Estado*. I've been convinced of this for a year now."

"No!" replied the Democratic leader, "Interrupting the constitutional rhythm would be terrible for the country!"

"Raúl, this doesn't alarm me," responded Chibás, his voice rising. "Not very long ago there was no constitutional rhythm in Cuba. No one respects the constitution. Grau violates it at every opportunity. I don't see why we fear such a false rhythm being broken. Let's not forget that our current government is merely disguised as a constitutional regime. The preferable thing would be for Grau to unmask himself finally."[26]

Menocal had originally called on Chibás to enlist his help in rallying the PPC behind Ricardo Núñez Portuondo. *Ortodoxo pactistas* had expressed doubts about the Liberal nominee, a noted surgeon and man of probity whose dour personality inspired scant popular enthusiasm. As a compromise, Millo Ochoa proposed a so-called "equidistant candidate" from outside the major opposition parties. The Liberals, however, were adamant in their backing of Núñez. They had registered 357,469 supporters during the party registration drive, first among all opposition parties, and claimed the right to head any coalition. Menocal repeated this argument, adding that Núñez was, "a good person."[27] Chibás, who always possessed an exquisite sense of the national mood, said, "I believe the Cuban people are

[26] "En Cuba, Política: 'Eres la Clave de la Situación…'," *Bohemia*, February 15, 1948: 63.
[27] Ibid., 52.

discontented," he said, "but if forced to choose between Núñez and the government's candidate they will elect the latter, whomever it ends up being, because voters want to overcome the present rather than returning to the past."[28] Menocal chided Eddy for continuing to associate the Liberals with Machado's bygone era. However, Núñez had been the tyrant's personal physician and represented an indisputable link to that epoch. Although he had never been implicated in any wrongdoing, his personal ties to Machado and the party's retention of some *machadista* elements would undoubtedly be an issue if he remained a candidate.[29]

The opposition's inability to settle on a contender gratified Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who founded the semi-independent *Auténtico* Reaffirmation Movement and offered to lead a so-called "third front" against the government. Despite fears that Suárez Fernández intended only to gain leverage within his own party, the Democrats and *Ortodoxos* were willing to listen.[30] Conversely, the Liberals held fast behind Núñez and threatened to face Cuba's voters alone rather than abandoning their leader.[31] This posture was almost certainly a bluff, as the Liberals were consummate pragmatists. They could gain nothing and would lose much by entering the election solo. With his enhanced bargaining power, Suárez Fernández

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[28] Ibid, 63.

[29] Prominent among these were Viriato Gutiérrez, former vice president of Cuba's chamber of representatives, Rafael Guas Inclán, the current governor of Havana province and Juan Antonio Vázquez Bello, the former Liberal party boss in Santa Clara. All three were millionaires with money they had stolen during Machado's presidency.

[30] Stokes,"The 'Cuban Revolution,'" 52.

[31] This position was partly rooted in the Liberals' experience in 1944. Before that year's election, President Batista forced them to support his handpicked successor, the Democratic leader Carlos Saladrigas, as head of the Social Democratic Coalition. The Liberals yielded reluctantly as they had registered more adherents than any other party in Cuba. One wing briefly declared the Liberals would renounce the pact unless one of their own headed the ticket. Eventually, they settled for the vice presidential candidate and an allotment of three senators per province (as opposed to two for the Democrats).

visited Guillermo Alonso Pujol and José Manuel Alemán at the latter's residence in Alturas de Miramar – one of Havana's plushest neighborhoods. In a show of confident informality, the Republican leader and former education minister received their guest clad in pajamas. The portly Alonso Pujol went a step further, displaying his massive belly. Alemán informed the senate president he would soon issue a statement reiterating his support for Prío.[32] He would also urge *Auténtico* candidates aside from Prío and Suárez Fernández to withdraw, as these were the only two with delegates in the party's national assembly. Alemán was especially anxious to eliminate Pepe San Martín, who he personally detested.[33] Suárez Fernández was fond of San Martín but disliked Prío and saw no reason why anyone should be "vetoed."[34] Further, Suárez Fernández boasted more delegates than any other *Auténtico* and concluded that such a strategy would only ensure his nomination. After an uncomfortable silence, Pujol asked the senate president to recommend a solution. "[T]here are many solutions you two can try," he said. "For example, a military coup. Against this I couldn't do anything as I wouldn't have time to flee once the soldiers marched across the Almendares River. I swear if they gave me half an hour, I would disappear!"[35]

Alemán and Pujol objected, saying they had no such plans. Suárez Fernández speculated they might conspire to suspend the elections. Failing that, he dared them to run Prío on the Republican ticket and announced, "I would then look for another

[32] This was done via interview with Alfonso Gonsé, director of the Havana daily *Alerta*.
[33] When Alonso Pujol mentioned San Martín, Alemán "jumped as if he had been stung by a wasp." He then dubbed San Martín "the worst candidate" and declared he would leave Cuba if Grau's cousin were elected. See "En Cuba, Política: Más Barato Te Costaría Un Viaje a Miami," *Bohemia,* February 22, 1948: 51.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

organization to nominate me and we would see who triumphs."[36] Alemán nervously wiped his hands on his pajama pants while Pujol removed his glasses and began wiping the lenses. Before either could reply, Suárez Fernández pointed out yet another option. The Superior Electoral Tribunal was due to rule shortly on the *Auténtico* provincial assembly's disputed result in Camagüey. The senate president was confident he would win this appeal unless, of course, Alemán and Pujol exerted "very strong and very violent" pressure on the judges.[37] Once again, his hosts denied thinking anything of the sort. As the nearly five-hour meeting drew to a close, Suárez Fernández asked how Alemán planned to avoid prosecution for embezzlement in the event of a third front victory. "I have a million pesos to spend on a senate campaign," said the minister without portfolio. "José Manuel," countered his guest. "A flight to Miami would be much cheaper."[38]

While the *Auténticos* threatened each other in private, *Ortodoxo* factions feuded before Cuba's judges. On February 14, the Superior Electoral Tribunal annulled the PPC provincial assembly result in Havana. Pelayo Cuervo had brought this case before the court to dispute the victory of PPC isolationists in December. Citing a legal technicality, Cuervo argued the assembly was illegal because eight delegates had not been convoked.[39] However, as PPC party chief in Havana, Cuervo

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, 52.
[39] This was clearly a ploy orchestrated by Cuervo, who neither embezzled nor stole but indulged in lawyerly skullduggery when necessary. During the hearing, Joaquín Martínez Sáenz, who was among the truant delegates, claimed he was unaware of when the assembly would meet. The lawyer representing Chibás found this strange given that the date was advertised in the press. Martínez Sáenz averred he "was not reading the papers that much." Reminded that he and Cuervo often saw each other and the latter would have been likely to remind him about the assembly, Martínez Sáenz said, "during those days, I didn't talk to Pelayo." Confronted with press reports indicating he had

himself had been responsible for summoning them. Enrique de la Osa noted dryly that, "Pelayo had appealed a result tampered with by Pelayo."[40] Seizing on this contradiction, Chibás subsequently filed a motion to remove Cuervo from his post for "negligence."[41] This request was unanimously approved, allowing Chibás to replace him with Manuel Bisbé. He thus gained a trusted friend and ideological ally in the party's upper reaches. Chibás, who was restless in both victory and defeat, did not savor this development for long. His attention was diverted forthwith by a column in *Prensa Libre* criticizing his juridical good fortune. Chibás spent hours every day combing through newspapers and magazines in search of material for his radio show. As one of Cuba's thinnest skinned politicians, Chibás was also on the lookout for attacks so that he might reproach the director or retort with a letter to the editor. *Prensa Libre* was an unlikely source of disappointment as it was run by his friend Sergio Carbó and usually provided the most favorable coverage of any Havana daily. On February 20, Chibás composed a missive to Carbó conveying his dismay but also stating he was certain the article had appeared "without your consent."[42] Chibás duly defended his dismissal of Cuervo, claiming the move was necessary to "fulfill my responsibility" and ensure the assembly functioned properly.[43] Given his well-known grudge with Cuervo, many were likely to view the

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appeared in Cuervo's law office shortly before the assembly, Martínez Sáenz said, "during those meetings we didn't talk about provincial politics." "How strange!" retorted the exasperated lawyer. "Politicians who meet in order to not talk about politics!" See "En Cuba, Política: Pelayo y Joaquín," *Bohemia,* February 22, 1948: 54.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 18, ANC.

[43] Ibid, 19.

move as tit for tat although by the standards of Cuban politics this was gentle indeed.

Aware that he was addressing a sympathetic audience, Chibás also revealed his latest thinking and offered a preview of his Sunday broadcast. Lately, Chibás had become intrigued by the third party candidacy of Henry Wallace in the United States.[44] He saw a parallel between the Progressives and *Ortodoxos* both of which stood against "traditional and decrepit" parties in their respective countries.[45] Chibás was particularly encouraged by the recent triumph of a candidate supported by Wallace in a special election for a Bronx congressional seat. That this event confounded U.S. political pundits delighted Chibás to no end. He also noted that Wallace was being accused of dividing the Democrats much as he had been reproved for splitting the *Auténticos*.[46] Chibás drew two seemingly contradictory conclusions from this state of affairs. First, he asserted that "Wallace's victory" confirmed the need for a third front against Cuba's "old and corrupt politics."[47] Next, he pointed out that,

> Wallace's party is the smallest in the United States and scarcely has any members but has won the election carrying more than 50 percent of the vote. The candidate of this party has obtained, by himself, more votes than all the others combined. The same will occur, in Cuba, with the PPC candidate.[48]

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[44] Henry Wallace (1888-1965) ran for president in 1948 on the Progressive party ticket. He served under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as vice president (1941-1945) and secretary of agriculture (1933-1940). He was also President Harry Truman's secretary of commerce (1945-1946).
[45] Ibid, 20.
[46] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 20, ANC.
[47] Ibid, 21.
[48] Ibid. The candidate, Leo Isacson, was actually a member of the American Labor Party. He won the seat in New York's 24th District after the incumbent accepted a judgeship. In the snap election of February 17, 1948 Isacson received 22,697 votes, his Democratic opponent obtained 12,598, the Liberal candidate counted 3800 and the Republican nominee boasted a mere 1500.

Chibás was clearly extrapolating a great deal from a single congressional race in a foreign country.[49] During his February 22 broadcast, he repeated this argument – leading the jilted Pelayo Cuervo to brand him a hypocrite. Luis Conte Agüero held that Chibás stood "at the most difficult crossroads of his life" after being supplanted as PPC president and realizing his faction was a minority within the party.[50] These were unwelcome setbacks but neither was particularly devastating. Although Chibás no longer ruled the *Ortodoxos*, he remained the party's most prominent figure. As for his pact-shunning followers, their ranks would swell when frustration with the usual politics mounted. This pointed to the real dilemma facing Chibás. Nothing would boost his popularity more than another mistake-ridden, scandal prone or dishonest administration. At 40 years old, Chibás was already a budding superstar. His greatest weakness was the lack of a political machine but this could be remedied with time. On the other hand, he rued Cuba's likely presidential contenders. Similar to Grau, Carlos Prío had not respected the constitution, he was corrupt and maintained links with gangsters. Ricardo Núñez represented an even more distasteful Liberal restoration. Chibás, who was constantly aware of his "duty before history"[51] to advance Cuba's revolution, felt the electorate deserved better. He was also hedging his bets. If a third front were agreed upon and headed by a candidate without links to Grau or traditional parties, it would potentially be very popular. Chibás, who closely tracked his own poll ratings, was almost certainly

[49] Moreover, the "traditional and decrepit" political parties of the United States would be vindicated in November of 1948 when the Democrats recaptured the presidency and won back the 24th congressional district in New York. Wallace did not win a single electoral vote.
[50] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 555.
[51] The phrase (*deber histórico*) appears with regularity in Chibás' letters and radio broadcasts.

loath to oppose such a venture. He could brush off the inevitable charges of flip-flopping from fellow politicos, as he knew the public would applaud.

Later that evening, the familiar sounds of Havana's three-week carnival were supplemented by more ominous but equally recognizable noises. Just after 11 p.m. as the last echoes of floats and merrymaking faded from the streets, UIR militants gunned down Manolo Castro and two companions. The 37-year-old Castro was Cuba's national sports director[52] and an MSR member who was close to the now infamous Mario Salabarría. Castro had infuriated UIR leaders for allegedly investigating whether his friend might be freed from prison. Informed that he had been targeted for assassination, Castro visited the presidential palace and appealed for help to Grau's sister-in-law Paulina Alsina and Cuba's police chief Hernández Nardo, who was a fellow MSR man. However, the latter was reluctant to become involved – perhaps due to the Orfila fiasco. Ironically, the one assailant captured by the authorities turned out to be Grau's godson; a 20-year-old agronomy student named Gustavo Ortiz Fáez. He belonged to a UIR "tendency" at the University of Havana led by Fidel Castro and Justo Fuentes whose fierce rivals were devotees of Manolo Castro.[53] At the burial, the *Auténtico* politician René Moreno poignantly summed up the killing saying, "We ourselves are responsible for this deed. We haven't learned how to unite in order to overcome, as good revolutionaries should. We are responsible for Manolo's death…"[54]

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[52] Castro owed his position as Cuba's national sports director to José Manuel Alemán, the MSR's chief patron. Before that, Castro had been the leading MSR representative at the University of Havana – where he was president of the University Student Federation (*Federación Estudiantil Universitario*).
[53] Enrique de la Osa. "En Cuba, Atentado: 'Nosotros Mismos Somos Culpables...,'" *Bohemia,* February 29, 1948, reprinted in de la Osa, *Primer Tiempo 1947-1948,* 365.
[54] Ibid, 366.

Gang violence was a reminder of *Auténtico* mismanagement but offered no guarantee of an opposition victory. Millo Ochoa, the new PPC president, thus remained in pursuit of his elusive quarry – someone who could unite Cuba's so-called "progressive forces." Among those he considered was Carlos Hevia, an *Auténtico* founder, respected engineer and the first Cuban graduate of the United States Naval Academy. An industrious man and able administrator, Hevia also possessed first-rate revolutionary credentials. In 1931, he was among 40 volunteers who stormed the city of Gibara in an ill-fated attempt to overthrow Machado. Hevia told Ochoa he would accept the third front nomination but urged him to speak first with Miguelito Súarez Fernández, whom he called the "operative factor" in Cuban politics.[55] Ochoa then revealed his plan to isolate the Liberals until they dropped Ricardo Núñez. If their intransigence persisted, he claimed many Liberal senators would "peel away" toward the third front in order to save their seats.[56]

Hovering above these negotiations was yet another case pending before the Superior Electoral Tribunal. By a 4-1 vote the court had overturned a ruling from 1944 requiring a party's provincial assemblies to approve national coalition deals. On February 23, politicians of every stripe packed the Tribunal's O'Reilly Street headquarters in Old Havana.[57] Much to their disappointment, nothing was decided and a further delay was incurred when one of the judges fell ill for three days.

[55] "En Cuba, Política: Dos Cosas Iguales a Una Tercera," *Bohemia,* February 29, 1948: 42.
[56] Ibid.
[57] A *Bohemia* reporter wrote that, "During its 65 years of existence – the last 30 devoted to court business – never have such well known figures of Cuban politics congregated within the building's walls." See "En Cuba, Política: La Madre del Cordero," *Bohemia,* March 7, 1948: 49.

Although the verdict promised consequences for all of Cuba's political parties, the *Auténticos* and *Ortodoxos* were especially on edge. A free hand for national assemblies would greatly benefit Grau and his chosen successor, Carlos Prío. With the provincial assemblies of Matanzas and Las Villas backing him, Suárez Fernández had been able to hold up the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance. Deprived of this trump card, he would lose a great deal of leverage within the party. Speculation was rampant that a pro government ruling was forthcoming. On February 26, a pessimistic Suárez Fernández met with Chibás and broached the possibility of another mass exodus toward the *Ortodoxos*. Contemplating an unfavorable outcome, the senate president's chief lieutenant in Matanzas, Diego Vicente Tejera believed the *miguelistas* would bolt, saying, "We have no choice but to scorch the earth behind us."[58] Even as Chibás contemplated adding Suárez Fernández and his legion of supporters, he too was preoccupied by the court's impending decision. His control of the Havana assembly had until now assured him of a veto against any pact he considered unacceptable. Conversely, Pelayo Cuervo and Joaquín Martínez Sáenz were eager to free themselves from their adversary's oversight. On February 27, the judges issued a pronouncement that confounded expectations. The new "instruction" pertaining to unresolved pacts, stated that if a coalition were stalled due to objections from a party's provincial assembly, the alliance's presidential and vice-presidential candidates would have to be substituted. Noting the revulsion of Carlos Prío when the verdict was read aloud, a *Bohemia* correspondent wrote that,

[58] Ibid.

"A jar of cold water poured down the neck of ex Prime Minister Prío Socorrás and his friends present with him wouldn't have caused as much disgust on their part."[59]

On February 29, Suárez Fernández met Chibás once again and confirmed his group's readiness to "consider" integrating a third front.[60] That evening, Chibás imbued the new project with his characteristic showmanship. After coining a catchy slogan ("third front against third floor"), he told listeners the alliance also required a "Cuban salute of victory."[61] This, he suggested, should entail an arm raised with three fingers pointing toward the sky. Despite such enthusiasm, the third front faced innumerable pitfalls. Foremost among these was the ambivalence of all parties involved. On March 7, Chibás and the *Ortodoxo* party chiefs of each province signed a document declaring "total identification" with the third front.[62] Nevertheless, many who argued for independence were poised to bolt if the party entered an alliance. Among the Democrats, a heated debate ensued over whether to join Suárez Fernández and the *Ortodoxos*. Although a majority approved, many top figures expressed reservations. Carlos Saladrigas, the party's presidential nominee in 1944, described Chibás and Suárez Fernández as demagogues who were "utterly crazy."[63] Antonio Martínez Fraga, a party chief from Las Villas, also objected to Suárez Fernández – citing his failure to officially abandon the *Auténticos* and past praise for Grau, which he called "an immorality."[64] These leaders and others, including ex treasury secretary Jorge García Montes, advocated a pact with the

[59] Ibid, 50.
[60] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 556.
[61] Ibid. The "third floor" referred to the private quarters of Cuba's presidential palace and was used by politicians of all stripes to refer to Grau.
[62] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 8, Expediente 258, ANC.
[63] "En Cuba, Política: Como en el Cuento de Poe," *Bohemia,* March 7, 1948: 54.
[64] "En Cuba, Política: ¡Este es el País del Relajo!" *Bohemia,* March 14, 1948: 51.

Liberals. As for Suárez Fernández, his self-assured pose before *Ortodoxo* and Democrat delegations was a façade. As senate president, he was all too familiar with the potpourri of personalities that would need reconciling and perhaps this was the basis for his qualms. Regardless of the reason, his discreet albeit noticeable contacts with *Auténtico* bosses were a sign of wavering commitment. Needless to say, the Democrats' pro Liberal rumblings and Suárez Fernández's political philandering were embarrassing and potentially damaging to Chibás. His public endorsement of the third front now appeared either naïve or expedient. Hence, he and Manuel Bisbé issued a statement intended to bolster their reputations and serve warning to their unscrupulous potential allies.

> We absolutely disagree with any steps that will transform the original idea of the third front into a horrible caricature of the beautiful portrait we painted for the Cuban people in our previous radio broadcasts. The third front is (and cannot be other than) the political solution capable of liberating the Cuban people from robberies, crimes and other shameless acts of the present without backsliding toward the Machado era. For this reason we have passionately defended the third front with an uplifted spirit, declining all personal aspirations, but under no circumstances are we ready to renounce our longstanding principles and revolutionary convictions.[65]

While Chibás fulminated, his pact friendly colleagues negotiated. On March 9, the Democratic railroad magnate José Miguel Tarafa invited leaders from his own party along with *Ortodoxo* and Liberal contingents to his country estate in Matanzas province. Addressing the Liberals, Senator Tarafa noted that Miguelito Suárez Fernández had offered to withdraw his candidacy in the name of third front unity and proposed Ricardo Núñez follow suit. The Liberal chief responded with

[65] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 557-558.

indignant disbelief. "Everyone here agrees I am a decent person; nevertheless, all of you want to veto my candidacy. I have spent 54 years in Cuban society and no one can accuse me of anything…I can't understand this attitude."[66] Núñez, who did nothing during the meeting to debunk his reputation as a stern, irascible sort, proceeded to threaten those present that he would not tolerate being portrayed as intransigent in newspapers sympathetic to the *Ortodoxos* or Democrats. He then declared himself willing to stand down if everyone agreed that was best but warned "not a single Liberal" would vote for the third front without him heading the ticket.[67] Núñez then moderated his position slightly, saying his replacement might be acceptable but only if the substitute were one of the provincial Liberal party bosses. This idea was quickly dismissed by Millo Ochoa, who said everyone had been gathered to discuss a "unified opposition" rather than "party questions."[68] To everyone's surprise, the Liberal congressman Prisciliano Piedra then suggested they nominate a figure without ties to any of the three parties. This plan so agitated Núñez that other members of the Liberal delegation whisked their leader to Tarafa's office, where he could calm down in private. Shortly thereafter, the Liberals abandoned their host's sumptuous *finca* despite pleas to stay and smooth out a deal.

The political spotlight now shifted toward the *Auténticos.* On March 10, Education Minister Carlos de Arazoza met with José Manuel Alemán at his home in Miami Beach. The scourge of Cuba's schoolchildren, whose sudden exile had inspired much speculation, ordered his surrogate to lend Carlos Prío "whatever help

[66] "En Cuba, Política: '¡Esperen Media Hora!'' *Bohemia,* March 14, 1948: 54.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

he needs" for the imminent national assembly meeting.[69] This arrived around noon the next day in the form of trucks and busloads full of armed men. Another group that descended on *Auténtico* headquarters was Havana's pickpockets, who took advantage of the crowded conditions and constant jostling to relieve many a delegate of their wallet. Among the victims was Arazoza himself, who shouted in displeasure after discovering his billfold, containing more than 800 *pesos*, had been filched. The assembly officially commenced at 3 p.m. with a so-called "functional quorum" of 79 delegates. This number reflected the absence of representatives from Matanzas and Las Villas, provinces controlled by Miguelito Suárez Fernández. Even some of those nominally present were elsewhere. Alemán, the new Havana party boss, was in Florida. Grau, the *Auténtico* chief, passed the afternoon in the presidential palace. Apart from the petty thieves, no one had any reason to attend the convention for everything had been decided in advance. Grau had not only chosen the nominee, he had leaked word of his decision to the crowds waiting outside the presidential palace before a vote had been taken across town.[70] Remarking on the farcical nature of the process, an *Auténtico* lawyer from Camagüey ruefully predicted that, "whatever Miguelito loses here he'll gain back later before the Superior Electoral Tribunal."[71]

In reaction to Prío's nomination, third front negotiations were redoubled. On March 12, Democratic provincial bosses exchanged views at the house of Raúl García Menocal and provisionally agreed to join the *Ortodoxos* and Suárez

[69] "En Cuba, Política: 'Como Ciertos Insectos...', *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 57.
[70] Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution,'" 55. The presidential palace was situated in Old Havana, about three miles northwest of *Auténtoco* headquarters in Vedado.
[71] "En Cuba, Política: 'Como Ciertos Insectos...,'" *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 57.

Fernández. That evening, the national assembly was convened and a rancorous debate ensued between third front partisans and those aiming for a Liberal-Democratic pact. When Antonio Martínez Fraga, the Democratic boss of Las Villas, told the convention he had tirelessly campaigned in his province for "this great Cuban" Ricardo Núñez Portuondo, a delegate from Havana quipped, "It's true then what they say, that you have been promoting Liberal politics in Las Villas instead of doing so for your own party!"[72] Martínez Fraga was undeterred, and continued to defend his position for three and a half hours until his exasperated opponents submitted a motion limiting the amount of time for speeches to 20 minutes. A vote was finally taken at around 4 a.m. and those favoring the third front prevailed 71-31. That afternoon, the *Ortodoxo* national assembly voted 90-22 for the alliance – although Chibás and nearly all the Havana representatives dissented. Explaining this stance during subsequent negotiations with Democratic and *miguelista* representatives, Manuel Bisbé assured them the Havana delegation, "with all due respect for the Democrats" was signaling its loyalty to the independent line and Chibás himself had been "enthusiastic" when the Democrats elected to join the third front.[73] Unfortunately, this latest round of talks was stalled over the issue of senate candidacies. Principally, the four *Ortodoxo* senators who were former ABC members demanded places on the third front ticket. Their insolence shocked all involved, but especially fellow *Ortodoxos.* Manuel Bisbé, the professor of Greek who admired Plato wistfully told Chibás that, "Here in Cuba no one respects hierarchies." He then confessed, "I never imagined they would behave with such a lack of

[72] "En Cuba, Política: La Fiesta de los Chinos," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 58.
[73] "En Cuba, Política: El Peso de las Senadurías," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 59.

ethics."[74] Far less surprising but equally devastating was news that the implacable Martínez Fraga formally vetoed the alliance after promising not to do so.[75]

After these hiccups, Suárez Fernández dispatched four acolytes to meet with envoys of Carlos Prío. They promised a return to the *Auténtico* mainstream in exchange for four senate seats in Matanzas and Las Villas and one each in the island's other four provinces. Prío was initially amenable, although Grau expressed disapproval and warned him that Miguelito was "playing dirty."[76] Indeed, during a meeting on March 15, the senate president upped the ante. Besides the senate candidacies, he now requested assurances from Prío that key *Auténtico* figures would support his presidential candidacy in 1952.[77] While Prío mulled these new terms, Suárez Fernández abruptly changed course toward the third front once again. By now, Miguelito's flip-flopping had inspired a raft of satiric cartoons. One, entitled, "At Close Range," portrayed a fence topped by an empty saddle. On the far side stood Prío and Grau. At the near side, Liborio, Cuba's everyman, asked Democratic party president Carlos Saladrigas, "Where's Suárez Fernández?" "He left," was the reply, "but wait a moment. He said he'd return right away."[78] On the other hand, Cuba's editorial pages were less inclined to mask their disgust with humor. "Let it be said," lamented *Bohemia,* "that politics in Cuba has ceased to be a public service and a patriotic duty and has converted itself into the most cynical

[74] "En Cuba, Política: Pensando en Griego," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 62.
[75] According to José Miguel Tarafa, Martínez Fraga shook hands with him and Senator Miguel de León after the national assembly concluded and pledged not to veto the agreement. See "En Cuba, Política: La Fiesta de los Chinos," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 58.
[76] "En Cuba, Política: No Podemos Suicidarnos," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 62.
[77] These included Havana mayor Nicolás Castellanos, Senator Tony Varona of Camagüey, Congressman Rubén de Leon of Oriente and Congressman Lomberto Díaz of Pinar del Río.
[78] "En la Cerca," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 58.

game imaginable of ambition and greed."[79] The magazine reserved special condemnation for the dithering of Suárez Fernández, noting that a "decided, heroic gesture" was required on his part to maintain popular enthusiasm for the third front.[80] *Carteles* added that, "In Cuba, politics is a veritable swamp and the majority of politicians are vermin splashing around in their element."[81] "Where," asked the editor, "are the sincere revolutionaries who struggled and risked their lives to overthrow the decadent regime of President Machado even as his innumerable successors have behaved even worse than he?"[82]

Chibás, of course, was very much a revolutionary but he proved that sincerity in politics was a complicated matter. After all, he truly felt pacts were harmful and yet for the past month he had vigorously promoted the third front on his radio show. Because of the former belief, he voted against the *Ortodoxo*-Democratic alliance and refused all entreaties to run for a senate seat on the coalition ticket or participate in any third front commissions. At the same time, despite occasional hints to the contrary, Chibás never seriously threatened to undermine an agreement – at least while an acceptable figure like Suárez Fernández was the probable leader. When a reporter asked the senate president about Chibás, Miguelito replied, "Eddy is a perfect gentleman!"[83] This was because he, like his *Ortodoxo* colleague Roberto García Ibáñez, was convinced the third front was "a solution to the dilemma facing the people over whether to vote for Machado in the person of Núñez or Grau in the

[79] "Editorial: Un Decepcionante Proceso Político," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1947: 53.
[80] Ibid. In fact, the editorial implied Suárez Fernández should follow the bold example of Hernán Cortés, who according to legend burned his ships upon landing on the Caribbean coast of Mexico – thereby eliminating the possibility of escape.
[81] "Los Corruptores de la Moral Política," *Carteles,* March 21, 1948: 13.
[82] Ibid.
[83] "En Cuba, Política: Trayectoria del Pensamiento de Miguel Suárez," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 63.

person of Prío."[84] Even so, Chibás was beset by serious qualms. On March 16, he attended third front proceedings for the first time and Suárez Fernández promptly begged his help in resolving "the *Ortodoxo* problem of Camagüey," a euphemism for Aurelio Álvarez. The tenacious veteran of Cuba's independence war had been pushing hard for the third front nomination of late. Álvarez had also not been shy about attacking Suárez Fernández for his dalliances with the *Auténticos.* Rather than refusing this appeal outright, Chibás fobbed it off onto Millo Ochoa. Later on, as a group of *Ortodoxos* discussed the distribution of senate candidacies, Chibás remarked to a friend that, "No one here is thinking of the revolution."[85]

Nor was Chibás alone in this thought. Rafael García Bárcena, María Teresa Freyre de Andrade, Regla Peraza and Pastora Núñez had recently abandoned the PPC to protest its dealings with Suárez Fernández and the Democrats. All were close to Chibás and considered the possibility of returning if the *Ortodoxos* adopted an independent line. Like Chibás, García Bárcena had been a member of the 1927 Student Directorate and a militant *Auténtico*. He was also one of Cuba's most acclaimed public intellectuals. Aside from occasional contributions to *Bohemia*, he founded the *Revista Cubana de Filosofía* (Cuban Philosophical Review) and was an original member of the Cuban Philosophical Society. Along with Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, García Bárcena had been among the party's most outspoken critics of pacts. Freyre de Andrade and Peraza carried the surnames of well-known martyrs, which imbued their opposition to coalitions with great moral standing. Agents of Machado had murdered Freyre de Andrade's three brothers in 1932, while

[84] "En Cuba, Política: Pensando en Griego," *Bohemia,* March 21, 1948: 62.
[85] Ibid, 63.

Peraza's father was a general in Cuba's independence war who was accidentally shot by one of his own men during an ambush. Pastora, now 27 years old, had known Chibás since she was 14 and viewed him as a mentor much as he had once been Grau's protégé. Ironically, their decision to forsake the *Ortodoxos* coincided with a stream of defections by the sort of pact friendly, office-seeking types they despised. Federico Fernández Casas jumped to the Liberals and secured a place on their party list in Oriente. Senator José Enrique Briguier, the ex Democrat from Camagüey, followed suit after learning he would be left off the provincial ticket. Adriano Galano, a former *grupo ortodoxo* member, also renounced the PPC.

Certainly, party-hopping politicians were nothing new in Cuba. Around this time, in fact, the Liberals were also suffering losses. First, the senator and political journalist Ramón Vasconcelos joined the *Auténticos*.[86] In an interview with *Bohemia* reporters, he blamed his switch on Alfredo Hornedo – a party bigwig and director of the pro Liberal daily *El País*, who had continually undermined him. Shortly thereafter, the Liberals were tempted with a bold offer courtesy of Carlos Prío. Although he was confident of winning the presidency, Prío worried a contentious congress would tie his hands. He thus proposed an "understanding" between the two parties that would ensure him a comfortable majority. In exchange, he was willing to concede three senate candidacies per province, three provincial governments, half his cabinet appointments and a million pesos to pay for the electoral campaign. Emilio Núñez Portuondo, the Liberal nominee's brother and a senator from Las Villas, could barely contain his glee as he listened to Prío.

[86] Aside from contributing to various publications including *Bohemia* and *Prensa Libre,* Vasconcelos was also editor of *Alerta.*

However, Ricardo Núñez still refused to retire his candidacy adding sarcastically, "So what if they give us a million pesos? What am I going to do with that much money? I'd be so worried about losing it I wouldn't be able to sleep."[87] When Prío was informed, he and Guillermo Alonso Pujol attempted to force Núñez to resign as party president by poaching Liberal lawmakers. They succeeded in peeling away Representative Prisciliano Piedra and Senator Ricardo Campanería, both of Matanzas province, but Núñez retained control.

Despite their failure to lure the Liberals, *Auténtico* leaders remained supremely confident. Earlier that month, Grau's former interior minister Alejo Cossío del Pino had reprised the party's thinking, saying, "We'll win the elections even though we'll have to inundate the island with millions of pesos."[88] Only a single fear nagged *Auténtico* self-assuredness and this was the prospect of an unfavorable ruling by the Superior Electoral Tribunal.[89] Accordingly, Grau summoned the court's president, Francisco Llaca Argudín, for an interview on March 16. Reluctant to face the erstwhile physiology professor alone, Llaca Argudín brought along his four colleagues for what he presumed would be an intimidating session. He was not mistaken, as shortly after arriving at the presidential palace Grau's obese justice minister, Evelio Álvarez del Real, read aloud a long and menacing document. Specifically, the government charged that appeals before the court regarding provincial assemblies were causing delays and leading toward a

[87] "En Cuba, Política: 'Que Voy a Hacer yo Con 1 Millón de Pesos?'" *Bohemia,* March 28, 1948: 47.
[88] Ibid.
[89] *Auténtico* dread of a court case was deftly satirized in the comic strip "El Reyecito Criollo." The cartoonist portrayed a balloon labeled "appeal" filling up with air, causing panic among Grau and Prío. With trepidation, the two men follow a cord attached and wince when they find Miguelito Suárez Fernández gleefully standing at a pump with Chibás sneering behind him. See "El Reyecito Criollo," *Bohemia,* March 28, 1948: 42.

"dangerous crisis" that threatened electoral guarantees.[90] More ominously, Álvarez alluded to the dissenting opinion of Judge Delio Silva that would have removed the veto of provincial assemblies and claimed, "today's difficulties could have been overcome" had it been approved.[91] Unexpectedly, Grau then reminded the judges of Decree 2665 issued in 1940 by Batista's front man, President Federico Laredo Brú, which effectively allowed him to nullify appeals before the court. At the time, this decree had been aimed against the opposition *Auténticos* – who had styled themselves as a party of virtue and legality before they lacked access to power. In any event, the implication was unmistakable, although Grau assured the judges that, "Of course, the situation nowadays is quite different."[92] On March 19, the court received a letter from Carlos Prío and Guillermo Alonso Pujol. As luck would have it, these two lawyers preferred not to dwell on actual laws but on the "chaos" that would result from an "erroneous interpretation" by the Tribunal.[93] This last bit of hectoring came to naught, however. Later that day, Llaca Argudín upheld the integrity of Cuba's judicial branch – declaring the Tribunal would not limit the "legitimate right" to appeal assembly results.[94]

Obviously, there would be no need for a court case if the *Auténticos* could coax Miguelito Suárez Fernández and his followers back into the fold. At first, this seemed improbable when the PPC and Democratic national assemblies approved Suárez Fernández and Raúl Menocal as their presidential and vice-presidential

[90] "En Cuba, Política: La Luz Roja," *Bohemia,* March 28, 1948: 46.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 47.

candidates on March 17. Four days later, however, Menocal was in Las Villas attempting to stave off a veto from the Democratic provincial assembly. During a brief speech in which he implored delegates not to sink the coalition, many vacated their seats and left. Bodyguards were sent to retrieve them but too many escaped to reach a quorum. This ploy was attributed to the Liberal leaning Polo Figueroa, who feared Menocal would unduly influence the assembly. When the assembly convened again, the Las Villas party bosses Antonio Martínez Fraga and Jorge García Montes ensured the *Ortodoxo*-Democratic alliance was nixed. Meanwhile, the *Auténticos* courted wavering *miguelista* legislators with bribes of $20,000. Their first taker was Salvador Acosta Casares, a congressman from Camagüey. During his March 28 broadcast, Chibás incited the outrage of workaday Cubans, whose average yearly income was $341, asking "Government or opposition? Whoever gives the most money!"[95] Chibás told listeners that decent men were being "deliberately irradiated" from Cuba's politics.[96] Nevertheless, he said, the third front offered a chance to vote against the "ignominious present" and would persevere even if the *Ortodoxos* were its sole support.[97] By every indication, this scenario now seemed likely. On April 1, Suárez Fernández was publicly mourning the third front – reserving his harshest words for the Democratic provincial chiefs of Las Villas, saying they had, "put their small-minded interests above the nation's greater

[95] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 559. Nor was $341 a meager income by regional standards. Cuba was among the wealthiest nations in Latin America during this time. Another interesting aspect of this broadcast was the fact that Chibás repeated almost verbatim many phrases from the March 21 editorial in *Bohemia*.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 560.

good."[98] The next day, he and Raúl Menocal officially withdrew their candidacies. Confronted with limited options, a return to the *Auténticos* now seemed logical for Suárez Fernández. Grau's former prime minister, Félix Lancís, established preliminary contacts precisely for this reason. Nonetheless, the senate president was too bitter to capitulate just yet.

Actually, there was plenty of animosity to go around. In an "exclusive declaration" to *Bohemia*, Chibás lambasted "false *Ortodoxos*" that ditched the party and sought to maintain their positions elsewhere. Among these were Pelayo Cuervo and Joaquín Martínez Sáenz, who obtained senate candidacies on the Liberal ticket. Also, Pedro López Dorticós accepted a congressional bid with the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance. Chibás did not specify names, but when he reviled those who had "stabbed me in the back" and deserted upon "seeing their petty personal aspirations in danger" there could be no doubt as to whom he was referring.[99] On the other hand, Chibás effusively praised María Teresa Freyre de Andrade and Regla Peraza, who had rejoined the party now that the specter of pacts had receded. Indeed, the tables had turned a great deal for independence-minded *Ortodoxos.* As the third front's collapse loomed, PPC leaders had convened a series of meetings to decide their next step. Chibás argued they should enter the elections alone. Manuel Bisbé, Agustín Cruz and José Manuel Gutiérrez concurred. Millo Ochoa initially claimed this would be "suicide" and pushed for a deal with Prío.[100] The future turncoat Pedro López Dorticós deemed independence a "utopia," as the party lacked

[98] "En Cuba, Política: Epitafio del Tercer Frente," *Bohemia,* April 4, 1948: 43.
[99] "Declaraciones Exclusivas de 'Eddy' Chibás," *Bohemia,* April 4, 1948: 41.
[100] "En Cuba, Política: 'Este es el Fin de la Aventura," *Bohemia,* April 11, 1948: 64.

both money and a political machine.[101] Eventually, Ochoa agreed to support Chibás and promised his delegates would support him. The boss of Pinar del Río, Dominador Pérez, followed suit. With the provincial chiefs behind him, Chibás was assured of the PPC nomination.[102] He subsequently recruited his cousin, Roberto Agramonte, to run as vice-president.

During his April 4 broadcast, Chibás attempted to enhance this bit of momentum for the independent line by providing a revisionist account of the previous six weeks. Chibás told listeners he and Suárez Fernández had envisioned a third front composed solely of the latter's *Auténtico* Reaffirmation Movement integrated within the PPC. The Democrats, he claimed, were invited to form a pact at the behest of Suárez Fernández adherents in Camagüey. Chibás reminded everyone he had spoken and voted against their participation in the *Ortodoxo* national assembly. However, this was a largely symbolic gesture. If Chibás had verily abhorred the *Ortodoxo*-Democratic coalition, he could have sought a veto in the isolationist-dominated Havana provincial assembly. Instead, he conducted a series of pro third front radio appeals while conveniently ignoring that a traditional party was involved. In fact, Chibás had met privately (albeit informally) with Raúl Menocal on multiple occasions to discuss third front business. Exactly why Chibás suddenly wanted to portray himself as a hardliner is unclear. Having recently been stung by the resignations of fickle dealmakers, perhaps he felt independence-

[101] Ibid. At first, López Dorticós endorsed a pact with the Liberals, asserting they were "not that bad" adding, "the Machado era was a long time ago and we should forget about this page in our history." At a later meeting, he changed his mind and promoted a pact with the Auténticos, saying "Prío, even with his errors, represents the revolution."

[102] At this time, the PPC provincial chiefs were as follows: Pinar del Río; Dominador Pérez, Havana; Manuel Bisbé, Matanzas; José Manuel Gutiérrez, Las Villas; Agustín Cruz, Camagüey; Aurelio Álvarez and Oriente; Millo Ochoa.

oriented *Ortodoxos* would prove more steadfast. Chibás emphasized that his advocacy of the third front had been "absolutely disinterested" but in some respects he had been merely uninterested.[103] He had refused any official role in negotiations, avoided most meetings and rejected entreaties to accept a senate candidacy. Although he had vigorously promoted the third front, Chibás seemed almost relieved at its disintegration.

While the third front's disintegration had cured Chibás of his vacillating, plenty of *Ortodoxos* were alarmed. The party's nominating convention was pegged for April 5 and Chibás spent most of that afternoon receiving delegates in his apartment. Many revealed their support would not extend beyond that evening. "Just show up tonight," Chibás told them, smiling, "After they nominate me you can do what you want."[104] The proceedings began at 11:30 p.m. Accompanied by Millo Ochoa, Chibás drove to PPC headquarters on the corner of *Industria* and *Dragones* in Central Havana. A teeming crowd greeted them in the street, obligating the two men to wade slowly toward the former boxing gym now known as "The People's Lyceum." Once inside, Ochoa addressed the delegates. He openly acknowledged the divisions between *Ortodoxos*, saying the party had engaged in a "sterile debate" between isolationists and those like him who felt electoral coalitions were the surest way to "triumph."[105] Undoubtedly, as the assembly followed its protocols, the PPC's mess of contradictions was on full display. When the roll call of delegates reached Joaquín Martínez Sáenz, the traitor's name was greeted chants of "Out!" and

[103] Conte Agüero, *El Adadlid de Cuba,* 562.
[104] "En Cuba, Política: 'Este es el Fin de la Aventura,'" *Bohemia,* April 11, 1948: 65.
[105] Ibid.

"Guerrilla!"[106] Subsequently, Agustín Cruz told Ochoa that the Las Villas delegation poised to vote for Chibás was composed entirely of *pactistas.* The isolationists from that province, who had lustily berated Cruz during the past months, followed the example of their leader Joaquín Escribiano and joined the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance. Finally, Chibás and Agramonte were proclaimed the nominees. While the building shook with applause, José Manuel Gutiérrez commented that, "This is the end of the adventure."[107] The Matanzas party chief was correct, at least with respect to himself, as he would soon return to the Liberals.

As the clapping ebbed, Chibás prepared to close the ceremony with a speech. He commenced on a conciliatory note, urging followers not to direct "bitter words" at those unwilling to join them.[108] Chibás recognized that numerous *Ortodoxos* believed he was embarking on a "crazy mission."[109] He swiftly confirmed their fears by describing the quixotic campaign he intended to wage. Chibás concluded that,

> Campaign posters are masks that disguise a candidate's intentions. We won't need them. In the public square we will raise our modest soap box without requiring a grand stage. And we will carry it from person to person. To get from here to there, my automobile, which is very old but very good, shall suffice. All we have to do is lower the top in order to convert it into a platform! I'm running for president to set an example of sacrifice and disinterest. That's why I'm accepting this nomination even though many would prefer otherwise.[110]

This was the sort of homespun morality tale that had long ago established Chibás as an idol of Cuba's masses. That same day, a parish priest and Chibás aficionado

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 66.
[110] Ibid.

named Jaime Genescá y Rovira typed a letter to his hero using similar rhetoric. "Take inspiration and accept the idea that some journalists have labeled you a ROMANTIC," he wrote. All of us citizens will be romantics when we give you our votes in the elections."[111] He then illuminated why Chibás' quest might be less dreamy than many supposed.

> In my continual travels I hear many workers and employees commenting on national politics and it's always the same story – they don't know who to vote for because they consider all politicians horrible and for this reason everyone is hoping to sell their vote and make a little money. This is why I believe your party can offer a dignified option for the citizenry of good conscience. The party you direct only has to be slightly better or a little less bad than those we are already familiar with and you will surely obtain the votes of the good citizens who are thinking about Cuba rather than their pockets.[112]

Previously, no serious presidential contender in Cuba had attempted to win office without the backing of a strong party network. Chibás would now have the opportunity to test whether his overwhelming radio popularity and impassioned followers could, largely by themselves, carry him to victory.

[111] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1103: 10, ANC. Genescá y Rovira's parish covered the towns of Cifuentes and Corralillo in Las Villas province. According to the 1943 census, Cifuentes counted 9830 inhabitants while Corralillo had 11,781.
[112] Ibid.

Chapter 4

"We Are Not Satisfied, nor Are We Very Hopeful"

During the second week of April 1948, Cubans perusing the pages of *Carteles* were treated to a sketch featuring a girl who approaches her father and asks, "*Papá,* what's a politician?" Unnerved, the man drops his cigar on the floor and bellows, "Young lady! Where did you learn to say bad words?"[1] The cartoon was entitled, "It's Come to This," and eight years into the life of Cuba's new constitution, all indications were that it had. In the previous two elections, Cubans had been offered something palpable and potentially breathtaking. Although the 1940 contest had been skewed toward Batista, it promised an end to military rule and full participation by each of Cuba's political parties – ending years of illegality for the *Auténticos*.[2] In 1944, Grau represented the revolutionary ideal of his brief but fondly remembered "100 days" administration. The current mood was best summed up by the political scientist Carlos González Palacios, who opined, "We are convinced that our collective life, more than forty years after the Republic's inauguration, hasn't reached the level we have the right to expect." He added, "We are not satisfied, nor are we very hopeful."[3]

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[1] Ozón, "¡A lo que hemos llegado!," *Carteles,* April 11, 1948: 12.

[2] Although the election of 1940 was generally considered fair, Batista used every means at this disposal to ensure victory. In response, opposition parties produced a 14 page report detailing a range of abuses. For example, their supporters were routinely beaten, threatened or incarcerated. Some radio stations critical of Batista were closed. Moreover, transportation to the polls was reserved first for Batista supporters. Frank Argote-Freyre, a Batista biographer noted that such tactics were probably unnecessary but, "Losing was not something he would permit." See: Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista,* 273.

[3] Carlos González Palacios, "Cinismo Político en Cuba," *Bohemia,* April 18, 1948: 27.

This was because the *Auténtico* presidential nominee, Carlos Prío, inspired muted enthusiasm among party members, most of whom preferred Miguelito Suárez Fernández. Grau's imposition would have seemed less heavy handed had he elevated a popular *Auténtico* with a reputation for probity such as Pepe San Martín. But how could Cubans expect land reform, respect for the constitution, better schools, honest administration or an end to the black market when Prío had done nothing but praise Grau over the past four years? Besides, everyone knew Prío had grown rich in office. Dyed in the wool *Auténticos* would vote for him as would public employees anxious about losing their jobs in an opposition administration. The party machine, Cuba's largest, would entice other voters in exchange for money or positions. In short, few of the island's citizens would choose Prío out of real conviction. As for Ricardo Núñez, he counted the support of Liberal party bosses and was free from the taint of corruption but had few natural gifts as a politician. He lacked charisma or a genuine connection with Cuba's masses. A majority of Democrats, his coalition partner, had desired a different candidate. He seemed upright but few had faith in his ability to address the country's myriad needs.

Chibás was the one novelty, the only candidate who inspired a passionate following and oozed popularity. He possessed the revolutionary heroism of Prío, the integrity of Núñez and a reserve of magnetism neither could match. Nevertheless, Chibás eschewed every bit of common sense electoral wisdom in the island's recent history. He ran alone where alliances were the rule and was essentially trying to win an election through a radio campaign rather than a political party. Quite simply, Cubans had never seen anything like this before. Quite a few enjoyed Chibás'

denunciations of government malfeasance but many a sober soul wondered whether this shouting, accusing presence could be trusted with the nation's highest office. Cubans were obviously dissatisfied. The only question was whether they would be hopeful enough to test the unknown.

BATISTA

After his presidential term concluded in October of 1944, Fulgencio Batista had settled in Daytona Beach, Florida. This was scarcely the "hard bread of exile" often rued by Cubans, especially as Batista had accumulated an estimated $50 million during his years in power.[4] As a private citizen, Batista tended to the delicate matter of divorcing his wife of 18 years and marrying his mistress for the past seven.[5] The former general also oversaw his extensive real estate holdings, including several Miami Beach hotels, and stayed fit by rowing in the nearby Halifax River. In April of 1948, a new crinkle was added to his routine when he agreed to run for senate on the Liberal ticket. This was an unexpected development, not least of all for Batista himself – who had rejected the offer at first glance, claiming the government would respond by "unleashing a wave of unspeakable aggression against my friends."[6] The idea had initially been floated by Salvador García Ramos, a Liberal representative from Las Villas, who believed Batista's name would draw substantial votes in that province. Batista relented after personal appeals from

[4] Unlike like other Cuban millionaires, Batista claimed to be "special" because of his "preoccupation" with the island's workers. See "En Cuba, Política: Batista y el Nuevo Partido," *Bohemia,* August 1, 1948: 56.
[5] *Time* magazine reported that Batista attempted to mollify his ex wife by giving her valuable real estate, including a 12-story apartment house and $8,000,000 in cash. See: "Dictator with the People," *Time,* April 21, 1952: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889465-4,00.html
[6] "En Cuba, Política: Un Cable de Daytona Beach," *Bohemia,* April 4, 1948: 41.

Ricardo Núñez and the Las Villas party chief Eduardo Suárez Rivas. Shortly thereafter, the columnist Francisco Ichaso reported that Batista was receiving daily visits from American and Cuban journalists. He was also in "almost permanent" contact with Havana via telephone.[7]

Batista ruled out any campaign trips to Las Villas, however, as he feared his lack of immunity left him at the mercy of a hostile government. In fact, there was a corruption case pending against him in the courts. Lawsuit number 30 dated back to October 20, 1942, when Batista's public works minister, Evelio Govantes, announced he was laying off a number of ghost workers, or *botelleros*, who had been assigned to dredge two of Cuba's harbors and clean Varadero beach. Govantes declared that the money allocated for these tasks was being devoted entirely to salaries with "not a single centavo" invested in actually improving the ports or the beach.[8] In the senate, José Manuel Gutiérrez, then an *Auténtico* senator, submitted a motion to interpellate Govantes. The public works minister subsequently revealed that a total of $1,877,632 had been allotted for the three projects but only $1623 spent on materials necessary to complete them. Govantes ended his testimony with a flourish, saying, "In Cuba, we confront the horrific and disconcerting reality whereby someone who steals a stale piece of bread for his hungry children is sent to prison but he who robs public funds is elevated to the rank of social and political leader."[9] A tremendous public outcry followed and a special judge was designated to oversee the prosecution of all those involved. In 1946, Cuba's attorney general,

[7] Francisco Ichaso, "Nuestras Sucursales de Miami y de Daytona Beach," *Bohemia*, April 18, 1948: 64.
[8] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Batista y la Causa Número 30 de 1943," *Bohemia,* April 18, 1948: 54.
[9] Ibid.

Rafael Trejo Loredo, requested Batista's extradition to face criminal charges.[10] To be sure, an element of politics was also driving the process – particularly as Trejo was a fanatical Grau devotee. In addition, Trejo actively pressured Cuba's Supreme Court to bring a formal indictment against Batista. That the case seemed to be moving forward just as the ex general had been nominated was an unlikely coincidence.

One reason Liberal higher-ups may have tabbed Batista was because the Democrats looked poised to join the third front until late March. Accordingly, the Liberals required a contingency plan to fill their senatorial tickets. After the Democratic assembly of Las Villas vetoed the third front, the party's national convention opted for a pact with the Liberals in exchange for 14 senate seats and three provincial governments. Although these parties had also been coalition partners in 1940 and 1944, Raúl Menocal averred there was no "ideological affinity" between them aside from a shared hostility toward Grau.[11] He added that Genovevo Pérez Dámera would have a greater impact on the elections than any party or candidate, as he alone would decide whether to ensure a fair vote. Cuba's army chief was also pivotal in restoring a semblance of unity to the *Auténticos.* On April 3, Pérez Dámera brokered a meeting between Miguelito Suárez Fernández and Carlos Prío. The senate president offered to bury the hatchet in exchange for seven senators along with the provincial governments of Las Villas and Matanzas. He also

[10] Besides being Cuba's attorney general, he was also father to one of the island's most famous revolutionary martyrs – also named Rafael Trejo, who was killed in 1930 during an anti-Machado protest by University of Havana students. After his son's death, Trejo brought a court case against the policemen responsible for shooting his son. As a result, he was jailed for seven months.
[11] "En Cuba, Política: El Destino Está en Manos de Genovevo," *Bohemia,* April 11, 1948: 56.

demanded that César Casas be removed from the Matanzas ticket despite Grau's dogged insistence that he remain. Prío was amenable but lacked the authority to extract Cuba's widely despised ex commerce minister or grant any other concessions without consulting Grau, Guillermo Alonso Pujol or José Manuel Alemán. Suárez Fernández had no chance of being received by the president and preferred to avoid the rotund Republican boss so he flew to Miami to speak with Alemán.[12]

The former education minister was living rather well in the "Magic City,"[13] having installed himself in a swanky beachfront headquarters. Nonetheless, Alemán was eager to avoid any scenario that would complicate his return to Cuba. He especially feared the prospect of a coup backed by his foe Pérez Dámera or an opposition president who would be tempted to levy corruption charges against him. Alemán agreed with Suárez Fernández that a divided *Auténtico* party enhanced both these possibilities and therefore accepted his conditions. Later that day, Alemán telephoned his friend Alonso Pujol – who arrived on the next plane. Without the slightest fuss, the Republican leader agreed to cede his party's senate candidacies in Las Villas and Matanzas to Suárez Fernández. In an even greater show of muscle, Alemán subsequently permitted Prío to squash César Casas' senate candidacy. Suárez Fernández was thus placated, although his resentment at being mangled by

[12] Prío was pleased to hear of this journey, telling Suárez Fernández he was "taking a step in the right direction." He urged the senate president to inform Alemán that a united *Auténtico* party would win the elections. Suárez Fernández was not so sure. While allowing that party unity was imperative, he also believed the *Auténticos* needed to address high prices spawned by the black market, the scarcity of meat and lack of electricity in rural areas. Without such "rectifications" he warned, "we won't advance very far." See "En Cuba, Política: ¡Al Fin…!," *Bohemia,* April 18, 1948: 57.

[13] Miami had been known as the "Magic City" since the early 20th century because its rapid growth inspired the impression that it appeared as a fully formed metropolis without ever having been a town.

the *Auténtico* party machinery continued to fester. Speaking to some associates about the upcoming polls, the senate president confessed his unwillingness to campaign for Prío or Alonso Pujol – adding that he would not share a stage with them "even for 10 millions."[14]

CHIBAS THE INSURGENT

The consolidation of the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance on one side and the Liberal-Democratic coalition on the other underlined the formidable challenge facing Chibás. On April 2, a Chibás supporter named Gonzalo Fernández penned a letter to his idol. Fernández, who was from the working class Havana neighborhood of Luyanó, invoked a famous anecdote from 1871, a low point in Cuba's first independence war. At that time, an official in the rebel army asked Major General Ignacio Agramonte with what resources they would carry on the fight since there appeared to be none left. According to legend, Agramonte passionately replied, "With the shame of the Cuban people!" The writer proposed this phrase as the *Ortodoxo* "combat motto" in the face of politicians "who lose their heads chasing after senate seats and think neither of decorum nor the people."[15] After reading it, Chibás scribbled the words "kind letter" in the upper left hand corner. However, he was clearly intrigued. Agramonte, who was killed two years after his famous utterance by a stray bullet, was one of Cuba's most revered martyrs and a quintessential exemplar of self-sacrifice – a notion Chibás had always found enormously attractive. Agramonte also happened to be a blood relative. As a boy,

[14] "En Cuba, Política: Falleció sin Testar," *Bohemia,* April 18, 1948: 57.
[15] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1103: 1, ANC.

his maternal grandmother, Luisa Agramonte, had plied him with tales of the family's exploits during the independence struggle. These invariably ended in tragedy but were also a source of tremendous pride.[16] Although Chibás' fight was of a different nature, he delighted in the allegory.

Always a believer in the value of symbolism, Chibás appeared on the air with Roberto Agramonte on April 11, thereby adding yet another descendant of the man who would feature prominently in his broadcast. He told his audience that:

> Some people ask me: With what resources are you counting on for the electoral campaign in order to rescue Cuba from the hands of so many bandits and frauds who have imprisoned her? Before this question, I cannot but remember the response of Ignacio Agramonte to the skeptics who also asked of him: With what resources are you counting on for the campaign to rescue Julio Sanguily (a rebel general) from the hands of the guerillas that have captured him? My answer is the same….[W]e are alone, alone with the people but aim to win with the most powerful of resources, the resource of Agramonte: The shame of the Cuban people!
>
> Thirty five horsemen armed only with machetes were enough for Agramonte to rescue Sanguily, who was guarded by a thick column of guerillas and Spanish soldiers armed with bayonets, rifles and artillery. A handful of *Ortodoxos* of shame, like those thirty five horsemen, will be sufficient to save the Republic from the ignoble spectacle offered by the present political corruption.[17]

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[16] Among the casualties were Chibás' grand uncle Eduardo Agramonte, who served as the rebel government's secretary of state and was a colonel in the army of liberation before falling in battle in 1872 at the age of 31. In terms of how such sacrifices were viewed, it is useful to excerpt a letter from Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, president of the rebel government, to the mother of Ignacio Agramonte. He wrote: "Nothing can console the pain of a mother. That her son is no longer alive is reason for her to weep inconsolably forever. But, madam, you cannot be deprived of the most justifiable pride…For (heroic) men, always persecution and death, for their family an eternal coat of arms, for their *patria* the duty to build for them monuments of gratitude. This is the fate of those whose acts will be recorded in the pages of history." See Louis Pérez, *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 101.

[17] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 564-565. Chibás first tried out this line of reasoning during an interview on Union Radio three days earlier. He had been asked, "What resources are you counting on to win the elections against the millions of BAGA, the syndicate of millionaires and the entrenched interests."

Chibás expected this message to hearten *Ortodoxo* partisans but was overjoyed to learn that it had also stirred some of the island's "neutral masses." Manuel Anca, a Havana medical surgeon, confessed somewhat brusquely that, "I don't belong to your political party or any other and I don't know you personally nor am I interested in getting to know you." Just the same, he praised Chibás and the *Ortodoxos* for "being able to renew the confidence and faith in the future of our beloved and hardworking Cuban people."[18]

Although Chibás did not say so on the radio, his presidential campaign was, in fact, counting on a resource besides the shame of the Cuban people. Specifically, this was the 4300 square foot Italianate mansion built by his father in 1924. Situated on 17th Street and Avenue H in Havana's Vedado district, the edifice was an architectural jewel with custom designed doors and windows. Eddy had moved there shortly before his 17th birthday and had concealed guns and explosives in its spacious interior during his years as a student revolutionary. Since his father's death in 1941, Chibás had lived there intermittently and in 1946 he and his brother Raúl rented the building to the Peruvian government – which used it as its embassy. By April of 1948, Chibás decided to sell the place and invested much of the 25,000 *pesos* he received in his campaign. In doing so, Chibás burnished his credibility even further in a nation where politicians typically acquired houses rather than vending them.[19] Chibás also resorted to the timeworn method of accepting donations from

[18] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1103: 31, ANC.

[19] Fulgencio Batista and José Manuel Alemán were two well known examples of politicians who doubled as real estate tycoons. However, they were by no means unique. For example, Jaime Mariné, Batista's former minister of sport, purchased a string of hotels in Caracas, Venezuela. Carlos Prío would eventually acquire three *fincas* in the Cuban countryside and his brother older brother Paco bought a sumptuous manse in Havana's exclusive Miramar neighborhood.

individuals and businesses. For example, his friend Ignacio Mendoza, an erstwhile revolutionary and current stockbroker contributed the substantial sum of 10,000 *pesos.* Alfredo Fernández Supervielle, brother of Havana's deceased mayor and the sugar magnate Jacobo Lobo chipped in 200 *pesos* apiece. Chibás also received financial support from the posh El Encanto department store (1000 *pesos*), the Tropical Brewery (1000 *pesos*), and National Concrete (1000 *pesos*) among others.[20]

Even as Chibás cultivated a high profile insurgent persona, he remained pragmatic behind closed doors. On April 9, for example, he authorized an *Ortodoxo* delegation to discuss a senatorial pact with the Communists.[21] Both parties saw an opportunity to gain second place in Havana and Oriente provinces, where both were strong, if they joined forces. Such a result would have netted three senators for each. Millo Ochoa, the *Ortodoxo* nominee for governor of Oriente, was another potential beneficiary and he strongly advocated the deal. Initially, the proceedings showed promise. However, when Manuel Bisbé insisted the Communists support Chibás' presidential candidacy as well, they demurred and suggested a nominee be found who would be acceptable to all. Chibás, predictably, vetoed the idea. While this was a setback for the party's senatorial hopes, he felt there was still much to be gained in Oriente – Cuba's largest, poorest and most neglected province. On May 17, Chibás and an *Ortodoxo* retinue set out on a nine day tour of the region to drum up

[20] For a more complete list of contributors to the PPC see Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 1106, Expediente 1106: 46-48, ANC.
[21] The *Ortodoxo* delegation consisted of Millo Ochoa, Manuel Bisbé, Leonardo Fernández Sánchez and Alberto Saumell, the mayor of Bayamo. The participation of Fernández Sánchez is interesting given that he was among the most strident opponents of pacts in the PPC. At the same time, he was also a former Communist.

support for his presidential candidacy.[22] In Santiago de Cuba, Chibás addressed a wildly enthusiastic gathering of 60,000, many of whom waved the party's signature brooms. Among those who warmed up the audience beforehand was Fidel Castro. Given his well known involvement in gangster politics at the University of Havana, the 21 year old Oriente native was an anomalous presence among the straitlaced *Ortodoxos*. His rhetorical talent, however, was already an asset to the party. Referring to Chibás, he declared,

> This lunatic, out of sublime craziness for the sublime ideal of an improved Cuba, values the recognition of his own people above all else. He would be incapable of disappointing the devotion professed by the masses, as that would deprive him of the very oxygen he breathes. The day Chibás senses a reduction in citizens' affection he would put a bullet through his heart, not out of cowardice in the face of failure, but so that his self-sacrifice ensures the victory of his disciples. No uncertainties! We are in the presence of a great man![23]

Shortly thereafter, Chibás mounted a truck top and from those modest heights proceeded to whip the throng into frothy exuberance. Gloria Cuadras, a member of the *Ortodoxo* Women's Wing from the city, recalled that his speech was met with "delirious acclaim and applause."[24] After Chibás finished, with the multitude's roar still echoing in the background, a group of supporters clamored for him to jump into their arms. Without hesitation, Chibás dived headfirst into the giddy mass of hats

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[22] According to Luis Conte Agüero, the travelling *Ortodoxo* entourage in Oriente featured Chibás' younger brother Raúl, Roberto Agramonte, Manuel Bisbé, Ventura Dellundé, Guillermo de Zéndegui and the *Ortodoxo* Women's Wing president María Esther Villoch. They were accompanied by the journalists Tony de la Osa and Juan González Martínez. De la Osa, presumably was the prime source for his brother Enrique's account of the tour, which appeared in the May 30 issue of *Bohemia.*

[23] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 569.

[24] Gloria Cuadras, *Lo que yo vi,* unpublished manuscript, private collection of Olga Portuondo Zuñiga, Santiago de Cuba, 191.

and limbs while a local photographer recorded the act for the next day's newspapers.[25]

In short order, Chibás roused the province to such an extent that Enrique de la Osa, claimed he had "destroyed all previous political calculations."[26] Before the *Ortodoxo* leader's arrival in Santiago de Cuba, a collection box had been placed on the city's main commercial thoroughfare, in order to raise funds for his reception. In three days, nearly 4000 *pesos* were contributed in small donations. Nor did Chibás limit his excursion to Oriente's urban centers. His itinerary included stops in the mid-sized towns of Victoria de las Tunas, Campechuela, Bayamo, Niquero, Puerto Padre, Gibara, Holguín and Manzanillo – where he evoked tears of anger over the murder of native son Jesús Menéndez. Chibás also stopped in the villages of Bocas, Delicias, Jobabo, Media Luna and San Manuel – all of which had less than 8,000 inhabitants. Rather than speaking in an ample square, as he had in Santiago de Cuba, he orated from the cane fields or under banana trees. Often, these remote areas were accessible only by horse. In one instance, he traveled by motorboat in a torrential downpour. As Chibás improvised his modes of transportation, his adherents did the same to spread the candidate's message – especially as funds were always in short supply. *Ortodoxo* aficionados lent their trucks, cars and buses

[25] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 568. The *Ortodoxo* leader was well accustomed to jumping from truck tops into the arms of his admirers, a habit that simultaneously gratified supporters and horrified rivals. Enrique de la Osa noted that, "Upon getting out of his famous automobile, Chibás would appear in rural towns and mount an open truck from which he would throw himself acrobatically into the multitude as if he wanted to bathe himself in the people of each location. The leaders of the Liberal-Democratic coalition and the (*Auténtico*-Republican) alliance, habituated only to the cold tactics of money, were scandalized by such demagoguery, as they called it. But Eddy trusted his political instincts in the power of a more emotional contact with the impressionable Cuban voter." See Enrique de la Osa, *En Cuba, Primer Tiempo: 1947,1948*, 468.
[26] Ibid., 452.

to the party in an effort to chauffeur fellow *chibasistas* to rallies, meetings or receptions organized in his honor. The PPC's publicity effort followed a similar fashion. De la Osa explained that, "the banners of Chibás' sympathizers were not constructed from colorful or elegant materials but rather were modest leaflets or home-made posters, usually of brooms and raised flag-like to signal that 'they were going to sweep the way clear for Chibás to enter the presidential palace.'"[27]

On the evening of May 30, Chibás devised a final parallel between his candidacy and Cuba's independence struggle. In 1895, the rebel plan had involved an initial incursion in Oriente and gradual advances leading toward Havana. Having just won many hearts in Cuba's easternmost province, Chibás planned "The invasion of Shame," a motorized *Ortodoxo* caravan that would symbolically banish all criminality from the capital. Unfortunately, the PPC horde was stalled at the village of Arroyo Arenas on Havana's outskirts by a group of squad cars from the National Police. The officers explained that Cuban law forbade formal campaigning after May 25. Instead of arguing, Chibás avoided a potentially violent confrontation by requesting they wait a few minutes while he called General Pérez Dámera. The army chief agreed with Chibás, suggesting only a change of route into the city to avoid disturbing traffic. Hence, even as the danger of a coup seemed to be receding, the army remained the final arbiter of Cuba's statutes.

[27] Ibid. 453.

EXODOUS

Several days before Chibás had been nominated for president, *Bohemia* reported the *Ortodoxos* were in such disarray that "nobody knew anything."[28] This was because they were increasingly unsure of who was in the party from one day until the next. During a meeting prior to the PPC convention, Aurelio Álvarez spoke of Pelayo Cuervo and Joaquín Martínez Sáenz as if they were still *Ortodoxos* before Chibás informed him they had joined the Liberals. The Camagüey party chief, who had stridently denounced "opportunists," became one himself by joining the Liberal-Democratic ticket a few days later. Shortly thereafter, he was joined by José Manuel Gutiérrez, the Matanzas boss. Pablo Carrera Jústiz, an ex revolutionary and wealthy University of Havana professor also abandoned the party in favor of the Liberals. On April 12, Natasha Mella addressed a letter to Chibás renouncing her candidacy for a seat on the chamber of representatives. Mella, who was only 21 years old, expressed a willingness to remain a party member but preferred to reduce her commitment. She had also been romantically involved with Chibás and this perhaps influenced the situation as did the jealousy of older *Ortodoxos* who resented her exalted status in the party.[29]

On April 25, Agustín Cruz, the party boss of Las Villas, published his resignation in *Bohemia.* Cruz had been offered a spot on the Liberal-Democratic ticket in that province but opted to withdraw from public life rather than appear alongside Fulgencio Batista, who as army chief in 1936 had engineered the

[28] "En Cuba, Política: 'Este es el Fin de la Aventura,'" *Bohemia*, April 11, 1948: 65.
[29] Conchita Fernández, Chibás' secretary, noted that many men were jealous of Mella because of her extraordinary beauty and her position as an *Ortodoxo* party delegate. See Prada, *Secretaria de la República,* 122.

impeachment of his friend, President Miguel Mariano Gómez. A keen proponent of pacts, Cruz decried "dogmatic isolationism" as both "antidemocratic" and "lacking political sense" under Cuba's current electoral law.[30] In facing the elections alone, Cruz claimed the PPC "now finds it impossible to offer citizens congressional candidates with a chance of winning" and thereby deprives the Cuban people of a realistic option for change.[31] Cruz thus became the third *Ortodoxo* provincial head to quit within the space of one month. In early May, Pastor Torres Sánchez relinquished his candidacy for governor of Las Villas and Eduardo Díaz Ortega forsook his campaign for representative from Pinar del Río. Both men joined the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance. Lower level defections were also common. In Camagüey province, the entire municipal assemblies of Guimaro and Esmeralda switched to the *Auténticos.* The *Ortodoxo* network, which had always been rudimentary given the party's newness, was devastated by an exodus of local directors, councilmen and organizers. On a daily basis during this period, Chibás received missives like that of Alberto Madrigal Valdes – who informed him that the president of his neighborhood's *Ortodoxo* organizing committee had jumped to the Liberal-Democratic coalition. Madrigal described this development as lamentable but affirmed, "the man who writes to you, who loves his *patria*, will know how to rescue the flag and direction of our party just as Ignacio Agramonte with 35 men rescued General Sanguily from enemy forces."[32] Undoubtedly, many of the new *Ortodoxo* officers were devoted and competent. However, this was not always the

[30] "Declaraciones del Dr. Agustín Cruz," *Bohemia,* April 25, 1948: 82.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1103: 137, ANC.

case. Hence, Chibás was informed by a supporter in the town of La Maya in Oriente province that, "no one here is campaigning for your candidacy or even mentioning you."[33] The party was also damaged by *Ortodoxos* who devoted themselves elsewhere while nominally remaining in the fold. Thus, an adherent from Placetas in Las Villas province notified Chibás that, "I'm writing to let you know that members of the executive committee in this city, some of whom sold themselves to the Liberal-Democratic coalition and others to BAGA, but all of whom are using your clean name to benefit their shady political campaigns and confusing public opinion in this way."[34]

Needless to say, loyal *Ortodoxos* were outraged by such duplicity and responded with defiance. Hugo Mir, a director of the PPC Youth Section, confronted the issue of defections in an article published in *La Correspondencia*, a newspaper based in the city of Cienfuegos. He wrote that,

> It's extremely painful when such things happen, especially when we are talking about *compañeros* with the best references and in whose integrity of character we trusted. We don't know what induced them to desert the *Ortodoxo* cause and cross over to the government. The public justification they have offered…is that for money, jobs or the promise of one thing or another they have put themselves at the service of Prío Socorrás and Alonso Pujol in their labor of defamation against our maximum leader, Senator Eduardo Chibás and those by his side who defend the continuity of the revolutionary movement, or better said, hope to save it. In any case, these acts, this opportunism doesn't dishearten us; on the contrary it stimulates us to struggle with more enthusiasm, certain that we have taken the correct political stance, assisted by the truth, defending the noble ideology of the Cuban revolution, for which many of our *compañeros* sacrificed their young lives.[35]

[33] Ibid., 123.
[34] Ibid., 133.
[35] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1104: 34, ANC.

Taking a cue from Chibás, Mir averred that, "just as the desertion of General Blas Masó did not discourage the rebels, who continued fighting until they gained their independence at the point of their machetes, neither should these unfortunate losses discourage good Cubans…"[36]

During his May 2 broadcast, Chibás himself allowed that "some known *Ortodoxo* revolutionaries" had "sold themselves like pigs to Carlos Prío Socorrás," but he dwelled on more comforting news as well.[37] Chibás explained that one month earlier Ricardo Núñez had commissioned an expensive national survey paid for by Federico Fernández Casas and administered by Raúl Gutiérrez Serrano, Cuba's most respected pollster.[38] According to the results, leaked to Chibás by a "credible source," he had placed first with Núñez a close second and Prío trailing well behind them both.[39] Núñez and Fernández Casas were so shocked by Chibás' unexpected popularity that they opted to keep their research private, ostensibly to hide the truth from ordinary citizens. Chibás also cheered his followers by citing a host of smaller more informal polls that yielded similar outcomes. For example, employees of the public relations firm *Guastella*, the Sinclair Oil Company and the La Corona Cigar Factory all favored Chibás in elections by secret ballot.[40] Throughout the month, the *Ortodoxos* bought advertisements in *Diario de la Marina* publicizing victories by Chibás in straw poll elections at a number of well known entities

[36] Ibid.
[37] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 9, ANC.
[38] Chibás alleged the survey cost $150,000, an enormous sum.
[39] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 6, ANC.
[40] For the Sinclair Oil Company, Chibás received 25 votes, Prío 16 votes and Núñez 9 votes. At the La Corona Cigar Factory, Chibás won 37 votes while Prío and Núñez settled for 15 apiece. Obviously, these polls were less than scientific. Also, they were in Havana, an *Ortodoxo* stronghold where the party maintained a strong presence.

including students from Cuba's engineering school, Havana's dockworkers, The United States Rubber Company, Cubana Airlines, Bank of Nova Scotia, Insular Underwriters, the Sarrá pharmacy and the department stores El Encanto and Fin del Siglo. They also boasted that,

> We have hundreds of surveys ratified by the signatures of thousands of workers but it is impossible to publish every one. The details we have cited are rigorously exact. Anyone who doubts them can question the employees and workers of the factories and businesses above. The result is the same everywhere. This is a reflection of public opinion.[41]

Given his superior position, Chibás claimed he rather than Prío was the best hope of averting a *machadista* restoration led by Núñez. Further, he reminded listeners that the *Ortodoxos* were an official party in all six provinces and every Cuban who wanted to would have the chance to vote for him. He thus urged them to heed his new slogan, "Shame vs. Money."

THE PARTY OF MACHADO

On April 11, *Carteles* ran an editorial weighing the merits of Prío and Núñez entitled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place."[42] After expressing strong reservations about both candidates, Alfredo Quilez, the magazine's director, endorsed the Liberal chief. Setting his own aspirations aside for a moment, Chibás opined that, "It would be disastrous if the government thieves won the elections, but it would be even more terrible if the bandits of the Liberal-Democratic coalition triumphed because

[41] "¡Vergüenza contra Dinero!," *Diario de la Marina,* May 18, 1948: 15. See also "¡Vergüenza contra Dinero!," *Diario de la Marina,* May 19, 1948: 13. These are but two of many examples.
[42] "Entre la espada y la pared," *Carteles,* April 11, 1948: 13.

the latter, in addition to robbing as much or more than those currently in power, would inundate the country in blood."[43]

Chibás bore two intractable grudges against the Liberals. First, they were tainted as the party of Gerardo Machado, Cuba's all purpose villain and bogeyman par excellence. Second, they were one of two "traditional" parties that had mismanaged Cuba during the republic's first three decades. On April 4, Chibás dismissed Ricardo Núñez as a "fervent sympathizer" of Machado who remained "deaf and mute" while the tyrant assassinated workers, journalists, professors, students and veterans of Cuba's independence war. In addition, Chibás charged Núñez with maintaining a similar silence during the mass strikes of 1935 against Batista's military regime.[44] Two weeks later, he revealed a new and damaging piece of information. After offering a public roll call of Machado's early victims, Chibás revealed that Núñez had traduced the memories of these martyrs during a two hour speech on February 24, 1930 in which he lauded the dictator for, "putting into practice the revolutionary program of Martí."[45] Núñez, who had delivered the address on behalf of the Cuban Medical Federation, had further deemed Machado "an example of austerity and virtue" and "deserving of the eternal gratitude of his people" even as he suspended the activity of opposition parties and illegally had himself elected to a second presidential term.[46] Moreover, Chibás pointed out that Núñez maintained a close friendship with the *porrista* Clemente Carreras, a known

[43] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 4, ANC.
[44] Chibás, of course, had participated in the strikes and received a six month jail sentence for inciting streetcar operators to join.
[45] "En Cuba, Política: La Historia Indiscreta," *Bohemia,* May 2, 1948: 50.
[46] Ibid.

assassin and torturer.[47] Chibás also reminded his audience that Núñez remained "surrounded by the flower of Machado-ism."[48]

Indeed, the Liberal party was top heavy with Machado era figures including Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, the tyrant's erstwhile public works minister, Viriato Gutiérrez, Machado's ex secretary of the presidency, Rafael Guas Inclán, president of the chamber of representatives during Machado's rule, Juan Antonio Vázquez Bello, the dictator's erstwhile boss in Las Villas province, Núñez's younger brother Emilito, president of the Machado era Civil Service Commission and Salvador García Ramos, who, on August 7, 1933 had stood on the *Capitolio* steps and fired into a crowd that had assembled after an underground radio station falsely reported that Machado had resigned.[49] Chibás predicted that if the Liberal-Democratic coalition won the elections, even more infamous characters from the 1930s would return to public life. He estimated that the notorious Arsenio Ortiz would retake control of the National Police and have prisoners murdered under the catchall excuse, "shot while trying to escape" and Captain Crespo would return to his post as chief of the Atarés fortress and resume his role as tormentor and executioner. Chibás also claimed a reinstatement of *machadista* personnel would be followed by reverses of gains won by the revolution, including the right to strike for urban workers and "semi-slavery" for their rural counterparts – who would be exploited without mercy by the many

[47] Among others, Carreras murdered a brother of Chibás' friend María Teresa Freyre de Andrade. After Machado was overthrown, Cuba's Tribunal of Sanctions condemned Carreras to death for his crimes but the sentence was never carried out.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Carlos Miguel de Céspedes and Rafael Guas Inclán especially were very much figures of the present. The former was on the Liberal party's senatorial ticket in Matanzas and the latter was governor of Havana province. Chibás also accused Emilito Núñez, who was running his brother's campaign, of embezzling $40,000 from the Civil Service Retirement Fund.

large landowners in the Liberal party running for senate.[50] Alluding to recent newspaper advertisements promising that Núñez would effect a "revolution of honor" if elected, Chibás accused the Liberals of treating Cuba's citizens like "idiots."[51] In a voice saturated with irony and indignation, Chibás wondered how Núñez planned to implement his planned revolution with such a compromised cast of characters.

Batista's decision to join the Liberal ticket afforded Chibás yet another inviting target. On May 9, one day after the thirteenth anniversary of the martyr Antonio Guiteras´ death, Chibás recalled that his fellow revolutionary had been carrying only 83 *centavos* in his pocket when he was shot. Guiteras, whose incorruptibility had earned him the moniker "the man who owns only one suit," provided a pertinent contrast to the figure responsible for his demise, Fulgencio Batista. Chibás noted that the ex general, whose senate candidacy had been supported "with great fanfare" by Ricardo Núñez, currently owned eleven buildings in Havana alone.[52] Of course, he also counted choice properties in Venezuela, Mexico and the United States as well, including a 15-storey apartment building in Miami. "It would seem," concluded Chibás, "that just as little boys delight in collecting stamps, Batista takes pleasure in acquiring real estate."[53] Later on, Chibás characterized the six years between 1934 and 1940, when Batista wielded behind

[50] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 22, ANC. Chibás discreetly neglected to mention that land confiscations had continued unabated after the revolution. Even worse, one of those large landowners with a sketchy history running for a Liberal senate seat was a former *Ortodoxo* – namely, Federico Fernández Casas. The *Auténticos* made a great deal of hay out of this fact in their anti Chibás campaign literature.
[51] Ibid., 15
[52] Ibid., 12
[53] Ibid., 13.

the scenes power, as a "reign of terror" and warned Cubans if they united pro Machado and pro Batista tendencies on their ballots, "God will hold us responsible."[54]

On May 31, the eve of elections, Chibás issued a final appeal over the airwaves. He bid his audience to respect the memories of Cuba's fallen revolutionaries by denying public office to *machadistas.* Doing otherwise, he asserted, would represent a "betrayal of our highest principles."[55] At the same time, he was convinced that support for the Liberal-Democratic coalition had crumbled of late and his chief rival would be Carlos Prío. Chibás thus attempted to court Liberals and Democrats by asserting their votes for Núñez would be "wasted" and he represented the only "practical and efficient way" to defeat the government.[56]

THE CASE AGAINST PRIO

Although his nominal opponent was Carlos Prío, Chibás fixed a suspicious eye on Grau throughout the campaign season. He remained certain his former mentor was planning something and saw plots behind every corner. For instance, Chibás claimed Grau had sought to "provoke public disorder" during the annual May Day parade at the presidential palace as a pretext for suspending the elections.[57] This belief may also partly explain Chibás' pains to portray himself as a latter day *mambí* (who better to lead Cuba in the event of a coup?) and the weekly declarations that he was leading the polls (who better than the people's choice to lead the

[54] Ibid., 27.
[55] Ibid., 50.
[56] Ibid., 52.
[57] Ibid., 1.

opposition until democracy is restored?). On the other hand, these tactics served just as well for his conventional presidential run. On balance, Cubans held members of the liberation army in high esteem. Drawing a parallel between his quest and their exploits was a shrewd strategy. As for the public surveys, Chibás was anxious to peel the *Auténtico* rank and file from its leaders and hoped evidence of his popularity would sway them. At the same time, Chibás also hoped to elicit their disgust by asking, "What type of government can we expect from Prío and Pujol?"

For starters, the venality that characterized Grau's administration would continue unabated. Prío had already "dirtied his hands" in murky deals involving the island's sugar differential, the U.S. owned Cuban Electric company and "other foreign monopolies."[58] Chibás further pointed out that Guillermo Alonso Pujol, while senate president in 1938, had fled to Europe having stolen millions of pesos in public works bonds, an act constituting "the Republic's greatest scandal to date."[59] Just as revolting was the fact that the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance had allotted prominent roles for José Manuel Alemán and César Casas. The former was now *Auténtico* party chief of Havana and a senate candidate from that province. More importantly, BAGA, his political vehicle, was largely financing Prío's campaign. In characteristic fashion, Chibás averred that Alemán and his minions were capable of selling anything and everything on the island, including its principal emblem – Havana's 16th century Morro fortress. Regarding César Casas, Chibás procured a letter to the widely despised "black market boss" from Carlos Prío and read it over the air on May 2. The missive essentially offered Casas a congressional candidacy on

[58] Ibid.
[59] "En Cuba, Política: Trágica Encrucijada," *Bohemia,* April 11, 1948: 57.

the Republican ticket as a sop for his "service" to the *Auténticos*.[60] Prío also assured the ex commerce minister that he would "fully retain" his "legitimately acquired rights," which Chibás interpreted as a promise to restore him to the cabinet after the elections.[61] Recalling yet another *Auténtico* scandal, he noted that the party had nominated Luis Caíñas Milanés, a former senator, known murderer and fugitive from justice, for the assembly seat in Oriente province of the man he killed.

Aside from shamelessness and sleaze, four years of Prío and Pujol would be disastrous for urban workers, who could expect interference with their unions and a government imposed leadership. Even worse, such an administration would also subjugate workers' interests to the whims of foreigners. As proof, Chibás alleged that Prío, as Grau's former labor secretary, had ousted the communist Lázaro Peña as president of the Cuban Workers Confederation in accordance with "international pressures."[62] Chibás charged that Prío's anti-communism was more a matter of convenience than conviction and suggested his rival was actually "anti-worker."[63] By contrast, Chibás promised never to meddle in "union matters" and supported the right of workers to elect their chosen representatives regardless of whether they were communist or not.[64]

Chibás contended the outlook for rural laborers would be equally dreary under Prío. He recalled that a group of *guajiros* from Oriente province had organized a march in Havana the year before, demanding that Grau fulfill his

[60] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 3, ANC.
[61] Ibid., 4.
[62] Ibid., 1.
[63] Prío had many faults as a politician but his anti-communism was both sincere and keenly felt. Like many ex-revolutionaries, Prío resented communist collaboration with Batista in the late 1930s while the *Auténtico* party remained illegal and its members endured persecution, death and exile.
[64] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 1, ANC.

promises of cement floors for their huts, sanitary latrines and new wells.[65] Rather than receiving or addressing the protesters, the government violently dispersed the crowd. "During those moments," said Chibás, "now and forever, I was and always will be on the side of the *campesinos*."[66] Chibás asserted that Prío would make no effort to improve their lives but aimed merely to pacify them with sympathetic folk tunes broadcast on the radio. He urged country dwellers to reject this "opium."[67] Chibás also assured them that the "fundamental motive" for his separation from the *Auténticos* had been Grau's "betrayal" of the *campesinos*.[68]

The *Auténticos*, in turn, considered Chibás' run for the presidency an act of perfidy against the revolution and were fond of using *Ortodoxo* recreants to deliver this message – which often concluded with an appeal for Chibás to abandon his campaign and support Prío. During his May 9 broadcast, Chibás disclosed that Grau and Prío had requested an audience with him, ostensibly to discuss an agreement.[69] Emissaries of the latter had already offered Chibás the prime ministry along with the education, commerce and treasury portfolios if he agreed to join them. Chibás

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[65] With his deft propagandizing touch, Chibás reminded listeners that the march took place on May 17, the same day that Niceto Pérez, a *campesino* from Oriente province, had been killed by a large landowner and Liberal party member.

[66] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 21, ANC.

[67] Ibid., 2.

[68] Ibid., 3. According to Chibás, his "maximum preoccupation" after winning his senate seat had been addressing the needs of rural Cubans. Believing the *Auténticos* were ignoring the issue, he spoke to Grau, who told him his first priorities were passing complimentary laws for the 1940 constitution and overseeing the budget. See Antonio Ortega, "'Tengo confianza en el pueblo Cubano,' dice 'Eddy' Chibás," *Bohemia,* May 9, 1948: 53. At one point, Chibás claimed to be so distressed about Grau's inaction regarding the *campesinos* that he offered to resign from the senate and head a special agency that would oversee improvements in their condition. Grau apparently laughed at this proposal and said, "This is not a job for you." See Arturo Alfonso Roselló, "Explica Chibás la causa y origen de su divorcio del Doctor Grau," *Carteles*, May 23, 1948: 29.

[69] A cartoon satirizing this situation appeared in *Bohemia* that same week. It portrayed Carlos Prío serenading a reluctant Chibás with the lyrics, "Come, my love, I'm calling you, come desperately…" while Grau looks on hopefully in the background. See "Musica de Lara," *Bohemia,* May 9, 1948: 58.

responded that he would much prefer to see criminals like José Manuel Alemán, César Casas, Alberto Inocente Álvarez and Emilio Núñez brought before a judge. "When all these men are in jail," said Chibás, "then and only then will I receive President Grau or Carlos Prío in my house."[70] Later on, Chibás, who never forgot a martyr, recalled that the one year anniversary of Manuel Fernández Supervielle's death had just passed and decided he would only submit to an interview with Grau if the government could bring the dead mayor back to life.

THE ORTODOXO PROGRAM

Journalists who interviewed Chibás often remarked upon the difference between his rambunctious radio demeanor and the measured comportment he demonstrated away from the studio. Arturo Alfonso Roselló, the editor-in-chief of *Carteles*, represented one such case. After a four hour conversation with him, he confessed that in "intimate settings" Chibás "speaks slowly, taking the time to sift through ideas without hurrying and reiterates his points without gesticulation or undue emphasis."[71] Gastón Baquero, the editor-in chief of *Diario de la Marina*, concurred, stating that, "Silence and a conversation full of pauses, rather than screams, marked the interview's rhythm."[72] In this sense, such encounters provided an ideal forum in which to debunk the notion, spread by detractors, that he was a demagogue. They were also an excellent venue for disseminating the *Ortodoxo*

[70] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 18, ANC.
[71] Roselló, "Explica Chibás," 29. Aside from his position at *Carteles,* Roselló also contributed a regular column to *Diario de la Marina* and contributed to *El País*, the pro-Liberal newspaper. His natural sympathies, therefore, were not with Chibás.
[72] Gastón Baquero, "Chibás considera necesario restituir al pueblo la fé en los hombres de gobierno para encauzar los destinos de la nación," *Diario de la Marina*, May 9, 1948: 1.

platform, especially as Chibás devoted his broadcasts to spectacle and revelation rather than the intricacies of party doctrine. Thus, during the last month before the election, Chibás sat down with *Bohemia*, which usually offered flattering coverage, *Carteles*, which viewed him warily, *Diario de la Marina,* which was mildly sympathetic but preferred Núñez, and *El Crisol*, which considered Chibás' broadcasts to be of such importance that it published complete transcripts every Monday.[73]

In all these sessions, Chibás evinced a great concern for Cuba's peasants. This was logical in two respects. First, he regularly received correspondence from the island's rural dwellers detailing the heartbreaking circumstances of their lives. Second, he was aware that his party had scant presence in Cuba's villages and small towns. If the inhabitants of these areas were going to resist the urge to sell their votes, they required a compelling program. Hence, Chibás told *Bohemia's* Antonio Ortega that Cuba's "fundamental" problem was in its countryside and *campesinos* deserved the same "social benefits" enjoyed by industrial workers.[74] At a minimum rural Cubans were entitled to cement floors in their huts, sanitary latrines and potable drinking water. Once these basic requirements were satisfied, Chibás a proposed second stage of improvements including farming cooperatives, an agricultural development bank, crop diversification and the creation of a scientific institute to develop species and breeds best suited to Cuba's climate. Asked about

[73] In terms of the editorial leanings of these publications, *Bohemia* was slightly left of center but offered a forum for a wide range of viewpoints from the Communist leader Juan Marinello to the conservative Francisco Ichaso and everything in between. *Carteles* was rabidly anti-communist and tilted conservative. *Diario de la Marina* was Cuba's oldest and most right-wing daily. The newspaper was pro-Catholic, pro-American, pro-Franco, pro-business and, of course an implacable foe of communism. *El Crisol* was a well respected Cuban broadsheet of moderate persuasion.
[74] Ortega, "Tengo confianza en el pueblo cubano," 53.

land distribution, Chibás recommended the establishment of a national registry to catalogue vacant land and uncultivated private holdings. In addition to disbursing the former he planned to impose a tax on the latter, which would stimulate the sale of disused acreage. Chibás emphasized his respect for property rights but stated that land also had a "social function" and Cuba's priority was to help farmers own the plots they worked.[75] "The current administration," said Chibás "turns Cubans into state employees. The communists make them proletarians. The Cuban People's Party would like them to be proprietors."[76]

During the *Carteles* interview, Chibás argued that rural rehabilitation was central to the *Ortodoxo* slogan of "economic independence, political liberty and social justice." He proclaimed that, "the rural population suffers the prejudice of a shameful stagnation, lives in the most primitive conditions, endures horrible neglect and has lost all faith and enthusiasm, not only in the fatherland's destiny but in its own as well.[77] Chibás planned to use the "millions" in revenues from Cuba's sugar differential to improve rural health and acquire land, tools, seeds, livestock and technical advice for peasants.[78] Freed from maladies such as typhus, malaria and intestinal parasites, *campesinos* could increase their productivity. Putting the land in fatherland would also imbue them with a real and defined sense of patriotism. Hence, Chibás imagined economic opportunity would extend beyond Cuba's cities into its interior. This, in turn, would herald changes in the island's political culture. Chibás explained that rural desolation essentially transformed many runs for public

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Roselló, "Chibás explica," 30.
[78] Ibid.

office into financial transactions. After all, he said, "it is easy to seduce the *guajiro* into selling his vote for a few *pesos* so at least he can feed his children."[79] As a result,

> …the governor or legislator who arrives at his position in this way does not feel obligated to the voter. He purchased his office or executive position; he didn't obtain it on merit or because of an effective campaign. He owes his office to money rather than a program. His interest and his end can be none other than recuperating his investment. In this way, public opinion, which is inherent to democracy and political liberty, disappears. In other words, free expression of the will of the citizens becomes prostituted.[80]

Nor were peasants the only ones deprived of the right to vote their conscience. Government employees had an irresistible incentive to choose the ruling party as otherwise their job would be given to a member of the opposition. For this reason, Chibás proposed a professional bureaucracy chosen by competitive examinations rather than party affiliation. Adopting this practice would also eliminate the *botella* or government employee who collects a salary but performs no work.

Reminded by Roselló that political liberty was an "ambitious" term that could not be reduced to "purity of the vote," Chibás mentioned the importance of equality before the law.[81] "There will be political liberty," he said, "when an anonymous worker has the same guarantees in the courts of justice as a millionaire or politician. Just the same," he continued, "there can be no political liberty when the pickpocket goes to jail while the corrupt functionary who robs millions gets to spend his money abroad."[82] In this vein, Chibás expressed a need for the long delayed Tribunal of

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

Accounts that would audit government expenditures and passage of the General Accounting Law for the State, Provinces and Municipalities to ensure public funds were monitored at every level.[83]

Chibás described the third aspect of *Ortodoxo* doctrine, social justice, in roughly the same vague terms as Cuba's 1940 constitution – a document he knew intimately. For instance, the "principle of social justice" is lionized in Title VI, Article 86. Further, he spoke of "betterment of the working classes" with the goal of "conciliation between Capital and Labor."[84] Such conciliation is provided for in Title VI, Article 84 – albeit more formally through special commissions of workers and management. In a nod to the red-hating subscribers of *Carteles,* Chibás claimed harmonious relations between the classes would eliminate the risk of "communist penetration."[85] Chibás also sought the approval of *Diario de la Marina's* conservative readership by declaring, "I am the only national leader who has never allied with the Communist party," and added, "My opposition to them is neither electoral nor political but comes from the bottom of my heart."[86] In fact, Chibás presented his most thorough and highly detailed program during the conversation with Baquero. His top priorities entailed agricultural diversification, a national bank, nationalized public utilities, subsidized fuel and electricity, reduced foreign concessions, lowered prices for basic goods, prosecution of black market speculators, an ambitious public works program, an increased budget for the

[83] The creation of a Tribunal of Accounts was one of the so-called "complimentary laws" of the 1940 constitution whose specifics were supposed to be ironed out by Cuba's legislative branch. However, neither Batista nor Grau was anxious to court oversight of their spending so the project languished.
[84] Roselló, "Chibás explica," 31.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Baquero, "Chibás considera necesario," 23.

ministry of agriculture and, of course, his package of reforms to revitalize Cuba's countryside.

Above all, the *Ortodoxo* agenda hinged on Chibás himself because most of its policy recommendations could also be found in the *Auténtico*-Republican and Liberal Democratic platforms. The rural poor could take comfort in Carlos Prío's announcement that agricultural reform deserved his "deepest and most sincere interest."[87] Moreover, Prío promised to oversee creation of the Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank and Tribunal of Accounts. He even called for a merit system in the civil service. Ricardo Núñez favored land distribution, touting the social and economic benefits of ownership for a peasantry that was "practically nomadic."[88] For those outraged by illegality and graft, he trumpeted his so-called "two revolutions" of constitutionality and honor. In advertisements, he and his running mate Gustavo Cuervo Rubio, both of whom were medical doctors, sold themselves as "University of Havana professors," "notable professionals" and men of "moral integrity." As such, they would confront the "upsetting and demoralizing" political climate and impose "administrative honesty."[89] A *Carteles* editorial corroborated this image, noting that Núñez enjoyed "recognized prestige, a firm will and good judgment."[90] Without jobs to distribute, money for votes or an organized

[87] "Los candidatos presidenciales opinan sobre el grave problema de la electricidad," *Bohemia,* May 23, 1948: 67.
[88] "Responde al Dr. Núñez Portuondo al Cuestionario de *Carteles," Carteles*, May 30, 1948: 32.
[89] The language appeared in an advertisement entitled "Trinomio de Integridad Moral," which appeared on page 69 of the May 23, 1948 issue of *Bohemia*.
[90] "Nuestro candidato," *Carteles,* May 23, 1948: 49.

political machine, Chibás could only rely on his charisma and the conviction that, "The Cuban people know that if I am elected, these robberies will be punished."[91]

[91] Roselló, "Chibás explica," 31.

Chapter 5

"The Miracle of Chibás"

On Tuesday morning of June 1, a few minutes before the voting was to commence, Eduardo Chibás was fast asleep. He had maintained his usual busy schedule the previous evening, appearing before the Havana Bar Association, the Commercial Street Business Owners Group and, of course, on the radio. Chibás had arrived home at 2:30 a.m. and when a *Bohemia* reporter stopped by the next day, the *Ortodoxo* leader was mired in slumber. With some difficulty, the journalist succeeded in stirring Chibás. The PPC chief banished the remnants of his grogginess by playing a recording, composed for him in Santiago de Cuba, which was a parody of the famous tune "*Quizás, Quizás.*" After hearing a few notes of the refitted jingle, entitled "Chibás, Chibás," which described him "sweeping" to victory in June, he was once again his loquacious, energetic self.[1] Before setting out to cast his ballot,

[1] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 8, Expediente 241, ANC. The song was arranged by Alberto Aloma Echezarreta. The Spanish lyrics are as follows:
Siempre que te pregunto
Que quien es ese hombre
Tú siempre me respondes
CHIBAS, CHIBAS, CHIBAS

Cuando oigas en un radio
Que alguno está gritando
Ya puedes ir pensando
CHIBAS, CHIBAS, CHIBAS

Que digan que está loco
Hablando, hablando
Pero en Junio primero
Arrollando, arrollando

Chibás gilded his cheerfulness with a layer of romanticism – hanging the following proverb in front of his desk. It read:

> Let the world think of us what it may. That's its own affair. If it doesn't put everything in its rightful place by the time we die, or even ever, that's its own prerogative. Ours is to work as if the nation were grateful, as if the world were righteous, as if public opinion were shrewd, as if life were just and as if men were superior beings.[2]

That evening, after the polls closed, Chibás dined with Roberto Agramonte. The *Ortodoxo* leader told his cousin that, "During the course of our travels, I have observed a certain collective craziness that could potentially result in a surprise. I'm convinced we will receive a great quantity of votes. The people have internalized our slogan of 'Shame vs. Money.' And our campaign only began a few months ago. If only we had more time!"[3] Later on, Chibás visited the Columbia military barracks at the invitation of Genovevo Pérez Dámera. The Cuban army, which supervised the elections, was also the surest source of information regarding their result. There, Chibás listened to the returns from all corners of the island and learned that Carlos Prío would be Cuba's next president.[4]

Verás el diez de Octubre
Al pueblo deliriando
Verás gobernando
Está CHIBAS, CHIBAS

[2]Ibid.

[3] De la Osa, *En Cuba, Primer Tiempo,* 470.

[4] Whereas Chibás merely lost his bid for Cuba's highest office, others were deprived even more tangibly. For example, the Democrat Carlos Manuel de la Cruz and ex commerce minister Alberto Inocente Álvarez had bet 100,000 *pesos* on the election results. Both men had apparently met in the Havana restaurant "El Caramelo," whereupon the Democrat boasted to his *Auténtico* rival that he was willing to bet 1000 or even 100,000 *pesos* on the triumph of Ricardo Núñez. Initially, Álvarez was uninterested and left the restaurant. He subsequently changed his mind after examining an opinion poll predicting Carlos Prío would win in all six provinces, after which he made a concerted effort to locate de la Cruz in order to seal the terms. See De la Osa, *En Cuba, Primer Tiempo,* 472.

The *Auténtico* candidate, who had emphasized his smiling, cordial nature throughout the campaign, won all six of Cuba's provinces. However, he gleaned only 45.83 percent of the popular vote even with nearly unlimited resources at his disposal. Moreover, the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance obtained 145,823 fewer votes than in 1944 – a worrying sign given the tremendous advantages of incumbency. In a similar vein, the government parties captured majorities in the senate and chamber of representatives but these results were less encouraging than would appear at first glance. This is because many nominally *Auténtico* senators and representatives were followers of Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who felt little or no loyalty to the new president.[5] On the other hand, José Manuel Alemán's senate victory proved lucre could still buy plenty of goodwill. With his immunity from prosecution assured, he immediately returned to Havana. While there were scattered indications that *Auténtico* attempts to reduce elections to a mere financial transaction had backfired, in general, the tactic was highly successful. A notable exception was Enrique Rousseau, an *Auténtico* candidate for the chamber of representatives who was heard lamenting the fact that he had paid 8000 *pesos* to so-called "political sergeants" in Havana's Cayo Hueso neighborhood without receiving the votes promised to him.[6] Given his obvious advantages, Prío's victory seemed inevitable even before the polls had closed. Sensing as much, foreign correspondents gravitated to his residence during the afternoon of June 1. These

[5] For example, the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance counted a 36-18 majority in the senate but 11 of those 36 were supporters of Suárez Fernández. See Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution," 74-75.
[6] De la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo,* 474.

included representatives from *Hollywood Reporter*, *Twentieth Century Fox* and the French magazine *INS.*

Ricardo Núñez finished second, with 30.42 percent of the vote and was hardly a picture of grace in defeat. He chalked up the results to "betrayals by many elements of the party."[7] When an advisor suggested a congratulatory phone call to Prío was in order, Núñez responded that he would do so the next day and shortly thereafter abandoned party headquarters in a huff. Rather than condemning traitors within the coalition, Raúl Menocal fingered Chibás as the "maximum cause" of their defeat, saying the *Ortodoxo* leader preferred Prío over Núñez.[8] Conveniently ignoring the fact that members of his own Democratic party had undermined the Third Front, Menocal told Enrique de la Osa, "You see? My thesis has been proved correct. Without a united opposition, it was always going to be difficult to beat the government." He added, "We are like the children of a millionaire who believe we will inherit a fortune when in reality there were fewer riches than we had imagined."[9] Across the Florida Straits, Fulgencio Batista had awaited the elections with barely contained brio. Claiming Núñez would win by 150,000 votes, the ex general rented a luxury suite at the Hotel Martinique in Miami Beach and summoned his expatriate military buddies to share in the expected merrymaking. Although Batista ultimately won his senate race, once news of Núñez's defeat spread, those gathered were in no mood to celebrate.

[7] Ibid., 472.
[8] Ibid., 473.
[9] Ibid.

Such was not the case for Chibás, who placed third with 16.42 percent of the electorate. Even as the surveys and straw polls he cited on the hustings proved mistaken, Chibás collected 320,929 votes – nearly double his party's total from the registration period. Unfortunately, the PPC did not win a single provincial governorship or senate race and succeeded in placing just six party members in the chamber of representatives – the most prominent of these being Manuel Bisbé. Nevertheless, William Stokes, a political scientist from the United States who chronicled the campaign, claimed Chibás "won a great moral victory at the expense of the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance."[10] This was because most of those who chose Chibás, apart from registered *Ortodoxos*, appeared to have been members of the government parties.[11] Chibás' friends in the media saw his performance in far more effusive terms. On June 6, *Bohemia* ran a piece entitled "The Miracle of Chibás," extolling the *Ortodoxo* chief's "beautiful and exemplary" campaign.[12] Later on, the article opined that,

> It can, without hyperbole, be affirmed that the disinterested pyramid of votes bestowed upon Eduardo R. Chibás – whose combativeness and immaculate conduct already anoint him as leader of the future political opposition – has cemented the undeniable reality that the Cuban people have left behind, forevermore, the slimy electoral customs that have stunted its progress.[13]

Enrique de la Osa, writing in the magazine's *en Cuba* section, stated that,

> Neutral and enemy observers alike consider the votes obtained by the *Ortodoxo* candidate to be an indicator of his political talents, especially

[10] Stokes, "The 'Cuban Revolution,'" 74.
[11] Stokes points out that the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance received 176,482 fewer votes than it registered while Chibás increased his total by 156,054. Most of the remainder seem to have chosen the Liberal-Democratic coalition, which garnered 48,932 more votes than it registered. See: Ibid.
[12] "El Milagro de Chibás," *Bohemia,* June 6, 1948: 43.
[13] Ibid, 95.

> as he struggled against the current against powerful parties, assisted only by his personal prestige and independence from the mercenary figures used by other politicians. The votes earned by the PPC chief, who didn't offer jobs, bribes or anything else of that sort, can be utilized as a lever by which he can raise a great party, one that would be the undisputed leader of the opposition in the coming years.[14]

Sergio Carbó, writing in *Prensa Libre,* added that "there is not the least bit of popular enthusiasm for the victory of Prío."[15] Of course, not all journalists were so accommodating. Francisco Ichaso, in his June 3 column for *Diario de la Marina*, could not resist a jab when the opportunity presented itself. Noting that a survey just before the elections had predicted Chibás would win more votes in Havana than he actually garnered, Ichaso explained this was a consequence of the "frothy" yet "ephemeral" emotions inspired by the *Ortodoxo* leader. [16] He estimated that if the elections had been held immediately after his Sunday evening broadcast, the vote totals and survey would have corresponded with more exactitude.

CRIES OF FRAUD

Chibás was fond of saying that his twenty years in public life were largely free of contradictions. However, his take on the election was a zigzag writ large. Initially, Chibás appeared satisfied with his performance and expressed both optimism and magnanimity in a public statement released on June 2. He allowed that the government's "enormous financial resources" had ensured victory but

[14] De la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo,* 481.
[15] Sergio Carbó, "Aspectos turbios de la jornada," *Prensa Libre,* June 4, 1948, reprinted in "Cómo opina nuestra prensa," *Carteles,* June 13.1948: 56.
[16] Francisco Ichaso, "Divagacion Postcomicial," *Diario de la Marina,* June 3, 1948:4.

claimed its triumph would be fleeting.[17] "Four years represents very little time in the life of a people," he said and recalling how quickly the tide had changed during World War II, offered, "It's the time between the Battle of Dunkerque and the Battle of Berlin."[18] Chibás duly mentioned the "betrayal" of PPC bosses who "deserted to the enemy" but emphasized the efforts of ordinary Cubans who replenished the party's ranks with "astonishing speed."[19] He also congratulated the armed forces on their impartiality and the citizenry for voting in an orderly fashion. The *Ortodoxo* leader even promised to be the "first to recognize it" if Carlos Prío presided over a good government.[20]

During his June 6 radio show, however, Chibás spewed pure bile. He asserted that Prío owed his victory to a "giant fraud" and "the most corrupt electoral process in the history of our republic."[21] This was an astonishing and reckless charge, not least of all because of Cuba's substantial record of ballot box manipulation in years past. Even as the 1948 poll was less than perfect, especially in terms of vote buying, there was no evidence of military intervention as in 1940.[22] Moreover, the present irregularities, contemptible as they were, could hardly compare to the election of 1916 in which Mario García Menocal (Raúl Menocal's father) maintained himself in office with the assistance of 300,000 ghost voters and

[17] "Reconoceré el buen gobierno que haga Prío, dice Chibás," *Diario de la Marina,* June 3, 1948: 14.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 59.
[22] While the Cuban armed forces generally behaved well, *Bohemia* lamented that the military had announced the final verdict rather than the Superior Electoral Tribunal. The magazine also scolded Grau for celebrating his disciple's victory on the balcony of the presidential palace well before the official results were announced. See "En Cuba, El Escrutinio del Ejercito," June 13, 1948: 51.

the not so mysterious disappearance of masses of opposition ballots.[23] Nor were they a match for tightly managed 1936 contest, in which the *Auténticos*, Communists ABC party refused to participate because their leaders were exiled or imprisoned for the most part. Chibás, of course, knew better but his hatred of Prío overwhelmed any logical considerations. The *Ortodoxo* chief's loathing had been recently and greatly inflamed when Prío had insulted his late father just before the elections. His June 6 broadcast paid a lengthy tribute to Eduardo Justo Chibás y Guerra, a civic-minded man and distinguished civil engineer who Eddy idolized. However, before the homage began, Chibás gleefully proclaimed that Prío's image was routinely booed by cinemagoers when it appeared on newsreels while his own met with an "ovation."[24] Chibás also attempted to back his allegation that the election had been stolen from him. Aside from paying cash for votes, he accused the communications ministry of retaining at least 50,000 registration cards which were converted to pro government tallies on election day. He also mentioned that the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance distributed more than 20,000 government jobs in exchange for votes. Some were obvious *botellas*. For example, 2,000 Havana residents were named inspectors of coffee plantations although their closest connection to agriculture involved the trees gracing the capital's sidewalks.

Chibás was not alone in questioning the election results. Juan Marinello, the Communist candidate who finished a distant forth, also wasted little time in impugning Prío's victory.[25] During the second week of June, Ricardo Núñez piled on

[23] For a full description see Thomas, *Cuba*, 527.
[24] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 58, ANC.
[25] Marinello received 143,033 votes, a mere 7.33 percent of all those cast.

as well. Speaking to reporters, he announced that the "apparently legal" *Auténtico*-Republican triumph was in fact "spurious."[26] Núñez recognized that the Superior Electoral Tribunal, the military and provincial and municipal authorities had performed their duties transparently. Nevertheless, the Liberal chief asserted that "the government of President Grau San Martín shamelessly unleashed every facet of the State's machinery in order to falsify the results of the elections, which have brought dishonor and ignominy to our democracy."[27] In a monologue reminiscent of his *Ortodoxo* opponent, Núñez mused that a new, more subtle sort of tyranny had taken shape and was vitiating the soul of his compatriots.

> When the armed forces use violence to impede the exercise of voting rights, it produces a reaction of indignation, of anger culminating in gestures of gallant rebellion that, in the end, result in vindication and reform. Such rebellions have, since Independence, achieved all the political and social advancements of the Cuban people. However, when part of the citizenry yields to bribes of the most varied forms, ranging from party assemblies that offer their services for dozens or hundreds of thousands of *pesos* to people in high positions who accept *botellas* or "protection" or those who are complicit with the black market, embezzlement, speculation, illegal dealings, unpunished crimes and the exploitation of social evils; or purchasing votes freely and openly without intervention from the authorities or its agents because it is precisely they who have organized the entire corrupt system, then one feels deep inside his spirit the immense pain of the great moral tragedy shaking the Cuban people…[28]

This statement caused a predictable uproar and despite its poignancy, earned him contempt as well as sympathy. For instance, a *Bohemia* correspondent remarked that the tactics Núñez railed against had been employed by many Liberal and Democratic bigwigs and were less successful only because they no longer controlled

[26] "En Cuba, Política: Herencia," *Bohemia,* June 20, 1948: 58.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

the levers of government power. Left unsaid but clear to all was the Liberal head's greatest failing, a flaw cited by sympathizers as well as foes, that he could never claim to represent a "revolution of honor" while he presided over a party swollen with Machado era peculators and murderers.

BUILDING THE PARTY

In many respects, the 1948 elections were a coming out party for Chibás. Although he had long been one of Cuba's most charismatic speakers and his gifts as a showman were evident every Sunday evening, the presidential campaign marked him as a rising star in the island's political firmament – one that had exclusively belonged, since 1933, to Grau and Batista. His unique style of politics, one that demolished all formal barriers between candidate and voter, was clearly popular. Flinging himself off truck beds and into the arms of admirers was merely the newest and most sensational in a series of similar gestures. Chibás also liked to stuff some close friends into his Packard every few weeks, drive to a barbershop and invite people to discuss politics with them while his locks were trimmed. Of course, his well attended walks to the CMQ studios on Sunday evenings always attracted substantial crowds.

Given his undeniable acclaim among Cuba's masses, the challenge now was for Chibás was to build a party capable of securing the presidency in 1952. This involved two immediate tasks. First, it was imperative to enroll most or all of the 156,054 citizens who had voted for him but did not belong to the PPC. Second, the party required a bloodletting of traitors and the establishment of a loyal, competent

hierarchy. Before Chibás could ponder these tasks, he needed to regain the PPC presidency, currently held by Millo Ochoa. He did so formally on June 5, during a meeting at *Ortodoxo* headquarters. Ochoa himself was under suspicion by party hardliners, particularly as he had appeared in the Liberal-Democratic column during the race for provincial governor of Oriente – which he lost. In late May, an *Ortodoxo* official had written to Ochoa's brother Guarro, the mayor of Holguín, requesting an explanation. The scarcely believable reply was that Millo "had not agreed to a pact" but rather had been "recommended" for the post in "disinterested" fashion by the other parties because he had the best chance of winning.[29] Chibás was aware of the situation but turned a blind eye, having always shown more nuance and tolerance than fanatical isolationists within the PPC.[30] After Ochoa was replaced as party president he maintained his position as *Ortodoxo* boss in Oriente with Chibás' wholehearted support.

By contrast, Chibás was less sanguine about other deviators – especially in the party's lower rungs. During and after the campaign, letters detailing every sort of duplicity arrived on his desk courtesy of livid *Ortodoxo* loyalists. In response, Chibás published an article in *El Crisol* on June 10 outlining his plan to cleanse the party of double-dealers. This gesture was received enthusiastically by the PPC rank and file, including Manuel Mozo Toledo of Havana, who stated that, "One needs to

[29] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1105: 116, ANC.

[30] The case of Millo Ochoa elicited a great deal of comment and speculation in *Ortodoxo* circles. On June 11, Eddy's friend Ignacio Mendoza wrote, "If (Ochoa) told the (Liberal-Democratic) coalition he would campaign for you and they nominated him anyway, then they are imbeciles but if he didn't tell them he betrayed them and is unworthy of confidence even as he has been loyal to you up till now." At the same time, Mendoza deemed Ochoa a "hero who was sacrificed for you" because his association with the PPC caused many Liberals and Democrats to vote for the *Auténtico* candidate, who was, in fact, an ex Liberal. See Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1106: 30, ANC.

come to our party willing to give everything for the good of Cuba without expecting personal rewards; those who want something more can go to the other parties that offer *inciso K* and sinecures or to the Liberal millionaires club; we offer only shame and honor for the people of Cuba."[31] Ofilia Khouray, a PPC leader in Camagüey put the matter more succinctly, informing Chibás that, "Just as you wish, all the traitors will be eliminated."[32] During his August 1 broadcast, Chibás thundered, "To those traitors who haven't resigned already, we are warning you to do so immediately. In this way, you will save us the trouble of expelling you."[33] He added, "We desire a pure party, composed of men and women of proven honor, without opportunists or sleazy politicians."[34] To drive his point home once and for all, Chibás referred to an article in *Bohemia* regarding a meeting of Batista and other Cuban politicos in Miami who were contemplating the formation of a new political party. Among other things, the ex general told his guests that, "When I was president, many politicians who today occupy elevated positions alongside Grau and now refer to me with rancor, used to approach me in order to ask favors or for money. Chibás, on the other hand, never asked me for anything."[35] The *Ortodoxo* leader retorted that, "Batista is right to say that I never asked him for anything. But now, since he's no longer president of the republic, I would indeed like to request something: don't ever think of joining the Cuban People's Party."[36]

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[31] Ibid., 28.
[32] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1103: 109, ANC.
[33] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 138, ANC.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid. See also "En Cuba, Política: Batista y el Nuevo Partido," *Bohemia,* August 1, 1948: 56.
[36] Ibid.

Running parallel to the fury directed toward renegade *Ortodoxos* was pride at having contributed to a worthwhile endeavor. On June 2, a party member named Carmen Hernández wrote Chibás a letter expressing her "profound sense of spiritual satisfaction" with his campaign.[37] She added that,

> For me and the many others who surely think the same way, we recognize that you have triumphed over thievery and pillage. The eloquence of those votes toward your candidacy shows us that we can still have faith in a people who know how to choose what's best and will be ready to do so in future opportunities. As a soldier in the ranks, I am ready to receive your orders![38]

Similarly, a supporter from Cárdenas with a literary bent declared, "The election result has reaffirmed our belief that 'not everything is rotten in the state of Denmark.'"[39] An *Ortodoxo* couple from Bauta, a town 25 miles southwest of Havana, confirmed that *chibasista* fervor extended beyond Cuba's adult population. They recounted an anecdote involving their four year old son, Nivaldo, who was accustomed to spending weekend afternoons in a nearby park. On June 16, while his parents were lost in conversation, the boy walked across the playground toward the local *Auténtico* party office, whereupon he opened the door and shouted "Long live Chibás!" to the surprise of those assembled. This was hardly surprising as Nivaldo apparently had acquired the habit of yelling "Vote for Chibás!" at anyone who visited the family home.[40] Chibás drew strength from these and other unconditional confessions of support. On his radio show, he reinforced the enthusiasm of his followers by announcing that,

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[37] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1105: 39, ANC.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1107: 53, ANC.
[40] Ibid., 17-18.

> Our party, which is the party of the great masses, the Cuban People's Party, the only real opposition party, must demonstrate, both in its platform and in actual practice to be against the vices of traditional politics: *personalismo,* sleaze, squabbling factions, clans, elitism, cabinet intrigues etc. This is not the party of no one but rather the people's party.[41]

As the *Ortodoxos* proceeded to rebuild, Chibás ruled out any possibility of joining the government. This was a statement of principle but also indicated that Chibás was now firmly in charge of the party and would remain so for the foreseeable future. After all, most of the pact friendly faction had deserted or been expelled and those who remained were in no position to challenge him. Nonetheless, this tactic flew in the face of conventional Cuban politics and would be tested early and often. Shortly after the election, rumors began circulating that Carlos Prío would offer Chibás the commerce ministry – no doubt as a means of engendering faith in his new administration. Speculation heightened on June 17, when Sergio Carbó endorsed his friend for the position in a *Prensa Libre* editorial entitled, "Chibás Could Be the Man of the Hour." Four days later, however, Chibás sent an extensive private letter to Carbó explaining why he could never accept such an offer. Chibás claimed, "In moments of great crisis, be they social or economic, true leaders, in order to be useful to their countries, must not compromise their moral authority by accommodating themselves to shady politics."[42] As French history was something of a hobby, Chibás cited Georges Clemenceau in 1914 and Charles de Gaulle in 1940 as examples of men who refused to join their nation's government during difficult times because it would have involved damaging ethical concessions. Instead, both

[41] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 29, ANC.
[42] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 200: 90, ANC.

jealously guarded their prestige and waited until their moral authority could affect a greater impact. Of course, Chibás also employed these parables to defend himself against two oft repeated charges. Namely, *Ortodoxo* dealmakers had accused him of forsaking attainable albeit incremental improvements in the name of an unrealistic ideal. The *Auténticos*, for their part, continually reprimanded him for dividing the country's revolutionaries. In any case, Chibás emphasized that Carlos Prío could create much good will even without *Ortodoxo* assistance. For example, if the president elect appointed a universally respected figure like Miguel Coyula as prime minister, Chibás pledged his party would support the government without asking for anything in return. In this way, Chibás revealed his second objective as *Ortodoxo* party chief. Besides constructing an organization capable of reaching power, he would, in the meanwhile, pressure Cuba's leaders into behaving more honorably.

ELECTORAL CODE ARTICLE 336

While Chibás believed the 320,929 votes he received were a potential cudgel, he also knew the *Ortodoxos* would be hard pressed to alter government policy without a single senator. This situation was all the more difficult to accept because Manuel Gran, an *Ortodoxo* senate candidate and University of Havana physics professor, had actually obtained more than double the votes of two Republicans destined for the *Capitolio.*[43] However, he was denied because of a stipulation in the 1943 electoral code apportioning senators by coalition rather than strict popularity. According to law, since the *Ortodoxos* finished third in Havana province they were

[43] These were Nestor Carbonell and José Ambrosio Casabuena.

not entitled to senate representation there. "Is this democracy?" Chibás asked during his September 12 broadcast. "No. This is something else: shamelessness."[44] This was also the first time since 1940 that an election involved more than two groupings of political parties. Given Chibás' insistence on the independent line, it behooved him to challenge this ruling which was both damaging and out of date in the current circumstances. He thus encouraged Gran to lodge an appeal with Cuba's Supreme Tribunal. Chibás also provided his radio audience with a brief lecture on the island's constitution. He declared that the electoral provision contradicted Article 98 and Article 103. The former guaranteed that votes for one candidate could not accumulate toward another; in this case, ballots cast for the first place *Auténtico*-Republican alliance had elected two nominees with inferior vote totals. Chibás was even more interested in the latter, which stated, "The law will assure representation for the minorities in the elective organisms of the state, provinces and municipalities."[45] The *Ortodoxo* leader interpreted this to mean that all parties should have a minimum of at least one senator. Chibás also noted that this idea counted the backing of Raúl Lorenzo, the normally pro *Auténtico* political editor of *Prensa Libre* and also of *Bohemia.* Ironically, Manuel Gran was not the only victim of Cuba's undemocratic electoral code. The Communist Salvador García Agüero, whose own radio show usually finished a distant second to Chibás in the ratings, received more than 100,000 votes but since his party finished fourth in Havana, he too was deprived. This benefited none other than Pelayo Cuervo, who as a member of the second place Liberal-Democratic coalition snagged a senate seat with 30,000 fewer

[44] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expeiente 201: 3, ANC.
[45] Ibid., 2.

tallies. Even so, Chibás was almost certainly gratified that his erstwhile friend had received half the amount of votes he obtained in 1944. Clearly, Cuervo's expedience had been punished by Havana's electorate.[46]

Chibás returned to the issue again during his September 19 broadcast, especially as the judges were due to rule shortly. This time, he opined that the electoral code also violated Article 120 of Cuba's constitution – which mandated equal suffrage. In his familiar voice of outrage, Chibás asked, "Do votes for the government matter more than votes for the *Ortodoxos* in spite of Article 120 of the constitution?"[47] Exerting less than subtle pressure on the judges, Chibás reminded his audience (and them) that Article 194 obligated the courts to resolve conflicts between current laws and the constitution. He then inquired, "Can the Supreme Tribunal permit an anti-democratic and anti-constitutional law to endure?"[48] The answer, of course, was yes.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

On September 26, two weeks before his inauguration, Carlos Prío announced the composition of his cabinet. Prío's appointments were a mélange of good intentions and backroom lobbying by his three patrons: Grau, Alonso Pujol and Alemán. For example, Prío knew the treasury had been sacked during Grau's term and wished to place an honest man in charge of Cuba's finances. His first choice for the post was the universally respected Carlos Hevia. In short order, Hevia proposed

[46] In his characteristically satirical manner, Enrique de la Osa described Cuervo as an "ex Democrat, ex *Auténtico,* ex *Ortodoxo* and recently minted Liberal." See: de la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo,* 486.
[47] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 15, ANC.
[48] Ibid.

a thorough audit and aimed to publish the results as a means of restoring public confidence. Horrified, Grau summoned Prío to the presidential palace and told him, "this cannot be."[49] He explained that,

> This is just too dangerous! You know we have a small deficit and, in addition, I've just been informed that Alemán asked Isauro (the present treasury secretary Isauro Valdés) for certain sums of money, at your request, in order to pay for your electoral campaign…I ignored that such things were going on in the treasury and I'm not ready for these errors to be publicly pinned on my administration. It seems to me that the best thing would be to leave Isauro in his place. This way we can all rest easy.[50]

Prío left the palace without contradicting Grau, but he was obviously troubled by the president's suggestion. Valdés was a devotee of Alemán and much as Prío had welcomed the support of BAGA during the electoral season, he was now anxious to free himself of the ex education minister's hirelings. Forced to surrender Hevia, he decided to name someone who would agree to cover up the treasury's shortfall but whose loyalty would not be in doubt. Hence, Prío tapped his younger brother Antonio.

The foreign ministry presented a different sort of dilemma. As Prío had no specific candidate in mind he was besieged by solicitations. Diego Vicente Tejera, the *Auténtico* boss of Matanzas and chief lieutenant of Miguelito Suárez Fernández, applied for the job but was vetoed by Grau. Ramón Corona, a protégé of Alonso Pujol also threw his hat in the ring.[51] Alonso Pujol, who was presently in Brussels and always on the lookout for mammon, had recently hatched a scheme requiring a

[49] De la Osa, *En Cuba Primer Tiempo,* 586.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Aside from being a creature of Guillermo Alonso Pujol, or perhaps because of it, Ramón Corona was also a Republican senator from Las Villas province.

sympathetic figure in the foreign ministry. This involved hawking Cuban visas to an estimated 25,000 Jews in war torn Europe for 500 *pesos* apiece. Prío was less than enamored by this prospect and decided to place Corona in charge of the justice ministry instead. At the same time, he remained eager to find a position for Hevia and thus settled the contest for the foreign ministry by selecting him.

Expectations ran particularly high for the education and commerce ministries, given how brazenly they had been abused under Grau. Prío evinced his concern for Cuba's schoolchildren by entrusting them to Aureliano Sánchez Arango, one of his closest political confidants. Sánchez Arango boasted outstanding revolutionary credentials, having been a member of the 1927 Student Directorate and later on joining the violent, anti-Batista outfit *Joven Cuba*. More importantly, he was competent and honest. Sánchez Arango also possessed a brash temperament that reveled in controversy, which seemed ideal for the task of eradicating the assortment of grafters and gangsters inhabiting Cuba's education ministry. As for the black market, long a source of ill feelings, Prío designated José Andreu to tame the island's hodgepodge of scarce items. Andreu was a Republican and a medical doctor who had served in Grau's cabinet as health minister. Although he was an able man, his appointment mainly requited a campaign debt to the *Auténticos*' electoral partner. In fact, this trend was evident in most of Prío's choices. To placate Grau and Alemán, he chose Francisco Grau Alsina as agriculture minister. Aside from being one of the president's favorite nephews, "Pancho" was so closely linked with the former education minister that his surname's initials formed the GA in BAGA. Prío further appeased Grau by naming Primitivo Rodríguez minister

without portfolio. Rodríguez was an *Auténtico* congressman whose exaggerated sycophancy toward the president was the subject of many a political cartoon.[52] Not surprisingly, he had been among the most ardent advocates of Grau's re-election bid.

Chibás, who touted himself as the leader of Cuba's "real" opposition, scoffed that Prío had, "announced the birth of a giant but a dwarf came out instead."[53] The *Ortodoxo* leader acknowledged that some future ministers, principally Hevia, were "figures of undoubted prestige" but on the whole, dubbed Prío's appointees, "the council of mockery."[54] With an unrivaled memory for political foibles, Chibás recounted a host of embarrassing anecdotes about the cabinet members to be. For example, he reminded his radio audience that Interior Minister Rubén León and minister without portfolio Ramón Vasconcelos had both served together before, under Batista, but with less than stellar results. In fact, León had been tried for misconduct because Vasconcelos had accused him of removing a marble staircase from the education ministry and installing it in his home. Chibás recalled that Virgilio Pérez, the communications minister, had been a member of the judicial police during Machado's regime and was director of the National Institute of Coffee under Grau, where he had engaged in various "scandalous dealings."[55] Edgardo Buttari, the labor minister, had been commerce minister under Batista where he had allegedly used scarce supplies of condensed milk to buy the support of Liberal party

[52] Satirical sketches involving Primitvo Rodríguez invariably portrayed him holding a hoe, as the term *guataca* in Cuban Spanish refers not only to the farm instrument but also to those who curry favor.
[53] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 26, ANC.
[54] Ibid., 25-26.
[55] Ibid., 27.

delegates. Chibás reserved his harshest words for Francisco Grau Alsina, who he accused of stealing two million *pesos* destined for Cuba's peasants while serving his uncle as assistant minister of agriculture. Following the cue of his BAGA co-conspirator, "Pancho" invested the embezzled funds in two country estates and commandeered agriculture ministry equipment to work the lands. Lastly, Chibás pointed out that the cabinet violated Article 126 requiring that half the ministers be non-legislators. A week later, he proudly announced that Prío had recognized the error and rectified it.

The day before Prío´s swearing in, Chibás delivered a special Saturday evening radio address. Certainly, the man who usually commanded Cuba's attention must have dreaded his rival's impending moment in the sun. He also realized a sense of optimism would likely flow from an event laden with promises and Chibás wanted his listeners to keep their wits about them. Hence, the *Ortodoxo* leader emphasized that his foe was a "laboratory product" who owed his victory to the "laborious process of political chemistry" rather than a "spontaneous and direct expression of public opinion."[56] He added that, "the government invested millions of *pesos* in Carlos Prío in the same cold-blooded manner that a business enterprise finances a project, its calculations determined with almost mathematical precision."[57] Chibás innately understood his fellow countrymen and knew them to be a passionate people. He thus fomented the belief that Prío needed to purchase even the applause he would receive as he took the oath of office. For Chibás, his opponent essentially represented Grau's venality without his popularity.

[56] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 36, ANC.
[57] Ibid., 37.

Expectations for the new president were modest and Chibás sought to diminish them even further, concluding in his speech that Prío's chances for success were but "one in a hundred."[58]

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October 10 was Cuba's most sacred national holiday. On that date in 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes declared the country's independence and initiated the struggle for liberation from Spain with a modest army of 147 men, 30 of which were freed slaves from his plantation – the "Demajagua." In choosing October 10 as inauguration day, the framers of Cuba's 1940 constitution laid a symbolic burden on the presidency that both Batista and Grau had shirked; namely, to honor the example of Cuba's founding father.[59] During his address, the congenial, handsome Prío said all the right things. He spoke of a national renewal headlined by land reform, an anti-gangster law and creation of a national bank. However, even as Prío attempted to set a new tone, José Manuel Alemán struck a devastating final blow on behalf of the previous regime. While Cubans sized up their new president, Alemán, now a senator from Havana, matter-of-factly looted the island's currency reserves.

Accompanied by a group of suitcase bearing sidekicks, Alemán headed a convoy of four education ministry trucks destined for the treasury building. Walking breezily past the guards, they scooped up millions of United States dollars, Italian lire, British pounds, French francs, Portuguese escudos, Soviet rubles and, of course, Cuban *pesos*. Their baggage swollen with booty, they proceeded to Havana's

[58] Ibid.

[59] Before the 1933 revolution, presidents were inaugurated on May 20, the anniversary of Cuba's official independence in 1902. However, this date was tainted by the United States' imposition of the Platt Amendment – which guaranteed it the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs almost at will.

airfield, where a chartered DC-3 awaited. Alemán and three cronies lugged the U.S. cash aboard and took off for Florida. This portion of the stash, estimated at $19 million, was transferred to Alemán's business headquarters in Miami Beach. An employee was later quoted as saying that on the day the money arrived, "bundles of $1000 dollar bills were tossed around like wrapped packages of pennies."[60] As for the remaining treasure, Alemán's henchmen were instructed to exchange it in local banks. Two weeks later, details of the heist began trickling out. On October 25, Raoul Alfonso Gonsé, director of *Alerta*, censured the previous regime's "last raid" against the treasury and lamented that the new administration had no alternative but to "tighten its belt" in order to meet its financial obligations.[61] Urging Prío not to be an "accomplice" to this crime he concluded with a favorite phrase of Chibás, namely, "to jail with the thieves."[62] For his part, the *Ortodoxo* leader was curiously silent although supporters sent newspaper clippings and any other information they found about the robbery to his office. One aficionado passed along the *Alerta* editorial but also informed Chibás that his daughter had recently given birth to a son, which they intended to name Eduardo in his honor.

Instead of focusing on this issue, Chibás had become obsessed with the "fascist penetration" of Argentine president Juan Domingo Perón into Latin America generally and Cuba specifically.[63] In fact, he spent a considerable amount of time collecting documents on Argentine agents in Cuba, their code names and supposed

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[60] "Dictator with the People," *Time*, April 21, 1952: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889465-6,00.html
[61] Raoul Alfonso Gonsé. "Los ladrones a la carcel," *Alerta,* October 25, 1948: see Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 36, Expediente 1109: 21, ANC.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 77, ANC.

objectives. During his October 24 broadcast, Chibás noted that the Havana radio station RHC *Cadena Azul*, one of the capital's largest and most prominent, had recently begun spouting pro Perón propaganda. Chibás stated that a secret deal was in place between the station's Cuban owner, Amado Trinidad, and Argentina's government controlled Radio Belgrano. In exchange for favorable coverage, the latter had agreed to pay a million *pesos* over a four year period. "It is grave," said Chibás, "when a Cuban broadcaster with the public influence of RHC *Cadena Azul*, which has listeners throughout Central America, is controlled by a foreign dictator with the fascist characteristics of Perón."[64] Chibás pointed out that Perón had already purchased the allegiance of radio stations in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Paraguay. He also maintained cozy relations with authoritarian regimes in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Honduras. Just as damaging, "General Perón" suppressed free speech in his native land and employed his surrogates to do the same abroad.

The following week, Chibás devoted nearly his entire show to Perón's overarching shadow. He was spurred partly by a military coup in Peru that overthrew the elected president, José Luis Bustamante, on October 29. Chibás believed it was no coincidence the plot originated in southern Peru, which was suspiciously close to Argentina's border. Styling himself something of a prophet, Chibás declared, "What do they say now, those who last Sunday called me crazy for my accusations against Perón?"[65] Within Cuba, the *Ortodoxo* chief accused Perón of co-opting labor leaders such as Ángel Cofiño, president of the Cuban Federation of

[64] Ibid., 66.
[65] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 72, ANC.

Labor and Vicente Rubiera, who headed the Union of Cuban Telephone Workers. Both men, he claimed were regular guests at the Argentine embassy. Chibás also returned to presumed deal between RHC *Cadena Azul* and Radio Belgrano, which he considered the most pressing threat. He cited a statement by Manuel Fernández, president of the Cuban Radio Broadcasters Federation, who expressed "serious worry" that Amado Trinidad "has converted himself into a propagandist for Perón, who is an opponent of free speech in Argentina."[66] Given Trinidad's sudden affinity for all things Argentine, Chibás mused that he should refer to himself as a *gaucho* rather a *guajiro.*[67] More ominously, this affaire confirmed Chibás' view that constitutionalism remained fragile in Cuba and was under siege from both external and internal sources.

In this sense, RHC *Cadena Azul* represented an ideal bogeyman because the station also towed a pro-government line.[68] Even as Chibás baited Amado Trinidad, he never lost sight of his primary opponent – Carlos Prío. The new president was off to a fairly auspicious beginning, having collaborated more closely with Cuba's legislators during his first two months than either Grau or Batista in their entire terms. For the first time, the semi-parliamentary system envisioned by Cuba's 1940 constitution seemed to be taking shape. Prío's first initiative, the so-called Law against Gangsterism, was approved in the senate with wide bipartisan support on November 10. The measure created a special court for prosecuting gangster related

[66] Ibid., 74-75.
[67] Trinidad threatened to bring charges of libel against Chibás now that he no longer enjoyed parliamentary immunity. However, he refrained from doing so – most likely realizing that a trial would offer Chibás an even broader forum for his accusations.
[68] Chibás noted that *RHC Cadena Azul* had always supported the government in power, having backed Machado, then Batista, then Grau and now Prío.

crimes with the understanding that they would be severely punished. Moreover, it required clubs and associations to register with the government and obligated gun-toting citizens to obtain a license. Explaining his vote, the Liberal senator Eduardo Suárez Rivas declared that, "When the government proclaims that it would like to rid the country of gangsters, the opposition parties have an obligation to provide the president with the necessary instruments."[69] On the other hand, Chibás mocked the statute as a "lie and deception," alleging it would deprive law-abiding Cubans of weapons and leave them at mercy of *pistoleros.*[70] For emphasis he added that, "The gangsters with ties to the presidential palace have received the law with happiness and enthusiasm."[71] Cuba's gangster problem, continued Chibás, was not due to a lack of laws but the fact that gunmen never seemed to remain very long in prison – usually because they had friends in high places. Indeed, much of Prío's anti-gangster rhetoric was undermined by the fact that he, like Grau, had filled the nation's security services with pseudo-revolutionary triggermen. For example, Eufemio Fernández, the new Bureau of Special Investigations chief, was a member of *Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras* (ARG).

Prío attained less ambiguous success when the chamber of representatives unanimously approved a law to establish the National Bank of Cuba on December 21. During negotiations in the senate, Prime Minister Tony Varona stressed the administration's desire for a "common effort" including opposition lawmakers that

[69] "Comentando la actualidad," *Carteles,* November 21, 1948: 48.
[70] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 68, ANC.
[71] Ibid.

would produce the "most technocratic national bank in the world."[72] Even so, minority leaders such as Eduardo Suárez Rivas and his fellow Liberal Ramón Zaydín stalled the national bank statute, believing it would be useless without budgetary and accounting reforms. Chibás, who was no longer a senator, echoed their concerns. Without the necessary safeguards, he declared the national bank may as well feature a "roulette wheel, baccarat, poker and Paco Prío."[73] In the event, creation of Cuba's National Bank was closely followed by the Organic Budgetary Law, which mandated transparent accounting practices. As a gesture of good will, Prío provided an itemized budget to Congress even before the law took effect – becoming the first president to do so in eleven years. Both the Organic Budgetary Law and National Bank fulfilled directives of the 1940 constitution that had been ignored by the previous two presidents. Moreover, Prío delivered on his promise to oversee a "technocratic" bank by appointing Felipe Pazos, a promising 36-year-old economist, as its director. Pazos had been a member of the Cuban delegation to the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 and had just completed a three year stint at the International Monetary Fund when he was nominated.

The education ministry seemed another preliminary triumph. During the interim between Prío's election and his inauguration, José Manuel Alemán had paid off some favors by handing out a "mountain" of education ministry jobs.[74] Aureliano Sánchez Arango, the new chief, refused to let them take effect – antagonizing Alemán but demonstrating his seriousness in the process. Sánchez Arango also

[72] "La semana parlamentaria," *Carteles,* November 14, 1948: 56. As Varona was also a senator from Camagüey, he was the administration's natural advocate in Cuba's upper chamber.
[73] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 69, ANC.
[74] "En Cuba, Educación: En Perpetua Polémica," *Bohemia,* October 9, 1949: 109.

cultivated a swashbuckling image by piloting his own plane to all parts of the island, showing up unannounced and conducting on spot school inspections. Within two months, he fired a plethora of teachers who did not meet certification requirements. In a shocking move, Sánchez Arango even renounced the right to name teachers or school inspectors. Henceforth, they would be hired according to an objective set of guidelines issued, ironically, by Alemán in 1946. Chibás personally hated Sánchez Arango but nonetheless applauded this act as a "commendable rectification."[75] However, this compliment was not allowed to linger in the minds of his listeners. Moments later, Chibás confessed sarcastic surprise that Prío or his education minister had been offended by *inciso K* or BAGA fueled appointments in the first place. After all, Prío had used them to win the presidency just as Alemán's designees had hoped to net an easy paycheck. "In other words," concluded Chibás, "from this mud hole and from such corruption the present government was born."[76] Heeding the advice of his friend Ignacio Mendoza, Chibás supplemented his criticism with a series of countermeasures. Specifically, he believed the massive teacher layoffs violated the principle of tenure and replaced the problem of indiscriminate hiring with the equally unsavory prospect of arbitrary dismissals. He also drew attention to the many teachers who had purchased their positions because, given the education ministry's venality, there was no other way to practice their profession. Rather than persecuting such figures, he urged Sánchez Arango to jail the high level officials who profited from this practice.

[75] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 79, ANC.
[76] Ibid.

Above all, the thousands of newly unemployed teachers were less interested in what was best for Cuba's education ministry than they were in recovering their jobs. Six weeks into Sánchez Arango's term, their growing clamor led Eduardo Suárez Rivas to submit a motion of interpellation. Sánchez Arango appeared before the senate on December 15 and connived, with the blessing of Senate President Miguelito Suárez Fernández, to fill the visitor's gallery with sympathizers. This was more a matter of comfort than necessity, as the education minister advanced his case for reform by ruthlessly detailing the abuses of his predecessors. Special attention was reserved for the schemes of José Manuel Alemán, which included manipulating tax collections, the employment of ghost workers and outright theft of ministry funds. The onetime "monarch of *Inciso K*," who had pulled out all the stops to avoid appearing before the senate in April of 1947, was now brutally exposed in absentia by a barrage of incriminating documents. While Sánchez Arango emerged unbowed from these proceedings, they stirred the displeasure of Grau, who believed Alemán had been his best minister.

Grau's fury was also aroused by an investigation into administrative corruption during his term, announced by Pelayo Cuervo on November 8. That afternoon, at around 4:30 p.m., Cuervo requested that Finance Minister Antonio Prío appear before the senate and explain why more than 100 million *pesos* were missing from the national treasury. Speaking in the *Capitolio* to a rapt audience of journalists, members of the public and fellow senators, Cuervo revealed a wealth of scandalous tidbits. Chief among these were the disappearance of one million *pesos* from customs service coffers the day before Prío's inauguration and indications that

Grau had daily stowed away 60,000 *pesos* from illicit sources during his years in power. A *Carteles* correspondent reminded readers that, "This is not the rumor of a mosquito."[77] Rather, it was Pelayo Cuervo, one of Cuba's most honest men, pointing the finger. Determined to avoid a potentially embarrassing scenario, the *Auténtico* senator Lomberto Díaz and his Republican counterpart Santiago Rey lamely asserted that the finance minister was working long days and could not spare even a moment of his time. When pressed, they were blunter – informing Cuervo that his motion of interpellation would never gain majority approval. Despite this setback, Cuervo doggedly continued his inquiry and revised the amount of stolen funds upwards as he gained possession of new documents. In effect, the former *Ortodoxo* and current Liberal senator's crusade was an advertisement for the benefits of pragmatism. Contrary to PPC isolationists who cherished the prospect of an ideal government sometime in the future, Cuervo argued for the best possible one immediately. His abandonment of the *Ortodoxos* had disgusted many party members, Chibás foremost among them, but Cuervo's activities presently represented the best chance of achieving something his old companions only talked about: putting government thieves on trial and delivering the guilty behind bars.

While a potential exposé of Grau's administration could prove awkward, especially as Prío had also pocketed significant sums, the new president's direst challenge involved the military. After eight years of civilian rule, Cuba's soldiers were as liable to violate the island's laws as they were to defend them. Genovevo Pérez Dámera, Grau's army chief, set the tone for his subordinates by periodically

[77] "La semana parlemantaria," *Carteles,* November 14, 1948: 56.

ignoring elected officials or judges. For example, he offered a public showing of the Orfila footage, gleefully overriding the interior minister's ban. Further, he had no qualms about contradicting Cuba's Superior Electoral Tribunal or defending the captain who murdered Jesús Menéndez in extrajudicial fashion. At the same time, he comported himself flawlessly during the presidential election. In opting to retain him, while dismissing all of Grau's cabinet ministers, Prío was most likely moved by two key factors. First, Pérez Dámera had been instrumental in coaxing Miguelito Suárez Fernández back into the *Auténtico* fold. In doing so, he had cleared the last hurdle facing Prío's presidential bid.[78] Moreover, he was a sincere enemy of Cuba's *pistoleros* and a useful counterweight to the gangster infested police forces.

If Cubans were curious as to whether the irresponsible or prudent Pérez Dámera would show up first, they did not have to wait long to find out. Shortly after Prío's term began, a retired general named Abelardo Gómez who lived in Miami accused Pérez Dámera of embezzling two million *pesos* from the military retirement fund. On November 13, Pérez Dámera responded with a bizarre and disturbing obloquy against the island's media outlets.

> I urge, emphatically, from now on that those in the national press who assume such cowardly attitudes, for God knows what reasons, to limit themselves to topics that rightfully correspond to publicity organs. They must understand that the obligation to nobly and disinterestedly serve the republic is more important than chasing after a few extra coins! We have had to make great efforts in order to contain the spontaneous impulses of the soldiers, who without exception have demonstrated their anger and a desire to go beyond the military barracks to attack those responsible for the insult. If mercenaries without conscience were to reach the Cuban public and commit imprudent or evil deeds, the responsibility would rest squarely with

[78] Suárez Fernández controlled the Matanzas and Las Villas provincial assemblies and could have, under Cuba's electoral law, rejected the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance.

> the press. We would like to advertise, once and for all, to anyone who would ignore our message, that we will not in any way tolerate those who question our prestige and reputation based on lies, because in that case we will know how, in a virile manner, to demand the respect we deserve without worrying about any consequences that may result.[79]

Needless to say, the island's journalists were horrified. Yet again, Pérez Dámera had disdained Cuba's laws and declared himself the ultimate arbiter of its public life. In the senate, Antonio Martínez Fraga demanded that the defense minister appear and personally explain the army chief's declaration. However, no official quorum took place the whole week because *Auténtico and* Republican legislators stayed away. During his radio show, Chibás read aloud Article 33 of the constitution, which provided for complete freedom of speech and confirmed that the judiciary alone had the power to determine whether charges were libelous. By now, however, the scandal centered less on Pérez Dámera's threats than Prío's reaction to them. On November 15, the president notified his cabinet that he had authorized the general's screed – adding that he personally had no intention of permitting the press to criticize his family. Chibás noted that many of Prío's relations were also public figures including his older brother Paco, a senator from Pinar del Río, his younger sibling Antonio, the treasury minister, his brother-in –law Enrique Cotú Henríquez, a member of the chamber of representatives and his father-in-law Gerardo Tarrero, the director of Cuba's lottery. "According to this theory," said Chibás, "the day that

[79] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 89-90, ANC.

all the president's ministries are occupied by relatives there won't be any opposition in Cuba because the sacred family of his majesty, Carlos I, is taboo."[80]

That same day, Prío exacerbated the situation by deciding to temporarily shut down the radio shows of Chibás and Salvador García Agüero, his two most popular critics, ostensibly because of "verbal excesses."[81] Suddenly, the man seeking to restore his party's good name was verging on tyranny and faced with mass protests. University and secondary school students joined ordinary citizens in the streets. The Federation of Radio Broadcasters, the Professional Journalists Association, the Cuban Press Bloc, the Federation of University Students, *Prensa Libre* and *Bohemia* all weighed in with strong condemnations. Given the furor, Prío reversed himself within 24 hours. The erudite Manuel Bisbé quipped that the president was like Penelope, wife of Odysseus, who unwove at night what she sewed during the day. Chibás called this the "politics of zigzag," created by those who were "inebriated."[82] With a glint in his eye, Chibás added, "One is no longer allowed to say drunks because Virgilio (the communications minister) may deem it incorrect."[83]

THE RETURN OF BATISTA

On Saturday, November 20, armed with parliamentary immunity and personal guarantees from the president, Fulgencio Batista boarded a plane for Havana. Upon arriving, the ex general was met by a throng of several thousand

[80] Ibid., 90-91.
[81] In an attempt to appear even-handed, Prío also placed two pro-government shows under ban but their audiences were miniscule compared to Chibás and García Agüero. Only the president's most devoted partisans believed he was acting equitably.
[82] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 94-95, ANC.
[83] Ibid., 95.

supporters whose fervor was such that he was able to reach his automobile only with the help of a military contingent. Ten days later, Batista penetrated the *Capitolio* where a less sympathetic audience awaited. Strangely enough for a man who had once ruled Cuba as military strongman and elected president he was, according to a *Carteles* correspondent, "visibly embarrassed and suffering from stage fright like any debutant."[84] Batista was helped through his initial disorientation by the ex *Ortodoxo* and former Democrat José Enrique Bringuier, who escorted him toward the Liberal delegation. Sensing everyone's eyes upon him, Batista rushed to sit down but the place he chose belonged to Rafael Guas Inclán. He then settled into the adjoining seat, which was owned by Eduardo Suárez Rivas. Moments later, Suárez Rivas appeared and Batista rose to greet him. Instead of informing Batista that the bench was his, the mischievous Suárez Rivas dropped a tie pin on it, causing the onetime military chief to jump up in pain and thereafter stand awkwardly in the aisle. Finally, Bringuier reappeared and shepherded Batista to safety in one of the back rows. However, he did not stay long. At his first opportunity, Batista fled the chamber. The *Carteles* reporter estimated that he had spent a mere 11 minutes among his fellow senators before leaving.

During his radio show, Chibás portrayed Batista in even more pathetic terms – describing him as, "exhausted, bent under the weight of the millions he stole, subjugated by the president, full of prudence and fear, after asking Prío's government, very docilely, for permission to return."[85] As with most Cuban politicians, Chibás was a man of countless grudges. Three unforgiveable

[84] "La semana parlamentaria," *Carteles,* December 12, 1948: 53.
[85] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 6, Expediente 201: 96, ANC.

transgressions in his mind were murder, venality and betrayal of the 1933 revolution. Usually, his enemies were guilty on one or two counts but Batista was a rare figure who covered all the bases. On this occasion, Chibás wondered how the ex military chief would assist Prío in undermining Cuba's revolutionary ideals. He noted that Batista, who had often commented on the island's politics while in Florida, was now mum "as if he had come from China or Siberia."[86] Chibás speculated that the ex general had been allowed back as a ruse to divide the opposition. Needless to say, he felt this was the wrong way for Prío to pursue reforms, saying:

> In order to preach, with moral authority, the value of honest administration, the first thing that must be done, as a gesture of sincerity, is to incarcerate those who have stolen from the National Treasury beginning with Grau San Martín and Fulgencio Batista. Anything else is hypocrisy or complicity. These two men belong in jail not for political reasons but because they are thieves and that's where they would be if there were sufficient shame in this country. In the United States, in England, in Switzerland, in the Scandinavian nations, in any country where laws are respected, these two men would be in prison even if they had only robbed and damaged their people half as much as they actually have.[87]

Despite Batista's hapless senate performance and initial deference, Prío was also playing with fire. Batista commanded considerable respect among the island's soldiers, whose respect for civilian authority remained uncertain. As if to underline the danger, a military junta in Venezuela toppled the democratically elected Rómulo Gallegos on November 24. Cuba already counted uniformed dictatorships to its east

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 97-98. Chibás also admired the United States voting system. During his December 12 radio show, Eddy told listeners he knew Harry Truman would defeat Thomas Dewey even as all the commentators thought otherwise because his rallies were twice as large and "the elections over there are honorable." See Ibid., 141.

in Nicaragua and its west in the Dominican Republic. Now there was one to the south as well. Even worse, Cuba's northern neighbor, the United States, seemed perfectly inclined to recognize the new Venezuelan regime. During his December 5 broadcast, Chibás did not hesitate to sound the alarm. He accused Prío of "taking a siesta" while Batista cultivated enlisted men and Grau recruited army and naval officers in competing attempts to seize power. "What just occurred in Venezuela," warned Chibás, "and what happened in Peru can be repeated in Cuba. We are in great danger."[88] As proof, he noted that Prío was having a difficult time standing up to his overweight military chief. Recently, Pérez Dámera had replaced a respected general loyal to the president with one of his own devotees over a trivial infraction. Rather than protesting, Prío backed *El Gordo.* In an episode that inspired less confidence, Pérez Dámera placed Abelardo Gómez, the general who accused him of corruption, under summary arrest. General Gómez had arrived in Havana to challenge the acquittal of Pérez Dámera before a military court on charges of embezzlement but only after receiving guarantees from Prío regarding his freedom and well being. Pérez Dámera, obviously, had little use for such promises. Given these circumstances and the fall of democratic governments throughout Latin America, Chibás proclaimed: "Carlos Prío, remember the adage that says: 'when you see your neighbor's beard on fire, soak your own in water.'"[89]

Chibás spent the next few weeks drumming up support for President Gallegos, who had taken refuge in Havana along with many members of *Acción Democratica* – his political party. In fact, Gallegos was lionized by Cuban leaders

[88] Ibid., 133.
[89] Ibid., 135.

across the political spectrum. Carlos Prío received *Acción Democratica* exiles with open arms and permitted them to engage in conspiratorial activities on Cuban soil. Moreover, he withheld recognition to the military government. On December 18, a motley collection of political leaders and intellectuals organized a pro Gallegos rally in Havana's *Parque Central*. The speakers included Fernando Ortiz, Manuel Bisbé and Communist chief Juan Marinello, who blamed Gallegos' overthrow on the Truman administration. Chibás, who was an enthusiast of the U.S. president, believed the coup was backed by Wall Street moguls interested in Venezuela's oil but absolved Truman of any responsibility. Also, Chibás accused Cuban Communists of "unprecedented cynicism," for praising democracy during the gathering while their Venezuelan comrades were busy accommodating the military regime.[90] Above all, Chibás felt there was a lesson that Cuba must not ignore. The *Ortodoxo* leader, whose radio show reached the entire Caribbean basin, recalled that Venezuelan listeners had ridiculed him when he first underlined the influence of Perón and the threat of military dictatorship in late October. Weeks before Gallegos was ousted, a Venezuelan newspaper accused Chibás of "seeing visions" and asserted that the "epoch of military takeovers and dictatorship is gone forever."[91] Chibás worried that Cubans were similarly smug about the prospect of a barracks revolt.

In 1948, Christmas fell on a Saturday, the day Chibás generally set aside to write and research material for his radio show. Normally, this would not have altered his schedule much as Chibás was neither a regular churchgoer nor particularly devout. Nevertheless, his brother Raúl's wife had recently given birth to

[90] Ibid., 154.
[91] Ibid., 142.

a son and Eddy, besides becoming an uncle for the first time, was tabbed as the child's godfather. He thus spent that morning in the Vedado Parrish Church at the baptism of baby Eduardo Raúl Chibás Rovira. Even as he paused, Chibás was certain Cuba's internal and external enemies would remain steadfast. Hence, he found time enough later on to prepare for his final broadcast of the year – which highlighted the three imperialist threats facing Cuba. These were Wall Street financiers, whose primary agent was Guillermo Alonso Pujol; Perón whose local representative was Amado Trinidad; and the Soviet Union, whose lackeys were Juan Marinello and Blas Roca.

Chapter 6

"I Would Proudly Go to Prison to Defend the Cuban People"

On the evening of January 1, 1949 Aurelio Álvarez died in a Havana Charitable Society hospital amidst a coterie of companions including Eduardo Chibás, Liberal vice presidential candidate Gustavo Cuervo Rubio and others. Chibás respected the 67 year old Álvarez despite his vociferous belief in pacts and desertion of the *Ortodoxos* nearly eight months earlier. The PPC leader could forgive these faults because, over a long career that spanned Cuba's entire history as an independent nation, Álvarez had behaved honorably at each major turning point. He joined the island's liberation army at the age of 16, where his mettle caught the attention of Commander-in-Chief Máximo Gómez. In 1926, as a senator and president of the Conservative party, he rejected the policy of *cooperativismo* under which Cuba's political organizations agreed to slavishly follow Machado. After Machado's illegal re-election two years later, Álvarez and his son René actively struggled against the regime. The boy was killed by Machado's soldiers while the father suffered prison and exile. In 1933, Álvarez supported the "100 days" government of Ramón Grau San Martín and the next year became a founding member of the *Auténticos.* He was elected as a delegate to the constituent assembly that devised the island's constitution and as an *Auténtico* senator from Camagüey,

Álvarez was among the first to denounce the venality of Grau's administration. Álvarez had also warmed Chibás' heart by accusing Prío of betraying the revolution.[1]

As a former legislator, Álvarez's body was displayed in the *Capitolio.* During the wake, which attracted present and former lawmakers of every party, a pair of elderly nabobs, Carlos Manuel de la Cruz and Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, discussed the two most talked about figures in Cuban politics – Fulgencio Batista and Eddy Chibás.[2] De la Cruz, an erstwhile Democratic parliamentarian who in 1934 had been a heartbeat away from Cuba's presidency, spoke first.[3] "Batista is finished," he said. "He will never again lift his head in triumph. He represents expedience. Those who want money and who took advantage during his years in power will support him, but no one else. If he didn't have the millions he stole from the treasury, he would be selling candy right now."

Céspedes, the former public works minister under Machado and current senator from Matanzas, replied, "You are mistaken. In my opinion, Batista is the most interesting figure in Cuba since the war of independence. He became president after starting from nothing."

"Don't forget, Carlos Miguel, that the slogan 'Shame against Money' obtained 400,000 votes in the last elections. This is the seed that will flower one day! Perhaps tomorrow, in 1950. A new generation is going to judge everything, from the Batista dictatorship up to the present era of Prío."

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[1] "En Cuba, Deceso: Una Vida Fecunda y Combativa," *Bohemia,* January 9, 1949: 53.
[2] Both men were also lawyers who had once been partners in the same firm.
[3] Carlos Manuel de la Cruz was appointed president of Cuba's State Council in 1934, which placed him next in line for the island's presidency – occupied at that moment by Carlos Mendieta. The State Council was an appointed body of 50 men which advised the cabinet and served as a substitute for the legislative branch until elections were organized in 1936. Another candidate for the job, Colonel Roberto Méndez Peñate, was so distraught at being passed over that he shot himself.

"When this day arrives," answered the senator from Matanzas, "there will once again be student martyrs and property belonging to government figures will be sacked just as it was during Machado's era. And everything will happen very rapidly because today it's possible to mobilize people by radio, which was impossible during our time." He paused for an instant and then added, "Batista will play his part. Remember that all the colonels enriched themselves while he governed omnipotently and they won't sit idly by. As for Chibás, don't assume he will be able to take advantage of the situation. History shows that all the apostles who light bonfires are burned in them. He will be the instrument who shows the way but will perish."[4]

THE UNFAITHFUL DISCIPLE

While the death of Álvarez deprived Cuba's political scene of a pugnacious and upright pragmatist, another figure with comparable qualities kept his shoulder to the grind. On January 18, Pelayo Cuervo presented a 33 page accusation to Cuba's Supreme Tribunal alleging 174,241,840 *pesos* and 14 *centavos* had been purloined during Grau's administration.[5] The case was subsequently passed along, "like a hot potato," to the Court of Instruction – which was deemed a more appropriate forum by reluctant Supreme Tribunal judges.[6] Lawsuit 82, as Cuervo's denunciation was officially known, provoked a flurry of speculation. Francisco Ichaso believed it

[4] "En Cuba, Política: Recordando el Pasado," *Bohemia,* January 16, 1949: 55.
[5] The exact size of the deficit was a matter of great debate. For example, Treasury Minister Antonio Prío estimated it to be 85 million *pesos.*
[6] Francisco Ichaso. "La Difícil Situación del Gobierno Actual Ante las Malversaciones del Anterior," *Bohemia,* January 31, 1949: 27.

contained "more than sufficient" evidence for criminal proceedings against Grau, some of his ex ministers and numerous government functionaries.[7] At the same time, he was realistic, asserting that, "There is nothing more difficult in Cuba than punishing administrative corruption," especially as many citizens felt stealing from the state was relatively harmless.[8] On the other hand, workaday Cubans were beginning to question whether the government would be able to fund basic services. In a cartoon that encapsulated the fears of many, the satirist David portrayed a doubtful man telling his friend that, "There will be a budget! But…will there be money?"[9] Prío guaranteed both while asserting the shortfall had "nothing to do" with his administration.[10] Chibás, however, begged to differ. On February 10, he visited the Court of Instruction and urged the judge assigned to Lawsuit 82, Antonio Vignier, not to spare Prío's appointees, saying: "To exonerate the thieves who occupy positions in the current government and throw all the blame on former employees of the previous regime…would be a monstrous miscarriage of justice and an example of incalculable cowardice."[11] For his part, Prío had followed Cuervo's relentless accumulation of evidence with dread since it began. The week before the senator submitted his complaint, a treasury ministry official called to ask whether he intended to denounce financial "irregularities" committed during the previous

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] David, "No es lo mismo," *Bohemia,* January 16, 1949: 54.
[10] "Grafoentrevisa exclusiva: Prío," *Bohemia,* January 16, 1949: 60.
[11] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 589.

administration.[12] Cuervo, who responded affirmatively, saw this as evidence that the palace was monitoring his "steps."[13]

Specifically, Prío desired to know if he should brace for a scandal. Just as Cuervo had been patiently amassing documents, Grau had been collecting a list of grievances against his onetime prime minister. Above all, the former physiology professor had explicitly told Prío of his wish to avoid embarrassment over the treasury deficit – which he blamed on the 1948 election campaign and Prío's need to purchase the popularity he came by naturally. Prío had bent over backwards to accommodate Grau, appointing a compliant finance minister and scuttling Cuervo's attempt at a senate hearing on the matter. However, he had been unwilling to prevent Cuervo's complaint from reaching the courts. *El Viejo* extracted swift revenge for this broken promise during a *Bohemia* interview published on January 31. To begin with, Grau dismissed Prío's attentiveness to the semi-parliamentary system – claiming his erstwhile disciple bought congressional support with stacks of lottery tickets which were resold at a hefty profit. The former president, who had never needed to bribe the legislative branch since he ruled by decree, boasted of using lottery revenue for "superior objectives" such as hospitals.[14] He cast further aspersions on Cuba's semi-parliamentary model by saying it was an "invention" of Batista, who had charged Colonel Jaime Mariné with the task of cajoling lawmakers.[15] In general, Grau confessed, "If someone asked me now why I made

[12] "En Cuba, Política: Diálogo Telefónico," *Bohemia,* January 16, 1949: 55.
[13] Ibid.
[14] "Porque hice presidente a Carlos Prío," *Bohemia,* January 31, 1949: 58.
[15] Ibid.

Prío president, I would tell him I made a mistake."[16] Grau was also eager to chivvy Aureliano Sánchez Arango. He accused the education minister of firing fellow *Auténticos* to burnish his presidential credentials. Regarding this aspiration, Grau recalled a malign piece of folk wisdom. "In a tiny village," he said, "a man was dying to be mayor so he approached a friend and told him of his ambition. The friend responded by saying, 'Sure, *chico,* why not, others more stupid than you have tried."[17]

Although Prío had expected a reproach, he was stunned by the rawness of Grau's comments. Shortly after reading the interview, he sat down for lunch with his brothers Paco and Antonio along with members of his inner political circle such as Tony Varona, Virgilio Pérez and the congressman Segundo Curti. Prío was livid but eschewed a forceful public rejoinder, particularly as Grau remained *Auténtico* party president and master of its machinery. Instead, he remonstrated among his select but sympathetic audience in the presidential palace. In the first place, Prío bristled at Grau's charge that he was an "unfaithful disciple," saying he had always followed his "own impulses."[18] He reminded everyone that in 1936 he had proposed Grau's expulsion from the *Auténticos* for failing to comply with party doctrine. More recently, as prime minister, he "had the guts" to oppose Grau's re-election campaign.[19] Further, Prío was irritated by the thefts from the treasury. "We have," he said, "shown extraordinary politeness in calling a deficit that which was really embezzlement, much of it realized after my election and, more concretely,

[16] Ibid., 65.
[17] Ibid., 66.
[18] "En Cuba, Controversia: 'El más Peligroso de Todos…,'" *Bohemia,* February 6, 1949: 49.
[19] Ibid.

between September 9 and October 10."[20] Lastly, Prío sensed something untoward in Grau's remarks. Like many Cuban politicians, he was acutely sensitive to possible signs of a coup. Grau, he opined, "thinks only of regaining power, but because he's old and must wait eight years in order to legally run for president, he's willing to try anything."[21] This sentiment was echoed by Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who told a *Bohemia* reporter that, "Grau has been corroded by his ambition to re-conquer power through any means, except legitimate popular election."[22] Unlike Prío, who grumbled privately, the senate president was one of many *Auténticos* who spoke to journalists with alacrity. Aureliano Sánchez Arango deviously suggested that Grau's comments were rooted in "senility," and wondered whether this also explained the "disaster" of his final months as president.[23] Asked if he had read the Grau interview, Diego Vicente Tejera explained that, "Nobody believes in (Grau) anymore. The country has lost respect for him."[24] A survey commissioned by *Bohemia* seemed to confirm this view. If faced with a choice between Prío and Grau, 64.09 percent of Cubans preferred the current president while only 6.14 percent opted for his predecessor.[25] In many respects, this was a more devastating verdict than the jeremiads of *Auténtico* leaders – many of whom wished him ill for their own personal reasons. For example, Tejera resented Grau for firing him as education minister in 1946 and later for blocking the presidential candidacy of his ally and

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 52.
[23] Ibid.
[24]Ibid.
[25] Of the remaining subjects, 13.18 percent replied "I don't know or I don't want to answer" and 16.59 percent said, "Neither." See Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo Opina Sobre Prío y Grau, Chibás y Batista," *Bohemia,* February 6, 1949: 65.

patron, Suárez Fernández. Conversely, a year earlier many citizens still believed he was the best president in the island's history.

Of all Grau's criticisms, the only one that remained unchallenged involved the Law against Gangsterism, which he declared, "has only served to encourage the very thing it seeks to avoid."[26] Grau, of course, had scarce moral authority in this case as he set the stage for gangsterism during his own administration and had famously taken ill during the Orfila massacre. Nevertheless, Prío's law had done nothing to stem a recent outbreak of violence. On the evening of January 12, Rubén Darío González, a member of the National Police who also belonged to *Union Insurreccional Revolucionaria* (UIR), was shot 17 times as he took a drink in Havana's seedy San Isidro district. In typical fashion, the bar's other patrons cowered on the floor until the getaway car had removed to a safe distance. The murderers were soon identified as Gustavo Massó and Juan Regueiro, both of whom were university students tied to *Movimiento Socialista Revolucionaria* (MSR) leader Rolando Masferrer. Masferrer's newspaper, *El Tiempo en Cuba,* praised them for eliminating the "assassin" González, who was implicated in the death of Manolo Castro.[27] Unfortunately, their celebration was short lived as their corpses turned up on the Havana Country Club's manicured grounds within 72 hours. During his January 16 broadcast, Chibás pointed out that Massó and Regueiro had last been seen entering police custody before their tortured and disfigured bodies were found. "It was the same way during the Machado era!" he shouted, anxious to make

[26] "Porque hice presidente a Carlos Prío," 58.
[27] "En Cuba, Atentados: 'Apártese todo el mundo,'" *Bohemia,* January 23, 1949: 52.

hay from the scandal.[28] Rather than pursuing justice in the courts, the National Police, with its strong UIR contingent, had apparently resolved the case through vigilantism. Not only had Massó and Regueiro been killed, but the latter's stepfather, Nemesio Fernández, had been interrogated and beaten with such ferocity that his wounds required treatment in the infirmary. The *Prensa Libre* columnist Néstor Piñango, who closely followed Cuba's gangster scene, explained that all National Policemen, even high-ranking figures, performed tasks for the UIR even if they did not formally belong to the group. Hence, National Police chief José Caramés, who was unaffiliated, involved himself in UIR business although the actual killing tended to be done by members like Lieutenant Armando Correa.

Public outrage was compounded by the fact that another cadaver had already been deposited in the Havana Country Club earlier in the week. The victim, identified as Rolando Vázquez Contreras, was a construction worker belonging to *Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras* (ARG) – an outfit with close links to Carlos Prío.[29] Vázquez had been fingered in the shooting of Gregorio Martínez, an employee of the Havana Electric Company and UIR associate. By all indications, this was yet another gruesome case of gangland tit for tat. Trying to make the best of a bad situation, Prime Minister Tony Varona lauded the "zeal" of Havana's policemen in elucidating details of the Vázquez case. A *Bohemia* reporter offered a less optimistic assessment, noting that less than two weeks before, President Prío had announced

[28] Ibid.
[29] During Prío's presidential campaign, the ARG leader Eufemio Fernández saw to his personal security. After the election, Prío appointed him chief of Cuba's Bureau of Special Investigations.

that, "the 'Law against Gangsterism' has helped create the peaceful climate that Cubans are now enjoying."[30]

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

On February 3, 1949, Eduardo Chibás probably scanned his advance copy of *Bohemia* with more than the usual anticipation. Inside was a public survey conducted among residents of Havana and its outlying suburbs, containing the following question: "If the opposition were able to unite, who, in your opinion, should be its natural leader, Chibás or Batista?" As it happened, a total of 42.73 percent of respondents preferred the *Ortodoxo* chief while 37.27 percent chose the former strongman. Moreover, Chibás owed this modest lead to women – who favored him by nearly 12 points (46.23 to 34.67). Among men, the two rivals were in a dead heat.[31] By any reasonable estimate, Chibás, whose popularity in Havana was well known, should have been the clear choice. However, he may have lost some support among pragmatists who looked askance at his distaste for pacts. Francisco Ichaso implied as much, claiming the *Ortodoxos* represented the most "sincere and vigorous" opposition to the current administration but their possibilities were hindered by a "lack of political realism."[32] Batista, who had imposed order during the turbulent years after 1934, may also have benefited from the spike in gangster violence. Even as Chibás boasted the most unconditional

[30] "En Cuba, Atentados: 'Apártese todo el mundo," 51.
[31] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo Opina Sobre Prío y Grau, Chibás y Batista," *Bohemia,* February 6, 1949: 65. The poll respondents were from Havana and the nearby municipalities of Marianao, Guanabacoa and Regla.
[32] Francisco Ichaso, "El Grausato en el Aventino," *Bohemia,* February 6, 1949: 42.

adherents in Cuba, the island's largest radio audience for a political show and kudos from its highest circulation magazine, his position as opposition leader was precarious.[33]

As per custom, Chibás attempted to grab extra attention and prestige with his unique brand of muckraking. For most of January, this involved an escalation of the polemic with Amado Trinidad. The proprietor of RHC *Cadena Azul* and apologist for Argentine president Juan Domingo Perón had lately begun publishing a series of articles denouncing United States policy in Latin America. Among those he considered "lackeys of Yankee imperialism" was none other than the *Ortodoxo* leader himself.[34] For his part, Chibás revealed that Trinidad had maintained regular contact with an Argentine spy named Guillermo Aikman. The two communicated via messages whose code Chibás had mysteriously managed to crack. Eddy thus treated his listeners to a detailed itinerary of the Argentine agent's activities including, including worldwide travels, flight numbers, telephone conversations, hotel rooms and even slight changes of plans. An impressed *Bohemia* reporter wrote that Chibás had turned himself into a "detective on a par with Sherlock Holmes."[35] Other media outlets were less gracious. Speculation abounded regarding how Chibás had come upon such sensitive documents and who had provided the key to encoded spy cables. The Communist daily *Hoy* angrily concluded that he was working for the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation

[33] Later that month, *Bohemia* announced that its most recent issue had sold 190,000 copies. See "190 Mil Ejemplares," *Bohemia,* February 20, 1949: supplement, 1.
[34] "En Cuba, Polémica: Duelo Entre Micrófonos," *Bohemia,* January 31, 1949: 55.
[35] Ibid.

and dubbed him, "second in charge of the G-Men in Cuba."[36] Unfortunately for Chibás, the engrossing twists and turns of this case were overshadowed in the public imagination by bullet filled gangster victims and Grau's sensational accusations.

The *Ortodoxo* leader would not play second fiddle for long, however. He, like most Cubans, had watched with alarm as the National Economic Board approved an increase in the country's already inflated electricity rates. In response, Eddy's friend Ventura Dellundé, who was president of the island's Consumers Association, appealed the measure before the Supreme Tribunal. After that, things became a bit murky. Eduardo Salazar, a Cuban Electric Company executive, offered Dellundé 200,000 *pesos* to drop the case but was rebuffed. He then turned to the judges, who were importuned so relentlessly that one asked to be discharged from the case. Nonetheless, public opinion was buoyed by the knowledge that three of the five judges were known to oppose higher electricity prices. Cubans were thus "violently surprised" to learn the Supreme Tribunal had rejected the appeal on February 19.[37] The last minute change of heart by Judge Francisco Torres Tomás, who had previously been critical of the Cuban Electric Company, was endlessly scrutinized. Chibás, whose radio show was scheduled for the next day, immediately realized he had a magnificent opportunity on his hands. The Cuban Electric Company, scorned by locals as the "electric octopus," was a perfect example of what he considered Wall Street imperialism. After all, its parent firm, Electric Bond and Share, was based in the United States and gouging Cuban consumers had been company policy since

[36] Ibid., 56.
[37] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Se Declaró Incompetente," *Bohemia,* February 27, 1949: 63.

1902.[38] During Machado's administration, the Cuban Electric Company had been granted preferential tax rates and land rights superseding those of the state or private citizens. In 1927, Cubans paid 17 cents per electric kilowatt even though production costs were only one and a half cents per unit.[39] Just over two decades later the situation had improved but only somewhat. In January of 1948, citizens of neighboring Puerto Rico were charged $9.85 per electric kilowatt as compared to $16.45 for Havana residents.[40] Four months later, *Bohemia* reported that the Cuban Electric Company was using antiquated equipment requiring three times the petroleum to produce a kilowatt as similar utilities in the United States.[41] Currently, the "electric octopus" argued that more revenues were needed to offset higher expenses. However, this was exposed as a ruse by the U.S. economist John Bauer and representatives of the engineering firm A.S. Beck, whose investigation found that the Cuban Electric Company's costs had risen 61 percent since 1936 but net income had doubled during that time.[42]

During his presidential campaign, Chibás advocated "immediate nationalization" of the Cuban Electric Company, claiming this would benefit the greater good rather than "egotistical money-making exploiters."[43] He also asserted that exorbitant electricity rates precluded the all important project of agricultural reform. While preparing for his broadcast, Chibás pondered these grievances and

[38] Electric Bond and Share was actually a holding company created by General Electric in 1905.
[39] In the chamber of representatives, Carlos Manuel de la Cruz complained in 1927 that firms such as the Cuban Electric Company had been "bleeding" the population since 1902. See: Aguilar, 65.
[40] J. Isern, "Refutan los Vecinos de La Habana a la Compañía Cubana de Electricidad," *Carteles,* February 1, 1948: 68.
[41] "Ante la grave problema de la electricidad," *Bohemia,* May 23, 1948: 66.
[42] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Se Declaró Incompetente," 62.
[43]"Los Candidatos Presidenciales Opinan Sobre el Grave Problema de la Electricidad," *Bohemia,* May 23, 1948: 67, 74.

seethed at the latest insult perpetrated by the foreign owned monopoly. Speaking into the microphones, he repeated the query ringing from every street corner. "What happened? What powerful force pressured this judge into changing his mind?"[44] Chibás knew the answer his audience expected and did not disappoint them. According to his sources, Cuban Electric Company employees had paid $300,000 to ensure an agreeable ruling. "Once again," he said, "the Cuban people have been disgraced because money has won out over shame. The ever growing mud hole of corruption invading the country has now reached a place we never thought possible: to some of the Supreme Tribunal judges."[45] Given the verdict's unpopularity, others also offered denunciations. In some cases, they used terms that were strikingly similar to Chibás. The senate majority leader Lomberto Díaz lamented that, "It's not just politicians anymore. It seems some judges have also entered into shady deals."[46] The *Auténtico* congressman Rogelio Regalado admitted, "It would be very bad for the country if the mud hole reached the judiciary."[47] Santiago Rey, a Republican senator, proclaimed that, "It appears a lot of money must have flowed" but added "some" of the judges were "responsible and honest."[48] On the other hand, Ventura Dellundé allowed that the decision was "surprising" but rejected suggestions that bribery had been a factor and expressed "absolute faith" in the court system.[49] As a practicing lawyer rather than an officeholder, this was perhaps a wise tactic. He reiterated that under Law 5 of 1942 only the president

[44] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Se Declaró Incompetente," 63.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 63-64.

could raise or lower electricity prices and eventually a majority of judges would recognize this fact.

Ultimately, Dellundé's stoicism placated neither Chibás nor the impugned judges. The latter merged their grudges into a single lawsuit and on February 25 Chibás was officially charged with defamation. After a brief hiatus, Chibás was once again the national focal point and seemed altogether pleased. In an interview with Luis Ortega, director of the Havana daily *Pueblo*, he claimed Carlos Prío had "inspired" the proceedings in order to jail him and thereby silence the "truths" he revealed every Sunday evening.[50] Besides a maximum two year prison sentence, he was also liable for a fine of up to 360 *pesos*. Calling attention to this possibility, Chibás slyly said, "Since I never enriched myself in the government, nor did I rob, deal in the black market or enter into business arrangements with Grau's henchmen, I don't believe I'll be able to pay the fine."[51] These remarks were merely an opening salvo in a controversy he knew would play to his advantage regardless of the outcome. On March 6, Chibás published an article in *Bohemia* entitled, "I Would Proudly Go to Prison to Defend the Cuban People" in which he excoriated the judges, the "Anti-Cuban Electric Company" and his favorite target, Carlos Prío. He noted ironically that the same three judges who declared themselves "incapable" of nullifying the recent increase in electricity prices had, in 1940, been quite "capable"

[50] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 591. Chibás was convinced the government meant to take him off the air one way or another. First off, the attempt to close down his show in November of 1948 was still fresh in his mind. The threat seemed even more concrete after Juan Manuel Márquez, an *Ortodoxo* city councilman from Marianao, had been banned from the radio in January. Chibás had inveighed against this decision, saying, "Only weak, unpopular and anti-democratic governments who support themselves via fraud, embezzlement and crime fear the free expression of ideas and clear exposition of the truth." See: Ibid., 588.
[51] Ibid., 591-592.

of quashing a rebate some years earlier.[52] Regarding the despised utility company, Chibás railed against exorbitant fees that were the highest in Latin America and accused Prío of pushing through a 70 percent rate hike in September of 1947 while he was prime minister. Apart from this "embarrassing bit of graft," Chibás repeated his claim that a portion of the 174 million *pesos* missing from Cuba's treasury could be found in the bank accounts of Carlos and Antonio Prío.[53] Chibás also could not understand why he was the subject of a court case while the streets were thick with so many gangsters and embezzlers. Nonetheless, if convicted, the *Ortodoxo* leader promised to enter the hoosegow with "legitimate pride."[54] Curiously, the one thing Chibás neglected to do was provide any proof that the judges had actually accepted money in exchange for their votes.

Meanwhile, public ire against the Supreme Tribunal's ruling showed no signs of diminishing. The Federation of University Students "energetically condemned" the verdict in a public statement and incited Cubans to "Fight against the oppressive electric octopus!"[55] Further, representatives from 68 civic organizations representing the entire island addressed an open letter to President Prío urging him to ensure "efficient, abundant and cheap electrical service."[56] The provincial council of Oriente congratulated Ventura Dellundé and Chibás on their campaign against higher electricity prices which, "deeply affect the country's poor and its industry."[57]

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[52] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Por Defender el Pueblo, Iría a la Cárcel Con Orgullo," *Bohemia,* March 6, 1949: 75.
[53] Ibid., 47.
[54] Ibid.
[55] "La FEU se Pronuncia Contra el Fallo del Supremo," *Bohemia,* March 7, 1949: 57.
[56] "Dos Documentos de Interés Público: El Comité Coordinador Nacional de Asociaciones Cívicas se Dirige al Presidente de la República," *Bohemia,* March 27, 1949: 63.
[57] "El Ejemplo de Oriente," *Bohemia,* March 20, 1949: 71.

Chibás, who by now fancied himself a modern day Galileo, stoked mass fervor at a series of nighttime rallies illuminated by candles and kerosene lanterns. On March 11, Chibás upped the ante by appearing before the senate and submitting a motion of impeachment against the three judges who had sided with the Cuban Electric Company. This gesture, provided for by Article 208 of the 1940 constitution, formed a symbolic contrast with the lawsuit against Chibás, which would be tried in the so-called Urgency Court created during Batista's military regime. The two cases crisscrossed four days later when the Urgency Court temporarily suspended its proceedings against Chibás in order to scrutinize the case pending before the senate. Chibás, who relished the gathering whirlwind, was buoyed by still more good fortune 24 hours later. Entering the studios of *Unión Radio*, Chibás enjoyed a chance encounter with the beautiful actress Carmelina Bandera – who he found practicing her lines for an episode of *La Palabra de Mazorra*. The *Ortodoxo* leader duly confessed to being a fan of the show, demonstrating that stridence was a posture reserved for political opponents.

* * *

During the month of April, Chibás learned that his family home, sold to pay for campaign expenses in 1948, had been converted into a funeral parlor. However, this inauspicious omen seemed more fitting for Carlos Prío – particularly as the Law against Gangsterism seemed incapable of denting the brisk business of Havana's undertakers. On Saturday, April 2, a University of Havana student named Justo Fuentes was killed in a drive-by shooting. He was cut down at 12:45 p.m. on a busy Havana street near the studio of Radio COCO, where he had a daily show. Fuentes,

who was vice-president of the Federation of University Students, had once been a UIR member. More importantly, he had crossed a line by publicizing government attempts to discreetly exile the jailed MSR leader Mario Salabarría. Salabarría remained notorious for his role in the Orfila massacre and was one of the few gangsters actually serving a long term prison sentence. Even so, his many contacts among high-level *Auténticos* nearly guaranteed an amnesty once conditions were right. Fuentes, in a fit of Chibás-style journalism, had embarrassed the administration by revealing a passport had lately been issued to Salabarría. Shortly thereafter, friends began advising Fuentes to be careful because he was being "checked out."[58] Fuentes paid no heed to these warnings and given his separation from the UIR, there was little he could do to protect himself. The same hail of bullets that ended Fuentes' life also killed a nearby taxi driver. Interestingly, no policemen arrived on the scene but a watchman did and he opened fire at the fleeing vehicle. He then drove the wounded Fuentes to the hospital. Unfortunately, he was unwilling to identify the assailants. However, Fuentes confessed the names of his attackers to Fidel Castro, an old UIR companion, before losing consciousness. They included two of Cuba's most notorious gangsters: Rolando Masferrer and Orlando León Lemus. Aside from heading the MSR, Masferrer was an *Auténtico* congressman from Holguín. Lemus, commonly referred to as *El Colorado* because of his red hair, maintained close ties with the Prío brothers. In fact, during his final lucid moments, Fuentes had repeated over and over that, "The red head killed me on the ground."[59]

[58] "En Cuba, Atentado: El Plomo Habla de Nuevo," *Bohemia,* April 10, 1949: 65.
[59] Ibid., 66.

Chibás had sat near Fuentes the day before his death when both attended a rally against the Cuban Electric Company on the University of Havana staircase – known as the *escalinata*. During his weekly broadcast, he accused the government of "inciting and protecting the assassins" and congress of "keeping the gangsters who reside among them from being prosecuted."[60] While Masferrer enjoyed parliamentary immunity, Lemus had been a fugitive from justice since participating in the Orfila killings and it was commonly believed he enjoyed official protection. In this vein, the journalist Ernesto de la Fe wrote, "The friendship between the Prío family and *El Colorado* is no secret."[61] A *Bohemia* reporter observed rising public anger at administration officials and their "guilty tolerance" of Cuba's triggermen.[62] By far, the bitterest expressions of outrage were those of Fuentes' fellow classmates. The Federation of University Students issued a three part declaration expressing a readiness to seek revenge if the murderers were not punished, urging Cuba's congress to rescind the immunity of Masferrer so he could be tried and accusing Paco Prío of personally sheltering *El Colorado*. Incensed students also intercepted passing trams and adorned them with posters insulting Masferrer, *El Colorado*, Paco Prío and Police Chief José Caramés.

Two days after Fuentes' murder, the senate convened to discuss the accused Supreme Tribunal judges, the Cuban Electric Company and electricity prices. The judges' fate initially rested with a five man committee, which recommended against impeachment but backed a motion, proffered by Antonio Martínez Fraga to create a

[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

senate commission charged with investigating the unpopular "electric octopus."[63] During the debate, Manuel Capestany emotionally vouched for Pedro Cantero, one of the indicted judges, who was also a childhood friend. Taking a less sentimental view, Varona opined that the motion for impeachment lacked "serious proof" and confessed that the government preferred to halt "Chibás' show."[64] Pelayo Cuervo, who admitted two of the judges were friends and believed all three were innocent, nonetheless felt a senate trial was the only means to exonerate them before public opinion. The *Auténtico*-Republican alliance, which held a majority, ultimately agreed to vote against impeachment and reject the proposed senate commission. Instead, they supported a project of the *miguelista* senator Porfirio Pendás – who planned to introduce a bill requiring lower electricity prices. This sop for the island's citizens was hushed up on the insistence of Varona, who claimed announcing it would "scare away" foreign investors.[65] The prime minister may have been feeling slightly fearful himself as a few days before he had received a visit from the Cuban Electric Company's American boss, known locally as "Mister" Wheeler. Leaving nothing to chance, the firm had also extensively lobbied members of the senate committee. Among other things, each man was provided with a 33 page legal brief containing arguments in favor of the company. At least one committee member, the Republican Santiago Rey, mimicked these during the hearing. While the hostility of pro government parties guaranteed the motion would fail, the indifference of opposition lawmakers turned the session into a rout. In the end, only

[63] The committee members were Lomberto Díaz (*Auténtico*), Santiago Rey (Republican), Manuel Capestany (Liberal), Rafael Guas Inclán (Liberal) and Antonio Martínez Fraga (Democrat).
[64] "En Cuba, Senado: 'Nuestra Posición Quedará en Entredicho,'" *Bohemia,* April 10, 1949: 66-67.
[65] "En Cuba, Senado: No quiere asustar a los Inversionistas," *Bohamia,* April 10, 1949: 67.

Pelayo Cuervo and Federico Fernández Casas voted for impeachment. The following Sunday, Chibás blamed the senate's decision on prime ministerial "pressure" and an unduly cooperative opposition, which he compared to the cowed legislators of Machado's era.[66] However, even as the price increase was unjust and the legal reasoning behind them flawed, the *Ortodoxo* leader never offered concrete proof that the judges had acted improperly.

On April 10, Chibás opened a new front against the administration. In a *Bohemia* article, he commemorated Prío's first "semester" in office by enumerating all that was amiss. "Let's take a look," he wrote, "at the effect of his six months in power."

> Businesses are faltering, factories are closing, workers are being laid off, salaries are being cut, *campesinos* are being evicted from their lands by the army, public services are a mess, public transport is in chaos, telephone and electric bills are higher, there has been a notable drop in government revenues, illegal payments of spurious debts to United States citizens have taken place while Cubans are forced to tighten their belts, a 100 million *peso* foreign loan is being negotiated to replenish money embezzled from the treasury by figures who served the Grau administration and currently hold positions in this government (and lastly) student and union leaders have been serially assassinated.[67]

For Chibás, the most disturbing of these ills was the prospect of a foreign loan. Since January, rumors had been circulating that Prío would cover up Grau's "deficit" with borrowed money. Chibás had been among those stoking the buzz. He felt vindicated when the island's newspapers reported that President Prío and his brother Antonio, the finance minister, had recently received three representatives from Chase National Bank. As with the controversy over high electricity prices,

[66] Eduardo R. Chibás, "El Acuerdo Contra el Pueblo," *Bohemia,* April 10, 1949: 60.
[67] Eduardo R. Chibás, "¡Otro Empréstito con el Chase!" *Bohamia,* April 10, 1949: 60.

Chibás was reenacting a drama from his years as a young revolutionary. Just as Machado once extended preferential treatment to the Cuban Electric Company, he had also relied on Chase National Bank for economic support.[68] Nor did the coincidences end there. One of the financiers who had visited Carlos and Antonio Prío was Winthrop Aldrich, who had helped formulate the loans obtained by President Machado.[69] Given the sticky fingered members of Prío's circle, especially his brothers Antonio and Paco, Chibás pointed out the danger of yet another parallel with the early 1930s – namely, that a foreign loan would enable graft of enormous proportions. In Machado's era, Chase National Bank had underwritten the construction of Cuba's 750 mile long Central Highway, which spans the entire island from east to west. Although this project proved indisputably valuable, it had been a magnet for shady dealings such that each mile, at a cost of 160,000 *pesos*, was ten times more expensive than reasonable estimates. "We will fight," concluded Chibás to keep the present government from mortgaging the Republic once again."[70]

The following week, Chibás warned of an additional pending danger. On his radio show of April 17, he accused Carlos Prío, José Manuel Casanova and the "known speculator" Francisco Blanco Calás of plotting to reap fabulous profits by

[68] Eschewing foreign loans had long been a staple of Cuban presidential campaigns, although such promises were often broken. As a presidential candidate in 1924, Gerardo Machado had offered a ten point program to the public. The last of his proposals involved paying off Cuba's public debts and avoiding new loans. During the 1948 campaign, Prío had also promised to steer clear of foreign loans.

[69] Winthrop Aldrich, a Harvard educated lawyer, was president of Chase Manhattan Bank between 1930 and 1934. At the time he visited Carlos and Antonio Prío he was Chairman of the Board, a position he held during the years 1934-1953. After his banking career, Aldrich served as United States ambassador to Great Britain (1953-1957).

[70] Chibás, "¡Otro Empréstito con el Chase!," 87.

manipulating sugar prices.[71] Casanova and Blanco had played comparable games in 1945, resulting in the infamous barter deal scandal. The feisty Liberal senator responded by labeling him a "mental retard" in *Prensa Libre.*[72] Chibás countered with a *Bohemia* article that was equal parts wit and journalistic exposé. He irreverently compared the "Czar of Sugar" to his 18th century Venetian namesake, contending that the latter, at least, had spent time in jail for his mischief while the "tropical" Casanova remained free plague his fellow countrymen.[73] In this case, Casanova and Blanco had "fictitiously" lowered sugar prices a few months earlier by leaking "alarmist rumors" and utilizing their influence within the industry.[74] Afterward, Blanco purchased 200,000 tons and promptly began lobbying the government to prematurely end the sugar harvest in an effort to limit supplies. President Prío had thus far resisted such a move knowing full well it would have resulted in mass unrest in the countryside. However, in February and March he issued decrees lowering the amount of sugar available for sale in Europe. According to Chibás, speculators, many of whom had ties to the administration, would take advantage of the momentary shortage to vend their sugar in Europe at a huge gain.[75] Thereafter, the hoarded sugar would be released – flooding the market, fetching ruinous prices and costing the Cuban treasury between 50 and 100 million *pesos* in tax revenues. The 65 year old Casanova reacted indignantly to these allegations and

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[71] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Respondiendo al Senador Casanova," *Bohemia,* April 24, 1949: 62.
[72] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 599.
[73] Chibás, "Respondiendo al Senador Casanova," 62.
[74] Ibid. Chibás' source for this charge was a formal complaint lodged by Representative Lincoln Rodón, president of Cuba's chamber of representatives.
[75] According to Chibás, administration officials with knowledge of the plan included ex Agriculture Minister Ramón Nodal, current Agruculture Minister Virgilio Pérez and Teodoro Santiesteban, secretary of the Cuban Tenant Farmers Association.

demanded a duel. Chibás chose Manuel Bisbé and Eric Agüero, the *Ortodoxo* party treasurer, as his seconds and dispatched them to negotiate terms with Casanova's representatives.

Carlos Prío had dueled with Chibás in 1947 after being similarly accused but was too tangled up with the island's gangster problem to respond. Six days after Fuentes had been killed, he received a delegation from the Federation of University Students in the presidential palace. The result was a 90 minute meeting laden with palpable tension and uncomfortable questions. Speaking on the students' behalf, Pedro Mirassou told Prío that "everybody knows" who killed Justo Fuentes but certain military and civilian authorities were "sabotaging" efforts to capture the perpetrators.[76] For instance, he found it "suspicious" that police and customs officials in Havana's airport had allowed Eustaquio Soto Carmenatti, one of those implicated by Fuentes, to board a Pan American flight for Miami – particularly as the suspected killer was using his own passport.[77] Confronted with these details, the cordial president attempted to win the students' confidence by revealing hitherto unknown information. Prío confessed that he had been notified "10 or 12 days" after *El Colorado* had secretly returned to Cuba but immediately sent a message urging him to leave so as not to "perturb" his government.[78] Rather than being placated, his audience was horrified. The medical student Orlando Bosch asked why Lemus had not been arrested. Prío lamely answered that such "elements" usually

[76] "En Cuba, Palacio: 'Tienen que Meter en un Puño a la Universidad,'" *Bohemia,* April 17, 1949: 59. Pedro Mirassou was also linked to UIR, which doubtless fed his desire to see the MSR triggermen behind bars.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

took refuge in the houses of senators, representatives or "influential friends."[79] Finally, Mirassou informed Prío that if no "effective" measures were taken to prosecute the criminals, the students would "rise up in rebellion" after Easter.[80]

Despite this threat, Prío's options were limited as Rolando Masferrer enjoyed parliamentary immunity and Soto Carmenatti remained ensconced in Florida. *El Colorado's* whereabouts were uncertain, although murmurs on the street suggested he had fled overseas. On April 19, however, the truth turned out to be otherwise. That morning, in the working class Havana neighborhood of Cerro, another university student with UIR ties was treated to a drive-by fusillade. The target, Luis Felipe Salazar Callicó, known as *Wichy*, was severely wounded in the head and neck. Upon arriving at the hospital, a commandant from the Bureau of Investigations asked who was responsible but Salazar angrily replied, "Why should I tell you? Everyone knows the police protect assassins."[81] Once again, Fidel Castro was on the scene and extracted the information. He advised reporters that the car had been driven by someone wearing a police uniform and the shooters were *El Colorado* and Policarpo Soler. The latter was a Batista era police chief and present day mercenary. In early 1948, Miguelito Suárez Fernández had publicly accused Soler of seeking to kill him and his ally Diego Vicente Tejera. As a result, Suárez Fernández had dispatched his UIR allies to neutralize the elusive Soler but to no avail. While Soler's reappearance was troubling, the continued presence of *El Colorado* posed a direct challenge to Prío. During his April 24 broadcast, Chibás singled out Lemus as part of

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 60.
[81] "En Cuba, Atentado: 'La Policía Protege a los Asesinos,'" *Bohemia,* April 24, 1949: 71.

a "tragic panorama" of impunity whereby gunmen "ride in the official automobiles of representatives, senators and ministers."[82]

Chibás utilized that evening's radio show for two other purposes. First, he ceded the opening minutes to Pelayo Cuervo – allowing the self-styled "independent" senator to address his audience for the first time since their rancorous falling out. As luck would have it, Cuervo was also tangled up in Cuba's judicial system. The Havana Municipal Court had recently ordered him to pay a fine of 150 *pesos* and submit testimony before the Urgency Court regarding possible defamation of the justice ministry. Cuervo marveled at the "inconceivable paradox" of being the only man punished thus far in the 174 million *peso* corruption case.[83] Afterward, the *Ortodoxo* leader fulfilled a second goal: hyping his upcoming appearance before the Urgency Court. Having been denied an impeachment spectacle in the senate, he had every intention of embarrassing the government during this public forum, set for April 27. He urged listeners to attend if possible and offered a preview of what they could expect, saying:

> I reaffirm tonight each and every one of my accusations against the Supreme Tribunal judges who ruled against the people, Gabriel Pichardo, Pedro Cantero and Juan Francisco Torres Tomás, who have shamelessly allied themselves with the Anti-Cuban Electric Company, the foreign monopoly, the international octopus of Electric Bond and Share. This is the truth. I proclaim it to the entire world. My sources include a high-ranking employee of the Electric Company itself along with four judges from the Supreme Tribunal and Havana Municipal Court. They can sentence me to 20 years in prison or even death but I

[82] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 600. This statement is particularly interesting as Orlando León Lemus had once been a familiar passenger in Chibás' automobile, official or otherwise, while he was an *Auténtico* senator. During a duel in January of 1945 against the journalist Joaquín López Montes, Chibás, in fact, chose *El Colorado* as one of his seconds. After his split with the *Auténticos*, Chibás denounced the party's gangster links. In this sense, his condemnation of Lemus was sincere but he was entitled to less self-righteousness than his tone assumed.

[83] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: El Deber Inexcusable," *Bohemia,* May 1, 1949: 61.

> will continue proclaiming the truth…Only an idiot could believe three judges of the Supreme Tribunal would dictate such an absurd and illegal sentence in order to bestow millions of *pesos* on a foreign monopoly and appease the magnates of Wall Street. The government is determined to see me defeated in the Urgency Court. The prosecutor will accuse me in the strongest terms. Nevertheless, if I am ordered to pay a fine, I will refuse. Nor will I allow the people to pay it or the president to grant me a pardon if I am convicted. I will go to jail.[84]

Chibás was in no danger of spending the next two decades behind bars or suffering capital punishment. His stretching of the particulars merely embroidered a situation whose outcome was a foregone conclusion. Chibás possessed no parliamentary immunity nor was he protected by a powerful patron. Moreover, his accusation was based on anonymous tips. Chibás was ticketed for prison and he knew it. The prospect of martyrdom suited his temperament but was also shrewd politics. Many Cubans, especially the poor, would be tempted to associate Chibás with his dearest image of himself – namely, an honest politician who sacrificed to improve their lot. Nearly three months had passed since the *Bohemia* survey comparing him and Batista as potential opposition leaders. His popularity had surely increased since then and would climb still further if he were incarcerated. Chibás had labored relentlessly to gain a higher profile in the public imagination. Further, his crusade against the Cuban Electric Company offered an ideal showcase for his party. As Chibás headlined rallies in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, *Ortodoxo* rising stars like José Pardo Llada and Ventura Dellundé drew large crowds in the cities of Santa Clara and Matanzas respectively. Meanwhile, President Prío seemed unwilling or unable to stop gangster violence and risked rebellion in the university.

[84] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 601.

Batista, meanwhile, largely confined himself to *Kuquine* – his country estate on the Havana outskirts. Surrounded by a stew of sycophants, politicians and journalists, he discussed goings-on and his prospects in 1952 but often seemed more interested in playing canasta or working out on his exercise machine. Prío's vice president, Guillermo Alonso Pujol, summarized the political panorama by telling a reporter:

> The opposition is composed of the popular thunder of Chibás and the tendency toward order represented by Batista. The first is an emotional opposition, of the youth, and the second channels sense and restraint. I've always believed the 357 thousand votes for Chibás mean something and if there is a great disappointment with the *Auténticos,* he will capitalize on it…Only older people and traditional politicians will gravitate toward Batista.

After a pause, the wily Republican chief added, "But we are only in the sixth month of this administration. Who knows what will happen tomorrow?"[85]

PRISONER NUMBER 981

The Urgency Court met on *Calle Tacón* in Old Havana. Its surrounding alleys were congested with boisterous would-be spectators when Chibás arrived wearing his customary white suit and clutching a cigarette in his right hand. Ever mindful of public relations, he composed a statement for the press in the moments before the trail began – yet again deploring Cuba's scandalously high electricity prices. At 10 a.m., presiding judge José Cabezas asked the *Ortodoxo* leader to confirm his accusation, which he did. Chibás was no stranger to Judge Cabezas. In 1935, he had sentenced the young revolutionary to half a year in jail. Seeking to avert a similar fate, Eddy's lawyer, Francisco Carone, called a string of character witnesses –

[85] "En Cuba, Política: 'Es un Converso,'" *Bohemia,* May 1, 1949: 61.

including the publisher of *Bohemia*, Miguel Ángel Quevedo, the *Ortodoxo* congressmen Manuel Bisbé, Roberto García Ibáñez and Beto Saumell along with the party's popular radio personalities José Pardo Llada and Guido García Inclán. Carone, who had participated in many anti-pact delegations during the *Ortodoxo* factional struggles, also defended his friend and client in a two hour speech. Among other things, he argued the Urgency Court was unconstitutional, having been founded as the instrument of a military regime. A *Bohemia* reporter believed Carone was wasting his time, observing wryly that "the judges were so anxious to fulfill their duty that they scarcely listened to him."[86] This view was seemingly born out when Judge Cabezas and his two colleagues announced their ruling of 180 days behind bars. Chibás responded with a signature phrase, yelling, "While the assassin of Guiteras lives unbothered in his *finca* and Alemán enjoys his millions, Prío has thrown me in prison for defending the people."[87] The pro-Chibás crowd, which consisted of many who had traveled long distances to see their hero, erupted with indignation. From the visitor's gallery emanated whistles and cries of "Viva Chibás!" The prosecutor, Francisco Zayas, was escorted from the building under police protection. Another detachment of cops forcibly cleared the courtroom. Even Roberto Agramonte, whose bland personality had earned him the nickname, "freezer bottle" among fellow *Ortodoxos*, found himself being attacked with a club.

Several hours later, the Urgency Court verdict inspired a heated debate in the chamber of representatives. Manuel Bisbé declared there had been a "prior

[86] "Condenado Chibás Por Defender al Pueblo Frente al Monopolio Eléctrico," *Bohemia,* May 1, 1949: 68.
[87] Ibid.

agreement" between the prosecutor and judges that counted the president's blessing.[88] Predictably, he was contradicted by Segundo Curti, one of Prío's close advisors, who sang the praises of Cuba's independent judiciary. In contrast to Curti's lofty rhetoric, the minister without portfolio, Primitivo Rodríguez, joked that, "Today they have just crucified the Jesus of our present generation."[89] Reaching even lower, Rolando Masferrer, who was presently a larger headache to Prío than Chibás, proclaimed the *Ortodoxo* leader lacked the "courage" to confront Cuba's problems.[90] To this, Roberto García Ibáñez replied that Chibás walked the streets unaccompanied, a habit "tough guys" like Masferrer, would never dare imitate.[91] The *Auténtico*-Republican alliance was unexpectedly delighted when Liberal and Democratic congressmen also defended the ruling. José Suárez Rivas, brother of the Liberal senate leader, asserted that, "*Ortodoxos* exploit the psychosis of many citizens while Liberals limit themselves to crafting complimentary legislation for the constitution."[92] This, of course, was quite untrue. Liberals had been in the ruling coalition between 1940 and 1944 and produced no such laws during that period. The real issue was that neither they nor the Democrats had any abiding love for Chibás, whose popularity threatened their perches in the opposition. The Communists, who were shunned by all and thus unencumbered by political calculations, offered the only outside support. Anibal Escalante, director of the Communist newspaper *Hoy*, said, "Everyone knows we have nothing in common

[88] "En Cuba, Política: Cinco Horas de Debate," *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 59.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.,60.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 59.

with Chibás," but stressed that his first obligation was to defend the people against the Cuban Electric Company.[93]

In the senate, only 27 members were present – which resulted in the session being cancelled for a lack of quorum. Pelayo Cuervo had been among the most eager to comment but contented himself instead by chatting with reporters. From a strictly legal standpoint, he was indignant that a party leader could be incarcerated by a quasi legal court on the periphery of the country's judicial system. He added that, "I have no political relationship with Chibás, but his honesty and civic conduct are beyond dispute. While he sits in jail, professional assassins walk around with impunity, government officials encourage gangsterism, illegal gambling is fomented and embezzlers of the public treasury are protected by the administration."[94] The Democrat Antonio Martínez Fraga was no admirer of Chibás but nonetheless admitted the *Ortodoxo* chief had realized a "brilliant campaign" against the Cuban Electric Company.[95] Rather than consorting with the press, Miguelito Suárez Fernández visited Chibás in prison. The senate president arrived bearing a chicken pot pie courtesy of his wife, which he presented to Chibás and said, "Listen Eddy, I've come to tell you that I'm going to request a pardon. You shouldn't spend more time in jail…It's a political error to keep you behind bars."

"No, Miguel," responded Chibás. "I won't permit Carlos Prío to pardon me. What's more, I would consider it an injury to my honor if any supporter or friend

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 60-61.
[95] Ibid., 61.

requested such a favor from the president. I've already told everyone. Do you understand?"

Suárez Fernández was adamant. "I'm going to ask for a pardon anyway," he said "and if you're offended you can demand a duel." This was a remote possibility, as Suárez Fernández well knew. The two men had an easy relationship and shortly thereafter they dissolved into smiles.

Later on, Chibás confessed, "Right now, the most important thing is to fight the foreign monopolies. I don't mind being imprisoned and in any case I've been here before."

"Don't worry," replied the senate president, "I assure you the electricity prices will be lowered."[96]

Suárez Fernández was not the only senator advocating a pardon. The Liberal chief Eduardo Suárez Rivas also backed the idea on behalf of his party. In the chamber of representatives, most Liberal and Democratic congressmen favored a similar proposal as did the *Auténticos* Segundo Curti and Armando Caíñas Milanés. Even among legislators who disagreed with Chibás, many were uncomfortable with his sentence – which recalled a harsher era in Cuban politics, barely more than a dozen years in the past, when party bosses were routinely locked up. Others, like the *Auténtico* senate leader Lomberto Díaz, believed incarcerating Chibás was a "measure of dubious effectiveness."[97] In any case, Chibás was determined to wring every possible advantage from his situation. Mrs. Suárez's chicken pot pie notwithstanding, he ate common prison fare and used the same canvas folding bed

[96] Ibid., 62-63.
[97] Ibid., 61.

as other inmates. With good humor, he told the journalist Mario Kuchilán that the view from his cell trumped that of his 14th floor apartment which looked out over the Caribbean. The *Ortodoxo* leader added that he was content because, "My being in prison assists the cause of national liberation."[98] Hence, Chibás asked Francisco Carone whether there was any legal way to prevent a pardon. Carone answered that the sentence could be appealed on the basis that it was unconstitutional. "Fantastic!" Chibás cried. "Submit it today and we will stop the government."[99] This tactic was unnecessary, however, as Carlos Prío showed no inclination toward leniency. Speaking for the administration, Prime Minister Tony Varona declared a pardon would represent a "slight" against Cuba's judiciary.[100] More importantly, the government looked forward to a respite from Chibás' Sunday evening harassments.

With the airwaves unavailable, Chibás resorted to his pen. On April 30, he published an article in *Prensa Libre* entitled, "To the People of Cuba." The piece closely resembled one of his broadcasts – offering readers a familiar and titillating jumble of gossip, reminiscence and criticism. Among other things, he questioned the Urgency Court's legitimacy, claimed Carlos Prío had mandated a guilty verdict in advance and that Judge Cabezas was happy to comply for personal reasons. The *Ortodoxo* leader noted that Cabezas was a cousin of Lieutenant Colonel José Eleuterio Pedraza, Batista's former second in command, whom he had often

[98] Mario Kuchilán, "Grafoentrevista Exclusiva: Chibás," *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 69. Kuchilán also revealed that being incercerated was more difficult than Chibás was letting on. According to other inmates, the *Ortodoxo* chief was having trouble sleeping and the food damaged his delicate stomach.
[99] "En Cuba, Política: 'Es un Error Político,'" *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 62.
[100] Ibid., 63.

excoriated as an "assassin."[101] Judge Cabezas had been so bent on revenge that he had denied Chibás the chance to issue "revelations of enormous importance."[102] Had they been aired, he averred, convicting him would have been far more difficult, "in spite of the president's orders."[103] Chibás also pointed out that he had been sent to jail on two previous occasions, in 1929 and 1935, for "defending the people."[104] In each instance he was offered pardons by the tyrants who ruled Cuba, first Machado and later Batista, and he had refused both offers – preferring the penitentiary to accepting favors from unsavory figures.[105] Presently, he was incarcerated by Carlos Prío, his former *compañero* from the Student Directorate, fellow political prisoner on the Isle of Pines and erstwhile peer in the constituent assembly. Unlike the dictators Machado and Batista, Prío lacked the decency to offer him a reprieve (even though he would have rejected it) and this was because the president nursed a "grudge" against him.[106] Nevertheless, Chibás contended that he did not harbor "one drop" of hatred for his onetime friend, only "sadness" for what he had become.[107]

Eddy's modest bout of charity toward Prío was perhaps attributable to his choice of reading materials in the *Castillo del Príncipe*, which comprised the Bible and two religious tracts – "The Path to Salvation" and "Human Vanity is the World's Natural Sin." On the other hand, Chibás devoured plenty of worldly literature as

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[101] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Al Pueblo de Cuba," *Prensa Libre,* April 30, 1949: reprinted in Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 605.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Machado typically offered freedom to prisoners on the condition that they abandon the country. Batista's offer almost certainly had similar strings attached.
[106] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 606.
[107] Ibid.

well, including verses from the 19th century Spanish poets Gustavo de Núñez Arce and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, a biography of Alexander the Great, *Sugar and Population in the Antilles* by Ramiro Guerra, one of Cuba's foremost historians, and of course, the 1940 constitution. In addition, letters of support poured in from all reaches. Many echoed the sentiments of Victor Fuentes Castillo, the *Ortodoxo* president of Yateras, in Oriente province, who wrote, "Being in the *Castillo del Príncipe* is no affront for revolutionaries; we've been there before, many of us worshipping at the altar of Liberty and showing our contempt for tyrants."[108] Chibás mostly read during the evening, since he was allowed to receive visitors before 6 p.m. His secretary, Conchita Fernández, arrived on a regular basis to take instructions and keep him supplied with the cigarettes he smoked constantly. Francisco Carone often dropped by to discuss legal strategies and other *Ortodoxos* dropped by to consult on matters dealing with the party. For example, the PPC planned a Saturday evening rally in Havana's *Parque Central* under the banner of, "Bandits are on the Street and Chibás is in Jail." However, the interior ministry was loath to grant permission and dragged its feet – leading José Pardo Llada, Guido García Inclán and Juan Amador to announce on their radio shows that the event would be canceled. Nonetheless, party members who spoke with Chibás were urged to press forward. They did and the government relented at the last minute. Despite contradictory signals, the gathering would up attracting more people than the famous May Day parade 24 hours later. Chibás also saw a steady stream of journalists along with a record number of visitors, who arrived by the hundreds

[108] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 10, Expediente 331, ANC.

every Sunday.[109] In their presence, he cultivated an assiduously positive outlook but privately, in letters to old friends, the *Ortodoxo* leader showed hints of melancholy. Writing to his university pal José Chelala Aguilera, he lamented that, "There are only a few of us left from the fight against Machado, because many of the 'crazy kids' from that era have already been assassinated, while others have assassinated themselves by betraying the ideals of the 'Generation of 1930' and renouncing their pasts."[110]

If Chibás was occasionally blue, he was also heartened by a slew of encouraging developments. Having always closely followed his portrayal in the press, Chibás was gratified to learn that most columnists and commentators backed him. Aside from his usual media allies like Miguel Ángel Quevedo and Sergio Carbó, Chibás was also supported by some longtime opponents. Notable among these was Ramón Vasconcelos, the minister without portfolio, who stated it was a "brutality" to "make an example" of a leader followed by "300,000 souls" while bloodthirsty gangsters enjoyed impunity.[111] Even more encouraging was the public reaction to those who were hardened against Chibás. Raúl Lorenzo attacked the *Ortodoxo* leader in such scathing terms during his show on *Unión Radio* that the station was deluged with angry phone calls and telegrams.[112] The fury was quelled only when José Pardo Llada, who hosted the popular program "*La Palabra*" (The Word),

[109] Luis Conte Agüero counted 824 visitors on May 1; 737 on May 8; 827 on May 15; 987 on May 22 and 761 on May 29. See Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 620.
[110] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 88, ANC.
[111] "En Cuba, Política: 'Una Amnistía Votada por el Parlamento,'" *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 61. The approval of Ramón Vasconcelos was also important because he had recently been named director of *Alerta*.
[112] Raúl Lorenzo was an erstwhile Marxist who subsequently became commerce minister during the presidency of Fulgencio Batista. Aside from his show on *Unión Radio,* he also published a regular column in *Bohemia.*

announced that the station did not agree with Lorenzo's opinions. Anecdotal evidence suggesting the people were behind Chibás was bolstered by more scientific proof on May 6, when *Bohemia* hit the newsstands. According to a new survey, 93.82 percent of Cubans were aware that Chibás had been found guilty by the Urgency Court while 76.01 percent believed he had been wrongly convicted.[113] Further, 52.39 percent felt Chibás' accusations against the judges were true and 66.53 percent thought him worthy of a pardon.[114] This unequivocal rebuke almost certainly influenced Prío's decision, taken after a cabinet meeting the same day, to reduce electricity prices to their 1943 levels.

That week's issue of *Bohemia* also served up unpleasant reading for Fulgencio Batista, although by now he knew what to expect when May 8 rolled around. On that day, a group of ex revolutionaries habitually descended upon the 18th century El Morillo fortress, in Matanzas province, to commemorate the death of Antonio Guiteras. Chibás, who regularly attended these processions, would invariably remind listeners to his radio show that Guiteras died an impoverished martyr while his murderer, Batista, lived free and swathed in riches. This year, Chibás would not be visiting El Morillo nor could he offer his annual live obloquy of the former general. At the same time, Chibás considered Batista more deserving of censure than ever – particularly as he once again resided in Cuba and was in the process of forming a new political party. Hence, Chibás delivered his latest

[113] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo Opina Sobre la Condena de Chibás," *Bohemia,* May 8, 1948: 52. Interestingly, a gender gap persisted in this question as well. For instance, 71.77 percent of men were convinced Chibás should have been acquitted whereas the number for women was 82.97 percent.
[114] Ibid.

vituperative attack on Batista by means of Cuba's most popular magazine. Entitled, "My Homage to Guiteras," the article briefly extolled the man who in many ways represented the revolutionary ideal for Chibás through a combination of incorruptibility and willingness to "immolate his life" for Cuba.[115] Switching from victim to executioner, Chibás argued Batista was unfit for politics because he had committed every imaginable abuse during his seven years as strongman and four years as president. Hence, he lacked the "moral authority" to address the nation's ills, including murders (he had sent plenty to the morgue himself), embezzlement (a Batista specialty), the lack of a formal budget (he had ruled without one), sleazy military men (he was the very embodiment of one), bloating the government payroll with friends and allies (a forte of his finance minister Anselmo Alliegro), abridgement of press freedom (Batista had closed unfriendly radio stations and persecuted individual journalists), failure to pass the 1940 constitution's complimentary laws (this had never been a priority), the black market (a phenomenon which began during his time in power) and last, but not least, the island's less than perfect democracy (Batista, after all, had engineered the impeachment of President Miguel Mariano Gómez in 1936, "managed" his successor, Francisco Laredo Brú and imposed Carlos Saladrigas as his coalition's presidential candidate in 1944).[116]

Chibás believed Carlos Prío was discreetly helping Batista as a means to "place obstacles" in the *Ortodoxos'* path.[117] More conspicuously, the president shut

[115] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Mi Homenaje a Guiteras," *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 56.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

down Chibás' radio show, hosted by Manuel Bisbé and Roberto Agramonte, in his absence. The communication ministry, offering the flimsiest of pretexts, asserted the *Ortodoxo* leader's time slot must be sold to someone else if he personally could not use it. This was part of a larger assault against unflattering press coverage and demonstrated Prío's scant tolerance for public criticism. Earlier, the government had closed *Radio* COCO for three days after the station aired a scandalous interview between Néstor Piñango and the outlaw Orlando León Lemus. From his secret hideout, the red headed gangster readily described his links with Carlos and Antonio Prío, which dated to the mid 1930s and continued still. The relationship was both deeply personal and highly convenient for both parties. For example, *El Colorado* had lent his support during the *Auténtico* registration drive of 1947 in the president's native province of Pinar del Río. He also provided a contingent of toughs during Prío's political standoff with Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who was backed by UIR roughnecks.[118] In return, Prío and his brothers protected Lemus from the authorities even though he was one of the most wanted men in Cuba.[119] Perhaps fearing this arrangement could one day break down, *El Colorado* expressed his desire to run for a senate seat and therefore seal his impunity for good. Embarrassing as these remarks were, Piñango's own observations caused an even greater uproar. Among other things, the reporter noted that he had been driven to the meeting in a National Police squad car and upon arriving saw armed soldiers

[118] According to Lemus, other *Auténtico* patrons of the UIR included Diego Vicente Tejera, Interior Minister Rubén de León, and Congressman Guillermo Ara.
[119] After the Orfila massacre, for example, *El Colorado* took refuge in the home of Paco Prío. As a senator, his residence was off limits to the police.

guarding the location – which appeared to be a *finca* just outside the city.[120] Río privately fumed that he would "finish" with Cuba's gangsters but only journalists and the media felt his immediate wrath.[121] Aside from suspending *Radio* COCO, Piñango was apprehended and held incommunicado until he recanted his comments about police and military involvement. Just before his release from the police station, which was two blocks from the Urgency Court were Chibás had been convicted and a stone's throw from Havana's seaside promenade, Piñango offered what sounded like a rehearsed declaration to fellow reporters. "The authorities," he said, "have treated me with full respect for press freedom and an evident desire to bring to a close an era of crime in Cuba that, once finished, will resound to everyone's benefit."[122]

Even if this were true, the administration was on shakier ground after police conducting a "search" ended up sacking the offices of *Tiempo en Cuba.* The weekly newspaper, run by *El Colorado's* associate Rolando Masferrer, was a logical target for investigation. However, the officers who destroyed, overturned and scattered everything in their wake aggravated the increasingly frayed nerves of Cuba's journalists. *Bohemia* published a photo of the grisly scene and asked, "Is this the new way of doing things?"[123] Of course, Masferrer was no run of the mill reporter and represented a less than ideal poster boy for press freedom. In the chamber of

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[120] Many, including Chibás, believed this *finca* was the property of Liberal Representative Manuel Benítez, who had headed the National Police during Batista's presidency and was a former military chief of Pinar del Río province.
[121] "En Cuba, La Capital: Marejada Antidemocrática," *Bohemia,* May 15, 1949: supplement, 2.
[122] Ibid. Once free, Piñango immediately went into hiding, as *El Colorado* and his cronies assumed he had furnished details of their whereabouts to the police. A *Bohemia* reporter added with foreboding that the gangster's "distrustful" and "determined" friends were already looking for him.
[123] "Una foto que parece de otra época," *Bohemia,* May 15, 1949: 64.

representatives, the *Auténtico* labor leader Emilio Surí Castillo pointed at Masferrer and yelled, "We need a dictatorship that will eliminate guys like this!"[124] Surí Castillo then requested Masferrer's immediate expulsion from the *Auténtico* parliamentary committee. However, he was mistaken in thinking gangsters could so easily be separated from the party. Rafael del Busto recalled that during the most recent *Auténtico* rally in *Parque Central*, his ticket to the grandstand had been stamped by none other than the elusive Policarpo Soler.[125] For his part, Masferrer explained what many already knew and the rest did not care to admit. "Gangsterism exists for political reasons," he said. "Almost all political bosses arm their groups and use them for electoral purposes. It's not possible to ask favors of them one day and persecute them the next."[126] He added that the best way to disarm Cuba's gangsters would be to arrange an agreement with Miguelito Suárez Fernández and National Police chief José Manuel Caramés – both of whom maintained ties to the rival UIR. Instead, Carlos Prío issued a decree creating the Group for the Repression of Subversive Activities or GRAS after its Spanish initials. This was to be an anti-gangster outfit commanded by the army. Though fears abounded that he was resurrecting Batista's hated Military Intelligence Service, which was disbanded in 1944, the president could no longer rely on gangster infested security forces. Prío compared the situation to that of a patient who must submit to a risky operation in order to save his life and added, "If nothing else works, I'll use the same methods

[124] "En Cuba, Cámara: Inmunidad y Gangsterismo," *Bohemia,* May 15, 1949: supplement, 6.
[125] Whereas most gangsters donned sobriquets, Policarpo Soler used a *nom de guerre*. His real name was Francisco Herrera Alonso.
[126] "En Cuba, Cámara: Inmunidad y Gangsterismo," supplement, 6.

against these people that were once used against me."[127] Thus, Prío cast his lot with Genovevo Pérez Dámera. Masferrer would have to be content with repairing his broken printing press.

While Prío turned the screws on Cuba's gangsters, Communications Minister Carlos Maristany relentlessly attempted to pry Chibás from his soapbox. On May 15, CMQ director Goar Mestre denounced government demands that he cancel his contract with Chibás. After suspending the *Ortodoxo* leader's show the previous week, Maristany urged Mestre to wash his hands of broadcasts that were "harmful and disturbing to the nation."[128] When he refused, Maristany ordered the radio frequencies to be changed in Pinar del Río and Camagüey in order to block CMQ and *Unión Radio*, which featured the popular *Ortodoxo* commentator José Pardo Llada, from reaching those areas. Mestre reminded the *Auténticos* that they had wholeheartedly endorsed Chibás when the party was in the opposition and his criticisms were directed at President Batista. Currently, many of the same figures who had applauded Chibás and the impartiality of CMQ were sworn enemies of both. Miguel Ángel Quevedo griped in *Bohemia* that Capestany was a "Torquemada" who considered himself "owner and lord" of Cuba's airwaves even though the communications ministry was meant to be "purely technical."[129] In his weekly political comic strip called "The Little Cuban King," A.R. drew Liborio, the island's everyman, speaking into a microphone with Prío looking on in the background. At one point, Prío pulls a drawstring and the microphone disappears through a trap

[127] "En Cuba, Palacio: 'Es Imposible Aguantar Eso,'" *Bohemia,* May 8, 1949: 78.
[128] "Una sinuosa maniobra contra la libertad de expresión," *Bohemia,* May 22, 1949: 71.
[129] Ibid.

door. Eying the place where the microphone used to be, Liborio asks, "Is this cordiality or censorship?"[130]

Government pressure notwithstanding, Chibás' show was allowed to continue and Manuel Bisbé reprised his role as surrogate. Rather than speaking himself, he read a statement written by Chibás which took the form of an open letter to the president. The *Ortodoxo* chief repeated his opposition to a pardon or provisional release, declaring he would only accept an amnesty voted by the senate and chamber of representatives. To those who believed his stubbornness was crazy, Chibás allowed he was an "abnormal case in a political climate where normal involved robbing, killing and selling drugs."[131] He also reminded Prío that his political slogans remained the same ones both of them had embraced as young revolutionaries:

> War against embezzlers of the treasury, corrupters of the people and gunmen! Continue the struggle for national liberation! Let's clean up the country's political culture! Freedom of the press! For a judiciary free of government interference! Down with the Urgency Court! No more suspension of radio broadcasts! No Military Intelligence Service! Down with the lackeys of foreign monopolies! Down with abusive electricity prices, the Cuban Telephone Company and the consortium of overseas oil companies (Standard, Shell and Sinclair)! No more sellouts and gangsters![132]

As luck would have it, the last of these catchphrases proved especially timely and not only in terms of political point scoring. Some days following the broadcast, a group of prisoners who had been sentenced for gangster related activities began planning to assassinate Chibás after rumors circulated that the *Ortodoxo* leader's

[130] A.R, "El Reyecito Criollo," *Bohemia,* May 22, 1949: 59.
[131] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 100, ANC.
[132] Ibid., 101.

presence among them was keeping the administration from granting a blanket amnesty. However, Gustavo Ortiz Fáez, the young agronomy student who murdered Manolo Castro, caught wind of the plot and notified Chibás – who defiantly exclaimed, "None of this worries me as I've never been the least bit afraid of dying."[133] Chibás added that if he were assassinated, he wished to clarify, for "historical" purposes, that the government was responsible.[134] As for Ortiz, he had not tipped off Chibás for altruistic reasons. He was a UIR member with close links to Fidel Castro. The latter was not only an *Ortodoxo*, he had also formed a youth splinter group loosely associated with the party called *Acción Radical Ortodoxo* (ARO).[135] Aside from publishing a newsletter and commenting on internal PPC matters, the organization was a stomping ground for the young and violently inclined, many of whom were university students affiliated with UIR. This crowd no doubt horrified those *Ortodoxos* who boasted of the party's "immaculate rank and file" but in this instance, at least, it may have saved Chibás' life.[136]

In truth, *Ortodoxo* purity proved maddeningly elusive as provincial party leaders and section heads continued to ferret out traitors and other undesirables. Throughout 1949, Chibás was regaled with accounts of unworthy or unsatisfactory partisans. Gloria Cuadras, who belonged to the Women's Wing, informed him a certain Zoila Perozo had been ejected for "campaigning in favor of Carlos Prío" and

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[133] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 616.
[134] Ibid., 617.
[135] The official young person's organization of the PPC was the *Sección Juvenil* (Youth Section), which counted chapters throughout Cuba. At the same time, there were numerous offshoots. For example, the rally against the Cuban Electric Company in Matanzas was organized in part by the *Union Revolucionaria Estudiantil.*
[136] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, 298, ANC. The statement was from Fidel Rocha Alfonso, a Youth Section leader from Esmeralda, but many *Ortodoxos* used identical language in referring to their party.

"trying to corrupt the consciences of some *compañeras*, who civically denounced her."[137] Of course, the zeal with which such figures hunted the party's malefactors was matched only by their personal devotion to Chibás. Cuadras concluded that, "All my sacrifices, all my efforts, all the minutes of my life are for the PPC and its honorable boss: my brother more than my friend, he who will bring a happy resolution to the great work for which many of our friends have shed blood or died."[138] In a similar albeit less florid fashion, the *Ortodoxo* municipal chief of Cárdenas sent Chibás a list of assemblymen who had crossed enemy lines during the presidential elections. According to some, such measures were not nearly sufficient. For example, the Youth Section of Sagua la Grande, in Las Villas province, demanded the expulsion of *Ortodoxo* congressman Félix Martín after he and fellow legislators voted themselves a raise in salary.

While *Ortodoxo* diehards schemed to dislodge real and perceived recreants, the *Auténticos* purveyed drama on a grander and more public scale. The crux of the issue was Guillermo Alonso Pujol, the Republican chief and intriguer par excellence who also happened to be Cuba's vice president. His outsized influence had long been a source of discomfort for Carlos Prío and the president aimed dilute his power by negotiating a pact with the Democrats. He entrusted the details to his close confidant Tony Varona, but the prime minister was loath to offend "*el Gordo*" (a nickname he shared with the similarly obese General Genovevo Pérez Dámera), who he hoped would support his presidential candidacy in 1952. With no results forthcoming, Prío asked Miguelito Suárez Fernández to head the discussions

[137] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 300, ANC.
[138] Ibid.

instead. Although the senate president was no great admirer of Prío, he was happy to undermine the Republican leader, saying, "I would rather deal with the devil than Alonso Pujol."[139] By May 13, the two sides had struck a bargain. Not only had the Democrats agreed to join the government, they also accepted a dissident faction of anti Pujol Republicans into their party – thereby damaging the vice president even further. Suárez Fernández was ecstatic, telling a *Bohemia* reporter it was necessary to act against the Pujol's "incessant plotting."[140] Certainly, Republican leverage over Prío had been substantially reduced. Moreover, the administration's congressional majority was now decisive. This was paramount for a president who took the semi-parliamentarian system seriously. Further, a handful of previously contrarian voices such as Democratic senator Antonio Martínez Fraga would now serve the government.

Prío was also in a stronger position to obstruct the amnesty law for Chibás proposed in the senate by Pelayo Cuervo and Federico Fernández Casas. Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who had earlier vowed to shepherd the measure, discreetly stalled while he and Prío worked together to lure the Democrats. When the amnesty was finally considered, the *Auténtico* majority leader Lomberto Díaz demanded the murderers of Aracelio Iglesias, the Communist organizer of Cuba's dockworkers, be covered as well.[141] In an interview for *Diario de la Marina* (whose editor, Gastón Baquero was one of the few who agreed with Chibás' sentence), Díaz explained the government was against "personalized" laws and any amnesty would therefore have

[139] "En Cuba, Política: 'Ha Sido una Batalla contra Alonso Pujol,'" *Bohemia,* May 22, 1949: 75.
[140] Ibid., 80.
[141] Aracelio Iglesias was general secretary of the Union of Laborers and Stevedores.

to be "general."[142] Closer to the truth was Prío's steadfast conviction that "nobody will remember" Chibás after six months in jail. However, the Liberal chief Eduardo Suárez Rivas astutely noted that Chibás had become a "permanent topic" in the street.[143] Even without his radio show, the *Ortodoxo* leader counted a regular platform in *Bohemia*. In an article published on May 29, he mocked Prío's reputed cordiality – writing that the president's warmth was reserved primarily for gunmen and embezzlers. Referring to the latter, Chibás observed that, "All of these *señores* live very comfortably in their regal palaces, in luxury hotels in New York or Europe, on the beaches of Florida or on their ill gotten *fincas*, where they get together in happy camaraderie with the Urgency Court judges who convicted me for defending the people against the foreign electricity monopoly."[144] Alluding to a photo in the previous week's issue of *Bohemia*, which showed Carlos Prío, Agriculture Minister Virgilio Pérez, Genovevo Pérez Dámera and Judge José Cabezas enjoying themselves on a country estate, Chibás added that he had been incarcerated so as not to "disturb the tranquility of their digestion."[145]

In addition, Chibás maintained his habit of answering those who disagreed with him in public forums. For instance, when former justice minister José Agustín Martínez wrote in *Prensa Libre* that Chibás' legal strategy seemed wanting, he replied that his was not a "regular case."[146] Rather, he stated that,

> We have tried to stir the sleeping conscience of the Cuban people. If the knock has not been sufficiently strong to rouse them, we will

[142] "En Cuba, Amnistía: Un Proceso Encubierto de Inhabilitación," *Bohemia,* May 29, 1949: 57.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Eduardo R. Chibás, "De Batista a Carlos Prío," *Bohemia,* May 29, 1949: 81.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibas. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 101, ANC.

> redouble our efforts and sacrifices. They will not be in vain. We have faith in the noble and great destiny of our country, which occupies the gateway to the New World, the best strategic position in history. In the worst case, the day will arrive in fifty or a hundred years when others more fortunate than us will be able to wake the people. No one will be able to take away from us the glory of having been their precursors.[147]

While Chibás' arguments were unlikely to sway detractors, the political cost of keeping him behind bars was becoming manifest even to those who were close to the president. On May 29, Prío's public relations director René Fiallo published an open letter urging him to remove Chibás from prison "as soon as possible" because helping "the most insignificant little devil of the opposition" achieve martyrdom would be foolish.[148] Just over two days later, on the first anniversary of his election, Prío relented. He authorized a conditional pardon, effective on June 4, and a trio of lawyers informed the reluctant Chibás that he had no choice but to accept. A self-promoter to the last, he scratched out the words "Chibás was imprisoned here for combating the electric octopus" on the wall of his cell.[149] The *Ortodoxo* leader also gave free rein to another of his manias, sending his faithful secretary Conchita Fernández to bring him a pair of socks that matched his tie in the minutes before he was due to be released.

When the gates were opened at midnight, Chibás was effusively greeted by a multitude of thousands – some of whom immediately hoisted him on their shoulders. The surrounding area shook with chants of "Shame vs. Money" and "Shame and Truth." As the throng accompanied Chibás to his car, the nearby

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[147] Ibid., 102.
[148] René Fiallo, "Carta Abierta al Dr. Carlos Prío Socarrás," *Bohemia*, May 29, 1949: 87.
[149] "En Cuba, Política: ¡En libertad el penado 981!, *Bohemia,* June 12, 1949: 76.

thoroughfares of Carlos III and Infanta were so clogged with people that public transportation was paralyzed. By the time Eddy arrived home, his *guayabera* was in tatters from the many adherents who had been anxious to touch him. The next day Chibás addressed an equally ebullient crowd, composed of all social classes, in *Parque Central.* Describing these scenes, Francisco Ichaso wrote, "We are, without a doubt, in a mystical presence similar to that once aroused in the people by Grau."[150] He added that Chibás, like his erstwhile mentor, possessed certain "magical elements" and inspired a "quasi religious fervor."[151] These intangible qualities were felt with particular keenness by Cuba's youth. Thus, it seemed apropos for 23 year old José Pardo Llada to warm up the *Parque Central* gathering while Chibás was flanked not by old friends, party bosses or even his lawyer but by two other *Ortodoxos* in their early 20s – Orlando Castro and Natasha Mella. Chibás counted this too in common with Grau, who had galvanized university students (such as himself and Carlos Prío) during the late 1920s. Nor was Ichaso the only one to see this parallel. Fulgencio Batista had also tabbed Chibás as the inheritor of "Grau-style messianism."[152] But the ex general represented an even more pernicious paradigm, that of military rule.

[150] Ibid., 77.
[151] Ibid.
[152] "En Cuba, Política: Batista y el Nuevo Partido," *Bohemia,* August 1, 1948: 56.

Chapter 7

"The Cave of Ali Baba and His 40,000 Thieves"

Carlos Prío was less worried about Grau-style messianism than by Grau himself. After lowering the temperature on his feud with Chibás and taming the untrustworthy Guillermo Alonso Pujol, he sought to make amends with the man who was perhaps his most formidable political opponent.[1] Hence, Prío summoned José Manuel Alemán from Florida to help arrange a meeting with Grau. Alemán arrived on a Pan American flight from Miami, dressed immaculately in white and reinforcing his opulent reputation by leaving generous tips for those airport employees lucky enough to serve him. Nor did the regal gestures end there. The ex education minister, who remained Cuba's premier political moneyman, also sent flowers to the wives of leading senators and congressmen. As a result, Alemán not only received the president at his *finca* outside Havana but also hosted a number of eager lawmakers – including Miguelito Suárez Fernández, Lincoln Rodón, Tony Varona, Eduardo Suárez Rivas and Guillermo Alonso Pujol. Alemán's warmest welcome, however, awaited him in Grau residence, where he was fervently embraced by his former patron and enabler. After a series of consultations, the

[1] Cuban presidents generally showed scant inclination for retirement after serving their terms. For example, the Liberal José Miguel Gómez (1909-1913) subsequently ran for president in 1920 only to be defeated by Alfredo Zayas in an election marred by fraud. The Conservative Mario García Menocal (1913-1921) attempted to regain office in 1925 but was defeated by Gerardo Machado. Meanwhile, Fulgencio Batista (1940-1944) was currently constructing a new party to support another bid for the presidency and Ramón Grau San Martín (1933, 1944-1948) was impatiently waiting until he could run again. Grau's control of the *Auténtico* party machinery mirrored that of Gómez, who dominated the Liberals until his death in 1921 and Menocal, who similarly ruled the Conservatives and their successor party, the Democrats, until his demise in 1940.

summit was fixed for June 13 at "Rancho Alegre," the *finca* of Genovevo Pérez Dámera.[2]

On the appointed day, Prío nervously approached Grau – ready to hug the man who had bestowed the presidency on him but resented any display of independence. Grau, however, was in no mood for emotional gestures and stopped him short, saying, "What's going on Carlos? How are you?" Prío began to explain some of their previous difficulties but Grau waved them aside. "No. Nothing of the past," he said. "It's better not to speak about these things. What's done is done. We're here to discuss the present and the future." Alemán, who was standing nearby, added, "I came here to reestablish party unity. If we want to remain in power, we must stay together in order to win in 1952."[3]

Having dispensed with the formalities, Grau seized control of the conversation. Specifically, he felt Prío needed to devise a public works program to create jobs. "As you know," said Grau, "the next sugar harvest will be disappointing. This means public revenues will be greatly reduced. I believe, Carlos, that you must cover this reduction and the best way to do so is though public works. Moreover, our government's success owes a great deal to rising salaries. As long as they keep going up, the purchasing power of consumers will too."[4] Rather than considering this advice, Prío gently pointed out that the term "our government" was a misnomer since he was now in charge. Grau, the ex professor, responded as if he were

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[2] Nearly every Cuban politician and military figure of note owned a *finca.* Prío's favored estate was "La Chata." Miguelito Suárez Fernández owned "La Tranquilidad." Alemán, of course, had purchased "América," the former country refuge of José Miguel Gómez. Grau bucked the trend somewhat by exchanging his comfortable Vedado residence for swankier digs on Miramar's *Quinta Avenida.*
[3] "En Cuba, Política: 'El Lugar no me Importa,'" *Bohemia,* June 19, 1949: 67.
[4] Ibid.

addressing a petulant student. "When I talk of our government," he said, "in reality I am referring to you. You shouldn't forget that I was only the president while you were more involved in day to day operations as labor secretary and prime minister."[5] Following this enigmatic answer, which ridiculed Prío's attempts to distance himself from Grau's administration, the president proceeded to hold his tongue and listen politely in the name of party unity. This was clearly a shrewd strategy as Grau left the premises in high spirits. Speaking to some supporters later on, he pronounced the interview a "success," and deemed himself a "reverse Machiavelli" because of his knack for uniting rather than dividing.[6] Grau was so pleased, in fact, that he also compared his virtues to those of Hamlet and even the mythical Prometheus.[7]

POLEMICS AND DUELS

Alemán's return to Cuba was a boon for most journalists who dusted off old rants against administrative corruption and famished schoolchildren deprived of their breakfasts. On the other hand, Humberto Rubio of *Pueblo* surprised fellow media types by lauding Alemán as a model citizen who used education ministry jobs to lower unemployment. Rubio even likened *inciso K* to the Home Relief Bureau devised by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Great Depression. This was too much for Jorge Mañach, who kindled a feud with a *Diario de la Marina* column

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Chibás had a similar fondness for bombast, perhaps as a consequence of Grau's influence. Most recently, the *Ortodoxo* leader had described himself as a latter day Galileo during his struggle against the Cuban Electric Company.

entitled, "Dialogue between Cynicism and Outrage." Mañach expressed "bitter anger" at Alemán for the "many millions" he embezzled as a public servant, particularly given his responsibility to educate the "Cuban people."[8] Perhaps no one was more acutely aware of Alemán's homecoming than Chibás but the *Ortodoxo* leader first had to settle some unfinished business. Shortly before his imprisonment, Chibás had agreed to a duel with José Manuel Casanova. On the morning of June 9, the two men touched sabers at a *finca* owned by the tobacco growing Placensia family – whose patriarch was sympathetic to Casanova. Chibás had initially resisted the idea of settling his dispute with Casanova on the so-called "field of honor" given his opponent's advanced age.[9] The fact that neither man incurred any wounds was most likely no accident. At any rate, Chibás had scarcely retired this dispute when he became embroiled in another with René Fiallo. Prío's public relations director initially chivvied Chibás for having reacted ungratefully to his pardon. Fiallo also chided Chibás for renewing his claim, shortly after leaving prison, that Prío owed his election "exclusively" to vote buying, *inciso K*, and *doña* Pastora (Madame Pastora) – the term Cubans used to refer to money, ill-gotten or otherwise.[10] He then asked, tongue firmly in cheek, whether the only "valid" and "honorable" votes were those cast for the *Ortodoxo* party candidate. His most damaging charge was that Chibás was a hypocrite. He noted that Chibás had stood exultant on the balcony of the presidential palace in June of 1946, after the *Auténticos* had triumphed in that year's mid-term elections, seemingly untroubled

[8] "En Cuba, Política: 'El Lugar no me Importa,'" *Bohemia,* June 19, 1949: 68.
[9] In fact, Casanova would die just over six months after the duel, on December 22, 1949 – 10 days short of his 66th birthday.
[10] René Fiallo, "Pecadores, Apóstoles y Hombres," *Bohemia,* June 12, 1949: 72.

that the same tactics he now denounced had been employed. The most irritating passage for Chibás, however, was Fiallo's insistence that "Carlos Prío is conducting the best government that is humanly possible right now in Cuba, with the best intentions of any Cuban president in recent memory and the cleanest personal conduct one could ever demand from a chief executive."[11]

Chibás replied that, "The good intentions of President Prío and his clean personal conduct" had not precluded him from visiting José Manuel Alemán, who he dubbed "the biggest embezzler in contemporary history." Rather than confronting the "great crook" and "demanding that he take responsibility" for his "unprecedented" robberies, Prío, "to the shame of all Cubans" embraced him cordially and welcomed him back to the island. The *Ortodoxo* leader added that, "Barely had the king of thieves landed in Cuba when all the principal figures of the government, beginning with the president of the republic, the prime minister and president of the congress ran like crazy to greet and embrace him, in a desperate race to see who would arrive first. "The marathon," wrote Chibás, "was won by the president of the republic."[12] With that, the stage was set for a new polemic. This played out in the pages of *Bohemia,* where they took turns hurling accusations at each other. On July 3, Fiallo allowed that the president's reunion with Alemán and Grau had "perhaps" been a "weakness or error."[13] Nevertheless, he asserted that Cubans were less interested in such gestures than the actual substance of Prío's government. Fiallo noted that the president had made three significant

[11] Ibid., 93.
[12] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Pecadores, Apóstatas y Ladrones," *Bohemia,* June 19, 1949: 81.
[13] René Fiallo, "Los Sepulcros Blanqueados," *Bohemia,* July 3, 1949: 81.

appointments since the meeting took place and none of the new job holders were creatures of Alemán or Grau. Raúl Roa, Cuba's new culture director was a respected University of Havana professor and eminent former revolutionary. Meanwhile, Carlos Ramírez Corría, the recently installed health minister and Segundo Curti, who took over the defense ministry were both close associates of Prío. Fiallo concluded that Prío was prone to mistakes, but his sensitivity to public opinion assured him these would never be irreparable. By contrast, he deemed Chibás a messianic demagogue whose party was endlessly obsessed with "ostracizing" and "excommunicating" those it considered unworthy. Fiallo claimed this guaranteed "audiences full of fanatics" but would never result in a national majority.[14] He also referred to Chibás' study of the Bible during his recent incarceration and likened the *Ortodoxo* chief's self-righteousness to that of the Pharisees. Fiallo then recalled that Jesus pardoned adulterers, the men who sank a crown of thorns onto his head, the soldiers who nailed him to the cross, those who mocked his martyrdom and even the repentant thief crucified next to him but never forgave the egotistical Pharisees who believed themselves in sole possession of truth and virtue.

Chibás had read the good book carefully while behind bars and was delighted to engage Fiallo on Biblical terrain. He observed that Prío's followers harbored abundant sympathy for the thieves crucified next to Jesus but pointed out that only the remorseful one was saved. The embezzlers of Prío's administration, those who spoke of rectifying previous ills but continued to rob and embrace José Manuel Alemán more closely resembled the evil thief who was condemned. "Following the

[14] Ibid., 90.

example of Christ," wrote Chibás, "I will also not pardon evil thieves."[15] The *Ortodoxo* leader left little doubt as to whom he considered unsalvageable. As evidence of presidential malfeasance, he offered Carlos Prío's latest real estate acquisitions on Havana's outskirts, including the *fincas* "La Chata" and "La Altura." On the latter, he alleged Prío used construction materials from the public works ministry to build roads, two regal mansions, a private wharf and a personal airport. Chibás further charged that Prío had prepared the attacks against him that appeared under Fiallo's byline and the publicity director was happy to comply since he had been "born servile" and "sold himself" to the president.[16]

An inflamed and exasperated Fiallo answered in kind on July 17. As evidence of Chibás' own "servility" he offered up the *Ortodoxo* leader's contradictory dealings with Federico Fernández Casas. In April of 1946, Chibás had denounced Fernández Casas as an "oppressor of the *campesino,*" a "land thief" and "persecutor of needy veterans of the independence war."[17] This was after the sugar magnate demolished the hut and destroyed the crops of Eusebio Maceo, a peasant from Oriente province. These actions took on added significance as the man also happened to be a relative of Antonio Maceo, a revered general from Cuba's independence war. In June of 1947, Chibás seemed to reverse course, telling Fernández Casas in a letter that "destiny" had placed him in a position to "harmoniously" resolve Cuba's "*campesino* problem."[18] Fiallo contended that this turnabout was due to the "many thousands of

[15] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Expulsaremos del templo los mercaderes y ladrones," *Bohemia,* July 1o, 1949: reprinted in Conte Agüero, 626.
[16] René Fiallo, "El Mal Ladrón," *Bohemia,* July 17, 1949: 79.
[17] Ibid. Chibás censured Fernández Casas on his radio show and also in print. Fiallo here cites an article Chibás wrote for *El Crisol* on April 3, 1946.
[18] Ibid.

pesos" Fernández Casas could provide for Chibás' fledgling party and his presidential candidacy. However, the attempt to paint Fernández Casas as an *Ortodoxo* version of José Manuel Alemán was marred by the fact that he no longer belonged to the party. Moreover, even though Chibás was not above expedience the public knew he spent weekends in his Havana apartment writing radio speeches while Cuba's top political and military figures luxuriated in country estates. In short, this was not the sort of argument the *Auténticos* were equipped to win. Fiallo, though, had two trump cards. First, he repeated the charge, initially leveled by Arturo Sánchez Arango in 1933, that Chibás had lived a comfortable exile in New York during the late 1920s and early 1930s thanks to his father's money but had been too mean-spirited to help fellow expatriates with fewer means. Sánchez Arango, in fact, blamed Chibás for the death of the student revolutionary Gabriel Barceló, who in his estimation contracted tuberculosis from being forced to wander Manhattan's wintry avenues.[19] Fiallo, however, merely asked why Chibás had refused to share his "opulence" with émigré *compañeros.*[20] The second accusation, which Fiallo asserted would "definitively shut [Chibás'] mouth," also dated from the 1930s. Specifically, he stated that Chibás' story of having been shot by an unknown assailant just before elections to the constituent assembly in 1939 was a lie. The version believed by the *Ortodoxo* leader's enemies and now propounded by Fiallo was that Chibás had wounded himself as a publicity stunt and claimed he was

[19] Lela Sánchez Echeverría, *La polémica infinita: Aureliano vs. Chibás y viceversa* (Bogotá: Quebecor World, 2004), 50.
[20] René Fiallo, "El Mal Ladrón," 87.

"never in any danger of dying."[21] He added that, "Everyone has taken notice of what extremes Chibás is capable of going to in order to assure a political objective. Faced with this grotesque spectacle everyone must arrive at the same conclusion: Chibás is a born clown, a born hypocrite, a born cheat – in other words: he was born vile."[22]

Eddy did not bother to pen a response. Rather, he sent Eric Agüero and Beto Saumell to discuss terms of a duel two days after the article appeared. This turned out to be a complicated matter. For one thing, Fiallo was unfit to clash swords or sabers as his arms were beset with cystic tumors. According to protocol, Fiallo submitted to a medical examination which confirmed the limited use of his limbs. During the second round of negotiations, one of Fiallo's representatives withdrew and was replaced by Raúl Roa, Cuba's new culture director. Both sides agreed to pistols as the weapon of choice but did not concur on the exact type until a third meeting on July 22. After that, further wrangling ensued over whether a Spanish or French dueling book should be consulted. During a forth meeting the following evening, at the Havana Yacht Club, Fiallo's seconds were replaced by the legislators Néstor Carbonell and Francisco Cairol. This was a common tactic given that dueling was illegal and lawmakers enjoyed immunity from prosecution. Finally, on July 24, Chibás and his adversary met at the *finca* "Milagros" outside Havana. The *Ortodoxo* leader violated the laboriously crafted rules straight away by loading one of the guns and firing a test shot into a tree. After a spate of head-shaking and hand wringing, everyone settled down and the duel proved uneventful. Each man took aim twice and no injuries were sustained.

[21] Ibid., 87-88.
[22] Ibid., 88.

Tony Varona was the next government official to try his hand at provoking Chibás. On October 12, he published an article in *El Mundo* entitled, "Chibás, the High Priest of Scandal and Intrigue." The piece was less concerned with sketching political differences than getting under the *Ortodoxo* leader's skin through a mixture of epithets and family bashing. Chibás, however, did not take the bait right away. Instead, he dissembled shock and disappointment in the next day's edition of *El Mundo*, writing:

> As a Cuban, I feel ashamed by the miserable spectacle that the prime minister of my country has offered today, with his infamous declarations, which are a product of the corrupt and slimy atmosphere in which he operates, but I am not willing, out of respect for the Cuban people and of myself, to descend into the filthy pond in which the premier of the government rolls about, without the least bit of shame, before the amazed eyes of the nation, which is already disgusted by so much cynicism and dishonor.[23]

For good measure and a bit disingenuously, Chibás added that, "No man who is well born uses this sort of language to attack a political adversary."[24] Even as Chibás had mastered his emotions and responded relatively moderately in print, he was furious. Unable to resist his anger, he telephoned Varona multiple times the next day, leaving a message and his number with the prime minister's secretary. On Saturday, October 15, Varona returned the call in the presence of two journalists – Carlos Lechuga of *El Mundo* and Ricardo Riaño, of *Bohemia.*

"Who's speaking?" said the prime minister, "Chibás? Listen, this is Varona! Yes, Varona!"

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[23] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 642.
[24] Ibid.

"What I want from you," replied Chibás, "is that if you are a man, you will repeat the insults in your article to my face."

"Listen, Chibás," answered Varona, "you know very well I'm no coward but I don't have to do anything you say right now. I am going to wait until tomorrow when you answer me on your radio show so that later on I can unmask you publicly. You are a farce!"

"And you are a coward!" screamed the *Ortodoxo* leader. "Tell me those things to my face! I'm here in my house. Come find me if you dare!"

"I'm more of a man than you!" screamed the prime minister. "You're crazy only when it's convenient. Remember when you were in jail and you would leave the shower still covered in soap and would dry yourself off that way just to call attention to yourself?"

"What you need to do," repeated Chibás, "is to come find me."

"Enough of that!" said Varona. "Don't forget that I cut you in the right arm when we dueled in Camagüey!"[25]

After the conversation ended, Chibás lingered in his apartment but Varona never showed up. The following afternoon, the prime minister sent a representative bearing a letter. He hoped to unnerve the *Ortodoxo* leader shortly before his broadcast with yet more incendiary lines. "You need not beat or challenge me as I am not interested in exterminating cockroaches," wrote Varona. "What you need to do is prove before public opinion that what I have said about you is untrue; explaining the usefulness of the things you have done in your life aside from

[25] "En Cuba, Polémica: 'Eddy' vs. 'Tony,'" *Bohemia,* October 23, 1949: 73.

injuring, defaming and living in luxury off the fortune you inherited but have not been able to conserve."[26] A *Bohemia* reporter lamented these increasingly caustic exchanges, observing that Chibás had unwisely abandoned his "initially advantageous position" while Varona was being "insensible to his constitutional role" as the government's chief representative.[27] Nevertheless, Varona was very much doing Prío's bidding. The president had tried to marginalize Chibás by jailing him, closing his show and harassing the owners of CMQ. Now, he attempted to discredit him through a series of polemics. Varona's intensely personal affronts were designed to elicit a wild response, something that would remind Cubans that Chibás was indeed crazy and not fit for high office. However, the *Ortodoxo* leader had composed a carefully written reply, recalling the style of Emile Zola's *J'accuse*, and did not deviate from it during his 25 minutes on the air. Avoiding ad hominem attacks, Chibás focused instead on his adversary's political shortcomings. For instance, he told his audience:

> I don't slander, Antonio de Varona. I accuse you concretely of criminal connivance with the government inspectors who defraud and extort money from industrialists and merchants, as proved by the case of Mr. Gabriel Rodríguez, owner of the furniture shop "La Venecia," in Camagüey. This retailer was foolish enough to heed the official exhortation to denounce government functionaries who deal in blackmail. He thus installed a microphone on the counter of his establishment and recorded the words of the inspector who tried to extort money from him, sending the disc to the police and informing the prime minister, Tony de Varona. The only thing he obtained was increased persecution from the inspectors who found all sorts of false violations and now he is trying to sell the store.[28]

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 73-74.

Each paragraph began with the same litany, "I don't slander, Antonio de Varona. I accuse…" Besides doing nothing to help ordinary Cubans from being shaken down by their government, Chibás charged Varona with robbing the 100,000 *pesos* used to purchase his residence on Seventh Avenue and 24th Street in Miramar and illegally acquiring the *finca* "La Dominica," which was state property. He also alleged Varona was in league with Ramón Ruisánchez, whose monopoly of Cuba's dried beef market artificially raised the price of this item beyond the means of most citizens. Furthermore, Chibás reminded listeners that his enemy had defended José Manuel Alemán in the senate in 1947 and subverted revolutionary ideals by investigating a pact with the Liberals to ensure support for the government's foreign loan.

On October 23, Varona answered Chibás in *Bohemia.* Among other things, he produced a letter from Gabriel Rodríguez, the everyman furniture store proprietor of Camagüey, which contradicted much of what Chibás said about him on the radio. Rodríguez had written to Varona the day after hearing the broadcast and revealed his problem with the government inspector occurred during Grau's presidency. He also denied sending his recording to the police or notifying Varona of its existence. Lastly, he admitted to selling his business but not because of official persecution or unscrupulous assessors but due to the law requiring retailers to keep 15 years worth of records on hand at all times. Rodríguez found this provision so onerous that he planned to seek greener pastures in a Latin American "sister republic" where maintaining only five years of records was the rule.[29] As for Chibás, he had obviously been sloppy. He had also been imprudent regarding his allegations of

[29] Manuel Antonio de Varona, "Eduardo R. Chibás y yo," *Bohemia,* October 23, 1949: 71.

corruption against Varona. The prime minister lived well but not lavishly so and was broadly considered to be honest. Rather than sleaze, his foremost political shortcoming was placing party interests above Cuba's constitution. Chibás correctly excoriated him for defending Alemán over the senate's right to interpellate government ministers.[30] He was on shakier ground concerning Varona's Miramar home, which likely attracted his attention because its previous occupant had been Mirtha Batista – the ex general's daughter. At any rate, the prime minister contended his home had cost 75,000 *pesos* rather than 100,000 and supplied a document from Banco Gelats containing some details of his mortgage. Regarding the *finca* "La Dominica," Varona noted it was government property; Grau had stayed there periodically during his term in office, Chibás himself had visited on various occasions and the premises were no more his than the presidential palace belonged to Carlos Prío. Having defended his own probity, Varona turned the tables on Chibás. He accused him of tax evasion and cashing false checks during his stint as a congressman. Above all, Varona still aimed to boil Chibás' blood. Thus, when Chibás protested against attacks on his family, the prime minister suggested he had none and deliberately impugned the *Ortodoxo* leader's manhood, writing:

> What I affirmed previously and I repeat now is that Chibás does not have his own household; he has no wife, nor does he have children and these are normal things for a man to have – this being a basic condition of their nature. And we can doubt his devotion and respect for the Cuban woman. He has not wanted to make one his wife and thereby recognize the virtue and goodness of our women. Chibás has

[30] Since Varona could never say he had backed Alemán in 1947 out of political expediency, he responded to the criticism by pointing out that Chibás had praised his initial appointment as education minister in May of 1946. He asserted that Chibás turned against Alemán only after Grau had declined to support his presidential ambitions.

> not been able to find a good woman with whom to share his life and begin an honorable family – which is the basic unit of society.[31]

Chibás closed out the polemic a week later; reminding *Bohemia's* readers that Varona had initiated the brouhaha to distract public attention from the administration's foibles. These included its treatment of Cuba's most famous furniture vendor, Gabriel Rodríguez, whose intent to leave the country represented "the most terrible accusation that has been made against a government."[32] Rather than "removing the filth" Chibás observed the *Auténticos* "aspire to muddy those of us who are clean."[33] He stated that the checks alluded to by Varona had corresponded to his regular congressman's salary and were in no way dishonest. Chibás added that his lawmaker's wages and inherited fortune had always been at the service of Cuba's people. Hence, while Tony Varona was buying the house of Mirtha Batista, he was selling his cherished family home, with a "tethered heart," for half its value, in order to convert the island into a "great nation."[34] Nor was this the first time Chibás had sacrificed financially in order to change the island's politics. In 1944, he borrowed 20,000 *pesos* against the value of an apartment building he owned in Vedado, known as the *Edificio Chibás*, in order to assist the election of Ramón Grau San Martín. He claimed this money and the intense campaign it enabled were a "decisive factor" in the *Auténtico* victory.[35] With a distinct whiff of pathos, Chibás wrote that, "When Grau San Martín became president of the republic,

[31] Manuel Antonio de Varona, "Eduardo R. Chibás y yo," 70.
[32] Eduardo R. Chibás, "El Primer Ministro y yo," *Bohemia,* October 30, 1949: 73.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 72.
[35] Ibid.

no one had more influence than I. But I did not ask nor did I accept anything for my personal benefit. I only urged him to fulfill the program of the revolution. I asked him on behalf of the *campesinos* and for Cuba."[36] The *Ortodoxo* leader, who lacked a steady income now that he was no longer a senator, then confessed he could no longer afford the monthly 133 *peso* payment on that loan and would probably lose yet another piece of his father's legacy. Despite his sporadically rash accusations, Chibás counted on two essential truths to maintain credibility and popular support. First, he was one of the few politicians who had become demonstrably poorer since entering politics – a fact not lost on many Cubans. While Chibás remained well off, the island's citizens were never regaled with accounts of his weekends at country estates or exclusive beaches. Second, even as his accusations of corruption against Tony Varona were off the mark, other *Auténticos,* notably the Prío brothers, were widely known to have profited from public office. Chibás sometimes played fast and loose with details but the larger narrative was undeniable. "I entered power branded as a millionaire," he concluded, "but I left two years later poorer than when I came. In contrast, the current leaders entered power without fortunes but now enjoy many millions of *pesos.*"[37]

DIVIDED LOYALTIES ONCE MORE

While Chibás tussled with Prío administration officials, trouble was afoot yet again within *Ortodoxo* ranks. During a tour of Camagüey province in mid July, Chibás discovered that many members of the party's Workers Wing also belonged to

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

the proletarian themed gangster outfit *Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras* (ARG). One of them attempted to play down his divided loyalties, saying, "Here in Camagüey, we do what we believe is right rather than following the orders of (ARG leader) '*El Extraño*.'"[38] Sometimes, this included persecuting fellow *Ortodoxo* sugar workers in the area who themselves manifested divided loyalties by supporting the Communist line. Isidro Figueroa, who headed the *Ortodoxo* Workers Wing, admitted such "confusion" was detrimental to the party's development and lamented that various "distinguished" colleagues refused to understand the necessity of working toward "legitimate (political) independence."[39] This was never going to be easy given the longstanding competition for workers among ARG, the Communists and *Auténtico* sponsored labor organizations.

In Matanzas, the old question of whether *Ortodoxos* should cut deals with other parties was revived by a group devoted to the province's former governor, Pablo Vega. This effort was discreetly supported by José Manuel Gutiérrez, the former *Ortodoxo* boss from the region who had supposedly retired from politics. Tensions were further stoked by the fact that the local executive council remained peopled with traitors who had supported outside candidates in 1948. On July 17, Chibás used his bully pulpit to demand the ouster of double dealers and press members of the provincial assembly to respect the national party platform. Chibás explained that "It's necessary to choose sides: those who are with (Pablo) Vega and the old tortured politics of horse trading and who would sell the party in exchange

[38] "En Cuba, Entrevista: Un Verdadero Discípulo de Chibás," *Bohemia,* July 31, 1949: 68. For the most part, gangster bosses were referred to by their nicknames. In this case, *El Extraño* (the strange one) was the sobriquet of Jesús González Cartas.
[39] Ibid.

for government jobs or those who follow the *Ortodoxos'* moral rectitude. There is no room for middle ground or transactions."[40] Chibás was also tested by Guarro Ochoa, the *Ortodoxo* mayor of Holguín in Oriente province. Hoping to bolster his re-election prospects, Ochoa roiled the waters by mulling an offer of support from Fulgencio Batista's *Partido Acción Unitaria* (PAU). Chibás had no intention of allowing such a move and informed Ochoa that he would have to resign from the party if he struck such a deal. This, in turn, raised the ire of Guarro's brother Millo, the *Ortodoxo* vice-president. He claimed provincial assemblies were autonomous and told a *Bohemia* reporter that, "I sacrificed myself once already for the party and I'm not prepared now to follow the independent line. I consider it suicide."[41] Despite his brother's fiery words, Guarro Ochoa backed down. On July 23, he notified Chibás that the agreement with Batista was off.

The debate over pacts was not confined solely to the provinces, although at the national level there were fewer dissident voices. At a meeting of *Ortodoxo* heavyweights in Roberto Agramonte's house, Chibás claimed the party's independent line had "perfectly translated" popular sentiment.[42] He mentioned the "warm ovation" he had received during a reunion at his old high school, the elite, Jesuit-run *Colegio de Belén*, along with the enthusiastic crowds that greeted him upon his release from prison and the rally in *Parque Central* in which *Ortodoxo*

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[40] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás*, 629.
[41] "En Cuba, Política: 'Eddy' o el Instinto Político," *Bohemia,* July 24, 1949: 67. Asked by a *Bohemia* journalist if he had any comment regarding Ochoa's remarks, Chibás replied that, "I don't understand Millo's attitude. The truth is that he was one of the party's most ardent *pactistas* but after seeing our success in the elections, he confessed to me that he had been mistaken. I esteem him very highly and would regret having to confront him over the issue. However, we can't sacrifice one of the party's central tenets for a mayoralty." See: Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

principles had been reaffirmed by a "human wave."[43] Chibás, who always loved a good metaphor, compared public opinion to large quantities of oil tucked beneath a thin layer of soil. "One only needs to drop a match," he said, "in order to create a blaze."[44] Chibás subsequently ceded the floor to Roberto García Ibáñez, the congressman from Oriente province, who argued for a less rigid policy. He cited the case of Pepillo Hernández, the *Ortodoxo* mayor of Victoria de las Tunas, who was offered support from outside parties. "What should we do?" asked García Ibáñez, "Should we sacrifice Pepillo to maintain our independence?"[45] Manuel Bisbé allowed that independence had been largely tactical before the 1948 elections but the party's encouraging showing enshrined it as a guiding formula. The host, Roberto Agramonte, suggested a historical analogy from the region – noting that in Argentina, the sustained intransigence of the Radical party, which was also an outfit dedicated to constitutionalism and clean politics, had eventually led to the election of its leader, Hipólito Yrigoyen, in 1916.

Closer to home, Chibás almost certainly must have recalled the *Auténtico* factional struggles during the late 1930s between "revolutionaries" and "realists." The former were dead set against compromise with Batista and advocated militancy in combination with acts of violence to defeat him while the latter, which included both Grau and Chibás, had sought the party's legalization and participation in elections. While the circumstances obviously differed this time around, Chibás now enforced the more radical path having watched *Auténtico* realism mutate into moral

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

turpitude. At the same time, discontented whispers and outright accusations of dictatorship made their way, as they often did in Cuba, to the press. The columnist Jorge Martí of *El Mundo* gave voice to some of these and was immediately graced with a letter by the *Ortodoxo* chief. Chibás wrote that:

> Liberty in the political sphere is not incompatible with discipline in individual political parties….I will defend the right of any citizen to found a monarchical party, a communist party, an annexationist party or a party open to pacts in accordance with their own personal taste but no one has the right to join the *Ortodoxo* party, which has a very defined doctrine, and defend monarchy, communism, annexation to Spain or political pacts. Every citizen has the right to dip their head into the pond infected by traditional politics but they don't have the right to join the *Ortodoxo* party and push it into a corrupt swamp.[46]

Two days later, on July 31, Millo Ochoa appeared on Eddy's radio show and proclaimed his adherence to the independent line. A contented Chibás told his listeners that Ochoa embodied the *Ortodoxo* ideal of personal sacrifice for the greater good. Ochoa, however had little choice but to submit. Since the 1948 elections, supporters of independence had gained control of the party. Ochoa disagreed with them but bowed knowing that circumstances were relatively fluid. After all, the national assembly had endorsed pacts in the recent past as had five of the party's six provincial bodies. At any rate, Millo Ochoa's attitude formed a marked contrast with that of José Manuel Gutiérrez. After failing to reorient the Matanzas provincial assembly, the latter bitterly declared that, "This Eduardo Chibás has created a party that seems like those of Mussolini, Hitler, etc. in which

[46] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 633.

every member must adhere to the unassailable truth, to the word and orders of the leader whether he's called Duce, Führer or Chibás."[47]

This view was most assuredly not shared by Carlos Márquez Sterling, the former president of Cuba's constitutional convention and erstwhile Liberal who was courting the *Ortodoxos* but had not yet become a member. From one standpoint, there was a certain poetic justice in Márquez Sterling, the biographer of Ignacio Agramonte, joining the party led by his subject's admiring descendant.[48] However, the man described by a *Bohemia* reporter as "the most intellectual of Cuba's politicians" was more interested in electoral reform than maintaining an isolationist posture. [49] Speaking of the 1948 contest, Márquez Sterling averred that, "shame could not defeat the two large coalitions supported by bribery and electoral machinery, and the *Ortodoxos* finished in third place, although they deserved to win."[50] This fact influenced him to believe that effecting changes in the electoral code, which unduly favored alliances, should be the party's first priority. While the old ways were still in force, Márquez Sterling advocated "temporary" pacts lest the *Ortodoxos* run the risk of losing their historical moment.[51] To be sure, these musings were purely theoretical for the time being. Even so, Márquez Sterling's dance with the party, which was very much encouraged by Chibás, indicated he was not quite the hardliner suggested by his rhetoric.

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[47] Ibid., 636.
[48] In Jorge Mañach, the *Ortodoxos* also boasted the biographer of another Chibás hero – namely, José Martí. As a professor of political economy at the University of Havana, Márquez Sterling added to the party's already formidable list of professors, which included Mañach and Manuel Bisbé among others.
[49] "En Cuba, Entrevista: 'La Vergüenza no Pudo Ganar…'" *Bohemia,* August 7, 1949: 65.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

GANGSTERS RETAKE THE STAGE

On the afternoon of July 20, an employee at Havana's city dump named Roberto Enríquez López was returning home from work when he was accosted by several armed men. They pinned him against the door of his house, jabbed their machine gun muzzles into his back and opened fire. Upon hearing the shots, his wife rushed out and hurled herself at one of the attackers. She was quickly brushed aside, however, and the men proceeded to finish off their victim – who was later found to have 23 bullet wounds. Enríquez López was not just anyone. Known by the nickname "*Muñeco*," (Puppet), he was a driver for Orlando León Lemus and had been an incidental participant at Orfila. The authorities thus suspected UIR of the murder, as the group's leaders had sworn to kill everyone involved in the Marianao shootout. Less than 24 hours later, MSR attempted to avenge its lost driver by targeting Emilio Tro's erstwhile chauffeur. The man, named Manuel Villa Yedra, barely escaped with his life by hitting the floor of his vehicle during a drive by shooting. On July 22, UIR responded by gunning down José Ramón Solís as he was speaking to some companions a few blocks from the University of Havana.

The police reacted to this violent epidemic in typical fashion; with a wholesale roundup of suspects. Meanwhile, GRAS, the two month old anti gangster unit, shocked the Cuban public with an unaccustomed display of competence and professionalism. While the lawmen dithered, GRAS officers established some obvious connections that had hitherto gone unnoticed. For example, they observed that UIR assaults involved point blank shootings ending with extra bullets for good measure while the wounded was on the ground. In contrast, MSR favored the drive-

by method. Aside from such findings, GRAS conducted its own investigation into the island's gangster problem. Afterwards, Genovevo Pérez Dámera spoke for an hour with police chief José Manuel Caramés and directed his subordinates to share information with the heretofore hapless Bureau of Investigations – which then formally accused a gaggle of triggermen with ties to the Orfila massacre of murdering Justo Fuentes earlier in the year and attempting to dispatch Wichy Salazar a few weeks later. This unruly group included Orlando León Lemus, Policarpo Soler, Eustaquio Carmenatti, Mario Aguerreberre and others. The suddenly efficient Bureau of Investigations also named two suspects in the murder of Roberto Enríquez López.[52] Finally, one of the witnesses dug up by GRAS officials and turned over to the police caused a stir by alleging that José Manuel Alemán had given 30,000 *pesos* to his gangster friends in MSR as seed money for new assassinations. Whether this was true or merely a slander instigated by Alemán's longtime foe Pérez Dámera is unclear. Needless to say, the infamous former education minister dismissed the charge from his comfortable Florida confines.

While Alemán's denials rang hollow given his wide-ranging improprieties, some criticisms of GRAS were justified – leading many Havana denizens to consider the unit's successes an aberration. Even a few of the unit's supposed triumphs later turned sour. For example, after an attempt to blow up the ex senator Joaquín Martínez Sáenz in the hotel Habana-Madrid, GRAS officers produced a confession from Francisco Cortés de Lara. However, Cortés later told the Urgency Court judge

[52] The police had previously arrested a man in connection with the murder of Enríquez López, based on a tip provided by the dying city dump employee himself. Placed in police lineup, the man was identified by Enríquez López's wife as the killer but this turned out to be a case of mistaken identity.

that he had only signed after being subjected to the "third degree."[53] This was hardly the only proof that GRAS was not immune from the vices of Cuba's other security forces. On August 8, a young man was found beaten unconscious on the corner of Malecón and Crespo. After being taken to the hospital and revived, he described being summoned by some GRAS agents while out for a stroll. He was subsequently forced into their car, beaten and deposited on the sidewalk. "It must have been an error," said the victim with admirable equanimity, "because I am not involved in politics or secret societies nor do I have any enemies."[54] Perhaps the surest evidence that GRAS had frustrated Havana residents was its derisive nickname. The group's officers were known as "green flies" because they cruised around in Oldsmobiles of that color and, even at their most benign, were often irascible pests. They also raised the specter of yet more lawlessness despite their mandate to restore order.

As for General Pérez Dámera, his hatred of gangsters proved valuable but this represented a felicitous convergence of interests in an otherwise strained relationship between himself and Carlos Prío. This was largely because the army chief, formed in an all powerful military, accepted civilian control on an intermittent, somewhat random basis. Thus, it was no surprise when the general considered GRAS a natural extension of his authority. Prío, on the other hand, viewed himself as the unit's commander. By now, such tensions were nothing new. Just after Prío took office, for example, Pérez Dámera had shown scant concern for Cuba's precarious finances and demanded inordinate sums for the military. When

[53] "En Cuba, Policía: 'Las Moscas Verdes,'" *Bohemia,* August 21, 1949: 70.
[54] Ibid.

the treasury ministry's head accountant objected, a confidant of Pérez Dámera gruffly informed some friends of Prío's that, "This little guy doesn't realize that Genovevo can get rid of him and the president whenever he feels like it."[55] On the other hand, Pérez Dámera was not above occasional conciliatory gestures such as allowing "Rancho Alegre," his *finca* noted for its spectacular pool, to be used for government meetings. Further, he was a reliable ally in the fight against gangsters – much more so than Prío, whose ties to gunmen often conferred an air of insincerity on his efforts to curb them. In any event, the fragile bonds linking president and army commander began to fray shortly after GRAS won its first plaudits.

On July 19, Pérez Dámera was alarmed by a broadcast from the Dominican station *La Voz del Yuna* warning him that his life was in danger. This threat resonated with particular force because the same announcer had correctly predicted the death by ambush of Colonel Francisco Javier Arana in Guatemala a day earlier. Nonetheless, Prío advised his army chief to ignore this provocation from the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. After all, the tyrant was not only an enemy of the *Auténticos*, who sheltered anti-Trujillo exiles on Cuban soil, but also of Prío's family as well. The president's brother-in-law, Enrique Henríquez, was an *Auténtico* congressman with Dominican roots who had helped organize a failed plot against

[55] "En Cuba, Destitución: Aliado del Sátrapa Trujillo," *Bohemia,* August 28, 1949: sup. 2. Lavish military budgets were a legacy of Grau's administration, although the logic behind them was fairly sound. After ten years of enjoying a privileged place in Cuban politics, Grau's election in 1944 promised diminished influence for the army. He therefore attempted to buy its loyalty by raising its budget to 20,037, 442 *pesos* by his last year in office. By contrast, during Fulgencio Batista's presidency military spending never rose above 8,500,000 *pesos.* Of course, generals and other high ranking officers enriched themselves regardless of who ruled. Pérez Dámera, for example, lined his pockets by raiding the army's retirement fund. Also, in 1946, the pursy general won second prize in the island's lottery – pocketing 50,000 *pesos* in a process that was widely thought to be rigged.

Trujillo the previous month.[56] To place more stock in Trujillo's hints than Prío's assurances would thus represent a double and unforgiveable betrayal. All the same, Pérez Dámera yielded to his anxiety. He sent two men on a clandestine mission to Santo Domingo, where they spoke with Trujillo and received information regarding the supposed peril. Pérez Dámera was sufficiently convinced by the evidence they brought back that he began surrounding himself with machine gun wielding bodyguards, a fact that caught Prío's attention and aroused his suspicions. On August 22, the president learned the reason behind these precautions. His sources had uncovered Pérez Dámera's secret contact with Trujillo and revealed that one of the go-betweens was Colonel Camilo González Chávez, Cuba's air force chief. The next day, Prío obtained a copy of the document that had unnerved his top military man. Written by an agent of Trujillo posing as a renegade ARG gangster, the text described preparations to murder the island's foremost general in minute and obviously disturbing detail. These included five different schemes, developed during the past several years, all of which betrayed intimate knowledge of Pérez Dámera's habits. The forgery maintained that ARG leaders Jesús González Cartas and Eufemio Fernández were behind these plans as they believed Pérez Dámera would "always be a serious obstacle" to their organization.[57] Moreover, Fernández, who was a close friend of Prío, supposedly had a clear motive given Pérez Dámera's

[56] In June of 1949, an expeditionary force of 800 Dominican exiles was training in Oriente province and preparing to set sail from the port of Baracoa as part of a multi-pronged, and ultimately unsuccessful, attack against Trujillo. As part of the same plan, Enrique Henríquez and the gangster Rolando Masferrer were in Haiti devising a land invasion while Prío's ex bodyguard Eufemio Fernández was overseeing preparations for an air assault from Guatemala.

[57] "Este Documento Constituyó una de la Causas de la Caída de Genovevo Pérez," *Bohemia,* September 4, 1949: 79.

"betrayal" of the *Auténticos'* first effort to oust Trujillo – the Cayo Confites operation in 1947.[58]

After reading the phony letter, Prío declared, "Either the army is an institution or a political force. If it's the first, my presence in Columbia (the main military barracks) will resolve the problem; if it's the second, the country is lost and I will share its fate."[59] At 5 p.m., the president ordered Police Chief José Manuel Caramés to keep his men in their station houses. He then called Defense Minister Segundo Curti to the presidential palace. Prío was determined to relieve Pérez Dámera of his position but two obstacles presented themselves. First, his decree required the prime minister's signature but Tony Varona was abroad. Second, the prospective new army chief, Ruperto Cabrera, was vacationing in New York. Prío resolved the former by naming Curti interim prime minister. As for the latter, Cabrera arrived home at 10 p.m. that evening – whereupon he was immediately summoned to meet the president. Prío realized he was in a precarious position even after General Cabrera agreed to command the military. To begin with, Pérez Dámera had named the entire palace guard and its loyalty could not be assured. Hence, Prío ascended to the third floor living quarters, told his wife he was about to

[58] Ibid. This expedition had been encouraged by Grau, funded by José Manuel Alemán and squashed by Pérez Dámera after the Orfila shootout. While Cayo Confites had primarily been run by MSR captains such as Rolando Masferrer and Manolo Castro, members of other "action groups" had also participated. Eufemio Fernández, for example, had been a battalion commander. Fidel Castro of UIR was also on hand. Upon returning to Havana, many filibusterers expressed their displeasure with Pérez Dámera. As they marched through the capital to a hero's welcome, a radio reporter asked Masferrer to say a few words. He obliged by cursing the army chief and calling him a traitor. When the journalist admonished Masferrer to watch his language, the temperamental ruffian smashed him with the microphone. See: "Filibuster's End," *Time,* October 13, 1947: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,933727,00.html

[59] "En Cuba, Destitución: Aliado del Sátrapa Trujillo," supplement, 3.

"take a very serious step" and bid her to leave for his mother's house.[60] At 11:10 p.m., Prío left for the Columbia military base accompanied by Cabrera and two other officers. They found the place subdued and quiet, presided over by a pair of *guayabera* clad colonels playing dominoes. A farcical scene ensued when Prío demanded the keys to Pérez Dámera's office but neither of the colonels had them. Luckily, an officer spied an open window and climbed through. Shortly thereafter, the soldiers were stirred from their slumber and assembled on the parade ground. Prío announced the retirement of Pérez Dámera and his replacement by General Ruperto Cabrera. He also urged his audience to cast off any lingering allegiance to their former leader, saying, "I hope that in the following days, Cuban military men will think more highly of the will they possess than the functions they carry out because the former is permanent while the latter is fleeting."[61] To his relief, the president's oratory was met by a round of applause but there was still no time to relax. Prío's most critical task remained at hand; namely to speak with Pérez Dámera himself, who was rusticating in "La Larga," his *hacienda* in Camagüey province.[62]

"General," said Prío, "I have called to inform you that you have been relieved as army chief of staff."

"As you order, Mr. President," answered Pérez Dámera, growing pale as his family looked on nervously. Moments later, he added, "Mr. President, but why?"

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Pérez Dámera bought "La Larga" in 1945, while still a colonel, and as with many Cuban officers he used military draftees rather than civilian laborers to work the land. As army chief, Pérez Dámera flew to "La Larga" on a weekly basis using a Cuban air force jet.

"You have lost confidence in me and when a subordinate does not trust his boss the situation doesn't go very well," said Prío coldly.

"Very well, Mr. President. May I speak with someone there?"

"With whomever you'd like, general," replied Prío.

The telephone was passed to one of the colonels present.

"What has happened, colonel?" asked Pérez Dámera.

"You have been replaced, general, just as the president has informed you."

"What do the officers say?"

"All are at the president's orders."

"And you?"

"I also, general."[63]

Pérez Dámera was caught unawares and had no choice but to yield although he plainly doubted the president's authority. He seemed to believe he had been deposed more by fellow officers than the nation's chief executive – an assumption that was not altogether mistaken. Shorn of his command and suspected of treason, Pérez Dámera adopted a more humble demeanor in accordance with his newly vulnerable position. Thus, he told an intimate, ironically named Trujillo, to notify the president that he was willing to leave Cuba immediately if his presence was considered "prejudicial."[64]

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[63] "En Cuba, Destitución: Aliado del Sátrapa Trujillo," supplement, 1-2.

[64] "En Cuba, Destitución: 'Están Hablando con el ex Jefe del Ejército." *Bohemia,* August 28, supplement, 2. This was not the first time a president had appeared at the *Campamento Columbia* and rallied the troops against their military commander. In 1941, Fulgencio Batista succeeded in a similar maneuver against Pedro Pedraza after the latter, who was army chief, demanded control of the navy as well. Once Batista won over the soldiers, Pedraza was arrested and placed on a plane to Miami. Of course, Batista had been Cuba's military leader for seven years before being elected as a civilian president in 1940. For Prío, the situation was more daunting even though Pérez Dámera was

For a moment, Carlos Prío basked in a hero's glow. The obese and opulent Pérez Dámera was no darling of the people nor was he a favorite of journalists, most of whom lionized Prío for defending the prerogatives of civilian government. Even the usually hostile Enrique de la Osa registered his approval, albeit by means of an anecdote. He noted that United States embassy officials were among the first to detect something had happened. When informed that Pérez Dámera had been unseated, they requested permission to send observers. Gushing with pride, de la Osa described how they "verified with amazement" that a Latin American army chief could be removed without setting off an insurrection.[65] On the other hand, Chibás could not resist portraying the situation in negative terms. Asked by a reporter for his opinion, the *Ortodoxo* leader initially expressed surprise that Prío had waited until "three o'clock in the morning" to exercise his constitutional right instead of doing so "in broad daylight like any other normal government activity." The most dramatic man in Cuban politics added that the episode had developed, "theatrically, like a horrifying melodrama episode, where the president's fear constitutes the main character." Considering the matter a bit further, Chibás concluded that, "What has occurred seems more like a surprise attack from one band of gunmen against a pack of rivals based on differences over how to divide their loot rather than the constitutional substitution of an army chief realized by the chief of state."[66]

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less threatening than Pedraza – who at one point had driven to the presidential palace accompanied by 30 cars full of machinegun bearing officers and bodyguards to press his case. For a more detailed account of these events, see: Thomas, *Cuba,* 724-725.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 636.

Although ungenerous, the *Ortodoxo* leader's reference to gangsters turned out to be prescient. On the afternoon of September 1, Havana played host to yet another lurid scene as Wichy Salazar and Francisco Fernández Cristóbal were murdered in a drive-by shooting. Salazar's sister Efigenia was also wounded in the attack but the enterprising *Ortodoxo* Juan Amador persuaded her to concede an interview from her hospital bed – which was broadcast live on *Radio Progreso.* Efigenia Salazar described how they had been walking toward Wichy's car, parked near their home in Havana's *Cerro* district, when bullets began flying from a vehicle in the distance. She later clarified that there were two automobiles filled with "around 12" triggermen along with some others on foot. "I recognized Policarpo Soler," she said, "who got out of the car with a machine gun….Policarpo killed my brother on the ground. He was wearing dark glasses and a *guayabera.* I screamed: 'Assassin, don't kill him!' He then opened fire on me and believed I was dead. Ah! *El Colorado* was also in this automobile."

"You know him?" asked Amador.

"Of course! Since the era of Batista. I saw him perfectly. Later on, the police pretended to chase the fleeing assassins. The truth is that I don't know why they can't capture these individuals since they too have machine guns."[67]

As a gang member himself with a violent past, Wichy Salazar was not an ideal repository for sympathy.[68] Rather, the shocking aspect of this story was Policarpo

[67] "En Cuba, Atentado: Sangre y Balas Bajo la Cordialidad," *Bohemia,* September 11, 1949: 65.
[68] Wichy Salazar and *El Colorado* had been founding members of ARG but had fallen out over the latter's decision to profit from the black market. Later on, Salazar joined UIR and *El Colorado* jumped to MSR. The rivalry between them was thus deepened by the feud between these gangs – which deepened considerably after the Orfila massacre. As for Policarpo Soler, he had once been a family friend of the Salazars but following an unknown incident vowed to exterminate all of them. This

Soler's attempt to murder an unarmed woman. During his Sunday evening broadcast, Chibás compared this outrage to Aurora Soler's execution at Orfila and noted that both had received "a bullet in the belly."[69] Moreover, Chibás incited anger at the apathetic lawmen who had watched in a nearby patrol car while Policarpo Soler descended from his vehicle and finished Salazar off. He also reproached them for their halfhearted pursuit of the perpetrators once they fled the scene. This last accusation was not entirely accurate, however. In fact, police trailed a pair of shooters to the University of Havana's agronomy school. This was one of many safe havens, including the houses and country estates of legislators, which dotted the capital's landscape and were off-limits to the authorities. Under intense pressure to act after this latest outrage, Carlos Prío set aside the university's autonomy and ordered police to occupy the agronomy school. They duly arrested the wanted gunmen along with 12 other suspicious characters. Among these was the agronomy school's student president, José Buján, who apparently had been doing more than keeping questionable company. By all indications, he had cut a deal with MSR gangsters to help win the presidency of the Federation of University Students (FEU).[70]

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would explain his attempt to snuff out Efigenia. He was also implicated in the murder of Wichy's brother Noel in September of 1948.

[69] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 637.

[70] "En Cuba, Atentado: El Alma Máter Afectada," *Bohemia,* September 11, 1949: 66. According to fellow university students who were willing to speak to the press, Buján's use of armed gangsters was meant to win support and intimidate other candidates from challenging him from the FEU presidency. Buján was also seen in the presence of *El Colorado* and Policarpo Soler, who lent their assistance whenever possible. In one alleged incident, Buján met with the current FEU president, Enrique Ovares, and asked for his adherence saying: "Look, I am backed by *El Colorado*. These (armed) men who follow me around belong to him and you will see how he appears here from one moment to the next."

Buján was also using the agronomy school and adjacent botanical garden, known as the *Quinta de los Molinos*, as his own personal fiefdom. Buján resided with his wife and two small children in one of the school's buildings and cut down trees from the botanical garden as if they were his own, selling the lumber for profit. In an even cheekier maneuver, Buján had removed a wooden house, piece by piece, from the botanical garden and reconstructed it on land he owned on the Havana outskirts. Altogether, Buján seemed to possess the same nerve as his patron and benefactor, José Manuel Alemán. Many students believed Alemán was supplying weapons stockpiled in 1947 for the cancelled expedition against Trujillo as a means to bring the university under his control.[71] Perhaps even more scandalous was the arrest of Juan Acosta, a member of the presidential palace secret service. Enrique de la Osa claimed this proved, "for the man on the street," that Prío had known all along what was going on in the agronomy school.[72] This theory was bolstered by documents confiscated during the police raid indicating that Buján and his MSR sponsors were closely monitoring the student campaign against Prío's attempt to secure a foreign loan. On his radio show, Chibás lamented that most students repudiated gangsters but were defenseless against gunmen who were "armed to the teeth, present everywhere, enjoying immunity, mocking the courts and boasting government support."[73] For Prío, the issue was particularly dicey because party reorganizations were scheduled for October. At that time Prío would need some of the same gangsters he now harassed to help secure friendly delegates in *Auténtico*

[71] "En Cuba, Atentado: En la Quinta de los Molinos," *Bohemia,* September 11, 1949: 66.
[72] "En Cuba, Atentado: Invasión Policial," *Bohemia,* September 11, 1949: 67.
[73] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 638.

assemblies, particularly as he hoped to impose his brother Antonio as a candidate for Havana's mayoralty. For this reason, most of those arrested were likely to find themselves back on the street before long. The case of Wilfredo Lara García, a drive-by shooter of Wichy Salazar nabbed in the agronomy school raid, more or less predicted this result. Lara already had murder and attempted murder charges pending against him, but was suspiciously free on bail, when he joined *El Colorado* and Policarpo Soler on their deadly mission.

Unfortunately for Prío, the miasmal stew of gangsters, unprofessional policemen and university violence continued to be a source of embarrassment. On September 13, José Pardo Llada announced during his radio show that a certain Mr. Manuel Caramés Monteagudo had been granted permission to construct a three story house on *Avenida Tulipán.* Pardo Llada noted the name's similarity to that of Havana's police chief and wondered mischievously if they were the same person or whether perhaps there was a brother who had won the lottery. Two days later, the 23 year old *Ortodoxo* broadcaster found a man in uniform waiting for him and was escorted to police headquarters. He was quickly shown into the office of José Manuel Caramés Monteagudo. With nary a word, the latter closed the door, removed his gold-butted revolver from its holster and cast it aside. Pardo Llada countered by taking off his glasses. Without further ado, Caramés punched Pardo Llada in the chest and received a glancing blow to the face in return. The two men grappled and hit each other for a short while before falling on the police chief's leather couch, whereupon Caramés bellowed, "You are a liar!" The affray then continued for another five minutes or so after which the exhausted belligerents

began hurling curses at each other rather than fists. Finally, someone opened the door from outside and two legislators rushed in along with the journalist Humberto Medrano of *Prensa Libre.* "What's going on?" asked Medrano, looking at Caramés. "Are you crazy?"

"I couldn't allow what he said," answered the police chief. "It's a lie."

"This is foolishness!" said Representative Armando Fernández Jorva. "You can't fight with a reporter!"

The chubby Caramés, answering like a pouting schoolchild, said: "He attacked me! He's the one who fought with me!"

"Why then," remonstrated Pardo Llada, "Did you put away your pistol?"

"And why did you take off your glasses?" asked the police chief.[74]

Finally, as the affair resembled a makeshift honor dispute, Medrano drew up a document, in accordance with the rules of dueling, which both men signed and thereby officially ended their conflict. By that evening, Caramés was a laughingstock to such an extent that the Puerto Rican singer Daniel Santos had already debuted a song dedicated to the incident. The island's cartoonists rejoiced as well. One sketch, entitled "Man of Prudence," portrayed a bare-chested figure wearing boxing gloves approaching police headquarters and saying, "Caramés wants to see me in his office and I have to be ready just in case."[75]

Aside from being imprudent and well neigh illegal, the Havana police chief had chosen poor timing for his ill advised loutishness. September 15 represented the second anniversary of the Orfila massacre and UIR militants were certain to

[74] "En Cuba, Policia: ¿Cabriñana o Queensberry? *Bohemia,* September 25, 1949: 66.
[75] Vergara, "Hombre Precavido," *Bohemia,* September 25, 1949: 66.

commemorate the death of their boss with an attack of some sort. Instead of concentrating on this eventuality Caramés had spent the afternoon pursuing a personal quarrel. In light of what would happen later this lapse was both reckless and unforgiveable. Shortly after 7p.m., a group of UIR triggermen opened fire on Rolando Masferrer as he left the *Capitolio.* A gun battle ensued on the marble staircase and legislators who found themselves nearby hit the ground and tried to crawl discreetly toward safety. The MSR leader saved himself by shooting his way back into the building but two of his gangster friends were gravely wounded and another died from a bullet to the head. As usual, no assailants were detained at the scene. A *Bohemia* reporter snidely observed that, "The so-called Law against Gangsterism had no effect even in the parliamentary realm, where the police showed themselves to be just as incompetent as they are in the university."[76] For Masferrer, this was the fifth time he had escaped unharmed from an assassination attempt since June of 1948. As with Wichy Salazar, public sympathy for Masferrer was rather scant but there was considerable fury that gangsters had yet again crossed a line – this time for bringing their conflict to Cuba's congress.

This sense of pervasive lawlessness was aggravated five days later when Gustavo Mejía Maderne, the vice president of the Association of Social Science Students at the University of Havana, was shot eight times in the back. Mejía had been a third year law student with no ties to the armed thugs on campus. Rather, he managed the university's swimming pool area and noticed its canteen was

[76] "En Cuba, Atentado: Por Quinta Vez," *Bohemia,* September 25, 1949: 71. University policemen tended to complain that they could not arrest the gangsters in their midst because they were outgunned.

purveying drugs and attracting dubious characters who were not students. Moments after denouncing this state of affairs to the university deans, he was riddled with bullets by Modesto González del Valle, who owned the canteen. Raúl Roa, dean of the social sciences faculty, told grieving professors and students at the hospital, where Mejía had been delivered dead on arrival, that he had seen González del Valle brandishing a pistol and overheard him saying, "Blood is going to run."[77] Heeding the popular uproar, Roa resigned his post and vowed to help rescue the campus from shady figures. The victim's uncle, Feliciano Maderne, who had fought Machado in the 1930s, hoped this episode would call attention to the "tolerance and protection that the present government reserves for gangsters" and that criminals would continue to kill "peaceable citizens" until the police began catching them.[78] Speaking to reporters in the packed emergency ward that contained his nephew's cadaver, Maderne added an emotional plea: "I summon President Prío to grant me an audience so I may ask him to fulfill his responsibilities and demand the guarantees and respect the honest citizens of my fatherland deserve!"[79]

While violence raged in Havana, assassins with government links plagued Cuba's countryside as well. On September 21, the Communist leader Lázaro Peña denounced the murder of two workers' leaders in the *Francisco* sugar mill of Camagüey province. Speaking in the chamber of representatives, he accused the *Auténtico* congressman and labor leader Emilio Surí Castillo of sponsoring the killings. Manuel Bisbé also blamed the administration for these deaths, adding that,

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[77] "En Cuba, Universidad: 'Ha Sido Muerto por la Espalda…,'" *Bohemia,* September 25, 1949: 65.
[78] Ibid., 66. Maderne also made much of the fact that González del Valle was brother-in-law to the infamous Mario Salabarría, the assassin of Orfila who was serving a 30 year jail sentence.
[79] Ibid.

"in Cuba human life has no more value than that of an insect!"[80] The more immediate focus, however, involved Havana and its beleaguered police chief. Armando Caíñas Milanés declared that, "Everyone, from the president of the republic to the most insignificant policeman, knows who the gangsters are, where they work, where they live and where they spend their time."[81] He then called for the resignation of Caramés, who he claimed was incapable of maintaining order. One triggerman, in fact, was sitting among them right there and then. Hardly one to remain silent during a lively debate, Rolando Masferrer artfully told the assembly that administration officials should follow the example of Aureliano Sánchez Arango – who had removed (mostly MSR) gunmen from the education ministry payroll. Specifically, he referred to Miguelito Suárez Fernández and Interior Minister Rubén de León, both of whom sustained UIR militants.

For his part, Carlos Prío bowed to public opinion and unleashed GRAS. This time, the "green flies" arrested 50 men, including Masferrer's private secretary but as Enrique de la Osa noted, these were "third category" suspects. "The big gangsters," including *El Colorado* and Policarpo Soler "remained untouchable."[82] More compelling was the news that Caramés resigned his position under pressure from the president on September 22. Shortly thereafter, the ex police chief agreed to an interview with two *Bohemia* reporters in which he connected each of the island's action groups to their respective *Auténtico* factions. For example, he claimed the government used ARG gunmen to win control over Cuba's labor unions.

[80] "En Cuba: La Capital: 'En Cuba la Vida Humana no se Respeta…'" *Bohemia,* October 2, 1949: 65.
[81] Ibid., 66.
[82] "En Cuba: La Capital: Una Mera Cortina de Humo," *Bohemia,* October 2, 1949: 66.

Caramés also stated that Miguelito Suárez Fernández provided "moral and material" support for gangsters and had helped the UIR boss José de Jesús Jinjaume flee to safety in New York. He further averred that the senate president had employed armed toughs in his electoral campaigns "before and after" the third front.[83] "Each time (the thugs) committed their misdeeds," concluded Caramés, "I sent them to the courts. In spite of the evidence I contributed, they were exonerated. This occurred with all the groups time after time."[84] Given all the negative publicity, Carlos Prío was lucky in at least one respect; namely, that Chibás had passed the week campaigning in Matanzas and Las Villas. This strenuous six day tour, which encompassed trips to villages, towns and sugar mills of every size, was undertaken in the island's rainy season – meaning he was subjected not only to intense downpours but also impassible country roads, which were dirt paths during the best of times and had now become car swallowing brown muck. Chibás returned to Havana so exhausted that he dashed off a quick condemnation of the Mejía shooting, which was read over the air by a minor *Ortodoxo* official named Isidro Sosa.

In conjunction with the first anniversary of Prío's inauguration, Raúl Gutiérrez conducted a public survey regarding how Cubans viewed his performance to date. The news was encouraging despite recent chaos in Havana's streets and university. In what was perhaps the most telling question, citizens were asked whether they preferred Prío over Grau, Chibás or Batista. In the event, they opted for Prío over *El Viejo* by seven percentage points, over the *Ortodoxo* leader by nearly eight percentage points and over the ex general by almost nine percentage points.

[83] "En Cuba: La Capital: Una Brasa de Candela," *Bohemia,* October 2, 1949: 70.
[84] Ibid.

One of the main reasons for this could be found in something Chibás had regularly denounced during the latter half of Grau's presidency but had largely stopped talking about since Prío took office. That is, prices were falling for basic goods and the black market was diminishing as a factor in Cuban life. As Chibás and others had pointed out, this was a worldwide phenomenon rather than a local one, driven by increasing production in the United States and countries devastated by World War II.[85] Nonetheless, Prío and Commerce Minister José Andreu reaped the political benefits. Asked what was best about Prío's administration, the fact that he had "lowered the cost of living (and) ended the black market" was ranked first by respondents.[86] They also chose Andreu as the government's best cabinet member. On the other hand, Prío remained unpopular in Cuba's interior. For example more than 53 percent claimed the president had done "nothing good" during his first year in office.[87]

THE GOVERNMENT LOAN

In the June 26 issue of *Bohemia,* an interview appeared with Treasury Minister Antonio Prío. Asked by Mario Kuchilán whether the government was preparing a loan, he opened his eyes wide and replied, "I would rather not talk

[85] In his open letter to Carlos Prío from May 8, 1949, while still imprisoned in the Castillo del Príncipe, Chibás wrote that prices for basic goods were falling just about everywhere. For example, in the United States, 100 lbs. of butter had dropped from $20.00 to $11.25. In terms of grains, rye had slipped from $2.50 to $1.26, wheat had gone from $3.05 to $2.18 and flour had descended from $7.65 to $3.70. Other commonly consumed items such as eggs had declined from 47 cents per dozen to 31 cents per dozen.
[86] Raúl Gutiérrez, "Survey Nacional: El Pueblo Enjuicia y Compara el Gobierno del Presidente Prío," *Bohemia,* October 9, 1949: 98.
[87] Ibid.

about it."[88] Three weeks later, Francisco Ichaso noted that the president and his prime minister remained mum on the subject but found it telling that the government did not offer any denials. Even as the administration stonewalled about the loan, two related issues – namely, the pillaged treasury and its capacity to support an ever expanding bureaucracy, could not be so easily minimized. Government jobs were the *Auténticos'* lifeblood and Prío had insisted the so-called "deficit" would not endanger them. Hence, there was palpable shock when 12,000 public employees received pink slips in July. *Auténtico* congressmen were particularly outraged. Some suspected that Grau's "deficit" had diminished the funds available for government work.[89] Moreover, the positions being cut had specifically been handed out by *Auténtico* representatives – some of whom counted more than 1000 places at the public trough at their disposal. Teodoro Tejeda Setién, a congressman from Las Villas province, was thus being quite honest when he referred to the displaced as "our employees."[90] Invited to address the *Auténtico*-Republican parliamentary committee, Tony Varona euphemistically explained that Cuba was suffering a "post-war crisis."[91] Predictably, those who complained loudest regarding the government's newfound penury were legislators loyal to Miguel Suárez Fernández. The real question, then, was whether the administration was prepared to antagonize them less than a year before midterm elections.

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[88] Mario Kuchilán, "Grafoentrevista exclusiva: Antonio Prío," *Bohemia,* June 26, 1949: 21.
[89] Foremost among these was the *Auténtico* congressman from Trinidad, Eduardo López Deustua. However, not everyone blamed Grau's deficit for the layoffs. One of the former president's devotees, Albertico Cruz, attributed the lack of money not to Grau's malfeasance but to the dishonesty of Lincoln Rodón – the Republican president of the chamber of representatives. See "En Cuba, Cámara: 'Este es un Congreso Barato…'" July 17, 1949: 70.
[90] Ibid., 72.
[91] Ibid.

Ichaso, in his *Bohemia* column, mentioned the persistent rumor that Prío planned to obtain a "river of gold" in order to bring back the go-go epoch of Grau.[92] This would maintain *Auténtico* unity at the cost of abandoning one of the party's last remaining principles. Having been formed during the late 1920s and early 1930s when President Gerardo Machado negotiated loans on what they considered exploitive terms, *Auténtico* founders, including Prío, had considered them anathema from the start. For this reason, Manuel Fernández Supervielle had campaigned for Havana's mayoralty in 1946 on a platform of bringing water to the city without foreign money or concessions. Of course, Supervielle's chief propagandist had been Eduardo Chibás, who was opposed to a loan then and remained steadfastly against one now. Asked by a reporter for his opinion, Chibás recalled that he had accused the government of attempting to borrow foreign money six months earlier on his radio show but the government had accused him of "calumny."[93] The *Ortodoxo* leader also could not resist one of his traditional crowd pleasing refrains, saying:

> What President Prío has to do now if he wants to behave honorably and logically is not to look for a loan of 100 or 200 million *pesos* to replace the millions that have been stolen from the public treasury but to throw the thieves in prison and confiscate the money they robbed. But he cannot do this because he would have to begin by incarcerating the majority of those who surround him.[94]

Chibás sprinkled his rhetoric with some sobering facts as well. He observed that Cuba had taken out 422 million *pesos* worth of loans in its history and had paid 205

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[92] Francisco Ichaso, Está ya muy adelantada la tramitación del empréstito," *Bohemia,* July 17, 1949: 104.
[93] "Encuestas de *Bohemia*: Sobre la concertación de un empréstito extranjero," *Bohemia,* July 24, 1949, 80.
[94] Ibid.

million worth of interest on that amount. The most egregious case of abuse had been a loan for 35 million contracted by the island's first president, Tomás Estrada Palma, in 1904, to pay veterans of the independence war. This was finally retired forty years later, with the government forking over almost 43 million *pesos* in interest.[95] Chibás was not the only political leader who opposed the loan. Grau declared that borrowing foreign money was "totally contrary" to *Auténtico* doctrine while Fulgencio Batista deemed the prospect of a loan "inconceivable" and an "ominous weight" on the Cuban people.[96] Notable in his dissent was Miguelito Suárez Fernández, who stood to gain from an infusion of cash and argued against dismissing a loan out of hand. He mentioned that Cuba was in danger of "depression" and referred to the Marshall Plan and President Harry Truman's "politics of reconstruction" as evidence of crisis on a world scale that should be solved by creative rather than rigid thinking.[97] No doubt, Suárez Fernández was also considering the present crisis of patronage that would disproportionately affect his disciples without a new revenue source.

On July 31, *Bohemia* published a layout on the hobbies of Cuban politicians. The magazine's readers learned that Miguelito Suárez Fernández was an avid gardener, for example, on those days when he was not plotting to outmaneuver rivals within his party. Lincoln Rodón, president of the chamber of representatives, expressed a fascination with Napoleon during those times when he was not

[95] Every Cuban president before 1933 with the exception of Mario García Menocal (1913-1921) borrowed money from foreign banks under onerous terms. In 1909, President José Miguel Gómez took out a 16 million *peso* loan. Eventually, 21 million in interest was paid. In 1923, President Alfredo Zayas borrowed 50 million *pesos* upon which the Cuban government paid 34 million in interest.
[96] "Encuestas de *Bohemia:* Sobre la concertación de un empréstito extranjero," 81.
[97] Ibid.

managing the island's unruly congressmen. After overseeing the bare cupboard of Cuba's treasury, Antonio Prío indulged in photography. Fulgencio Batista, who rarely left his country estate, confessed a devotion to reading – a passion he pursued in the well stocked library he maintained there.[98] The most thrilling pastime belonged to Aurelio Sánchez Arango, an aviation enthusiast, followed closely by the mayor of Marianao, Francisco González Orúe, who rode a motorcycle. Conversely, when reporters reached the 14th floor of Chibás' apartment building, he offered scarce recompense for their effort, saying his hobby was, "to moralize Cuban politics."[99] He proceeded to demonstrate this by sitting at his desk and writing a critique. Perhaps Chibás was even composing his open letter to Carlos Prío, which also appeared on July 31.

For Chibás, the loan was further evidence that his erstwhile friend had become "a servant of imperialist interests."[100] Prío had bowed to Wall Street through preferential treatment of the Cuban Electric Company and was doing so again by seeking to borrow money from United States banks. Just as Chibás had pressured Prío into withdrawing the rate hikes for electricity, he hoped a similar campaign would scuttle the loan before it was consummated. Although the subject remained officially taboo, Prío had begun preparing the ground by touting his own personal honesty and that of his cabinet. Chibás scoffed, reminding Prío that he had

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[98] Batista, in fact, owned one of the largest private libraries in Cuba. Moreover, his love of reading was longstanding. As a young stenographer in the military, he was given the nickname *"el literato"* (the literary one) by fellow soldiers. See: Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista,* 25.
[99] "¿Cual es su hobby?, *Bohemia,* July 31, 1949: 40.
[100] Eduardo R. Chibás. "De Eduardo Chibás a Carlos Prío: Contra un Absurdo Empréstito Extranjero," July 31, 1949: 54. Chibás dated Prío's transformation from revolutionary to imperialist servant to April of 1942, when, as chairman of the senate committee of finance and taxes, he supported the so called "Gift Law" that cancelled 10 million *pesos* worth of debt incurred by public utilities – four million of which belonged to the Cuban Electric Company.

known him as a university student who "lived very modestly."[101] He challenged Prío once again to explain how he acquired so many choice properties since entering politics. As for the president's ministers, Chibás accused Antonio Prío of lining his pockets by directing tax inspectors to shake down Cuba's merchants and industrialists. He also pointed out that an ethical cloud hung over Agriculture Minister Virgilio Pérez, who had manipulated the price of coffee by importing 15 million pounds even as the country was already well stocked. According to Chibás, this "affaire" netted 1.5 million *pesos* for Pérez and his cronies while "ruining" 23,000 domestic coffee farmers.[102] Chibás concluded that,

> Every time a government has requested a loan, they play the same tune: "the loan is for paving streets and constructing aqueducts in interior cities," "the loan is for improving the island's sanitation," "the loan is for stimulating agriculture," "the loan is for building a new sewage system," etc., etc. Nevertheless, in the shadow of these loans the one thing that has always been constructed is great personal fortunes.[103]

While Chibás steadfastly disapproved of any loan, he felt borrowing money domestically represented the lesser of two evils. He noted that Cuba possessed 300,000 *pesos* worth of gold in New York's Federal Reserve Bank and 600,000 million *pesos* in national bank deposits. The onus of repayment would still hinder industry, business and the general population – all of whom would endure higher taxes, but at least this money would stay on the island. Foreign loans were not only a "bloodbath for the national economy," they also begat an inevitable swarm of outside accountants, engineers and other technocrats sent from overseas to ensure

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 55.
[103] Ibid.

compliance.[104] In this vein, he warned Prío that, "You know very well that loans constitute the imperialist instrument of penetration, the favorite weapon of 'dollar politics' in order to economically subjugate the people of Latin America."[105]

By now, the loan was such a charged topic that Raúl Gutiérrez, Cuba's public survey guru, was commissioned to produce a new poll. His research revealed a trio of interesting findings. First, 75.56 percent of respondents were aware of the government's semi-clandestine project to organize a loan. Second, more Cubans seemed to think borrowing cash could be beneficial or conditionally beneficial (45.56 percent) than those who felt it would be prejudicial or conditionally prejudicial (37.58 percent). This was no surprise as many Cubans hoped renewed public works employment would cover the loss of jobs caused by a 20 percent reduction in the sugar harvest. Did this mean Chibás' usually unerring instinct for what was popular had deserted him? Not quite. Asked whether the loan should involve money from the United States or capital raised domestically, only 2.96 percent preferred the former while an overwhelming 77.46 percent opted for the latter.[106]

Apart from fanning patriotic feelings and impugning Prío's credibility or that of his ministers, Chibás began using the government's attempt to cadge foreign funds as an all purpose cudgel to hack away at each of his rival's political failings. In an August 28 *Bohemia* article, he utilized the loan as a metaphor for the administration's neglect of everyday Cubans. The *Ortodoxo* leader was particularly

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo Opina Sobre el Empréstito," *Bohemia,* July 31, 1949: 64-65.

galled by Prío's plan to build a tunnel beneath Havana's harbor and a tourist area on the other side's surrounding land. He claimed the tunnel would connect capital dwellers more easily to the beaches but would do nothing to help rural farmers, who lacked decent roads, bring their products to market. Regarding the future sightseeing zone, Chibás predicted it would be a "new city overflowing with wealth for the recreation of tourists and rich *Habaneros*" while the rest of the island was "abandoned."[107] To underline his point, the *Ortodoxo* leader inserted a photo of an overcrowded tenement in a ramshackle Havana neighborhood. Underneath, the caption asked, "Will the tourist city in eastern Havana be built before this situation is remedied?"[108]

Chibás also believed the loan flowed from Cuba's overly deferential legal system. Rather than enforcing the law, judges permitted venal government employees to steal without fear. As a result, those who normally pilfered "up to their elbows" now did so, "up to their shoulders."[109] The lamentable status quo was encapsulated by Pelayo Cuervo's lawsuit. At first, the case seemed destined to reverse decades of impunity for sleazy officials. Aside from Cuervo's detailed 33-page brief, the *Ortodoxo* congressman Félix Martín had provided documents proving José Manuel Alemán had bribed legislators from the *Auténtico*-Republican alliance. Given this profusion of evidence, Special Judge Antonio Vignier admitted at the time that, "There's enough here for an indictment" and "People will wind up in jail."[110]

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[107] Eduardo R. Chibás, "La Cordialidad en Paños Menores," *Bohemia,* August 28, 1949: 62.
[108] Ibid. Another photo showed a dingy hospital bed in the city of Baracoa, in Oriente province, where money was so short that nurses typically solicited donations in the streets in order to buy coffee and milk for their patients.
[109] Ibid., 63.
[110] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Aquí También Había Crisis," *Bohemia,* October 16, 1949: 75.

Cuervo, however, began to express pessimism – telling reporters that Carlos Prío had offered Vignier and District Attorney Jesús Coll positions on the soon to be created Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees if they would ease up. As luck would have it, Vignier and Coll eventually concluded there was not enough evidence to prosecute. Chibás found this odd since Alemán, secure in his parliamentary immunity, had told the journalist Mario Kuchilán that he had filched "a little more" than 20 million *pesos* between January and October of 1948.[111] While the ex education minister and current senator was untouchable, some of his accomplices were almost certainly eligible for prosecution. The most obvious candidate was Grau. In fact, a *Bohemia* reporter had recorded Carlos Prío implicating the former president in February of 1949 and hundreds of thousands of Cubans had read about it for themselves. "I wonder," asked Chibás, "what Judge Vignier has to say about this?"[112]

Just as the lawsuit appeared fated to languish, Carlos Manuel de la Cruz entered the fray unexpectedly. The hoary lawyer and erstwhile Democratic lawmaker submitted a motion to revive the case and allow time to adduce further proof of wrongdoing from treasury ministry archives. De la Cruz also sought to initiate a criminal investigation regarding the disappearance of books, papers and documents relating to the case – especially as Antonio Prío had publicly admitted to removing them. He was aided by serendipity, as the unsympathetic Coll and Vignier were away on vacation, so his appeal was received by District Attorney Rafael Trejo instead. Trejo immediately placed the matter before Cuba's Supreme Tribunal. In a

[111] Eduardo R. Chibás, "La Cordialidad en Paños Menores," 63.
[112] Ibid.

grave tone, de la Cruz asserted this was the "last opportunity" for the island's judiciary to demonstrate respect for the law but also expressed optimism given the "irreproachable conduct" of the judges on its highest court.[113] Nonetheless, this flicker of hope was promptly snuffed out by an unfavorable ruling. Appraising the situation, a *Bohemia* reporter remarked that Grau had scorned Cuba's judiciary but Prío, himself a lawyer, preferred cajolery. Neither man seriously considered Article 170 of the constitution, which mandated "independent" judges who owed obedience "only to the law."

Of course, the nation's most pliable judges occupied the Urgency Courts – which existed outside the constitution altogether and were despised as instruments of political repression. In 1947, a lawyer named Emilio Maza brought a suit before the Supreme Tribunal seeking their extinction. The case was decided after Prío assumed office and its resolution reflected the new president's wheedling style. At the outset, Presiding Judge Julián de Solórzano and a majority of his peers agreed the Urgency Courts should be abolished. Later on, Solórzano was suddenly withdrawn in favor of the more amenable Judge Chaves Milanés, who convinced enough colleagues to keep the Urgency Courts. Prío wanted them to handle those accused of violating the Law against Gangsterism and held out the prospect of nominations to the Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees to those who complied. On the other hand, Cuba's court system did not always bend to the whims of power. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal ruled with commendable impartiality during the island's voting season, for example, but in general the judiciary had thus far proved

[113] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: Aquí También Había Crisis," *Bohemia,* October 16, 1949: 75.

incapable of standing up to the island's presidents. In this vein, the philosopher Mario Llerena indicated that, "Our constitution is admirable, the laws are good, the form of government is satisfactory" but the problem is one of "spirit." In other words, "The evil is not in the law but IN THE JUDGES WHO MUST ENFORCE THE LAW."[114] For Chibás, this failure was at the root of the administration's loan proposal.

By October 10, when Carlos Prío addressed the nation on the first anniversary of his inauguration, Chibás had been intermittently railing against the foreign loan for 10 months. Since being released from prison in June, the *Ortodoxo* leader's criticism had evolved into an all-encompassing monomania. During his speech, broadcast from the presidential palace, Prío attempted to deflect some of the criticism – promising the loan would be used to create jobs rather than covering Grau's deficit. At the same time, Prío warned Cubans against "someone" who "portrays himself as a national hero by insulting the chief of state on a daily basis."[115] He added:

> Guard your home, Cubans, from the man who slanders me so crudely because what he does against me, knowing that as president of the republic I cannot hold him to account, he will one day do against you, because the slanderer is a slimy type who cannot master his own criminal weakness![116]

The identity of this mystery figure, already quite obvious, became even more discernable when Prío inveighed against "irresponsible and shrill voices that have

[114] Mario Llerena, ¿Qué es la 'Revolución Cubana,'" *Bohemia,* October 16, 1949: 117.
[115] "En Cuba, Palacio: Un Discurso Polémico," *Bohemia,* October 16, 1949: 73.
[116] Ibid.

been attacking the public works plan based on funds from the loan."[117] He did not explicitly refer to Chibás because of his constitutional responsibility as Cuba's "moderating power" and source of "national solidarity." More importantly, the great unknown remained the loan itself rather than the name of Prío's principal foe. When the island's citizens turned off their radios that evening, they still had no idea when the loan would be contracted, how much money was involved, who was doing the lending and what terms were being discussed. Chibás echoed these and other concerns in a public reply to the president on October 16. With typical pizzazz, he claimed the government's vaunted public works program was so hopelessly vague that "a child in kindergarten" could produce something "equal or better."[118] Chibás maintained that construction projects required long months of planning by engineers and other technical personnel, none of which was being carried out. Moreover, Prío's assertion that the loan would not be arranged with any institution requiring oversight of the money or detailed building schemes seemed like a recipe for massive embezzlement. Chibás concluded that:

> If a bank exists that will lend the money under these conditions, it better not hope later on that the Cuban people will pay back, with interest, the millions of *pesos* it gave the members of this administration to spend on elections or rob outright. This would be a political debt for them but never a debt of the republic.[119]

Regardless of its parameters, the loan would require two-thirds approval in Cuba's senate and chamber of representatives.[120] This set the stage for the

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Eduardo R. Chibás. "Mi Replica al Presidente Prío," *Bohemia,* October 16, 1949: 87.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Article 253 of Cuba's constitution mandated that, "The state will not arrange loans unless a law of congress is approved by two-thirds of the members of each legislative body and at the same time the necessary permanent revenues to pay the interest and amortization are provided for."

legislature's most pivotal moment since 1941, when it narrowly approved a $25,000,000 credit from the United States Export-Import Bank. Back then, *Auténtico* lawmakers including Carlos Prío and Tony Varona had vigorously opposed the measure in terms similar to those now being used by Chibás. Prío had questioned whether public employees who flaunted "costly luxury items" could be trusted to administer the funds honestly while Varona proclaimed that, "We will only be truly free when we have our own economy."[121] Chibás gleefully turned their previous words against them in what was now an all out campaign. Apart from denigrating the loan from behind his microphones every Sunday, his friend Miguel Ángel Quevedo offered a regular space in *Bohemia* to do the same. On October 23, Chibás lambasted Prío's preliminary message to congress – claiming the president's promises to build country roads and irrigation canals were insincere because he offered no specifics. He also wondered why there was no mention of rural electrification or an agricultural lending institution. Once again, Chibás asked whether the government was only serious about allocating resources to Havana's tunnel, which he had long since dubbed, "the cave of Ali Baba and his 40,000 thieves" and the tourist city.

The following week, Chibás emphasized a new wrinkle. He noted the president's loan proposal was in the hands of José Manuel Alemán, who headed the senate's finance and budget committee. "This means" that Alemán, as "the biggest embezzler in history," and someone who attained his position through "favorable votes from pro government senators" would be charged with deciding if the loan

[121] Eduardo R. Chibás, "El Empréstito Extranjero (Mi Vida Me Defiende)," *Bohemia,* October 23, 1949: 83.

was "honest and convenient to the republic's interests."[122] Chibás also compiled quotes from Cuba's pantheon of heroes from previous generations, all of whom had bequeathed warnings against foreign loans. These included José Martí, the island's foremost poet and essayist whose words on almost any subject were usually considered definitive; Antonio Maceo, a venerable general from the independence wars; and Enrique José Varona, the father of Cuba's educational system. In addition, Chibás reproduced a snippet from his ex nemesis, Ramón Grau San Martín, who had recently told an ad hoc student group known as the University Committee Against the Loan, that:

> They have asked me not to talk about the loan, to remain silent and be quiet. But faced with this nonsense that could sink the republic I cannot just cross my arms. The loan goes against the national interest and combating it is a duty of the entire citizenry. I would be against any loan, even if it were only for one *peso.*[123]

University of Havana students, in fact, were among the loan's fiercest opponents. Since being created in August, the University Committee Against the Loan had gained support from all 12 faculties. As the congressional debate approached, the outfit began organizing a march on the *Capitolio*. Aiming for the largest possible crowd, invitations were extended to each of the island's political leaders. This did not sit well with some Committee members, notably the *Ortodoxo* youth leader Max

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[122] Eduardo R. Chibás,"!El Empréstito en Manos de Alemán!, El Primer Ministro y yo," *Bohemia,* October 30, 1949: 70.

[123] Ibid. On another occasion, Grau told students from the University Committee Against the Loan that *Auténticos* who supported the measure were "outside the party" and could conceivably be expelled. In other words, his truce with Prío was all but dead. This was clear from his advice to *Auténtico* legislators who begged him to be silent on the issue. He told them, "Don't think you are going to make money by voting for the loan because later on your political operatives are going to ask for a cut and you will end up without money or the public's trust." See "En Cuba, Empréstito: 'A lo que ha Llegado Esta Gente,'" *Bohemia,* November 6, 1949: 74.

Lesnik, who objected to courting Batista and Grau, both of whom he dubbed, "traitors of the university."[124] His was a minority voice, however, even among fellow *Ortodoxos.* Chibás himself declared the importance of a truly mass demonstration. In this vein, students visited the Liberal leader Eduardo Suárez Rivas in his law office and Ramón Grau San Martín in his home on Miramar's *Quinta Avenida.* Suárez Rivas denounced the loan in its present form as "anti-constitutional" and "anti-scientific."[125] As such, he promised to expel any Liberal who voted in favor of the measure. Nevertheless, he was not opposed to the loan per se, only its current dearth of detail and thus refused to attend the rally. Grau, of course, was more sympathetic but he too declined to show his face. The ex-president, who overrated his popularity, feared the government would claim people had shown up to support him rather than to protest the loan. He thus promised to send the *Auténtico* legislator Humberto Becerra as his representative. Batista also demurred but his party, PAU, eagerly agreed to participate.[126]

In the early evening of October 31, as senators met the quorum call, an estimated 80,000 to 1000,000 people paraded up Old Havana's grandest thoroughfare, the *Paseo del Prado,* toward the *Capitolio.* Students led the procession but an honorary place among them was given to Enrique Loynaz de Castillo. Loynaz de Castillo had been a general during Cuba's independence struggle but was also famous for having written the text and music of the *Himno Invasor,* or marching

[124] "En Cuba, Empréstito: Fué el 31 de Octubre de 1949," *Bohemia,* November 6, 1949: 73.
[125] En Cuba, Empréstito: 'Nos Oponemos al Mensaje No al Empréstito,'" November 6, 1949: 73.
[126] A sneering *Bohemia* reporter wrote that Batista stayed away because he "would not dare to put his dubious popularity to the test." See "En Cuba, Empréstito: 'Contra la Hipoteca del Gobierno,'" *Bohemia,* November 6, 1949: 75.

theme of the 1895 war against Spain. Behind them followed the political parties; the PAU sans Batista, the *Ortodoxos* headed by Chibás and the Communists, fronted by Juan Marinello. The throng also contained a substantial number of women, which drew the attention of *Bohemia's* correspondent. Their collective chants were heard inside the *Capitolio* and many lawmakers could not resist the temptation to approach the windows and have a gander at the crowd outside. Given the magnitude of their votes, the session was unusually well attended but there were some notable absences nonetheless. Despite his stated opposition to the loan, the habitual truant Fulgencio Batista remained at his country estate. José Manuel Alemán, another regular absentee, stayed away as well. According to the *Auténtico* senator Rubén de León, Alemán was actually opposed to the loan and had "given orders" to his legislative adherents to vote against it.[127] This likely explained why Alemán's acolytes in the senate, Carlos de Arazoza and Pancho Grau Alsina, were no-shows. Liberal ranks were missing José Manuel Casanova, who was in London, along with Alfredo Hornedo and Eduardo Zayas Bazán. Among these, Casanova was known to support the loan and had signaled his wiliness to return if his vote was needed.

Sixty minutes into what would be a 20 hour session, Pelayo Cuervo offered the simplest and most direct criticism of the loan. Namely, the president refused to

[127] "En Cuba, Senado: La Batalla del Empréstito," *Bohemia,* November 6, 1949: 75. There are a number of possible reasons why Alemán may have opposed the loan. The infusion of cash would allow Prío to rely less on Alemán's largesse and could therefore diminish his influence. Alemán's friendship with Grau may also have been a factor. Finally, Alemán's rivals within the party, particularly the faction led by Miguelito Suárez Fernández, were also sure to benefit from the extra money – a prospect he perhaps hoped to avoid.

provide "detailed information" that would allow legislators to vote responsibly.[128] This was part of an ongoing pattern. He reminded his peers that the senate had requested documents regarding the nation's finances a year ago and Carlos Prío had refused to comply despite repeated appeals. Cuervo promised to combat this latest round of obfuscation with a lawsuit if the loan were approved. The Liberal boss Eduardo Suárez Rivas was equally feisty but far more partisan. Among other things, he accused the president of using the loan as a vehicle to finance his brother Antonio's campaign for mayor of Havana. In any case, after myriad delays, recesses, motions and speeches, the weary senators voted 37-9 in favor of the loan at 2:10 p.m. the following day. The measure was now confronted with one final obstacle, Cuba's unruly chamber of representatives. While gaining the senate's assent for the loan had involved a fair amount of drama, the government's pact with the Democrats had largely ensured the necessary votes for a two-thirds majority. This was not the case in the lower house, particularly as many *Auténticos* harbored reservations. Such renegades were dealt with harshly. For example, eight public employees who owed their positions to Rafael del Busto were fired after he withheld support. Thereafter, del Busto adopted the government line. Victor Vega Ceballos was more willing to bend at the outset but only up to a point. He told Prío he would vote for the loan but declined to defend it in the chamber of representatives, saying the bill was unconstitutional and its justification did not merit two million *pesos* let alone the 200 million the administration was seeking.

[128] Ibid.

On November 11, a session was initiated in Cuba's lower house. While opposition representatives such as Manuel Bisbé and the Communist Anibal Escalante denounced the loan, pro-government legislators feverishly negotiated to increase their vote totals. Tony Varona tirelessly coursed through the *Capitolio's* nooks and crannies, alternately wheedling and threatening potential targets. After 17 hours, it was clear the majority would fall three votes short of the necessary two-thirds. Hence, the *Auténticos* played for time by requesting the proceedings be rescheduled on September 15. This ensured at least one more vote, as the Republican Manuel Orizondo, who had been vacationing in Paris, was due to return by then.[129] The government also managed to lure two Liberals during the hiatus. Hence, when the chamber of representatives reconvened, the result was already a foregone conclusion. However, members of the public were still treated to a show. The excitement began when José Suárez Rivas asked for a recess so the party could expel its treacherous legislators, whom he deemed "men without honor."[130] This delighted the crowd, which burst into spontaneous applause. However, chamber president Lincoln Rodón was in no mood for theatrics and ordered the visitor's gallery to be emptied – prompting even more noise along with shouts of "traitors," "thieves" and "*botelleros*."[131] Once they were gone, only representatives, journalists

[129] The government had been frantically trying to arrange for Orizondo's return since early November and for a long time this seemed a less than promising endeavor. Fellow Republican Mario Robau told the press that Orizondo, "detests flying" and would only rush back if the administration sent an "airplane filled with money." See "En Cuba, Empréstito: Amenaza y Soborno," *Bohemia,* November 13, 1949: 78. Needless to say, the opposition enjoyed this situation immensely. At one point, the Liberal congressman José Suárez Rivas said, "I hope the president is preparing to build a chimney in the *Capitolio* because at any moment a stork may appear carrying Mr. Orizondo from Paris." See "En Cuba, Cámara: Una Jornada Sin Gloria," *Bohemia,* November 20, 1949: 76.
[130] "En Cuba, Cámara: 'Se Ha Producido Toda Clase de Presiones,'" *Bohemia,* November 20, 1949: 76.
[131] Ibid.

and a handful of politicians remained. During the interminable speeches, which lasted into the following afternoon, lawmakers beguiled the time by playing poker, taking naps or gossiping among themselves. At one point, Grau's ex interior minister Alejo Cossío del Pino approached the Communist Joaquín Ordoqui. Referring to the common cause made by *Ortodoxo* and Communist congressmen in censuring the loan, he said, "Listen Joaquín, when Chibás is president he is going to let the Communists use the radio frequency 1010 once again. He may even give you a second frequency as well."

"*Chico,*" said the gray haired Communist leader, "but that won't be for awhile."

Chibás, who happened to be nearby, said, "Only two more years. By 1952 we'll already be in power."

Cossío then touched on the juiciest topic among Cuban politicians besides the loan; namely, the attempt by Carlos Prío to position his brother Antonio as Havana's next mayor and possibly as a future presidential candidate. Alluding to the Prío family's thin skin and willingness to shut down critical broadcasts, Cossío added, "The worst scenario would be if you had to wait for Antonio to grant you a radio frequency."[132]

With the loan now a certainty, Raúl Gutiérrez conducted a second public opinion poll which showed that a majority of Cubans were now against the measure. This was a tribute to Chibás, whose denunciatory broadcasts and *Bohemia* articles reached a larger combined audience than any other politician or commentator. The

[132] Ibid., 76-77.

survey revealed that 46.28 percent of Cubans believed borrowing money would prove prejudicial while 34.87 percent felt it would be beneficial or conditionally beneficial. Even more damaging, when Cubans were asked who would administer the loan more honorably they chose Chibás over Prío by a margin of nearly 15 percentage points.[133] Thus, even though the *Ortodoxo* leader had lost his campaign against the loan, the issue would remain a potent weapon against Prío going forward – particularly if questions of mismanagement were raised in the future.

CASTELLANOS FLIRTS WITH THE *ORTODOXOS*

Since leaving the chamber of representatives in 1948, Alejo Cossío del Pino bought *Radio-Cadena Habana* and devoted himself part-time to journalism. He had become somewhat marginalized among the *Auténticos* after serving Grau as interior minister but remained close to Nicolás Castellanos, the mayor of Havana. Castellanos, for his part, was increasingly worried by Carlos Prío's manipulation of the party machinery to install his younger brother Antonio as the *Auténtico* mayoral candidate.[134] He thus began to consider alternative options, which included switching parties and running under a new banner. Cossío, who maintained ties with Grau, the Communists and Guillermo Alonso Pujol among others, was an ideal emissary. On October 12, 1949, Cossío happened upon Millo Ochoa at the funeral of

[133] Raúl Gutiérrez, "Segundo Survey Sobre el Empréstito," *Bohemia,* November 20, 1949: 85. Cubans were asked whether a range of political figures, including Chibás, Ramon Grau San Martín, Fulgencio Batista and Juan Marinello would administer the loan more honestly than Carlos Prío. Chibás was easily considered the most honorable of the lot. Head to head, 36.81 percent considered Chibás more honest, while 21.84 percent opted for Prío. A substantial portion, 28.71 also answered "neither."

[134] Carlos Prío influenced the process in a twofold manner. First, during the party reorganization of October 1949, he backed candidates for the *Auténtico* municipal assembly who supported his brother's candidacy. Second, neutral or wavering delegates were lured with financial incentives.

Peru's ambassador, José Bernardo Goyburu. Cossío pulled the *Ortodoxo* vice-president aside and begged him to arrange a meeting with Chibás. Just over a month later, Cossío addressed Chibás, Ochoa, Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Orlando Castro in the *Ortodoxo* vice-president's hometown of Holguín. Cossío informed them that Castellanos was prepared to adopt the party's independent line and face Cuba's voters without pacts. Chibás expressed doubts that Castellanos fully understood the party's "new political style" but promised to consult its higher-ups and return with a definitive answer.[135] The *Ortodoxo* leader saw Cossío next on November 16, in the *Capitolio,* during the legislative session on the foreign loan. He handed over an envelope with his reply, which dismissed Castellanos as little different from fellow mayoral candidates Antonio Prío and Panchín Batista – both of whom were widely considered to be corrupt.[136] For good measure, Chibás sent a copy of his remarks to the press.

The matter was far from decided, however. At noon on November 18, José Pardo Llada set the nation abuzz when he broadcast that Chibás and Castellanos had broached the possibility of the latter leaving the *Auténtico* party and running for re-election as an *Ortodoxo.* A *Bohemia* reporter noted that, "It's been a long time since an event has been able to excite the man on the street to such an extent."[137]

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[135] "En Cuba, Política: Otro Suceso de Resonancia Nacional," *Bohemia,* November 27, 1949: 73. During his broadcasts of June 4 and June 28, 1949 Chibás had accused Castellanos of stealing funds belonging to the municipality and diverting more than a million *pesos* earmarked for Havana's aqueduct to create jobs for day laborers who, in their gratitude, would support the *Auténticos.* These were a few reasons why Chibás believed Castellanos was not fit to be an *Ortodoxo*.

[136] Despite his assurances, Chibás had not officially consulted *Ortodoxo* leadership regarding Castellanos. His negative response was inspired at least in part by news that Castellanos intended to meet with Carlos Prío, which undoubtedly convinced Chibás the party was being used. Subsequently, however, Castellanos cancelled the appointment.

[137] Ibid.

Castellanos had met Chibás the previous evening, having insisted on an audience regardless of the *Ortodoxo* leader's declarations. During their talk, Chibás asked numerous questions regarding the mayor's conduct, his efforts to build a new aqueduct and how he responded to meddling from the central government. Castellanos offered detailed answers that began to peel away his interlocutor's skepticism. Playing on the *Ortodoxo* leader's fondness for honest administration, Castellanos proclaimed that, "43 million *pesos* have passed through these hands over the past three years and look, Eddy, they are clean!"[138] The mayor also offered up Havana's municipal electoral apparatus, which would provide a considerable boost to a party notable for its lack of organization. While some of his misgivings had been assuaged, Chibás expressed a reluctance to withdraw the mayoral candidacy of his good friend Manuel Bisbé. At any rate, he promised Castellanos that his appeal would be placed before the party's executive council.

A spirited meeting ensued in the home of Roberto Agramonte. As party bigwigs discussed Castellanos in the second floor library, delegates from the *Ortodoxo* municipal assembly fluttered nervously downstairs. Many could not hide their enthusiasm for the Havana mayor, who offered control of Cuba's capital without compromising the party's much disputed independent line.[139] Conversely, when Chibás introduced the matter he made no attempt to conceal his reservations. Aside from his reluctance to retire Bisbé's nomination, two things gnawed at him. First, Chibás feared backing Castellanos would give the impression he was a

[138] Ibid.
[139] Castellanos had also told Chibás that if he were nominated as the *Ortodoxo* candidate, five prominent city councilors (four *Auténticos* and one Republican) would join him.

hypocrite, particularly as he had publicly censured him a few days earlier. Second, the Havana mayor's campaign already counted the outright support of Grau and Guillermo Alonso Pujol – two toxic figures who Chibás preferred to avoid. The *Ortodoxo* leader's doubts were shared by Isidro Figueroa, the Workers Wing boss and Orlando Castro, the Youth Section head. Castro claimed the current popularity of Castellanos would be fleeting, akin to "the foam of a newly poured beer."[140] On the other hand, Castellanos found fervent support among Beto Saumell and Roberto García Ibáñez. The former addressed his colleagues in a passionate tone, saying:

> *Compañeros,* the party has now been presented with its best opportunity to strengthen itself. This may involve a concession of principle but it will be repaid by winning the island's second most important position. It is my understanding that we are a political party that must confront reality rather than a conclave of cherubs or Franciscan monks. If we follow the path of rigorous Puritanism, the moment will arrive in which every *Ortodoxo* will be obligated to be a saint with a halo among other attributes. By this avenue, we will never be a majority party nor will we ever win the presidency of the republic. Let's not deceive ourselves: the people of Havana support Castellanos against Prío's attempt to impose his younger brother.[141]

García Ibáñez confirmed the last portion of this comment with an anecdote. He related that he had been eating in a Vedado restaurant recently and the waiters, who were all *Auténticos*, approached him to say they would vote for Castellanos.

Meanwhile, one floor below, Agramonte's residence was filling up with telegrams from *Ortodoxos* on every corner of the island imploring the party leadership to welcome Castellanos. Although García Ibáñez was unaware of the ever swelling pile of messages beneath him, he and Saumell, who had been mayor of a

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[140] "En Cuba, Política: 'La Política es el Arte de Organizar la Realidad,'" *Bohemia,* November 27, 1949: 74.
[141] Ibid., 75.

mid-sized town, possessed a keen sense the popular will.[142] Unlike previous wrangles, intrinsic aspects of the party program were not at stake. Essentially, the question was whether Castellanos was moral enough to be an *Ortodoxo.* For men like Saumell, Millo Ochoa and García Ibáñez, this was crossing the line between a new political style and electoral hara-kiri. As such, García Ibáñez added:

> We are a political party, different though we are from all the others, and not a sect of monks. We have to conquer power by political means and we will never do so if we maintain this religious aura that some would like to impose on the *Ortodoxo* movement. The incorporation of Castellanos would represent a second rebellion from within the *Auténtico* party. This offers a tremendous opportunity for us. If we nominate Castellanos, we will march at the front of popular opinion.[143]

Luis Orlando Rodríguez, who was opposed to Castellanos but allowed that Manuel Bisbé was a weak candidate, tried to break the impasse by suggesting Chibás run instead.[144] This motion was approved unanimously but rejected by the *Ortodoxo* leader. As the meeting stretched past 4 a.m., Chibás spoke one last time before committee members would cast their votes and stagger home to sleep. He observed that:

> There is no doubt Castellanos has offered us the mayoralty on a silver platter. It's true that by nominating him the independent line wouldn't be jeopardized but the morals of our movement would

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[142] Saumell had been mayor of Bayamo, a city in Oriente province with 90,124 residents according to the 1943 census.

[143] "En Cuba, Política: 'La Política es el Arte de Organizar la Realidad," 75.

[144] Luis Orlando Rodríguez was hardly the only *Ortodoxo* who was unhappy with the choice of Manuel Bisbé as the party's mayoral candidate. Carlos Márquez Sterling, for example, claimed the party was isolating itself by choosing someone with no chance of winning. *Acción Revolucionaria Ortodoxa* (ARO), Fidel Castro's quasi splinter organization, was equally displeased. He published a flyer complaining the "Jesuit" Bisbé had been "imposed" by the party's higher reaches. Curiously, Castro reasoned that Bisbé did not deserve the nomination because he had been a traitor willing to negotiate pacts "even with the Communists." See Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 7, Expediente 212: 4, ANC.

> certainly suffer. Any other party would accept his nomination because this would bring in the *jamón* and everyone would be anxious for their share. But we don't do such things. And even though winning the mayoralty could guarantee victory in 1952 the people would doubt our conduct and would lose faith in us. It's preferable to wait with our prestige intact rather than to arrive in power quickly and discredit ourselves.[145]

Shortly thereafter, the groggy assemblage had its say. When the news that Castellanos had been vetoed was communicated downstairs an audible groan spread through the house.

The following day, Chibás received a *Bohemia* reporter in his apartment. Chibás, who usually paced back and forth while talking, was shorn of his habitual restlessness on this occasion. Sitting comfortably in an armchair and infused with an unaccustomed tranquility, he said, "I know there is a hostile reaction to my attitude on the street but it doesn't matter. It's the natural effervescence of the moment and will disappear. The people are always sentimental and impassioned but he who directs a political party must see the larger picture."[146] This was not a typical statement from Chibás, who normally spoke of the people with near mystical reverence. But the *Ortodoxo* leader, who prided himself on his ability to uncover subterranean plots and hidden machinations, was sure he knew something that had escaped them. Chibás told the journalist that Castellanos had not been acting on his own but was rather an agent of Miguelito Suárez Fernández. He explained that Suárez Fernández had aimed to destroy his party and weaken Carlos Prío in one fell swoop. At first, Castellanos would flirt with the *Ortodoxos* so that Prío would feel

[145] "En Cuba, Política: 'La Política es el Arte de Organizar la Realidad," 75-76. The term *jamón* (ham) was commonly referred to in Cuban politics as the fruits of office, including money, jobs, perks, etc.
[146] "En Cuba, Política: 'Un Inconfundible Sello Miguelista…'" *Bohemia,* November 27, 1949: 76.

pressure to remove his brother and restore the Havana mayor on the party ticket. If the *Ortodoxos* had accepted Castellanos as their candidate, they would be faced with the prospect of supporting him in tandem with the *Auténticos*. The party's reputation for honesty and independence would thus be in tatters. Such a result would gratify Suárez Fernández both politically and personally since he would "never forgive" Chibás for foiling the third front in 1948.[147] The *Bohemia* correspondent reacted to these conspiracy theories with understated incredulousness. Others, including some *Ortodoxos*, were not so polite. This was a bizarre performance in many respects, particularly as Chibás could hardly have believed much of what he said. For one thing, nepotism was a longstanding tradition in Cuban politics and the president, who possessed immense power and resources, was never going to jettison his younger brother. Chibás, who had chosen his cousin to run alongside him in 1948, knew this quite well. Stranger still was the assertion that a grudge existed between Chibás and Miguelito Suárez Fernández over something with no basis in fact. Anyone who listened to the radio in 1948 realized Chibás had vigorously boosted the third front. Further, those who read newspapers or magazines with political coverage knew the Democrat Antonio Martínez Fraga (whose party was now a member of Prío's government) had sunk the third front by engineering its rejection in the Las Villas provincial assembly. Once again, the *Ortodoxo* leader's obsession with posterity appeared to have influenced his rebuff of Castellanos and was behind the intention to whitewash a pact friendly past he now considered unbearable.

[147] Ibid.

According to preliminary polls, Chibás had passed up an excellent opportunity. Raúl Gutiérrez's public survey of November 22 showed that 57.91 percent of Havana residents preferred Nicolás Castellanos as their mayor, as opposed to 12.87 percent for Antonio Prío, 10.43 percent for Manuel Bisbé and eight percent for Panchín Batista – the PAU style nepotism candidate. In addition, 66.91 percent of *Auténticos* declared themselves ready to buck party discipline and vote for Castellanos.[148] Nevertheless, Chibás was content to demonstrate that he, unlike other Cuban politicians, was willing to sacrifice expedience in the name of principle. Thus, he told the *Bohemia* reporter that, "They won't be able to brand me as an over eager aspirant for the presidency because everyone now knows that that I have scorned my chances in 52 by rejecting Castellanos."[149] At the same time, many members of the *Ortodoxo* municipal council remained partial to Castellanos and some publicly called on Bisbé to step down. The professor of Greek duly satisfied them by publishing a letter resigning his candidacy. This touched off a new round of jostling for the party's nomination along with recriminations from Bisbé's closest adherents, including Chibás himself. The most likely replacement was Ventura Dellundé, who had distinguished himself in the campaign against the Cuban Electric Company. He was also affluent and demonized by hard-liners as the "BAGA of the *Ortodoxos*" for alleged delegate buying.[150] For his part, Dellundé led a group

[148] Raúl Gutiérrez. "Primer Survey Sobre la Alcaldía de la Habana," *Bohemia,* November 27, 1949: 82-83

[149] "En Cuba, Política: 'Un Inconfundible Sello Miguelista…,'" 77.

[150] "En Cuba, Política: Una Tempestad en un Vaso de Agua," *Bohemia,* December 4, 1949: 76. During a meeting of the *Ortodoxo* executive council on December 1, Raúl Primelles accused Dellundé of buying municipal delegates. The congressman Félix Martín, who supported Dellundé, challenged him to provide specific information. When Primelles offered the name of a delegate from the Havana neighborhood of Vives, Dellundé offered a less than convincing denial.

protesting "favoritism" towards their leader's closest confidants. Chibás, however, argued that he was not prepared to sacrifice Bisbé for "one who has arrived at the last minute with a bag of money."[151] The *Ortodoxo* executive council agreed and restored Bisbé. Further, pleas to place the matter before the municipal assembly, which would probably have contradicted this decision, were dismissed. Ironically, this was the sort of chicanery sanctimonious *Ortodoxos* ascribed to "traditional" parties. At any rate, Chibás had demonstrated once again that he feared the wrath of history more than the ire of his party's rank and file. On the other hand, Millo Ochoa was warier of irrelevance, telling a reporter from *Pueblo* that, "If we don't enter into any pacts, I invite you to the burial of the PPC on June 1, 1952 at 6 p.m."[152]

[151] Ibid.
[152] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 654. This, of course, was when the polls would close during the next presidential election.

Chapter 8

"I'm Not One of Those Generals Who Dies in Bed"

On January 1, 1950 the cartoonist Carlos Vidal published a satirical take on Cuban politics entitled, "What Will the New Year Bring?" "Will it bring happiness?" asked one drawing, in which America's Uncle Sam handed Carlos Prío a bag of (loaned) money. "Will it bring political liberty?" inquired another frame in which a gun toting, well dressed "political sergeant" traded cash for the vote of a barefoot peasant. "Will it bring sacrifices? posited a further sketch in which Carlos Prío gamely shares his *jamón*, the emblem of political goodies, with his brother Antonio. "Will it bring struggles?" asked yet another in which the Republican chief Guillermo Alonso Pujol and the Liberal leader Eduardo Suárez Rivas fought over the very same *jamón* – in reference to the latter party's negotiations with the *Auténticos* to join the government. "Or," asked the final portrait, which portrayed a hungry *guajiro* dreaming of a full plate, "will it be exactly the same as last year?"[1] While Chibás was nowhere to be found in this comic strip, he too was the subject of a pressing question as the new year dawned, namely: Will he continue to defend political independence at all costs? The latest figure to test this conviction was Eduardo Suárez Rivas, who visited Chibás on the evening of January 11. Arriving at Eddy's apartment in the elegant López Serrano building, the Liberal boss offered to delay the pact he was discussing with the *Auténticos* and see whether an agreement with

[1] Carlos Vidal, "¿Qué Espera del Nuevo Año?," *Bohemia,* January 1, 1950: 59.

the *Ortodoxos* could be reached instead. In this vein, he informed Chibás that the Liberal assembly was ready to nominate him as the party's presidential candidate in 1952. Intransigent as ever, Chibás rejected the proposal but left the door slightly ajar by suggesting the Liberals dissolve themselves and join the *Ortodoxos* as the ABC party had done in 1947. This was an unlikely prospect, but represented the only way Chibás could imagine squaring his conscience with Cuba's political realities. However, this solution would have involved a different set of intractable problems. Much to their horror, the *Ortodoxos* had found that many ABC members remained loyal to their former leaders even after the party had nominally ceased to exist. Quite a few had abandoned the *Ortodoxos* in 1948 after Joaquín Martínez Sáenz joined the Liberal-Democratic coalition. Absorbing the Liberals now would have proved far trickier. For one thing, how could Chibás agree to merge with President Machado's old outfit? Even if those with ties to the tyrant were excluded, the symbolism would have been crushing – although realists like the Ochoa brothers and perhaps Roberto García Ibáñez would not have minded. The Liberals, after all, had been such an opportunistic party that they had brought Fulgencio Batista out of retirement in Daytona Beach to bolster their senatorial ticket. In addition, Suárez Rivas himself had lobbied for the move. Having committed this unholy sin, how could he hope to fare in a party whose executive committee had refused the relatively benign Nicolás Castellanos?

The impossibility of admitting an influx of Liberals became all the more clear on January 28, when the *Ortodoxo* national assembly convened in Havana. This gathering, which took place on the 97th anniversary of José Martí's birth, re-elected

Chibás as party president and produced a strikingly self-righteous document. One motion, which was introduced by Chibás and approved unanimously, proclaimed:

> It is evident that the *Ortodoxo* party, the only true opposition party, would be diluting the ideals that gave it life and would betray its reason for being if it were to enter…into understandings with the men and organizations of the present and past who are responsible for the existing corruption and therefore squander the *Ortodoxo* moral revolution and its historical destiny in order to embrace immediate electoral opportunism.[2]

Rather, the *Ortodoxos* pledged to "sweep away the putrefaction of national politics."[3] As a result, there was an obligatory dig at Nicolás Castellanos, who had loomed so large in the party's imagination lately and whose acceptance of support from Grau, Guillermo Alonso Pujol and José Manuel Alemán was exhibit A of the sort of politics they intended to eschew.[4] Chibás and the *Ortodoxos* added an extra dollop of legitimacy to their position by including a maxim from the *Apóstol* himself which dovetailed nicely with the party slogan, namely: "Shame must become the fashion while shamelessness should go out of style."[5]

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[2] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 657.
[3] Ibid.
[4] By this time, Nicolás Castellanos had been brought in from the political wilderness by the Republicans, who nominated him as their candidate for the Havana mayoralty. This, of course, was payback courtesy of Guillermo Alonso Pujol for Carlos Prío's pact with the Democrats. Euphoric at finally having a party behind him, Castellanos gleefully excoriated the men who had caused him so many recent difficulties. He deemed Antonio Prío "incompetent," noting that his adversary had spent 22 years working for the same bank, earning 90 *pesos* per month, without a single raise or promotion. "His only ability," said the Havana mayor, "was in amassing a fortune of six million in two years (in the treasury ministry)." Castellanos also referred to the fact that Carlos Prío had offered him a senate seat on the *Auténtico* ticket for 1950 as a consolation prize, but he replied that Antonio needed that job more than he, if only for the parliamentary immunity given his "embezzlement" from the treasury ministry. See "En Cuba, Política: '¡Qué no piensen ya en despostularme!'" *Bohemia,* January 8, 1950: 78-79. Aside from snagging Castellanos, the Republicans also recruited Grau to run for the senate under their banner. While flattered by the gesture, *El Viejo* did not want people to think he was seeking office in order to secure parliamentary immunity from Lawsuit 82. See "En Cuba, Política: '¡La Dificultad Está en las 174 Millones!'" *Bohemia,* January 22, 1950: 77.
[5] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 657.

For the time being, however, shamelessness was very much in vogue. Nowhere was this more visible than in the nomination of Antonio Prío for Havana's mayoralty. "Little brother Antonio," as he was irreverently known by many of the capital's denizens, was proclaimed the *Auténtico* candidate in a Sunday morning ceremony in the National Theater. This event was open to the public and widely advertised in Cuba's newspapers and magazines but most of those in evidence were conscripted public servants or the quarry of so-called political sergeants. Employees of the customs service were not only ordered to attend but were told exactly where to park their vehicles.[6] Further, while an understanding with the Liberals had yet to be consummated, they helped the *Auténticos* rustle up spectators in a gesture of good will. Antonio Prío's inability to attract a large audience without government intervention was due to his unpopularity but also to the 9 a.m. start time, an hour when plenty of *Habaneros* preferred to sleep. Among those who were awake, quite a few directed insults at the caravan drivers offering free rides to the National Theater. But inside the neo-baroque edifice, a mere stone's throw from the *Capitolio*, an entirely different atmosphere reigned. Cabinet members were out in force to commend the president's younger brother, including Education Minister Aureliano Sánchez Arango, Foreign Minister Carlos Hevia, Public Works Minister Manuel Febles, Interior Minister Rubén de León, minister without portfolio and all purpose yes man Primitivo Rodríguez and Antonio's successor as treasury minister,

[6] "En Cuba, Política: La Proclamación de Antonio," *Bohemia,* January 22, 1950: 73.

Pepín Bosch.[7] When his turn to speak was at hand, Antonio had no trouble wringing an ovation from the assemblage of cowed government workers, well fed political sergeants, rural laborers bused in from the countryside and random pickups from the streets lured by curiosity or the prospect of favors.[8]

Encouraged by this warm reception, Antonio Prío visited the *Palacio de los Deportes* (Sports Palace) later that evening, where Havana residents often spent Sundays participating in raffles sponsored by the Allied Omnibus Company. He sought to elicit some cheers by telling the announcer he would sponsor a prize of 100 *pesos.* However, this overture did not stop the thousands of raffle players from whistling derisively when Antonio appeared before them. When he tried to speak, the whistles grew louder. Others stood on their seats and shouted, "Out!" or "Go away!" The raffle announcer ventured to settle the crowd by shouting, "Gentlemen, Cubans are famous for being civilized."[9] Unfortunately, the restive throng responded by smashing chairs against the floor. Not knowing how to respond, the conspicuously upset and pale faced candidate for Havana's mayoralty remained on the scene. The mayhem subsided only when a recording of Cuba's national anthem was played. This not only tranquilized the seething multitude and allowed the raffles to continue but also provided "little brother Antonio" with a chance to

[7] Primitivo Rodríguez was a lackey par excellence both for Grau and Prío. For this reason, he was always portrayed in political cartoons bearing a *guataca* or gardening hoe, which symbolized subservience in Cuban slang.
[8] A *Bohemia* reporter observed that the crowd was short on women and wondered sarcastically whether they preferred the handsome Nicolás Castellanos or the respectable Manuel Bisbé. These virtues were notably absent from Antonio Prío's resume. He lacked his older brother's good looks and was among the most venal and least qualified figures in the cabinet.
[9] "En Cuba, Política: Noche de Angustia," *Bohemia,* January 22, 1950: 74.

discreetly escape his most embarrassing moment in politics.[10] The cartoonist Vergara was one of many who reveled in the incident, drawing a bedridden Antonio Prío flanked by an advisor who tells a colleague, "Since going to the *Palacio de los Deportes* he's been sick with the whistles."[11] Of course, Chibás attempted to disparage Antonio even more forcefully during his weekly radio show by comparing him to another former treasury minister who had been nominated for mayor in the very same National Theater four years earlier. Unlike Antonio Prío, though, the martyred Manuel Fernández Supervielle had never pilfered state funds. "In today's event," said Chibás, "not one of the speakers referred to the honesty of the *Auténtico* candidate. His only merit consists in being a brother of the president of the republic!"[12] Chibás then proceeded to explain why Antonio was never extolled for his probity. For one thing, he had lied to Judge Antonio Vignier, who was investigating Lawsuit 82, by swearing the nation's finances were in perfect order even though he had publicly admitted there was a deficit upon taking office. Chibás also accused Antonio Prío of ordering subordinates to torch a building in Old Havana which, "coincidentally," contained documents proving the previous government had embezzled 174 million *pesos.*[13] In addition, he alleged the president's brother had shortchanged the newly founded national bank and

[10] Subsequently, Antonio Prío and his handlers blamed this humiliating episode on the Communists, although there was no evidence they had more of a predilection for raffles than the Cuban population at large. In response, the president's younger brother attempted to bolster his anti-Communist credentials by contributing a red-baiting piece to the island's most right wing newspaper, *Diario de la Marina.* This was entirely disingenuous, however, as Antonio Prío spent the day after his debacle at the *Palacio de los Deportes* negotiating with the Communists for their support.
[11] Vergara, "Enfermo de Gravedad," *Bohemia,* January 22, 1950: 75.
[12] "En Cuba, Política: Un Reverso Terrible," *Bohemia,* January 22, 1950: 74.
[13] Ibid.

increased the money supply in exchange for "private commissions."[14] Summarizing Antonio's 15 month tenure as treasury minister, Chibás told listeners, "This has been the worst and least efficient administration the republic has ever had," adding that his management had been characterized by, "jokes, *santería,* gambling and corruption."[15]

On February 5, Chibás published a brief article in *Bohemia* entitled "Shame versus Shamelessness," which endeavored to flog his party's newest slogan to the wider public. Chibás wrote that Cuba was living through an "epoch of confusion" whereby the nation's politicians had cast aside all scruples in the pursuit of political advantage.[16] In this vein, even entrenched enemies like Ramón Grau San Martín and Fulgencio Batista could "coincide" in their support for Nicolás Castellanos.[17] Meanwhile, Castellanos and Antonio Prío seemed eager to compromise themselves by courting the favor of Blas Roca and "Stalinist imperialism."[18] And not to be forgotten was Carlos Prío, a member of the 1930 Student Directorate who counted the formerly pro-Machado Virgilio Pérez in his cabinet. With his habitual flare for phrase-coining, Chibás dubbed Grau, Batista, José Manuel Alemán, Nicolás Castellanos and Guillermo Alonso Pujol the "five children of shamelessness" for their criticism that he was assisting the government by censuring them. In the face of so

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid. While Antonio Prío was undeniably dishonest he was probably not as corrupt as his predecessor, Isauro Valdés. However, Chibás was fond of superlatives both with regards to himself and his adversaries. Hence, Chibás regularly characterized attacks against him as the most vicious campaigns Cuba had ever seen. By the same token, the venality of this or that government official was often described as the worst in the republic's history.

[16] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Vergüenza Contra Desvergüenza," *Bohemia,* February 5, 1950: 68.

[17] Batista initially supported his younger brother Panchín for the Havana mayoralty but the two had a falling out and the latter decided to join the *Auténticos.*

[18] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Vergüenza Contra Desvergüenza," 68.

much deviousness, Chibás exhorted Cubans to take refuge in the *Ortodoxo* party, which had "remained apart from the putrefaction."[19]

While Chibás seemed feisty as ever in his politics, he had recently appeared emaciated and devoid of his usual verve. Unusually for him, he skipped an *Ortodoxo* rally in Sagua la Grande due to vomiting and intense abdominal pain. This situation deteriorated further until the morning of February 12, when Chibás was hospitalized for a diaphragmatic hernia that doctors linked to his much disputed gunshot wound from November of 1939. Apparently, the bullet that had nearly ended his life just over ten years earlier had relaxed the muscles of his diaphragm, which in turn was harming his stomach and digestive system. This condition required immediate treatment as the hernia could otherwise become strangulated and potentially life-threatening. Eddy's close friends debated whether he should travel to the United States as diaphragmatic surgery was uncommon in Cuba. Chibás, however, insisted on staying and chose an eminent local doctor, Vicente Banet, to perform the procedure. That evening, Chibás gamely said a few words over the air and ceded his remaining time to Carlos Márquez Sterling. The latter had recently heated up his flirtation with the *Ortodoxos* by writing a series of flattering columns for *Bohemia* but continued to shun outright commitment. Nonetheless, Chibás was shrewd in his choice of understudy as Márquez Sterling spoke about the looming threat of fraud in Cuba's mayoral vote. He accused Antonio Prío's henchmen of filching 100,000 identity cards from the communications ministry

[19] Ibid.

which would be strategically "managed" on election day.[20] Another scheme entailed arranging city residency for 50,000 rural dwellers who would cast ballots for the president's younger brother. Márquez Sterling also coquettishly exalted his University of Havana colleague, Manuel Bisbé, as a man of probity while characterizing Antonio Prío as the embodiment of nepotism and Nicolás Castellanos as an opportunist without firm beliefs or ideals. He claimed Cubans possessed a tendency to vote for the candidate who could most damage the government and for this reason Catholics and Communists, Grau and Batista along with representatives of everything and everyone in between had coalesced behind Castellanos. In this instance, though, he attempted to sell Bisbé, whom he had previously deemed unelectable, by saying, "It's time for our people to vote in favor of something rather than against it!"[21]

Meanwhile, Chibás spent the next two days preparing for surgery in Havana's *Sagrado Corazón* hospital. This in no way implied a hiatus from politics. On the contrary, Chibás kept tabs on the *Ortodoxo* municipal assembly to ensure they would nominate Manuel Bisbé as the party's mayoral candidate. After the vote was taken, Bisbé and a group of *Ortodoxo* councilmen visited Chibás at his sickbed to deliver the good news. These were hardly the only guests who graced the clinic. Apart from friends and family, scads of anxious supporters also showed up. Many assuaged their fears by fastening religious pins and medallions to his pajamas or praying to Cuba's patron saint, the *Virgen de la Caridad*. On the morning of February 15, Chibás passed two and a half hours under the knife. When he emerged from the

[20] "En Cuba, Política: Márquez Sterling: Huésped de Chibás," *Bohemia,* February 19, 1950: 74.
[21] Ibid.

anesthesia, his friend and personal doctor Pedro Iglesias Betancourt greeted him by saying, "Shame vs. Money!" The bleary *Ortodoxo* leader responded with, "We must fight for Cuba!"[22] Although the initial prognosis was promising, Chibás remained in the hospital during the following two weeks so doctors could monitor his diet and shoo away most callers. Afterwards, he convalesced in Roberto Agramonte's residence – where he was attended to regularly by his cousin's family, his younger brother Raúl and his secretary Conchita Fernández. All the while, he was instructed to avoid strenuous activities of any sort. Even reading was proscribed. Chibás paid scant heed to the ban as he was a notorious bibliophile and habitual devourer of newspapers and magazines. Worse still, the famously fidgety *Ortodoxo* chief, who chafed under these restrictions, granted an interview to a *Bohemia* correspondent. Having already been dubbed "the impatient patient" by a journalist, Chibás further justified this nickname by greeting his interlocutor with a barrage of questions and series of mini-sermons.[23] Chibás was particularly eager to comment on Carlos Prío's pronouncements regarding *nuevos rumbos* or new directions for his presidency. This was Prío's catchall phrase for a "break with the past" that would involve respect for the constitution, administrative honesty, economic development and an end to gangsters.[24] The implication was that these things had been lacking under Grau's administration and would be remedied during the remaining years of Prío's term. Chibás pointed out that Prío's negotiations to bring the Liberals, with their

[22] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 659.
[23] "En Cuba, Política: El Infatigable Chibás," March 5, 1950: 75. Chibás also missed the thrill of his Sunday broadcast. In his absence, the show was hosted on February 19 by Pedro Iglesias Betancourt and on February 26 by the lawyer and University of Havana professor Manuel Dorta Duque.
[24] Mario Kuchilán, "Grafoentrevista Exclusiva: El Presidente y la Crisis," *Bohemia,* February 5, 1950: 82.

Machado era holdovers, into his government was hardly a step forward. He also questioned whether Pepín Bosch, the new treasury minister and former head of the Bacardí Company, could run an honest outfit while thieves and smugglers were among his subordinates.[25] Attempting to allay concerns about his condition, Chibás exclaimed, "I am not one of those generals who die in bed!"[26] Just the same, the interview petered out because he eventually became too exhausted to continue.

As the weeks passed and Chibás remained in poor health, his doctors began to fret. They sent copies of his x-rays to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for a second opinion. The medical staff there replied that Chibás was in serious danger and should check himself in immediately. For his part, the *Ortodoxo* leader was consumed by the idea that he had stomach cancer. He begged Pedro Iglesias Betancourt and the other doctors not to conceal the truth from him. Above all, he was frightened by the prospect of dying in the United States and refused to make the trip. Despite these worries, Chibás projected an impishly cheerful façade for public consumption. When a reporter from *Alerta* called, he claimed to be "perfectly well" and confessed to having eaten chocolate ice cream, black beans with rice and fried pork – much to the horror of his doctors.[27] Chibás also forsook his sickbed now and then. On one occasion, he snuck out of the Agramonte residence in order to attend a meeting of the *Ortodoxo* municipal assembly. News had reached him that a potential candidate for city council was being vetoed by hardliners because of his wealth. Chibás, who found this unfair, wished to argue in his favor. Lastly, and most

[25] Specifically, Chibás mentioned Guillermo Padilla, director general of the Cuban customs service and the lottery, who he deemed a "contrabandist." See Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 74.
[27] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 664.

predictably, Chibás would drag himself out of bed to visit *Bohemia* headquarters at 6:30 a.m. every Thursday so he could receive his advance copy of the magazine.

THE DEATH OF JOSE MANUEL ALEMAN

Chibás was not the only prominent Cuban politician whose wellbeing was in doubt. On the evening of March 24, José Manuel Alemán lost consciousness at his home in Havana's exclusive Alturas de Miramar district. He had been suffering from Hodgkin's disease since 1942 and tried a variety of treatments, including radiation therapy, mustard gas injections and urethane. However, medical science was largely helpless in the face of this ailment and those afflicted usually lived between two and 10 years after its onset. When Alemán regained his senses, he was overwhelmed by pain. Sensing the end was near, he summoned Guillermo Alonso Pujol and entrusted him with his final political instructions. Shortly after 1:30 a.m. the next morning, Alemán was dead. Although he had seldom fulfilled his duties as a senator and prized the office mostly for its parliamentary immunity, Alemán nonetheless insisted on a state funeral in the *Capitolio*. The ex education minister's desire for a grand public ceremony was slightly odd given his tendency to work behind the scenes while he was alive. However, this may have owed something to his extraordinarily distinguished father and a wish to be acknowledged for his own achievements – even as these seemed dubious to most Cubans.

He had spent the first 25 years his life under the shadow of José Braulio Alemán, a general during Cuba's independence struggle, delegate to its 1901 constitutional convention and governor of Santa Clara province. During his lengthy

career in the Liberal party José Braulio had also been named ambassador to Mexico by President Gerardo Machado and later served as education minister. The latter position allowed him to arrange a plum job for his young son, José Manuel, who had graduated from Westchester Normal School in Pennsylvania with a degree in accounting. Given his connections, José Manuel rose quickly within the education ministry and soon become chief of personnel. At the same time, Alemán was not without talent nor was he content to coast on the basis of his father's credentials. He mastered the ministry's bureaucratic minutiae so thoroughly that he became indispensible to successive education ministers and finally to President Grau himself. In the words of Enrique de la Osa, he was also an "astute psychologist."[28] This allowed him to cultivate and accommodate men of vastly different personalities and political ideas. Thus, during the mass strikes of 1935 against Fulgencio Batista's de facto military regime, Alemán ran the education ministry while its chief, Leonardo Anaya Murillo, sought to deal with the 300,000 students, teachers and university employees who had joined the demonstrations. His support for one quasi dictator did not preclude him from attempting to overthrow another in 1947, especially as he was now an *Auténtico* and his new boss, Ramón Grau San Martín, hoped to oust Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic as part of his plan to encourage democratic regimes in the Caribbean region. Hence, Alemán organized and bankrolled the ultimately unsuccessful Cayo Confites expedition.

Alemán's pliable principles and penchant for opportunism were by no means exceptional. Neither was the fact that he had pinched public money. Alemán's

[28] "En Cuba, Deceso: Un Personaje de Leyenda," *Bohemia,* April 2, 1950: 70.

notoriety derived from unprecedented larceny and his creation of a blunt political instrument out of cash designated for Cuba's schoolchildren. Certainly, prosperous figures had always swayed politics and underwritten friendly legislators. Alemán took this a step further by diverting the nine *centavo* tax on every bag of sugar sold toward a slush fund whose name became synonymous with corruption. In the years 1946-1948, BAGA subsidized *Auténtico* campaigns, including Carlos Prío's presidential bid, purchased lawmakers, who were colloquially known as *baguistas*, co-opted the interior, treasury and health ministries, financed MSR gangsters, bought friendly press coverage, notably in *Pueblo*, and won Alemán a place in the party's highest reaches. Alemán also pursued personal enrichment with more zeal than any of his predecessors. In September of 1949, a *Miami Herald* reporter named Bert Collier estimated Alemán's Florida real estate empire was worth between $70 and $200 million. These included luxury hotels and residences on Collins Avenue in South Beach along with apartment buildings in downtown Miami. He was also a player in the land development business, buying up much of Key Biscayne through his Ansan Corporation. Alemán's dearest possession, however, was "Il Mío Castello," his pretentiously named mansion on Pine Tree Drive acquired toward the end of 1947. The parvenu-like moniker originated with the home's previous owners, who had it inscribed above the doorway. Nonetheless, it suited Alemán's desire to inhabit one of the most coveted houses in South Beach. Its amenities included a bronze gate, marble staircases, a wharf for his yacht and a six car garage. Moreover, Alemán invested in three construction companies owned by Anselmo Alliegro, a

former Machado supporter and Batista ally who had been his boss in the education ministry between 1940 and 1944.

Shortly after Alemán's death, the journalist Manuel Hernando Torres attempted to calculate the value of his Cuban holdings. Among Alemán's known possessions was a cargo transport company called Línea Cuba Aeropostal, which counted a fleet of seven planes and whose primary route was Havana-Miami. Almost certainly, Alemán sought to capitalize on those like himself who pilfered things in Cuba and aimed to place them beyond the writ of local authorities. As in Florida, he acquired great quantities of land for future development – chiefly on Havana's outskirts, where he hoped to construct an international airport and build new towns. Alemán also cultivated Cuba's primary cash crop, having procured and remodeled the sugar mill "Portugalete" near San José de las Lajas. His tentacles even extended to the island's national pastime as he purchased the Marianao Bears, one of Cuba's four professional baseball teams. Last but not least, as with any man of means, he presided over a luxuriously outfitted *finca*, the "América," on which he had spent more than a million *pesos* in renovations. After surveying these and other assets, the author believed Alemán's fortune was impossible to calculate but remained certain his heirs would gain "the most fabulous inheritance" any Cubans had ever received.[29]

In political circles, there was less interest in Alemán's lucre than his senate seat. The Liberal lawmaker Carlos Miguel de Céspedes declared that his party should wage a sincere effort to capture it, especially as the death of José Manuel

[29] Manuel Hernando Torres, "Es Incalculable la Fortuna Que Deja Alemán," *Bohemia,* April 2, 1950: 98.

Casanova in January had raised the danger of losing a seat in Pinar del Río. However, the Liberals lacked a natural candidate and occupied a nebulous middle ground between the government and opposition. Meanwhile, the compulsive intriguer Guillermo Alonso Pujol encouraged Grau to run as a means of fortifying the motley coalition of Republicans, Communists and Batista's PAU known as the *Coincidencia*. However, *El Viejo* politely refused their entreaties, citing his determination to avoid seeking parliamentary immunity.[30] Alonso Pujol's second choice, Pepe San Martín, turned him down too, despite heavy lobbying by Grau. This left the ad-hoc group with little choice but to nominate the non-descript Guillermo Belt – who had served as unelected mayor of Havana under Batista during the 1930s and had also been Grau's former ambassador in Washington.

As for the *Ortodoxos,* they deemed this a perfect opportunity for Chibás, despite his health woes. At a meeting of party higher-ups in Manuel Bisbé's residence, the host argued that candidates for congress and the city council (not to mention himself) would benefit from Chibás' considerable coattails. Luis Orlando Rodríguez put the matter in starker terms, demanding that Chibás reward the party for its loyalty to his principles by giving it a presence in the senate. After all, he said, "We have accepted, despite its risks, the heroic line of political independence."[31] Millo Ochoa added that Eddy's prestige would allow him to win from his sickbed if necessary. Leonardo Fernández Sánchez chimed in that Alemán's seat "historically

[30] The columnist Francisco Ichaso discounted this excuse, asserting that Grau refused to run because he knew his popularity had diminished significantly and losing a senate election would have been a "mortal blow" to his political career. See Francisco Ichaso, "Panorama de las Elecciones Parciales," *Bohemia,* April 23, 1950: 51.

[31] "En Cuba, Política: 'Ir Contra ese Monstruo de Popularidad Sería un Suicidio,'" *Bohemia,* April 2, 1950: 76.

corresponded" to the one Chibás relinquished in 1948 and implied it was bound to return to its rightful owner.[32] The uncharacteristic harmony of this session, which must have surprised its normally disputatious participants, reflected Chibás' rare combination of the ethical credentials craved by *Ortodoxo* hard-liners and the political viability cherished by realists. Nevertheless, their gusto was tempered by Pedro Iglesias Betancourt, who informed Eddy's Sunday evening radio audience on April 2 that its idol was seriously ill even if his life was not directly in danger. Iglesias Betancourt also confessed that the "impatient patient" would require another operation. He concluded by saying, "I beg *Ortodoxo compañeros* to set their desires aside and oblige Chibás to rest for the good of his health."[33] This plea not only failed to convince the party faithful, it was dismissed by Chibás himself – who delighted in discounting or ignoring nearly every recommendation provided by his medical handlers. On April 8, looking visibly pallid and slender, he attended the party's Havana provincial assembly meeting. This took place in the home of Heriberto del Porto, an *Ortodoxo* candidate for Havana city hall, because the party, always short on cash, had sold its headquarters. Chibás was greeted with typical euphoric fervor but also by solicitous shouts and instructions. Some voices urged supporters not to embrace him too tightly, while others bid Chibás to sit down and preserve his strength. All the while, his friend Iglesias Betancourt stood nearby carrying a small briefcase containing an emergency injection in case he faltered. When Leonardo Fernández Sánchez nominated Chibás as the party's senatorial candidate, he praised him as "the man without fear and without defects" who

[32] Ibid.
[33] "En Cuba, Política: 'El Partido me ha Señalado un Puesto de Combate," *Bohemia,* April 16, 1950: 78

"showed the way in 1948 with an intense campaign that resonated in the conscience of the Cuban people."[34] Shortly thereafter, Chibás rose and addressed the packed salon – promising to serve the Cuban revolution and fulfill his party's orders by winning. The excitable José Pardo Llada subsequently exclaimed that, "We will fill the most dishonest of vacancies with the most honorable of all Cuban politicians!"[35]

The nomination of Chibás was met with a mixture of fear, resignation and eagerness among *Auténticos*. Some, like Alberto Inocente Álvarez, believed he was too formidable an opponent. The venal former commerce minister who was contesting the vacant seat in Pinar del Río, told reporters, "I wouldn't dare challenge Eddy. To go against this monster of popularity would be political suicide!"[36] Other potential nominees declined for different reasons. Foreign Minister Carlos Hevia believed the moment was inopportune while Education Minister Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who was urged to run by René Fiallo, was loath to abandon his current post. This left two keen but unloved contenders. The first was Agriculture Minister Virgilio Pérez, who was dogged by sparse personal appeal and copious dirty laundry. He had dishonestly managed Cuba's Institute of Coffee under Grau and been a policeman during the Machado era. His rival was minister without portfolio Ramón Vasconcelos, who was also director of *Alerta.* In the latter capacity, he had disgruntled Carlos Prío for lambasting the imprisonment of Chibás in 1949 and thus ruined his chances of garnering any favors. Vasconcelos further realized the bleakness of his prospects when he spied Pérez for senate posters on his way back

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] "En Cuba, Política: 'Ir Contra ese Monstruo de Popularidad Sería un Suicidio,'" *Bohemia,* April 2, 1950: 76.

from Alemán's funeral. Even as Pérez seemed to have the inside track, Miguelito Suárez Fernández was determined to put forward a more distinguished contender lest Chibás win in a romp and use the victory as a springboard for 1952. He therefore suggested the party try three of the island's best known brand names – Pepe San Martín, Miguel Mariano Gómez and Raúl Menocal. Grau's cousin and popular former public works minister, whose lack of political enthusiasm had rendered him very much in demand, reiterated his desire to remain a private citizen. Gómez, who was the son of Cuba's second president and had occupied the top office himself in 1936, also declined as did Menocal, the child of a two time president and former Democratic boss.

MIDTERM ELECTIONS

With midterm election campaigns already in high gear, Raúl Gutiérrez published a survey measuring the "political sympathy" for Cuba's primary movers and shakers.[37] The questionnaire guru asked respondents who, among Carlos Prío, Ramón Grau, Guillermo Alonso Pujol, Fulgencio Batista and Eduardo Chibás, they believed was "most beneficial" for Cuba.[38] Despite an uneven record, Prío topped the list with 23.86 percent. Chibás was next with 20.74 percent. Batista registered 17.17 percent and Grau followed in fourth place with a mere 12.82 percent. Alonso Pujol had the worst showing by far, rating an embarrassing 0.67 percent nationwide and zero in the province of Pinar del Río. Prío's relative popularity was in marked

[37] Raúl Gutiérrez, "En Un Survey Nacional el Pueblo Opina Sobre el Gobierno, el Nuevo Rumbo, Grau, Batista y Chibás," *Bohemia,* April 2, 1950: 87.
[38] Ibid., 86.

contrast to that of his government. In a different query, where Cubans were asked to judge his administration, 23.19 percent replied that it was "good," 29.71 percent said it was "bad" and 35.06 percent answered it was "average."[39] The most notable finding was that Grau, who had been so revered in 1944 and whose smile still tickled the masses in 1948, had seen his standing sink lower than Batista's. This owed much to the sensational revelations of José Manuel Alemán's vast and varied shopping spree with state funds. If Pelayo Cuervo's Lawsuit 82 against Grau and those who sacked the treasury during his term seemed somewhat abstract or politically motivated, as *El Viejo* himself liked to believe, there was no facile explanation for the seemingly endless possessions of his favorite minister. The columnist Francisco Ichaso styled these a "new and forceful blow to Grau's solar plexus," adding that the former physiology professor could no longer claim "It wasn't me."[40]

The timing of this poll may have appeared curious since, among all these figures, only Chibás was seeking elective office in 1950. At the same time, they were fixtures of Cuban politics and each one was running a proxy in the pivotal Havana mayoral race. Antonio Prío's demoralizing experience in the *Palacio de los Deportes* had sketched the limits of his brother's boosterism. The only question was whether he could buy off his unpopularity or frighten *Habaneros* into voting for him. In advertisements, Antonio promised to build a "true" aqueduct, suggesting his proximity to the president would facilitate this project. His slogan was thus,

[39] Ibid., 88.
[40] Francisco Ichaso, "La Opinión Pública Brinda Escaso Apoyo a los Liberes de la 'Coincidencia,'" *Bohemia,* April 9, 1950: 90.

"Whatever Havana Needs, Havana Will Have." Also, having failed to lure the Communists himself, he derided his rival Nicolás Castellanos for accepting their support. One poster showed a pair of children praying at their bedside under a portrait of the Virgin Mary while the ominous shadow of Joseph Stalin hovered above them. Castellanos remained the frontrunner despite being supported by two men, Grau and Alonso Pujol, who were held in low public esteem. Most importantly, he relied on incumbency and the fact that he was not Antonio Prío. His campaign emphasized all manner of "tangible achievements," including renovated day care centers, improvements in city hospitals and new schools. Hence, Castellanos proclaimed himself, "A Mayor Who Shows the People His Works." Lastly, there was the well meaning but grayish Manuel Bisbé. He boasted the moral stature of Chibás sans charisma, but this was not an auspicious formula according to polls. His candidacy would test whether Cubans were willing to vote for the upright but often bland figures proposed by *Ortodoxo* fanatics in major elections. Bisbé's announcements stressed his revolutionary credentials, including expulsions from teaching jobs by Machado and Batista. They also lionized the fact that his current position at the University of Havana had been gained through an "open competition" rather than favoritism. Moreover, he was touted as an industrious congressman, who proposed numerous bills and a man of principle, who had spent seven hours combating the president's foreign loan. His motto declared that, "His Clean and Useful Life Guarantees That He is the Best Candidate."

On April 16, Bisbé was featured in a *Bohemia* series called "Twenty-four Hours in the Lives of the Mayoral Candidates." Readers of the magazine and

potential balloters were offered a photo essay of Bisbé at his steady best. As such, he was shown inscribing Greek phrases on the blackboard of his university classroom, sitting with sympathizers at his campaign headquarters and chatting with colleagues who were also respectable *Ortodoxos* such as Herminio Portell Vilá, Vicentina Antuña and Roberto Agramonte.[41] While these portraits portrayed a decent man who associated with an honorable crowd, Bisbé's main liability was highlighted by something missing in the captions. Pictured next to Chibás in one frame and José Pardo Llada in another, his companions were both described as "popular" while Bisbé was attached to laudatory but less handy adjectives like "honest" and "trustworthy."[42] In fact, the 25-year-old Pardo Llada was shaping up as the party's newest superstar, having built his following, like Chibás, though a popular radio show and charismatic, scandal-mongering style. Pardo Llada first drew national acclaim in 1944 with his commentary on the vastly destructive hurricane that wrecked Havana harbor and killed an estimated 300 people. Like Chibás, he championed causes dear to the island's rural and urban working classes. For example, he advocated higher salaries for sugar workers and denounced a rise in bus fares. While Pardo Llada was far from unique in espousing these stands, he also possessed what the journalist Walfredo Vincente called a "contagious popularity."[43] This was reflected in the top ratings of his daily afternoon broadcast,

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[41] Herminio Portell Vilá was a University of Havana professor and one of Cuba's most notable historians. He was also running for Havana city council on the *Ortodoxo* ticket. Vicentina Antuña was a Latin professor and officer in the *Ortodoxo* Women's Wing. Aside from being his cousin's ex vice presidential candidate, Roberto Agramonte was head of the *Ortodoxo* provincial assembly for Havana and a sociology professor.

[42] Eduardo Hernández, "24 horas con los candidatos a Alcalde: Manuel Bisbé," *Bohemia,* April 16, 1950: 44, 46.

[43] Walfredo Vicente, "El Pardo Llada que Usted no Conoce," *Bohemia,* May 14, 1950: 32.

which outperformed all other news shows of its kind.[44] In addition, he could neither walk nor drive through Havana without being stopped and effusively greeted by people of every sort. His run in with former Police Chief Caramés notwithstanding, even officers of the law happily paused and chatted with him. Aside from his magnetism, Pardo Llada's background as a schoolteacher's son and generally modest personal habits pleased *Ortodoxo* moral guardians.[45] His closeness to Chibás, who he saw nearly every day, also stood him in good stead. Although still quite young, the party astutely nominated him to run for congress and the enthusiasm aroused by his candidacy was second only to that of the man he so consciously emulated. With no need for a political machine, Pardo Llada gathered tremendous momentum using his radio popularity, the genuine affection of Havana residents and endorsements from respected men like the independence hero Enrique Loynaz del Castillo and Cuba's foremost public intellectual, Fernando Ortiz.

In this too, Pardo Llada was treading a path previously blazed by Chibás. For the party's established luminary, however, this would be a different campaign given his very considerable physical limitations. Ecstatic rallies culminating with leaps into the arms of his aficionados were out of the question. Nor could Chibás tour the numerous towns and villages of Havana province to personally state his case. The *Ortodoxo* leader still had his wits about him though and on April 9 delivered a blistering contumely against his two opponents. In his first live and complete radio

[44] In Cuban Advertising Association surveys tracking radio listeners in Havana and the neighboring municipalities of Marianao, Regla and Guanabacoa, Pardo Llada's show regularly appeared first in the category of "news shows lasting four minutes or longer." Between February 2 and February 19, 1950, his broadcast drew a 9.52 rating, beating out CMQ's news program, which tallied an 8.50 share. See "El Ultimo 'Survey,'" *Bohemia,* March 19, 1950: 58.

[45] Pardo Llada shared a simple apartment in the La Sierra district of Havana with his wife, María Luisa Alonso, who was a dentist.

address since February, Chibás recalled that Virgilio Pérez, the erstwhile judicial policeman, had arrested him in April of 1929 and sent him to prison for four months, thereby rendering a valuable service to President Gerardo Machado. He also accused Pérez of raiding Cuba's Institute of Coffee and agriculture ministry to the tune of five million *pesos.* Moreover, just as Pérez had succeeded José Manual Alemán as *Auténtico* party boss in Havana, he also desired to replace him in the senate using the same methods favored by the late education minister – namely via "large scale bribery."[46] Chibás referred to his second opponent as "Mister William Belt." This was a reference to his American roots as the grandson of John Benjamin Belt, who had settled in Cuba after the United States Civil War. In this vein, Chibás wondered whether Belt aspired to represent Cubans or "Boston aristocracy."[47] Continuing with this theme, Chibás recalled that as Havana's mayor in 1933 Belt had betrayed the revolution by "screaming for American intervention."[48] In the end, Belt did boast one Cuban trait, although it was the rather disappointing one of opportunism. Hence, in 1935, now serving as Batista's appointed mayor of Havana, he placed a medal of honor around the neck of Pedro Pedraza after he had suppressed the mass strikes of that year.

Besides returning to the airwaves full time, Chibás also took up his pencil.[49] As always, his friend Miguel Ángel Quevedo happily ceded him space in the island's

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[46] "En Cuba, Política: 'El Partido me ha Señalado un Puesto de Combate," *Bohemia,* April 16, 1950: 78.
[47] Ibid. Chibás' suggestion that Belt was not really Cuban scored political points but also contained a fair bit of hypocrisy. After all, Eddy's father, Eduardo Justo, was naturalized as a United States citizen in 1891 at a court of Quarter Sessions in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he had been working as a civil engineer.
[48] Ibid., 79.
[49] Chibás wrote the first drafts of his articles and radio speeches in pencil, usually while chain smoking, after which they were typed by his secretary Conchita Fernández.

most popular magazine – which was already running regular pro *Ortodoxo* columns by Jorge Mañach and Carlos Márquez Sterling. On April 23, Chibás published an article entitled "Message to the Cuban People" which reiterated and amplified his earlier criticisms of Virgilio Pérez and Guillermo Belt. Apart from painting Pérez as a pro Machado stooge and abuser of public office, he provided an embarrassing anecdote. Chibás related that after Machado was ousted and angry mobs sought revenge against government agents, Pérez had "hidden behind the skirts of female family members and friends" who begged revolutionary leaders to pardon his "wickedness."[50] Chibás lacked similar juicy details about "Mr. William Belt," dismissing him instead as an "unconditional servant" of Wall Street who would feel more at home in Washington's Capitol than Cuba's *Capitolio*.[51] Finally, Chibás reserved some harsh words for a newcomer – the Communist Anibal Escalante. Unlike, Pérez who he deemed a crook and Belt who he called a lackey of United States bankers, Chibás considered Escalante a flunky for Moscow's "despotic" empire – which he termed "the most dangerous and bloodthirsty" of the current century.[52] In presenting his own case for election, Chibás recycled choice bits of rhetoric from his presidential campaign. Paraphrasing his classic speech from 1948, he asked, "What are we counting on to win Havana's vacant senate seat?"[53] Rather than a political machine or money, Chibás answered, "My history as an incorruptible

[50] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Mensaje al Pueblo Cubano." *Bohemia,* April 23, 1950: 71.
[51] Ibid., 93. Chibás was far from the only one to poke fun at Belt's American origins. For example, the political satirist Niko published a cartoon in which two men of obvious American appearance are walking down a Havana street. Off to the side, one Cuban tells the other, "To tell the truth, I don't know whether they are tourists or political sergeants of William Belt." See Niko, "Confusión," *Bohemia,* April 30, 1950: 77.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 70.

combatant during a quarter century of incarcerations, persecutions and constant sacrifices."[54] He reminded readers that the Prío family, Nicolás Castellanos, Virgilio Pérez and Alberto Inocente Álvarez had all enriched themselves in public office. Conversely, he had refused to "exchange shame for money" and was now measurably poorer.[55]

Chibás also reprimanded the government for abetting an epidemic of "siblingism" in Cuban politics. This began at the top with Carlos Prío's imposition of his younger brother Antonio as the *Auténtico* mayoral candidate of Havana, his sister Mireya as a congressional hopeful from Oriente and his sister-in-law's brother, Tino Fuentes, as a prospective representative from Las Villas.[56] Those who followed suit included Tony Varona, who had his brother Roberto nominated to run for mayor of Camagüey; Virgilio Pérez, who tabbed his brother Gerardo to fill the congressional seat he was vacating; Diego Vicente Tejera who lined up a congressional bid for his brother Titi in their home province of Matanzas; Octavio Rivero Partagás of Pinar del Río, whose brother César was up for re-election as a representative; and the infamous Rolando Masferrer, who placed his brother Kiki on the congressional ticket in their native Oriente. On the other hand, Chibás was not entirely immune from the tendency toward nepotism – which was pervasive in all of Cuba's political parties. He conveniently neglected to mention that his cousin

[54] Ibid., 70-71.
[55] Ibid., 71.
[56] Of course, Carlos Prío's older brother Paco was already a senator from Pinar del Río while his brother-in-law Enrique Henríquez occupied a congressional seat from Oriente province.

Roberto Agramonte had been elected *Ortodoxo* party boss in Havana at his behest and the two delegates who had raised charges of favoritism had been expelled.[57]

As Chibás pressed on in characteristic style, the *Auténtico* senator and Prío confidante Lomberto Díaz described a different though no less captivating panorama. While Chibás railed against the status quo from outside, Díaz detailed the thinking of those who ruled the island. Having invited a *Bohemia* reporter to his country house in Pinar del Río province, Díaz spoke frankly, assisted by several drams of *guayabita*, a local guava infused liquor. Among other things, he stated that Carlos Prío rather than party assemblies would choose the *Auténtico* presidential candidate for 1952. As a consequence, legislators loyal to the president were anxious to modify the electoral code and eliminate the veto currently wielded by provincial bodies over party nominees. Apart from anti-democratic, this change would cause considerable rifts within the party – particularly among followers of Miguelito Suárez Fernández.[58] As to whom Prío would actually select, Díaz said the president was awaiting the midterm election results. If Antonio were to win the Havana mayoralty "by an ample margin," as many in the party expected, he would be the standard bearer in 1952.[59] In the event that Antonio lost, the field would be more wide open. Díaz claimed Carlos Hevia would have the inside track as the

[57] They were Segundo Abreu and Baltasar Arroyo, both of whom abstained from voting out of protest. See Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 654.
[58] Díaz mentioned that the *Auténtico* party chief in Matanzas, Diego Vicente Tejera, "doesn't content himself with the trust of Carlos (Prío) but rather wants to keep the knife of the veto in his hands for his defense." See "En Cuba, Entrevista: 'La Mayoría Votará por Chibás…'" *Bohemia,* April 23, 1950: 80.
[59] Ibid. The fact that Díaz and other *Auténticos* believed Antonio Prío could handily win the mayoralty despite his obvious unpopularity was a testament to their nearly unlimited faith in the party's political machine and the government's resources.

president held him in "great esteem."[60] However, circumstances were still fluid. For instance, if Virgilio Pérez upset Chibás at the polls, he could reasonably expect the party's laurels although Díaz recognized the *Ortodoxo* leader was a "fearsome" opponent and would probably emerge victorious.[61] Even in the likely event of his defeat, Pérez was "lending a great service to the government" because no one else had been willing to challenge Chibás.[62] In fact, for an *Auténtico* nabob, Díaz offered a surprisingly nuanced assessment of his party's bête noire. The standard *Auténtico* appraisal portrayed Chibás as an irresponsible rabble rouser who was unfit for high office and a ruinous influence on the nation. On the contrary, Díaz allowed that Chibás alone among opposition figures "had something to say."[63] Alternatively, Grau, Batista and Alonso Pujol were "washed up" and "electoral cadavers."[64]

If his campaign advertisements were any indication, Chibás was saying the senate was a den of iniquity and vowed to construct a wall against "vile exploiters of the people" if elected.[65] He thus urged voters to "place their brick" by marking their ballots for him. Another poster limned a battle scene and proclaimed that Chibás would be the people's "trench."[66] As there were no *Ortodoxos* in the senate and only two open seats there, he would have scarce opportunities to introduce any bills. However, as a party chief and future presidential candidate, the press was understandably interested in his legislative proposals. One afternoon a reporter

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. Díaz reserved his highest praise for the *Ortodoxo* leader's campaign skills, saying "any other candidate would need three months to gain the ground Chibás could cover in 30 days." This may have been hyperbolic but only slightly. Chibás was far and away the best campaigner in Cuba.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "¡Ponga su piedra…!," *Bohemia,* April 30, 1950: 25.
[66] "La Trinchera del Pueblo Debe Ser…," *Bohemia,* May 19, 1950: 81.

stopped by the Agramonte residence to ask Chibás about his program and found him still in pajamas. Smiling, the *Ortodoxo* leader related that he had attended a rally in Cárdenas (75 miles east of Havana) the night before and gone to bed at 4 a.m. This had not been a campaign stop as Cárdenas was in neighboring Matanzas province and nobody there could vote for him. Rather, he had felt obliged to support a local *Ortodoxo* candidate and made the trip despite violent objections from Pedro Iglesias Betancourt. Chibás answered the journalist's questions with gleeful good humor and offered, with consummate showmanship, to pose at the desk where he wrote his Sunday radio speeches. At one point, he turned on the radio and said, "Permit me listen to Virgilio (Pérez) so I can amuse myself."[67] Soon enough, Chibás dived into a lecture on nepotism, as he explained that all four Pérez brothers were elected officials or state employees and dishonest ones at that.[68] Regarding his legislative agenda, Chibás mentioned passage of the 1940 constitution's complimentary laws. He was especially keen on imperatives that would curb corruption such as a general accounting law, establishment of a national comptroller's office and an act that would establish defined standards for state employees. Chibás also wished to tinker with the electoral code so that senators would be elected based on majority vote rather than by coalition. His most ambitious scheme was a crowd pleaser and hoary campaign staple that involved handing "thieving functionaries" over to the courts for prosecution and devising legislation that would recover stolen funds and invest them in "urgent" projects

[67] Antonio Perdomo, "Mi Programa Legislativo Responde a las Necesidades Morales y Políticas del Pueblo Cubano," *Bohemia,* April 30, 1950: 69.
[68] On the other hand, Eddy's younger brother Raúl directed the Havana Military Academy – private high school for boys.

including aqueducts, hospitals, country roads and rural schools.[69] This project was timelier than ever in the wake of Alemán's lavish accoutrements but had no chance in an *Auténtico* controlled senate.

Shortly after this interview, Chibás began feeling the effects of his ill advised trip to Cárdenas. Besides staying out until the wee hours, Chibás had insisted on delivering a speech and passing through the gigantic crowd on foot, accompanied by José Pardo Llada. Within days, Chibás began vomiting after meals and required regular infusions of saline, blood and plasma. Moreover, his weight plummeted since he could not digest any solid food. On April 27, he had planned to commemorate the first anniversary of his incarceration by addressing an *Ortodoxo* throng next to the *Castillo del Príncipe*. That morning, however, Chibás fainted multiple times. Pedro Iglesias Betancourt told him to stay home, warning he could die in the middle of his speech otherwise. Chibás spent the afternoon in his room pondering the counsel of his friend and doctor but by 7 p.m. he had decided to forsake sound medical advice yet again. This seemed foolish, particularly as Chibás threw up twice before leaving the house and three more times as he waited his turn at the pulpit. When the *Ortodoxo* leader finally stood to address the multitude, he was interrupted by concerned voices begging him to stop. Chibás marveled that never before had "his people" asked him not to speak.[70] Later on, having safely

[69] Antonio Perdomo, "Mi Programa Legislativo Responde a las Necesidades Morales y Políticas del Pueblo Cubano," *Bohemia,* April 30, 1950: 69.
[70] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 671.

returned to the Agramonte residence, he asked his cousin's wife, "Don't you think the Cuban people, who are so good, deserve what I just did?"[71]

On April 30, the Havana senate contest swerved in a highly unexpected direction. That evening, Chibás offered breaking news to his Sunday audience. Shortly before he began broadcasting, Cuba's Superior Electoral Tribunal had disqualified Virgilio Pérez from running because of an erroneous coalition agreement. Specifically, he had sought to be listed on the *Auténtico,* Democratic and Liberal ballots but the Liberals had never formally nominated him and the pact was thus invalid according to the island's electoral code. Upon learning the verdict, Prime Minister Tony Varona announced over the radio that the court had initiated a "coup" and claimed, with notable indelicacy, that it "could not do this to a government party."[72] The ornery Varona thus expressed officially what most *Auténticos* had long assumed – namely, that they were entitled to rule and the law was a useful cudgel against opponents but did not apply to them. Virgilio Pérez echoed the belief that Cuba's courts were a government plaything by wondering how the judges had dared to "rebel against the president of the republic."[73] For his part, Carlos Prío telephoned one of the magistrates and accused him of "negligence" for not clarifying the rules pertaining to special elections.[74] This was a disingenuous gripe since the electoral code had not changed one iota. Further, Pérez had been the only candidate to run afoul of the regulations. The real problem was that he had trusted his bungling advisor and lawyer, Rigoberto Ramírez, to submit the

[71] Ibid.
[72] "En Cuba: Tribunales: 'Esa Sentencia es Justa…' *Bohemia,* May 7, 1950: 73.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

paperwork. Chibás, who was no stranger to legal disputes, convened the *Ortodoxo* executive committee for a consultation. In a dig at Varona, the party conveyed "support" for the electoral tribunal's decision to "apply the same legal precepts to the government parties as those that oblige everyone else."[75]

The government, of course, was not inclined to stand pat and submitted an appeal that was considered on May 2. Judge Eloy Merino, who had been extensively lobbied by the president, seemed ready to change his mind. He argued the court had created "public anxiety" and urged his peers to grant an extension allowing the *Auténtico,* Democratic and Liberal parties to put their pact in order.[76] His revised criteria drew a strenuous and verbose objection from the court's *Ortodoxo* observer, Joaquín López Montes. Speaking for 90 minutes, López Montes denied the existence of any public anxiety – claiming the only citizens suffering unease were the prime minister and friends of Virgilio Pérez. He concluded darkly that, "A state of public anxiety will reign only if the people, who have respectfully accepted the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's egalitarian sentence, now contemplate its retraction and thus lose faith in the courts."[77] Regardless, Judge Merino and Judge Aurelio Álvarez Maruri reversed course and their votes swung the majority in favor of repeal. Weighing in as a "responsible citizen," Chibás deplored the government's "brutal coercion" and pronounced himself "profoundly ashamed" by this turnabout.[78] At the same time, he had relished the prospect of "soundly defeating" Pérez and

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 74. The *Bohemia* reporter observing this case was convinced that Judge Merino had been tampered with, noting that he lacked his "habitual composure" while citing his new, pro-government line. The journalist added that, "Those familiar with the judge's habitual eloquence suspect something strange is happening with him." See Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 75.
[78] Ibid.

confessed to feeling a certain "personal satisfaction" that the race would continue. Chibás repeated and expanded on these thoughts in a subsequent *Bohemia* article. The *Ortodoxo* leader asserted that he was "sure" Cuba's Court of Constitutional Guarantees would invalidate Pérez if given the chance.[79] However, his party had decided to forego this route.

> because everything that the ex *porrista* Virgilio Pérez represents – stolen money, political machinery, vote buying, fraud, shady political deals – all this corruption is going to be swept from public life in the six provinces, not by means of legal appeals but through the clean and incorruptible votes of the Cuban people, in an avalanche of ballots without precedent in Cuban history.[80]

The obsession of Chibás and the *Ortodoxos* with public dishonesty, particularly in terms of vote buying, seemed to be gaining traction not only among hard core followers but also for the island's shapers of opinion. During the second week of May, the theme was taken up by Francisco Ichaso in *Diario de la Marina,* Rafael Estenger in *Alerta,* Carlos Lechuga in *El Mundo* and Prío's minister without portfolio Ramón Vasconcelos. A *Bohemia* correspondent quipped that even sleazy politicians were none too happy with the situation as the price of purchasing their positions was becoming onerous.[81] Buying votes had not always been part of Cuba's electoral process, but the practice boasted a long and varied history – dating from at least 1914, when two unpopular politicians found success by bribing those who marked ballots for illiterate citizens. In those days, they tore 100 *peso* bills down the middle and provided one half to their accomplices prior to elections and the

[79] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Sangre y Cieno," *Bohemia,* May 14, 1950: 70.
[80] Ibid., 71. The *porra* was slang for members of President Gerardo Machado's security forces.
[81] "En Cuba, Política: El Dinero en la Política," *Bohemia,* May 14, 1950: 74.

other once victory was assured. Given the multitude of choices on each ballot, including candidates for congress, provincial government and town or city council, voters could opt to sell their votes in bulk (a ploy known as the pineapple) or keep one or more for themselves. In Havana, such machinations eventually gave rise to an early political vehicle known as the *Cenáculo* or Circle, which entrenched Liberals in the city's bureaucracy and elective offices. During Gerardo Machado's presidency this operation was centralized and positions were auctioned from the presidential palace, often costing up to 100,000 *pesos*. With the advent of BAGA in 1946, a joint venture between José Manuel Alemán and Francisco Grau Alsina to help them capture senate seats snowballed into the most powerful political machine in Cuba's history – capable of co-opting entire municipal assemblies. BAGA's essentially unlimited funds, siphoned directly from Cuba's treasury, provided Carlos Prío with approximately 30 million *pesos* for his 1948 election campaign. Alemán spent an estimated 10 million *pesos* on his senate seat. This infusion of money raised the ante for everyone else, including fellow *Auténticos,* some of whom had paid upwards of 300,000 *pesos* for places in congress.[82]

Alemán's demise and the dissolution of his political apparatus did not diminish the preeminence of mammon. On the contrary, costs continued to skyrocket. This was nowhere more evident than in the Havana mayoral race. Aside from trying to buy the city's hostile denizens, Antonio Prío also needed to appease his coalition partners and other useful individuals with cash inducements. With habitual indiscretion, he admitted to shelling out 350,000 *pesos* for Liberal support.

[82] Ibid.

The amount paid for continued Democratic fealty was less well publicized but undoubtedly substantial as well. Panchín Batista, the governor of Havana province and an erstwhile mayoral candidate himself, was also lured to the *Auténticos* through a generous cash reward. Moreover, Antonio supplemented his budget by distributing an endless supply of lottery tickets – which served as a form of cash. While the precise extent of his expenses remained unknown, he bragged to an adherent of Nicolás Castellanos that, "The money I'm spending resembles a tale from *A Thousand and One Nights*!"[83] Needless to say, the legislative races involved similar tactics. Alberto Inocente Álvarez, the *Auténtico* senate contender for Pinar del Río told the press he expected to spend a million *pesos* on his campaign. Moreover, the average bid for an *Auténtico* congressional seat, which often surpassed 900,000 *pesos*, required only slightly more modest outlays.[84] A *Bohemia* reporter blamed these swelling prices on candidates who "brilliantly" manipulated the "bribery industry" including Edgardo Buttari, Prío's ex labor minister; Armando Da'Lama, a venal treasury ministry official; Gerardo Pérez, brother to the unscrupulous Virgilio; and Guillermo Ara, who employed UIR gangsters along with Cuba's dubious political sergeants to harvest votes.[85]

Although vote buying proved phenomenally successful over the years, Cubans had usually been willing to forgo the extra lucre if they felt strongly about a candidate. Hence, the sports journalist Victor Muñoz topped the list for Havana city

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 75.

council in 1920 because he was adored by the island's myriad baseball fanatics.[86] Ramón Grau San Martín achieved the same result in Cuba's constituent assembly elections of 1939 by riding a wave of popular emotion and messianic fervor. The man who placed second in that contest, Eduardo Chibás, was currently headlining what a *Bohemia* reporter called "an historic duel between opulence and civic-mindedness."[87] A public survey by Raúl Gutiérrez, published on May 14, suggested most Cubans would vote their consciences rather than selling them – at least in his case. The poll indicated that 33.14 percent of Havana residents preferred Chibás, while 20.11 percent favored Virgilio Pérez. Third place belonged to the Communist Anibal Escalante with 8.25 percent and Guillermo Belt of the ad hoc *Coincidencia*, who lacked both riches and devoted followers, placed last with 4.10 percent.[88] These statistics, while not encouraging for Pérez, nonetheless implied that vote buying was having an impact. This was especially true in rural parts of Havana province, where Pérez led Chibás by more than seven percentage points. Pérez, whose policies as agriculture minister had proved disastrous for coffee farmers, was no darling of country dwellers. Rather, poverty and desperation inclined them to sell their votes more than wealthier urban inhabitants. In fact, every candidate except for the well heeled Pérez counted less support in bucolic areas.[89] Then again, this advantage was offset by Pérez's unpopularity within his own party and coalition

[86] Victor Muñoz wrote for *El Mundo* and was the first Cuban baseball chronicler to substitute Spanish equivalents for the game's original English terminology. He turned "home run" into *jonrón* and "hit and run" into *corrido y bateo*. As a city councilman, he is best remembered for proposing a law to celebrate Mother's Day – which was approved in 1928, six years after his death.
[87] "En Cuba, Política: El Dinero en la Política," *Bohemia,* May 14, 1950: 75.
[88] Raúl Gutiérrez, "Tercer Survey Sobre la Alcaldía y Primero Sobre los Senadores," *Bohemia,* May 14, 1950: 84.
[89] Ibid.

partners. Only 37.64 percent of *Auténticos* showed a willingness to vote for him and 27.01 were prepared to mark their ballots for Chibás. Among Democrats, Chibás led Pérez by more than ten percentage points. Liberals also opted for Chibás by a lesser but still decisive margin of almost five percentage points.[90]

While Chibás was among the handful of Cuban politicians whose popularity could surmount a well financed pro-government opponent, his friend Manuel Bisbé lacked the same crossover potential. Unlike the *Ortodoxo* leader, Bisbé encountered no significant backing outside his party. According to the public survey of May 14, only 4.95 percent of *Auténticos* intended to vote for him. Bisbé registered similarly dismal figures with every other political grouping except his own – never surpassing single digits for any of them. Even worse, 26.51 percent of *Ortodoxos* preferred Nicolás Castellanos.[91] Bisbé was not entirely without appeal, given his election to Cuba's chamber of representatives, but he was in no way capable of overcoming the municipal machine of Castellanos or prodigal spending of Antonio Prío. Bisbé did not blame his projected third place finish on either of these things, however. Rather, he irascibly accused Raúl Gutiérrez of distorting the results and claimed his numbers would improve if he could afford to pay for his own research. If anyone had the resources to co-opt Cuba's premier pollster, it was Antonio Prío, but his second place showing, more than 22 points behind Nicolas Castellanos, implied his wallet was being utilized elsewhere. In many respects, he resembled Virgilio Pérez given his huge war chest and meager likability. Even as he bought votes and slowly rose in the polls, the distaste many Havana residents harbored for Antonio was a

[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

poor omen. Since the last public survey in March, his overall rating had increased from 20.53 percent to 26.32 percent.[92] This reflected the unwillingness of *Auténticos* and members of pro-government parties to back him uniformly. For instance, 40.09 percent of *Auténticos* and 38.70 percent of Democrats favored Castellanos. Most embarrassing was that 58.82 percent of Liberals preferred Castellanos even though the party hierarchy had been bought off by the government.[93]

With election day looming, the moment for eleventh hour surprises was at hand. Despite his comfortable lead in the polls and uncooperative diaphragm, Chibás set to work on a new *Bohemia* piece featuring sensational revelations about Virgilio Pérez. From back issues of *Diario de la Marina, El Crisol*, *Información* and *El País,* he reconstructed a lurid incident from March 19, 1934 in which Pérez shot and wounded his vaudeville actress girlfriend during a lovers' quarrel and then murdered a man who crossed his path as he fled through Old Havana's streets. Pérez was accordingly arrested and tried in the city's Instructional Court, where his defense lawyer happened to be Miguelito Suárez Fernández. Chibás declared that "enormous pressure" had been exerted on the judges to absolve Pérez and they duly complied. He also found it "curious" that Pérez's file had been subsequently "robbed" from the court's archives. Chibás concluded that, "Anyone who does not believe what I am saying about Virgilio Pérez can visit any public library, request the

[92] Ibid., 82.
[93] Ibid., 84.

newspapers I referred to in this article and verify the truth for themselves."[94] Not surprisingly, Pérez was livid. He threatened violent reprisals against the magazine's director, Miguel Ángel Quevedo, its staff and even their premises. Pérez also denounced *Bohemia* before Cuba's Association of Journalists, albeit to little effect. The following week, *Bohemia* ran a defiant editorial stating it would not be "frightened" by "boasts" of an "ex servant of Machado and modern 'revolutionary' millionaire."[95] On the other hand, Carolos Lechuga, writing in *El Mundo*, upbraided Chibás for exposing Pérez's former paramour to unwarranted scrutiny. The woman, whose full name and home province had been furnished by Chibás, appeared to agree. She published an insulting public letter to him in a wide swath of Havana's newspapers. Undaunted, the *Ortodoxo* leader charged Pérez with having ghost written the abusive missive and forcing his old sweetheart to sign or forfeit her government job. In fact, so many rumors emerged regarding this affair that Chibás felt compelled to refute some of the more scurrilous ones. He acknowledged that people were saying his article had ruined the woman's marriage, that her husband had vowed to kill him and her small grandchildren were crying desolate tears. In a last *Bohemia* column before the elections, Chibás explained the lady was actually single and childless. The incessant hearsay, he averred, was nothing more than a government sponsored "farce."[96]

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[94] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Virgilio Pérez: Porrista, Homicida y Otras Cosas; William Belt, Machado y Pedraza," *Bohemia,* May 21, 1950: 143.
[95] "Poniendo las Cosas en su Lugar: Independencia y Verdad," *Bohemia,* May 28, 1950: supplement. 1.
[96] Eduardo R. Chibás, "¿Acaso Virgilio Pérez Representa a la Mujer Cubana?" *Bohemia,* May 28, 1950: sup. 11.

As the campaign drew to a close, Chibás continued to exasperate his doctors. On May 30, he attended an event honoring him in the *Hotel Inglaterra* but was so weak he could hardly say more than a few words. Since his diaphragmatic hernia was diagnosed in February, Chibás had dropped 50 pounds from a frame that had never been stout to begin with. Twenty-four hours before the polls closed, looking wan and ghost-like, he toured Havana's neighborhoods with Manuel Bisbé and planned last minute strategies with *Ortodoxo* candidates for congress and city hall. Dressed in a white *guayabera* and bowtie, he contemplated updated surveys by Raúl Gutiérrez indicating his polemic with Virgilio Pérez had damaged his case but still showed him ahead "by a nose."[97] Pérez's gains, which may have been the result of frenzied ballot buying as well, were not enough to carry him past Chibás – who won by just over 17,000 votes.[98] Chibás blamed the closer than expected result on concerted attacks by the Communists, who were fairly strong in Havana and barely mustered a peep against Pérez. The *Ortodoxo* leader allowed that he disagreed with the Communists on international matters but noted his vigorous protest when Jesús Menéndez had been murdered. "Do they believe Virgilio would have done the same as me?" he asked. "(Virgilio) would have supported the government against any transgression against our democracy."[99] At the same time, Chibás obtained an

[97] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 676. Chibás, who devoted obsessive care to his personal appearance, had not worn a *guayabera* by accident. This was a traditional shirt and quintessential symbol of Cuba. Carlos Prío had incited howls of outrage a few years earlier by banning it from the presidential palace in favor of suits. Conversely, during a visit to Cuba in 1948, President Harry Truman had earned plaudits for donning a *guayabera.* As for Guillermo Belt, who had spent the previous two months being called "William," he emphasized his Cuban bona fides by wearing one to the voting station.

[98] The official vote totals were as follows: Eduardo Chibás: 200,287, Virgilio Pérez: 183,220, Guillermo Belt: 93,143 and Anibal Escalante, 73,359. See: Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 676.

[99] "En Cuba, Elecciones: La Lección del Primero de Junio," *Bohemia,* June 11, 1950: 77.

unexpected boost from Mayor Francisco Orúe of Marianao, who gladly accepted cash from Pérez to deliver votes but ordered his constituents to support Chibás instead. Commenting on Eddy's victory in *Diario de la Marina,* Francisco Ichaso wrote,

> Electoral machines and money are losing the dominance they once possessed. The *Ortodoxo* candidate has won on the basis of his superior personality, his influence with the masses (and) the respect his behavior has awakened…The people see in Chibás an implacable critic, a prosecutor who fearlessly attacks shamelessness and iniquity wherever he finds them. In a sphere where silence, dissimulation and complicity are the norm, he represents an exception.[100]

The government's reach absorbed an even greater blow when Nicolás Castellanos was re-elected as Havana's mayor by a margin of 16.5 percentage points. While Virgilio Pérez was amply assisted by the *Auténtico* apparatus and his own personal affluence, he was not a member of Carlos Prío's inner circle nor had he been the president's preferred choice to succeed Alemán. By contrast, the administration spared neither expense nor effort to elect Antonio Prío. Ignoring polls that predicted a distant second place finish, *Auténtico* operatives fancifully viewed a landslide victory in the offing.[101] When the bad news became evident, Carlos and Antonio Prío covered assorted advisors with epithets.

These prominent setbacks notwithstanding, electoral bribery continued to yield fruit more often than not. Despite losing in Havana, and also in Camagüey,

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Each of Havana's mayoral candidates was unhappy with the various polls taken by Raúl Gutiérrez. Castellanos complained they underestimated his popularity, Antonio Prío pretended not to notice them and Manuel Bisbé whined that surveys reflected the whims of those who paid for them. However, the May 31 questionnaire proved highly accurate. Castellanos was favored by 53.85 percent of respondents and won 53.36 percent in actuality. Antonio Prío was chosen by 34.35 percent and garnered 36.88 percent on election day. Lastly, Manuel Bisbé was named by 11.80 percent and came away with 9.76 percent.

Cuba's third largest city, where Tony Varona's brother Roberto was defeated, the *Auténticos* snagged more than 100 mayoralties.[102] Some of these were won by genuinely popular candidates such as Luis Casero in Santiago de Cuba, but many others resorted to shady methods. The government also added to its congressional majority. In Las Villas province, the *Auténticos* spent approximately 500 thousand *pesos* to elect six representatives. One of these, the president's brother-in-law Tino Fuentes, was accused of funding his campaign with government checks meant for road construction and selling pardons to criminals via the justice ministry.[103] The midterm elections thus offered consolation along with dollops of bitterness for each of the island's political groupings. Guillermo Alonso Pujol and Ramón Grau San Martín reveled in the victory of their protégé, Nicolás Castellanos, who retained Cuba's second most powerful political office. However, Castellanos, who had been an obscure Havana city councilman before the suicide of Manuel Fernández Supervielle, had primarily won because he was not the president's brother. Other *Coincidencia* nominees such as Guillermo Belt and René Benitez, who ran for senate in Pinar del Río, finished poorly in their respective races. As for the *Ortodoxos,* they regained a presence in the senate after a two year hiatus and Chibás, who had conducted a heroic campaign, showcased his presidential bona fides for 1952. *Ortodoxos* advanced in the lower house as well. In particular, José Pardo Llada provided a spectacular boost by collecting 72,000 votes – more than any

[102] Roberto Varona lost despite outspending his opponent, the incumbent Francisco Arredondo, by a 10 to 1 margin or 500,000 *pesos to* 50,000. The prime minister's brother was also given 2000 government jobs to distribute where necessary. See Conchito del Río, "La 2nda Zafra de Cuba: 63 Millones Costaron las Elecciones," *Bohemia,* June 18, 1950: 38.

[103] "En Cuba, Elecciones: La Lección del Primero de Junio," *Bohemia,* June 11, 1950: 76. Then again, José Ramón Fernández, who was a protégé of Education Minister Arturo Sánchez Arango, engaged in similar shenanigans and was defeated.

congressional candidate in Cuba's history. He thus established himself as the island's most dynamic young politician. Pardo Llada represented a new generation that had neither fought in the independence war nor tussled with Machado and the ensuing military flavored governments. His credibility derived from being a Chibás-style muckraker who was always, in the words of a *Bohemia* reporter, "risking his life in daily combat for the public benefit."[104] *Ortodoxo* fixtures such as Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Millo Ochoa were also elected. While these men embodied the *Ortodoxo* ideal of relative poverty, not all the party's winners fit this profile. In Las Villas, an *Ortodoxo* coffee baron named Aurelio Nazario Sargent rode to victory on a flotilla of jeeps that crisscrossed the countryside and blared his message. Even more enterprising was the prosperous Gerardo Vázquez, who accrued the highest vote total in Camagüey by hiring a dozen airplanes to spread *Ortodoxo* slogans across the skies. These successes were tempered by the poor showing of Manuel Bisbé, who could not muster even 10 percent of the vote in a party stronghold.

With the elections over, Chibás acquiesced to his doctors finally and remained inactive for nearly all of June. His devotees, however, busied themselves with letters of congratulations. A "great admirer" from Panama who read Chibás' articles in *Bohemia* and commended his "righteous conduct" requested an autographed photo.[105] A 30 year old sugar worker from Las Villas province who had previously shown negligible interest in politics wrote that he was now enthusiastic about campaigning for him. A Cuban man residing in New York City related that, "I pray for the triumph of (your) party and your ideals and also for your personal

[104] Ibid., 79.
[105] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 38, Expediente 1129: 30, ANC.

health, knowing that you are my country's salvation.[106] Ricardo Pareja Lodosa, a member of the Young *Ortodoxos* in Matanzas, claimed Chibás was bound by a pact "with the entire nation and our martyrs to care for your well being." He added that, "You must not abandon your health and cannot forget that you are the only and supreme hope of the entire Cuban people, which trusts in you alone."[107] Chibás read these missives and others with great satisfaction, underlining as always his favorite passages with a red pencil. He was further gratified by a fresh opinion poll published on June 25 that confirmed him as Cuba's leading presidential contender. Asked who they preferred in the island's highest office, 26.25 percent of respondents chose Chibás. His nearest rival, Fulgencio Batista trailed in second place by nearly eight percentage points. The third place candidate, Miguelito Suárez Fernández, was just over 12 points behind. In addition, Chibás led in five of Cuba's six provinces and the three most populous ones, Havana, Oriente and Las Villas. Chibás was also undoubtedly pleased that his erstwhile adversary, Virgilio Pérez, gleaned a measly 0.84 percent.[108] Asked by a journalist for his view, Chibás said, "This clearly indicates that in Cuba space is being cleared for shame in the face of political machines and the government's corruptive money."[109]

[106] Ibid., 50.
[107] Ibid., 55.
[108] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo de Cuba, Opina Sobre las Pasadas Elecciones, El Gabinete de Prío y los Posibles Presidentes," *Bohemia,* June 25, 1950: 84.
[109] "En Cuba, Survey: Los Presidenciables Opinan," *Bohemia,* July 2, 1950: 75.

CAUSA 82

In the simplest terms, Chibás and the *Ortodoxos* aimed to change Cuban politics by offering honorable candidates for public positions. For Chibás this was not merely a political strategy but a duty to the country's founders. Responding around this time to a letter from a young aficionada, he noted, "Our forbearers, who knew how to write pages of glory and bequeathed us a free and sovereign republic, deserve something better than what our present unscrupulous rulers have delivered. This," he concluded, "is the task to which the *Ortodoxo* party has pledged itself."[110] Although the organization's civic-minded gestures had aroused considerable enthusiasm, these tactics by themselves were not a blanket solution. Reform also required curbs on the ability of politicians to fund campaigns and buy votes from the national treasury. Reasonably effective deterrence, involving prosecution and incarceration for embezzlers, was therefore essential. Hence, on June 30, Chibás submitted a brief avowing that approximately 50 million *pesos* had been pilfered from the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund during the Grau and Prío administrations. Chibás proclaimed that,

> Justice should reign for everyone. The weight of the law should fall equally, without favoritism, on all those who have put their hands in the till and not only the ones who are less influential or powerful or have lost proximity to executive power. It is neither civic-minded nor brave to accuse only ex President Grau San Martín and not his ex prime minister and the current president of the republic Carlos Prío; the same goes for he who was director of rents and taxes under Grau and who was treasury minister in this administration. Both (Prío) brothers were as responsible for these outrages as Grau…[111]

[110] Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 38, Expediente 1129: 35.
[111] "En Cuba, Tribunales: Un Juez y un Magistrado," *Bohemia,* July 30, 1950: 75.

However, it was one thing to make denunciations before the courts and quite another for them to be acted upon, as Chibás well knew. In this sense, the fate of *Causa* 82, the lawsuit brought by Pelayo Cuervo against thieves from Grau's administration, was highly significant. During its initial go-round, the case yielded little except a fine against Cuervo for publicly criticizing the lethargic and reluctant judiciary. Special Judge Antonio Vignier had actually closed the indictment and recommended the lawsuit be discontinued. In a rare display of independence, the Havana municipal court disagreed and reassigned the case to Judge Arturo Hevia with instructions to investigate more than 30 potential instances of malfeasance. Before Judge Hevia could pursue this mandate, however, he was recused on a ridiculous pretense. Specifically, a man named in the lawsuit, who had fought in the independence war, claimed Hevia was prejudiced against veterans. The next judge appointed eventually recused himself as well, this time because Grau's ex finance minister, Isauro Valdés, alleged personal enmity. In truth, Valdés worried that an honest magistrate would send him up the river. Toward late May, Judge Federico Justiniani took over and within a month he filed charges against the men he deemed "scoundrels."[112] These included Valdés and four associates who were arraigned for stealing nine and a half million *pesos* from the Havana customs office. Asked by a reporter for his opinion, the usually stern Pelayo Cuervo pronounced himself "very satisfied" that the "dignity" of Cuba's judicial branch had been salvaged. Addressing the customary unwillingness of government officials to pursue these cases, he said, "the justice minister should not forget that the state is harmed above all by such

[112] "En Cuba, Tribunales: Las Pruebas Definitivas," *Bohemia,* July 2, 1950: 78.

crimes."[113] Judge Justiniani expressed fewer doubts about the process, affirming that, "criminal lawsuits are like a sudden storm. You walk outside one day to sun and a fresh breeze and just like that you are soaked!"[114]

Unfortunately, these exultations proved premature. In the early morning hours of July 4, six masked men toting machine guns appeared at the courthouse in Havana's *La Víbora* neighborhood where the *Causa* 82 documents were stored. Although Judge Justiniani had instructed the guards not to open the door for anybody, one of them insouciantly ignored his orders and moments later he and his companion were bound, gagged, blindfolded and had their ears plugged. Wasting no time, the burglars forced open a cabinet and removed all 6032 relevant pages. Such surgical efficiency was curious as the folders holding them were unmarked. Further, not a single piece of paper pertaining to any other cases was taken. Even an adjacent civil suit concerning a certain purveyor of frog's legs remained undisturbed. After stowing their precious loot in a sack, the villains fled without further ado. Thus, rather than an unexpected tempest of justice there was only more scandal. José Pardo Llada, who was informed right away by a police reporter, called it "the news of the year" and rushed to the courthouse with Pelayo Cuervo in tow.[115] One of the guards, Julio Gutiérrez Santana, told his version of events to a *Bohemia* correspondent. Speaking with visible uneasiness, he disclosed that he and his partner had unlocked the door because they believed the intruders were night patrolmen. He also confirmed that the robbery was an inside job, indicating that

[113] Ibid., 79.
[114] Ibid.
[115] "En Cuba, Asalto: En la Madrugada del 4 del Julio," *Bohemia,* July 9, 1950: 76.

one man seemed to know exactly what they were looking for. Judge Justiniani, who was justifiably livid, contributed his own more extensive commentary. He refused to forgive the guards, particularly as they had been warned not to admit anyone during strange hours, not even himself. This was because there had already been an attempt to tamper with the evidence. Some days earlier a man impersonating Pelayo Cuervo had tried to enter the courthouse after midnight. Justiniani also revealed that his phone had been ringing incessantly of late. The callers, who universally claimed to be journalists but who were probably political operatives, always sought information regarding the next round of indictments so they could plan accordingly. Exactly who they represented was a matter of feverish speculation. Popular suspicion implicated Humberto Becerra, Grau's close friend and ex interior minister, who was arrested that afternoon. In custody, Becerra glibly maintained that he and Grau were anxious to see the case go forward in order to ascertain "who had robbed in Cuba."[116] He blamed Carlos Prío for the break-in and maliciously wondered how "two unhappy policemen" could have been the lone custodians of such important documents.[117]

The eminent lawyer and retired Democrat Carlos Manuel de la Cruz, who had recently joined the prosecution of *Causa* 82, estimated that only seven people were familiar enough with the case to know the exact folders that contained its pages. These were Judge Justiniani, his secretary, the court clerk, Pelayo Cuervo, Justice Minister Oscar Gans, State Prosecutor Jesús Coll and de la Cruz himself. He thus believed someone from that group had supervised the assailants. Otherwise, the

[116] Ibid., 77.
[117] Ibid.

precision and speed of their operation would have been impossible. De la Cruz suspected Coll, who had been added to the legal team just 72 hours before the robbery. He avowed that stealing the documents was "ridiculous" since copies could be had from the various ministries within 20 days. Conversely, he allowed that powerful figures would aim to thwart any such effort.[118] These included Antonio Prío, who had served in the Grau era treasury ministry and was among those "most compromised" by the case.[119] For his part, Pelayo Cuervo guessed that Coll and perhaps Gans had a hand in the burglary. Given his pro government orientation and previous efforts to smother the case, Coll certainly possessed a compelling motive. At any rate, Cuervo admitted he was already preparing a brief for the Supreme Tribunal to assist in reconstructing the lawsuit. The press was also anxious to hear from Chibás on this matter. In his statement, the ailing yet spirited *Ortodoxo* leader saw an irrefutable link between the stolen documents and a meeting on July 1 between Grau and emissaries from Prío. He claimed they discussed reconciliation so as to present a common front against the threat of legal investigations involving both sides.

During his July 9 broadcast, Chibás, as he often did, reiterated what was already being said in the newspapers and on the street. Unlike Carlos Manuel de la Cruz and Pelayo Cuervo, both of whom pointed implicit fingers at the president, Chibás opted for a more unequivocal tone. He told his audience:

> Tonight, before the people of Cuba, we concretely accuse the president of the republic, Carlos Prío Socarrás, of being the intellectual author of the armed assault against the courthouse where

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

> the lawsuit against the embezzlement of 174 million *pesos* is being processed and which was perpetrated in order to save his brother Antonio…who was about to be indicted by Judge Justiniani…[120]

For good measure, he added that the *Causa* 82 fiasco demonstrated the government was unworthy of foreign credit. "When we announced more than a year ago that American bankers should not provide one cent to the Prío government," he said, "the president's paid spokesmen disparaged us as slanderers and demagogues. Once again, time has proven us right."[121] Chibás then contrasted the "corruption" and "incapacity" of Prío's administration with the probity of *Ortodoxo* congressmen, who had recently agreed to forego their parliamentary immunity.[122] At the government's behest, State Prosecutor Rafael Trejo sent a transcript of the radio show to the Urgency Court and recommended that Chibás be charged with defamation.[123] Relishing the prospect of another popularity boosting row, Chibás shunned his election certificate – which would have exempted him from being tried.

On July 16, Chibás took to the airwaves and excoriated Trejo for doing the administration's dirty work. Trejo's lack of backbone also served as a potent allegory since his son of the same name was a revolutionary martyr who had been murdered by Machado's policemen in 1930. Chibás noted that:

> Judge Trejo has passively watched, without pressing any charges, as hundreds of assassinations have taken place in full public view and hundreds of millions have been impudently robbed; the only thing he has bothered himself with is accusing me of denouncing the thieves by

[120] "En Cuba, Denuncia: Chibás Vuelve a Urgencia," *Bohemia,* July 23, 1950: 75.
[121] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 678.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Noting that Trejo had also tried to suppress *Causa* 82, a *Bohemia* reporter noted sarcastically that, "Lack of respect for the current government rather than repeated mockery of the law and justice seems to be, in the opinion of Judge Trejo Loredo, the only offense punishable by his office." See: "El Fiscal Trejo," *Bohemia,* July 23,1950: 75.

> their first and last names and for uncovering the intellectual author of the famous *Causa* 82 burglary; in brief, his indescribable behavior is offending the memory and civic example of his son Rafael Trejo…[124]

Chibás also accused the government of attempting to use his delicate health against him. Since he required a second operation and soon, any jail sentence would essentially prove fatal. Chibás told his listeners the president hoped silence him by effectively threatening his life. "But Carlos Prío made a mistake," he said defiantly.[125] Chibás not only refused to recant, he offered a detailed narrative of the *Causa* 82 thefts. He alleged that Antonio Prío and Oscar Gans had directed the operation in accordance with the president's orders. Moreover, he claimed Miguelito Suárez Fernández had offered "advice" and the chief of the Bureau of Investigations had provided "technical support."[126] Looking forward to his day in court, Chibás chose the juridically nimble Carlos Márquez Sterling as his legal counsel – who likened the action against his client to the false accusations against Captain Dreyfus in France. If the administration insisted on bringing the case to trial, a public relations disaster beckoned since both Pelayo Cuervo and Carlos Manuel de la Cruz were eager to testify. By far, the surest indicator of government complicity was the fact that all the initial suspects had been released and the case was in danger of being dropped due to a lack of indictments. This situation was mercilessly lampooned by Cuba's cartoonists. Carlos Vidal sketched a boy asking his father, "So, Chibás is the only one who will be prosecuted for the *Causa* 82 robbery,

[124] "En Cuba, Denuncia: Chibás Vuelve a Urgencia," 75.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 76.

is that right *papi*?"[127] Determined to avoid this eventuality, Cuervo submitted a denunciation against Ernesto Figueras, the guard who had opened the courthouse door and seemed curiously untroubled by the whole affair. Specifically, Cuervo suspected him of having been planted and believed he had let the criminals in without them bothering to knock.

Judge Justiniani did not rest either. Citing the indictment Chibás had submitted in June, he petitioned the Urgency Court to consider criminal charges against Carlos Prío for raiding the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund. Since the president could only face prosecution before Cuba's Supreme Tribunal, the Urgency Court was essentially deciding whether to elevate the case before their superiors. As often happened when so much was at stake, one of the magistrates, Eugenio González, apparently had trouble making up his mind. In a move that hardly inspired confidence, he spent July 20 at "La Chata," Prío's *finca,* where he received less than objective instructions and perhaps an inducement or two. Not surprisingly, González voted no as did his colleague Fidel Vidal. This excused the president from the awkward and unprecedented spectacle of appearing as a defendant before the nation's highest court. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, the verdict was not unanimous. Chibás hailed the dissent of Antonio Barreras as a "glorious achievement for Cuba's judiciary."[128] As for his own prospective date with the Urgency Court, Chibás was disappointed to learn that Havana's Provincial Electoral Authority had sent his credentials to the senate and he was therefore immune from prosecution. This by no means ended the proxy war waged by Prío

[127] Vidal, "El País del Contrasentido," *Bohemia,* July 23, 1950: 79.
[128] Eduardo R. Chibás, "¡Yo Acuso!" *Bohemia,* July 30, 1950: 90.

against Chibás via the Urgency Courts. During his July 30 broadcast, Chibás contended that Carlos Prío met secretly with Fulgencio Batista at the *finca* of Senator Manuel Pérez Galán – Cuba's pineapple king.[129] Prío roundly denied this and resorted to the Urgency Court once again, which requested a waiver of the *Ortodoxo* leader's parliamentary immunity. Chibás complied with alacrity, but as his second operation loomed this new skirmish would have to wait.

THE SECOND SURGERY

Given the failure of his operation in February, Eddy's doctors and many of his supporters urged him to schedule his second surgery in the United States. Nevertheless, Chibás flatly refused, holding that if he were going to die he preferred to do so in Cuba. Thus, on August 1, he checked into the *Miramar* clinic – one of Havana's newest and most advanced hospitals. Chibás would need a few weeks of rest and close monitoring by his medical staff before going under the knife. Almost immediately, he required two blood transfusions. In the early going, at least, the *Ortodoxo* leader's repose was strictly enforced and only his brother Raúl, his cousin Roberto Agramonte and his secretary Conchita Fernández were allowed to visit.

While Chibás was indisposed, Communications Minister Sergio Clark issued the controversial Decree 2273, guaranteeing a "right of reply" to anyone singled out for censure during radio transmissions. This measure, which became known as the "gag decree," had actually been devised by Justice Minister Oscar Gans. He justified it as a remedy for the "great number of citizens" whose "prestige" was being

[129] Manuel Pérez Galán controlled an estimated 70 percent of Cuba's pineapple production.

"compromised" on the island's radio shows.[130] Under the new rules, radio stations were obligated to cede space for the injured parties so they could personally rectify any insults directed against them. Enrique de la Osa claimed the justice minister's real aim was to curry favor with Carlos Prío, especially as a cabinet reshuffle was in the offing. That Prío desired a new instrument for suppressing media criticism was undeniable. Just before the midterm elections, he had told a crowd in the town of Bauta that, "soon, Cuban women will no longer suffer attacks on the radio."[131] This allusion to the feud between Chibás and Virgilio Pérez during their senate campaign hinted at the decree's real purpose. After being publicly accused of responsibility for the *Causa* 82 robbery, Prío proved willing once again to compromise the island's constitution for imagined political advantages over Chibás and José Pardo Llada. The decree almost certainly violated Article 33, which guaranteed freedom of expression and absolutely breached Article 24, which prohibited the confiscation of property without payment. Perhaps worst of all, Cuba's director of radio, a functionary in the communications ministry, was granted the power to decide whether a complaint merited the right of reply rather than the nation's courts. This contradicted Article 170, which declared that, "Justice may be administered only by persons who permanently belong to the judiciary."

Despite these imperfections, Gans crowed that he had extended free thought and expression to all of Cuba's five million inhabitants. He further declared that, "To deny a citizen the right to defend himself against distorted claims would be a

[130] "En Cuba, Censura: El Decreto-Mordaza," *Bohemia,* August 13, 1950: 75.
[131] Ibid.

manifestation of ambitious totalitarianism."[132] In a swift response, the *Ortodoxo* radio host Guido García Inclán stated,

> The five million citizens Gans refers to have no need to protect themselves from radio attacks but rather against the government itself. Isn't it true that hospitals lack thousands of beds and many poor people die due to a scarcity of medical assistance? Isn't money robbed from the people in order to build luxurious apartment buildings? Does the farmer feel secure in his land and does he have access to roads so he can sell his products? These things that are denounced on the radio constitute an effective defense of the citizens against the government's outrages.[133]

Goar Mestre, the director of *Circuito CMQ*, concurred; affirming that radio campaigns generally defended the "great masses" against the "egoism, ambition and venality of our politicians."[134] Alejo Cossío del Pino, who owned *Radio Cadena Habana,* asserted that men who had illegally enriched themselves wished to avoid the embarrassment of being called thieves. In fact, the decree was reviled among reporters of all political stripes and every independent press organization. More to the point, Cubans already exercised the right to defend themselves against all manner of accusations – doing so vigorously in the many polemics conducted via radio, magazines and newspapers. The government's objective, gussied up in fancy garb, was to intrude on the broadcasts of Chibás, Pardo Llada or any other opponents.

Although he was ostensibly out of commission, the *Ortodoxo* leader was planning a surprise – which he hinted at during a visit by Carlos Márquez Sterling.

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[132] Ibid., 76.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Goar Mestre, "El Decreto 2.273 es una Franca Invitación a la Usurpación de Funciones," *Bohemia,* August 13, 1950, 71.

Chibás swore he would return to the radio "very soon" and indeed, on August 13, he escaped from the hospital and broadcast an open letter to the president.[135] While journalists made much of his flair for the dramatic, Chibás was also convinced he could die in surgery and felt the need to condemn Prío's "gravest" error.[136] His strong voice belying a faltering body, he pointed out that Cubans had no reason to expect anything constructive from an "evil *machadista*" like Oscar Gans.[137] Chibás also mentioned that Goar Mestre offered the government a 30 minute time slot on CMQ immediately after his show in order to rebut any prospective inaccuracies but it had refused, insisting instead on replying, if need be, during his own half hour. "This," he said, "demonstrates the hypocrisy of Decree 2273, which the people, with their formidable intuition, have baptized the gag decree from the first moment."[138] Chibás further noted that the president had all of Cuba's media at his disposal while he possessed only a single show. "And this half hour, once a week, on one radio station floor," he declared, with rising indignation, "you want to take from me with tricks, using my illness to your advantage."[139] Lastly, Chibás reminded Prío of their time as delegates to the constituent assembly in 1940, where they had advocated the creation of Article 40. This nullified any provisions by the government or courts impinging upon constitutional guarantees and condoned "adequate resistance"

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[135] Carlos Márquez Sterling, "Un Decreto al Estilo Fascista," *Bohemia,* August 13, 1950: 86. In his weekly column, Márquez Sterling deemed the decree's timing "cowardly and cunning" because Chibás, who it was mainly directed against, was in no position to respond. The *Ortodoxo* leader agreed, saying, "They waited until I checked into the clinic, so I would find it difficult to defend myself or accuse them of what they are plotting in the dark against the Cuban people. Regardless of how much they persecute me," he concluded, "I will very soon appear for my radio show on CMQ to continue fighting the battle of SHAME AGAINST MONEY and SHAME AGAINST INDIGNITY."
[136] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Carta Abierta al Presidente Carlos Prío," *Bohemia,* August 20, 1950: 103.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

against them. Thus, he concluded, "Whenever you attempt to violate public liberties, you will have to confront me, your incorruptible adversary."[140]

As if to demonstrate the needlessness of Decree 2273, Antonio Prío fulminated on *Unión Radio* later that night against José Pardo Llada, Carlos Márquez Sterling and Goar Mestre. Further, Humberto Medrano, the editor of *Prensa Libre's* evening edition, responded in print to an offensive remark by Chibás. This included an invitation to duel once the *Ortodoxo* chief recovered from his surgery. As the insulted party, Medrano had the right to choose the weapon – a fact that caused panic among Eddy's friends since the *Prensa Libre* editor was a champion marksman. Nonetheless, Chibás told his seconds, Luis Orlando Rodríguez and Pardo Llada, to accept whatever terms were proposed. As a result, both men withdrew saying they refused to "lead Chibás to the slaughterhouse."[141] Impervious to all pleas, Chibás named new seconds, who were relieved when Medrano's representatives opted for sabers. Having settled this matter, Chibás finally gave the go-ahead to his medical staff. On August 17, Dr. Antonio Rodríguez Díaz sutured the hernia and signs of success abounded almost immediately. Chibás began gaining weight within days. On August 26, for his 43rd birthday, the doctors allowed him to eat steak fillet and roast chicken. In a show that political disagreements did not always constitute grudge matches, Commerce Minister José Andreu was among those who visited Chibás in the hospital. Miguelito Suárez Fernández also inquired about the *Ortodoxo* leader's health.

[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

On the afternoon of September 1, Chibás checked out of the *Miramar* clinic with a provisionally clean bill of health. Amenable at last to his doctors' orders, he agreed to depart for a recuperative vacation in Canada and the United States that evening. Before setting off, however, he supervised an *Ortodoxo* meeting in the house of Manuel Bisbé. While Chibás had been convalescing, the administration had ventured into dubious legal territory once again by arbitrarily closing the Communist daily *Hoy*. Instead of seeking a court order or legislative approval, the government favored a ministerial resolution. Unfortunately, Labor Minister José Morell Romero, whose signature would have been required, expressed serious qualms about its legitimacy. Tony Varona thus proposed that Morell Romero feign illness so he could temporarily assume control of the labor ministry and shut down the newspaper. The prime minister warned cabinet members that, "The next loan we will be requesting, which we need so badly and will guarantee us victory in 1952, depends on what we do now against the Communists."[142] Minister without portfolio Ramón Vasconcelos, who had attended the meeting and vehemently opposed the prime minister's reasoning, subsequently resigned in protest. Speaking to reporters, he pointed out that even the United States government, which currently was at war with communist North Korea, did not restrict publication of *The Daily Worker*. Chibás, whose thinning locks had grown noticeably grayer since enduring two surgeries over seven months, informed the assembled *Ortodoxos* he feared the government was "on the road to dictatorship" but remained confident the

[142] "En Cuba, Clausura: El Periódico "Hoy" y el Artículo 33," *Bohemia,* September 3, 1950: 78. Senator Eusebio Mujal, who was also head of the Confederation of Cuban Workers, pressed the president for even more drastic action. Rather than merely depriving the Communists of their mouthpiece, he wanted it to be handed over to him and his organization.

party would thrive during his absence.[143] He added that the *Ortodoxos* were the only party with the moral standing to criticize the closing of *Hoy*, which he termed "unjustifiable" and a "flagrant aggression," because they had never cut any deals with the Communists.[144]

Even as the *Ortodoxos* in attendance were grateful to see Chibás, many disagreed with him and were not shy about saying so. The newly elected Havana city councilman Herminio Portell Vilá spoke first, asserting that *Hoy* was not really a Cuban newspaper like *Diario de la Marina* or *Alerta* but rather an "organ of Moscow."[145] As evidence, he pointed out that *Hoy* reproduced the same articles that ran in Communist dailies from throughout the world. Portell Vilá also challenged the official *Ortodoxo* posture that the attack against *Hoy* endangered political freedom, believing the government was focused solely on the Communist threat. The onetime Communist José Chelala Aguilera agreed, saying he knew better than anyone that Cuban Marxists were "puppets of Moscow."[146] Gerardo Vázquez, the recently elected congressman from Camagüey, urged the party to outflank the administration by demanding an outright ban of the Communist party. On the other hand, Joaquín López Montes, the *Ortodoxo* delegate to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, explained that seizing *Hoy's* offices without compensation contravened Cuba's constitution. Then, abandoning his legal emphasis for a moment, he

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[143] "En Cuba, Política: 'El Partido Sabrá Luchar Gallardamente…' *Bohemia,* September 10, 1950: 75.
[144] Ibid. Chibás listed Antonio Prío among the hypocrites given his attempts to court Communist support while he was running for mayor but who now was at the forefront of those defending *Hoy's* closure.
[145] Ibid. The ultra conservative, pro-Franco *Diario de la Marina* congratulated the government for shutting down *Hoy.* Most of Cuba's print media, however, including *El Mundo, Alerta* and *Bohemia,* strongly disapproved of the measure.
[146] Ibid., 76.

declared, "Closing a newspaper means closing an idea and we cannot fully develop our democracy without allowing opposing views."[147] Beto Saumell and Luis Orlando Rodríguez concurred; with the latter claiming *Ortodoxos* were above all, "militants of democracy."[148] By 6 p.m., time was running short as Chibás would soon have to catch his flight. In his closing appeal, Chibás referred to a *New York Times* editorial which argued that banning Communism in the United States would betray the principles of freedom espoused by its Founding Fathers. When the vote was taken, a majority supported his position. He thus boarded the plane with an air of contentment.

As Chibás was whisked northwards, a *Bohemia* reporter conducted an odd sort of interview with Diego Vicente Tejera, the inevitably quotable *Auténtico* party boss of Matanzas and his lieutenant Sergio Megías. Having been granted permission to sit in the back of Tejera's Cadillac and discuss politics with the two bigwigs, the journalist was treated to numerous intriguing snippets. Regarding the 1952 presidential race, Tejera averred that the only *Auténtico* candidate capable of being elected "without difficulty" was the ostensibly retired Pepe San Martín.[149] If Prío chose someone else, which was likely, he stated the party would merely "utilize certain procedures" to ensure victory.[150] Asked what he meant by this phrase, Tejera frankly replied, "It's foolish to think we will hand over power the way Batista did in 1944."

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid. Those who backed Chibás on the issue also included Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, Raimundo Lazo and Mario Alzugaray.
[149] "En Cuba, Política: 'Es Tonto Imaginar que Vamos a Entregar el Poder…,'" *Bohemia,* September 10, 1950: 77.
[150] Ibid.

"And what about the popular will?" inquired his interlocutor.

"What popular will?" responded Tejera with obvious contempt. Motioning to the sidewalk, he said, "Do you think we will permit that man, for example, who is waiting for the bus to decide our future? Don't even think about it!" In this vein, he confirmed that, "Life in Cuba is becoming increasingly difficult. For me, the voter who seeks to resolve his personal problems on election day is more valuable than the one depositing a ballot influenced by hysteria on the radio." Tejera concluded that, "We will follow the lead of Mexico, where the government party always wins even as it takes some work to obtain votes from the opposition."[151]

IN NORTH AMERICA

Eddy's doctors had prescribed a vacation abroad with the idea that he would avoid the strains of Cuban politics. However, during the course of his journey, Chibás was never far removed from the island's hustle and bustle. For one thing, he remained well informed though constant telephone contact with Conchita Fernández. During one call in late September, she conveyed that MSR gangsters had murdered Tulio Paniagua Recalt – a treasury ministry official and confidant of Miguelito Suárez Fernández.[152] He subsequently denounced the killing during a

[151] Ibid.

[152] Suárez Fernández charged the government with responsibility for Paniagua's death and resigned his post as senate president in protest. In Cuba's upper house, Suárez Fernández read a public statement claiming he had been warned that he, his family and his friends had been targeted for assassination. Of course, his longstanding ties to UIR deprived him of any moral high ground. Gang violence, after all, was one of many ways in which *Auténticos* settled their internal squabbles. During the same session, Pelayo Cuervo struck while the iron was hot and shared his own gangster story. He related that gunmen had approached Judge Antonio Vignier and offered their services against him and another accuser in the *Causa* 82 case. When Cuervo found out, he demanded that Vignier denounce the ruffians to the police, otherwise, he would do so himself before the Supreme Tribunal.

wide ranging press conference. As part of his talk, Chibás invited the popular Communist radio commentator Salvador García Agüero to join the *Ortodoxos* and promised to nationalize the Cuban Electric Company and Cuban Telephone Company if elected president. Chibás was also more than happy to discuss politics with reporters from New York's Spanish language daily, *La Prensa.* For every bit of tourism he indulged in, including visits to the Empire State Building observatory and Bronx Zoo, there were politically oriented excursions to places like the United Nations or NBC studios in Rockefeller Center, where Chibás recorded a message for his compatriots. Even his modest room in the Hotel Edison near Times Square was no sanctuary. Once Cuban expatriates learned of his whereabouts, he was besieged by would-be callers. On October 10, Chibás addressed the Cuban Athenaeum of New York and lambasted the Prío administration before a packed house. Further, Chibás eagerly contributed to a *Bohemia* survey regarding the views of Cuban politicians on the second anniversary of Prío's inauguration. Swollen with ire over Decree 2273 and convinced that Prío had dishonorably exploited of his infirmity, the *Ortodoxo* leader was decidedly ungenerous in his assessment. Chibás affirmed that Prío's government "could not have been more negative for the republic."[153] The man who usually exalted his country and told reporters he preferred the Caribbean vista of his bedroom window to the panorama from New York's tallest building then cast Cuba as a land of gangsters, nepotism, rural misery, urban decay, red-baiting

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Eventually, Cuervo submitted his evidence to the Bureau of Investigations and no action was taken. He concluded that, "Since then, I am among those who doubt the efficiency of this Bureau, especially when the government intends to cover up a crime." See "En Cuba, Senado, 'Mientras el Gangsterismo Siga Protegido por el Gobierno," *Bohemia,* October 8, 1950: 75.

[153] "Opinan Sobre los 2 Años del Gobierno del Doctor Carlos Prío Socarrás," *Bohemia,* October 15, 1950: 87.

hysteria and untrammeled venality. Further, Chibás used his commentary as a vehicle to mock the president's long awaited cabinet reshuffle. He observed that the "prelude" to these changes, which included replacement of the widely disliked Tony Varona as prime minister, were the gag decree and "hypocritical attacks" against the press.[154] Fellow *Ortodoxo* Jorge Mañach was asked to comment as well and he furnished a more nuanced analysis. Among other things, he praised Prío for wriggling free of the men who made him president – namely Grau, Guillermo Alonso Pujol and José Manuel Alemán. In addition, Mañach lauded him for dismissing the crooked army chief Genovevo Pérez Dámera and purging the education ministry of thieves. The national bank, Tribunal of Guarantees and new University of Oriente were also tangible achievements. Mañach, who Chibás had designated as his future culture minister, qualified these positives by confirming that many of Cuba's "great necessities" remained unsatisfied and lamenting the "tone" of its political life.[155]

Despite Eddy's frenetic schedule and inability to absent himself, even fleetingly, from Cuban politics, his condition swiftly improved. When Chibás left Cuba, he weighed a mere 119 pounds. By the first week of October, he had reached 143 and seemed finally to fill his clothing. Chibás had planned to return on October 14 but extended his stay so he could pass through Washington, D.C., where he had lived with his father in 1932 and Tampa, home to a substantial émigré community. In the latter city, Chibás paid homage to an elderly matriarch who possessed two quasi sacred artifacts. These were a gold ring bestowed by José Martí and a revolver that had once belonged to Máximo Gómez, the chief general of Cuba's liberation

[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 86.

army. The woman was so moved by Chibás that she offered to make a present of them but he demurred, requesting only to borrow the ring. Thereafter, he told a gathering of more than 5000 people in the local baseball stadium that he would keep it if he continued to pursue the work of Martí. "But if I frustrate the longings of my people," he said, "if I am unfaithful to revolutionary ideals, please *señora* do not send Martí's ring, send instead Gómez's revolver so I may castigate the brain that has betrayed my heart."[156] As in Cuba, the multitude fervidly hugged and touched him as he exited – many with tears welling up in their eyes.

EXPANSION

Chibás arrived in Havana on October 28, allowing him sufficient time to prepare for his Sunday radio broadcast the next day. After a year in which he had rejected a deal with the Liberals and shunted aside Nicolás Castellanos, the *Ortodoxo* leader attempted to present a more inclusive message. He declared that:

> The Cuban Peoples' Party is not a closed sect that cultivates hate, vengeance and grudges but rather a party of open doors. No decent, honorable and honest Cubans – be they Liberal, Democrat or *Auténtico* – will find among us a single voice of censure. This is a place for those who aspire to consolidate the republic and to eradicate crime, thievery and vice.[157]

Later on in his speech, Chibás took this idea a measured step further, announcing that:

> The *Ortodoxos* do not discriminate against anyone willing to serve the nation and lose their life for it if necessary, even if they have previously committed political errors involving tactics or strategy.

[156] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 692.
[157] Ibid., 696.

> Proof of this can be found within our ranks, where those who once marched under different banners and who, on occasion, were our bitterest opponents now work together…The only ones who have no place in the Cuban Peoples' Party are those who have mocked the people's trust, unseemly politicians, thieves of all epochs and people who only pretend to believe in democracy.[158]

After the show, Chibás headlined a rally in *Parque Central* where he addressed masses of broom wielding supporters. He reiterated that *Ortodoxos* welcomed all Cubans with clean hands and concluded by reprising a version of the ritual he had debuted in Tampa. In a deliberate swipe at the last three Cuban presidents, Chibás swore before the statue of José Martí that after being elected in 1952 and serving his term he would possess no more gold than the ring he had been entrusted with in Florida.

On November 9, Chibás arrived at the house of Roberto Agramonte – where he presided over his first *Ortodoxo* meeting since returning. The agenda was particularly important as Pelayo Cuervo, José Manuel Gutiérrez, Agustín Cruz, Federico Fernández Casas and Carlos Márquez Sterling had recently asked to join the party. Eddy's rhetoric had almost certainly been a factor in their decision and he argued strenuously for their acceptance. He related that other politicians had expressed a willingness to sign up as well; suggesting the party's softer tone could broaden its appeal.[159] First, however, some men who had once been considered traitors would have to be readmitted into the fold. Chibás himself had feuded quite

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[158] Ibid.

[159] The personal popularity of Chibás also acted as a magnet and was not lost on the island's politicians. He claimed that a recent public survey commissioned by Carlos Prío had showed him winning 41 percent of voters. Whether this was the case or not, some political leaders, notably Eduardo Suárez Rivas of the Liberals, sensed that Chibás represented the future and kept their lines of communication open with him.

acrimoniously in the past with Cuervo, Gutiérrez and Fernández Casas but now claimed he was beyond grudges or pettiness. He also pointed out that none of the five applicants had stained their reputations with blood or stolen money. Lastly, Chibás sold the advantages of having three *Ortodoxo* senators rather than one. Above all, he emphasized that, "we just affirmed that (our) doors are wide open to Cubans of good will so how can we reject them?"[160] The most obvious reason to do so was that each had a fondness for pacts but so did the party's vice president, Millo Ochoa. In the end, this did not prove to be an obstacle. José Chelala Aguilera proposed they sign a declaration recognizing the independent line but was waved away. Several expressed reservations about Federico Fernández Casas, who they considered ethically suspect, but the vast majority agreed with Chibás and the final vote was unanimous. In fact, the combination of Chibás' restored health and the prospect of adding five political heavyweights inspired a feeling of giddiness among the attendees, one of whom blurted out that, "We ought to win the presidency because we are going to save everyone!"[161]

Similar emotions bubbled over after Raúl Gutiérrez conducted his latest opinion poll. The results, which fittingly arrived on Christmas Eve, were greeted with euphoria by *Ortodoxos* as they contained all manner of encouraging news. Asked to rate Carlos Prío's administration, only 17.97 percent of Cubans nationwide volunteered that it was "good." By contrast, 34.50 percent answered "bad" and

[160] "En Cuba, Política: 'Yo no Transijo Cuando se Trata de Principios,'" *Bohemia,* November 19, 1950: 79.
[161] Ibid.

37.09 percent said "average."[162] Questioned which electoral block they preferred in general terms, an astounding 58.63 percent chose the opposition against 31.40 for the government. In part, this reflected disillusion among *Auténticos*, 36.70 percent of whom were willing to vote against their party. Regarding those who planned to run against the government in 1952, Chibás was easily the most popular contender – more than 19 points ahead of Fulgencio Batista.[163] Further, Chibás retained the crossover appeal that proved decisive in his election to the senate. For example, 25.34 percent of *Auténticos* backed him as did 24.24 percent of Democrats, 30.72 percent of Republicans and 25.52 percent of Liberals.[164]

[162] Raúl Gutiérrez, "Survey Nacional: Oriente, Camagüey, Las Villas y Toda la Isla, Opinan Sobre el Gobierno y Los Posibles Presidentes," *Bohemia,* December 24, 1950, 74.
[163] Ibid., 77. Nicolás Castellanos, who was already touting his presidential candidacy with full page ads in newspapers and magazines, finished fourth – with only 2.47 percent.
[164] Ibid., 78.

Chapter 9

"Time Will Prove Me Right Once Again"

The year 1951 arrived in tandem with an intermittent cold spell, which sent Havana residents scurrying for their warmest clothing. In *Diario de la Marina*, the inclement weather was a regular theme for cartoonists – one of whom, with equal parts facetiousness and despair, dubbed Cuba the "Alaska of the Caribbean."[1] Even so, the plummeting temperatures did not distract Chibás' core of fanatical followers from their two obsessions – bringing administrative honesty and decency to Cuba and worrying whether the man who embodied these ideals enjoyed sound good health. In this vein, on January 4, Manuel Padial Vidal of Santiago de Cuba's humble Mariana de la Torre neighborhood, wrote Chibás to inform his "esteemed friend" that he had been "very worried" during the months when Eddy had been sick, especially as he was "the only hope of the Cuban people," and if he had died the country would have been left in the hands of "this dog Carlos Prío." In addition to asking God and Don Bosco[2] to preserve Chibás' well being, Padial Vidal relates that he recently visited his uncle's farm in the mountains and told the local *guajiros* of the "benefits that you represent for Cuba, or that is, for us Cubans for a government to arrive composed of a single party without shady deals or coalitions."[3] In contrast to this handwritten letter's lined paper, looping script, mangled grammar and easy

[1] José Roseñada, "En la Alaska del Caribe." *Diario de la Marina,* February 4, 1951: 46.
[2] Giovanni Bosco (1816-1888), an Italian priest and pedagogue, was canonized in 1934 by Pope Pius XI.
[3] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 38, Número 1135: 53-54, ANC.

informality was a missive directed to Chibás on January 5, by Manuel Belver, an accountant and erstwhile PRC "militant" from Havana's working-class Guadalupe neighborhood who meant to join the *Ortodoxos*. Belver's correspondence was meticulously proper in every respect, right up to the rubber-stamping of his name at the bottom of the page. Just the same, his sentiments were typical – if perhaps a bit more nuanced. He confessed his belief that Chibás was the only member of the party capable of implementing its program and declared that while many Ortodoxos were honorable, Chibás was unique in his "integrity of character" and "revolutionary conscience."[4]

Despite the incessant worry of supporters, Chibás remained a picture of vigor. After welcoming the new year with a dinner at the Havana Country Club,[5] Chibás picked up where he left off during the final months of 1950 by launching barrages against two of his bitterest opponents, Fulgencio Batista and Carlos Prío. Hence, on the morning of Friday, January 5, Chibás submitted a formal accusation against the former before a judge at the Tribunal of Justice. The initial rather breathless press reports suggested that Batista was being charged with embezzling money from the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund. The chronically truant senator replied with calculated indignation, stating the accusation was, "so absurd and perverse, that public opinion, if it hasn't realized before, should now be convinced

[4] Ibid., 62.
[5] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 717.

that a serious presidential candidate can't be someone, like Mr. Chibás, who has become a [public] figure based on mendacities, calumnies and injuries."[6]

The next day, Chibás clarified the situation, claiming he had never accused the "ex military dictator"[7] of robbing the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund. Instead, he asserted that Batista had pilfered millions of pesos earmarked for medicines, school lunches, the military retirement fund and neighborhood roads during his administration (1940-1944) and had therefore "speculated with the hunger and misery of workers and peasants."[8] For proof, Cubans need look no further than the fact that Batista had been a mere sergeant in 1933 with a 30 peso per month salary. Given these circumstances, Chibás asked, what explanation aside from corruption could explain his immense wealth? As one of a handful of men in Cuba who had become visibly less affluent (although he was far from poor) through the practice of politics, Chibás was all but invincible on this issue. Nonetheless, Batista did not shy from the fight. "For Chibás, lying is as natural as breathing," he proclaimed.[9] Going forward, he dismissed the notion, repeatedly propagated by Chibás, that he owned luxury properties in numerous countries – allowing only for "a modest house" in Daytona Beach, Florida, which was actually for sale.[10] In any case, Chibás' attempt to conflate Batista's dishonest administration with working-class and rural misery was a clear gambit to weaken his rival's still considerable appeal among Cuba's urban laborers and peasants. Some members in both groups undoubtedly

[6] "Absurdo lo que dice E. Chibás del R. Azucarero," *Diario de la Marina* January 9, 1951: 6. See also, Fernán Villalva, "Radiografías," *Carteles,* January 28, 1951: 26.
[7] Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, "Nuestra política es así." *Carteles* January 21, 1951: 102.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Fernán Villalva, "Radiografías," *Carteles,* January 28, 1951: 26.
[10] Ibid.

remembered Batista's stint as military chief and behind the scenes ruler (1934-1940) with fondness. Many workers, for instance, surely associated him with his decision to allow the founding of the Cuban Workers Confederation in 1939. As for country-dwellers, plenty recalled the government-underwritten leases for small sugar farmers promulgated in 1937 along with the civic-military schools established beginning in 1936.[11]

In addition to relying on his singular talent for public accusation, the effort to diminish Batista was also taken up Carlos Márquez Sterling. In his weekly *Bohemia* column, he alleged that Batista represented, "revenge, resentment, persecution and return to a past best left to rest at the bottom of history."[12] Márquez Sterling also argued that Batista had far more ambition than popular support. In this way, he was the opposite of another military figure cum president, José Miguel Gómez (1909-1913), who, on a sunny day in 1920, spent seven hours on his balcony in Old Havana waving his arms as hundreds of thousands of men and women passed by in a show of delirious support – all this despite the fact that he no longer aspired to public office. The crowd was perhaps mistaken to advocate the return of the corrupt general, known affectionately as the "shark that bathes but also splashes," but at least their will was unmistakable.[13] Márquez Sterling added that the populace now

[11] Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba,* 160 and 132-133.
[12] Carlos Marquez Sterling, "La emoción del candidato en el pueblo de Cuba," *Bohemia* January 7, 1951: 29.
[13] Charles E. Chapman, *A History of the Cuban Republic*: *A Study in Hispanic American Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 297-316. Chapman estimates that Gómez stole $8 million during his administration. At the same time, the "shark" also ensured that those surrounding him benefited. In this sense, his friends were "splashed." See also, Hugh Thomas. *Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 504-505. Specifically, he notes that Gómez "ended his presidency a millionaire after having entered it quite poor, but in a time of prosperity…these things were

clamors for Chibás because, after years of being defrauded, Cubans desire a leader who will never steal or embezzle.[14] Lastly, he ventured an apology of sorts for Chibás, explaining that the "necessity to castigate and condemn" is a function of widespread fraud and thievery in Cuba and that, when and if such qualities are eradicated from public life, the island's politicians will be free to argue over "construction and progress."[15]

A week later, an interview with the Havana city councilman Herminio Portell Vilá provided a small but useful fillip for Chibás' latest accusation. Asked about the "political panorama," he characterized the ex general in the following terms:

> Just imagine Batista, the millionaire at the expense of the public treasury who doesn't visit the *Capitolio* nor does he occupy his senate seat, but nonetheless collects his salary. This absent legislator, who doesn't dare show his face so as to remind everyone in the chamber of his guilt, governed the country for 11 years without authority or ability. He did and undid at his whim…What can we hope for from him?[16]

While *Ortodoxo* heavyweights continued to jab at Batista, Chibás latched onto an enticing new target – the so-called "one-percent" decree, a controversial and unpopular deduction from the salaries of the nation's sugar workers (even those who were unaffiliated) meant to fill union coffers. This recent concession had been "snatched" from the Prío administration by Eusebio Mujal, the burly labor leader and *Auténtico* senator who was all but certain to raid the funds to strengthen his

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tolerated." Thomas also points out that, "The word summing up the Gómez years was *chivo*, a goat; but since it is slang for 'crumbs,' its colloquial usage is graft."

[14] Carlos Marquez Sterling, "La emoción del candidato," 121.

[15] Ibid, 212.

[16] "en Cuba, Entrevistas," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 59.

own position and that of the party[17] The resulting furor was such that a *Bohemia* correspondent compared the measure word for word to one enacted by Mussolini in 1926 and claimed, tongue firmly in cheek, that "If it were possible to raise oneself on a pedestal of accusations, there is no doubt Eusebio Mujal…would acquire the proportions of a statue."[18] *Bohemia's* disapproval was part of a larger frenzy of criticism that also encompassed *Diario de la Marina, El Mundo* and *Alerta*. Political chieftains of all stripes added denunciations as well, including Liberal party head Eduardo Suárez Rivas and Guillermo Alonso Pujol.

For Chibás, the "one-percent" exemplified nearly everything he found distasteful in Cuban politics. The deal between Prío and Mujal smacked not only of unconstitutionality but also of cronyism, corruption and contempt for the island's multitude of sugar workers who, in effect, were now to be officially pick-pocketed at the president's behest. This situation, which aroused the *Ortodoxo* chief's considerable outrage, also presented an ideal opportunity to make inroads among rural voters – a constituency that had sometimes eluded Chibás, often but not always because of vote buying. Most recently, during his 1950 campaign for the senate Chibás proved far more popular among urban dwellers than residents of the countryside. One reason for this was suggested by a PPC partisan named José Hernández Oliva of Meneses, a village in Camagüey province so obscure, it doesn't appear on most Cuban maps.[19] He asserted that many *campesinos*, when asked

[17] "en Cuba, Trabajo," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 61.
[18] Ibid.
[19] For example, Meneses does not appear on the modern, 25 x 36 inch map of Cuba published by Editiones GEO and sold in the Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí in Havana. The website http://www.fallingrain.com/world/CU/5/Meneses.html estimates the current population of Meneses to be 6414 within a radius of seven kilometers.

about the *Ortodoxo* leader, typically reply, "Chibás! He's very honorable, yes, but he has never done anything in our favor, nor for anyone…he does nothing more than talk, he hasn't introduced any law that would support us against evictions nor does he say what his platform is, none of that."[20] Such a view prevailed, according to Hernández Oliva, because farmers were less familiar with Chibás than their urban compatriots. The scarcity of media outlets in the island's more isolated corners meant that they were often unaware of the *Ortodoxo* leader's efforts on their behalf. Given the national attention being paid to the "one-percent" and its universal effect on the nation's peasants, Chibás undoubtedly aimed to captivate this group and imprint a grand gesture on their collective memory.

During his first radio broadcast of 1951, on Sunday evening, January 7, Chibás addressed a "veritable harangue" to Cuba's sugar workers – urging them to mobilize against a measure he deemed, "unconstitutional, totalitarian and fascist."[21] He began each paragraph with the same intonation: *Trabajador azucarero*, sugar worker. False union leaders were betraying them. Their one-percent contribution would fall into the hands of the dishonest politicians that impeded the investigation into the embezzlement of the Sugar Workers' Retirement Fund. "Write immediately to your boss, let him know that you won't accept any reduction in your salary in order to pay the arbitrarily imposed union dues. You will be backed by the Constitution and the law!"[22] Ironically, listeners tuning into to CMQ that evening had been given no inkling that Chibás would focus on the issue. The advertisements

[20] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 39, Número 1145, p. 14, ANC.
[21] Ibid., 63.
[22] Ibid.

preceding the show in *Diario de la Marina*, for example, mentioned only that Chibás would present Pelayo Cuervo Navarro, Federico Fernández Casas, José Manuel Gutiérrez and Agustín Cruz in order to make public their re-incorporation into the PPC.[23] Nevertheless, Chibás' condemnation of the "one-percent," which went beyond those of all other politicians and publications,[24] was warmly received by the nation's sugar workers.

In the days and weeks that followed, he received a torrent of mail from grateful peasants. Some, like Juan Marín of Central Hormiguero en Las Villas province, were local *Ortodoxos* and union members who feared the "one-percent" was a government ploy to dispossess their "purely Ortodoxo" sugar workers unions.[25] Many more, like José Fernández Carranza of Central Zaza in Las Villas province[26] or Luis Gamez of Finca Aranguito in Havana province[27] were indignant over the prospective reduction in their salaries by an untrustworthy and crooked administration. For men such as these, who wrote by hand on notebook paper, who spelled and misspelled words the way they were pronounced,[28] to whom the price

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[23] The advertisement, which appeared during the week of January 2-7, 1951 in *Diario de la Marina* proclaimed: "EDUARDO R. CHIBAS Hablará hoy domingo a las ocho de la noche por la hora del PARTIDO DEL PUEBLO CUBANO para presentar ante los micrófonos del Circuito CMQ a los fundadores de la Ortodoxia que esta noche harán pública su reincorporación al PARTIDO DEL PUEBLO CUBANO, los señores Pelayo Cuervo Navarro, Federico Fernández Casas, José Manuel Gutiérrez, Augustín Cruz." (Eduardo R. Chibás will speak tonight, Sunday, at 8 p.m. during the hour of the Partido del Pueblo Cubano in order to present before the microphones of the CMQ radio station the founders of the *Ortodoxo* party who tonight will make public their reincorporation into the Partido del Pueblo Cubano, Messrs. Pelayo Cuervo Navarro, Federico Fernández Casas, José Manuel Gutiérrez and Agustín Cruz).

[24] "en Cuba, Trabajo," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 63. The author of this section, with understated delicacy, wrote that Chibás, "did not limit himself to offering opinions that were more or less conventional."

[25] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 38, Número 1135, p. 99, ANC.

[26] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 38, Número 1136, p. 64, ANC.

[27] Ibid., 157-158.

[28] To present but one example, the all purpose verb "hacer," meaning to make or to do, was nearly always spelled "acer" by Cuban peasants because the letter h in Spanish is silent.

of a stamp was far from negligible, Chibás seemed something more than the rare, honest politician. How else could the lines of sugar workers forming each Sunday evening on plantations throughout the island, each hoping to inch a bit closer to the voice emanating from the radio set, be explained?

MANHATTAN SKYSCRAPERS

The period between December 24 and January 6 was traditionally a dead spell of sorts in Cuba. The thoughts of Havana's middle class temporarily drifted from more serious matters toward seasonal culinary delights or the circus, with its elephants, dwarves, lion tamers and alluring equestriennes performing in the *Palacio de los Deportes.* The *Bohemia* columnist Néstor Piñango opined that the season, ushered in with roasted pork on Christmas Eve and ending with the clank of toys received on the day of the Three Wise Men, was best withstood by "enjoying it – if possible – or just letting the days pass."[29] Chibás, a restless workaholic with few interests outside politics and no family of his own, showed little inclination for such customs. The *Carteles* columnist Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, with blithe sarcasm and a dollop of truth, describes a nation contentedly indulging in Christmastime delicacies ranging from cassava with sour garlic sauce and oven cooked turkey to succulent *congri* and hazelnuts. In the midst of such bliss, among the gifts left under the bed by the Three Wise Men, next to the mended shoes, were the "frightful" declarations

[29] Néstor Piñango, "Los propagandistas de la oposición," *Bohemia*, January 14, 1951: 52.

of Chibás (and Batista) that suddenly and unexpectedly jolted Cubans back into reality when they opened their newspapers on Saturday, January 6.[30]

After weighing in against the "one-percent" the following evening, Chibás turned his attention to Carlos Prío. Health Minister Juan Antonio Rubio Padilla provided him with a perfect pretext in the form of an unflattering *Bohemia* article.[31] Among other things, he claimed the *Ortodoxo* party had been rendered irrelevant by the achievements of Prío's administration, notably the Tribunal of Accounts and the Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank. The Minister of Health also harked back to the days when he, Prío and Chibás were members of the Student Directorate in 1931. During that era, he recalled the need to "interrupt" his friendship with Chibás in order to accuse him of, "grave misdeeds against the ideology and discipline of the organization" – a charge that allegedly led to the future *Ortodoxo* leader's expulsion.[32]

The following week, Chibás noted that Rubio Padilla's life had long been marked by hypocrisy, beginning with the fact that he had never taken up arms against Machado but nonetheless participated in looting the homes of pro-Machado figures after the dictator had been toppled. Chibás further pointed out that he had never been expelled from the Student Directorate. On the contrary, Rubio Padilla had asked for and obtained the dismissal of another member, Pío Álvarez, who Chibás described as, "the most pure, valiant, loyal and audacious revolutionary of all

[30] Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, "Nuestra política es así," *Carteles,* January 21, 1951: 102.
[31] Juan Antonio Rubio Padilla, "Reto a Chibás: En Defensa del Presidente Prío," *Bohemia*, January 7, 1951: 54-55, 77.
[32] Ibid, 55.

time."[33] This action had so upset Chibás that he and another member, Reynaldo Jordan, had resigned in protest. Returning to the theme of hypocrisy, Chibás reproduced an excerpt of an article by Rubio Padilla that had appeared in *Bohemia* on October 23, 1949, before he had joined the cabinet, in which future minister harshly criticized the very administration he now praised. Chibás' primary goal, however, was not to parry the barbs of a minor Prío lieutenant[34] but rather to spearhead a new campaign against the president himself.

The crux of the issue involved the government's decision, on December 21, 1950, to secure a second public loan of 25 million pesos,[35] coupled with the fact that the pro-government majority in the senate voted down a motion to investigate possible embezzlement of funds from the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund. Moreover, as the recently re-incorporated *Ortodoxo* senator Federico Fernández Casas explained, the loan had been concluded while the Supreme Tribunal was still considering whether the law authorizing it was constitutional.[36] To Chibás and the *Ortodoxo* hierarchy, the strategy of their rivals seemed not only transparent but also timeworn. Prío's new loan would be used to cover up peculation of the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund just as the $200 million the administration borrowed in 1949 had mitigated the "deficit" left by Grau. Lastly, an article that appeared in the

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[33] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Respuesta a un reto del gobierno," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 56.
[34] Perhaps the most damaging criticism of Rubio Padilla came not from Chibás but from a tubercular resident of Camagüey named Carlos Santalo. In a letter to Chibás, dated January 10, 1951, he asked, "How is it possible that the Minister of Health employs his time in defending the Honorable President of the Republic, who is a Doctor of Law and capable of defending himself and not employing it in trying to resolve the problem of those suffering from tuberculosis in his country?" The fact that Santalo makes no mention of belonging to or supporting the Ortodoxo party gives his complaint added credibility. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 38, Número 1135, 4.
[35] Cuba's currency had been the U.S. dollar until its National Bank was created in 1948. Afterward, the value of the Cuban peso was equivalent to one U.S. dollar.
[36] "en Cuba, Política," *Bohemia*, January 7, 1951: 64.

November 12, 1950 real estate section of the Sunday *New York Times* provided just the right kindling for Chibás' imagination. This piece reported that "Havana interests" had been purchasing choice Manhattan properties; the latest of these being the 25-story Heckscher Building on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, whose value was estimated at $5 million. In a tantalizing twist, the buyer's identity was not revealed. The only certainty was that, "Cuban plantation money" was involved.[37] On January 7, *Bohemia* brought this irresistible story to the attention of its readers, running a suggestive piece called "Cuban Millionaires Make Mysterious Investments in New York Properties."[38] Aside from reprinting the brief *New York Times* article, close-up photos of Manhattan skyscrapers now in Cuban hands were splashed across the magazine's pages. The journalist, Baldomero Álvarez Ríos, reported that Havana residents were already guessing which of the nation's parvenu politicians would turn out to be the new José Manuel Alemán. Chibás, of course, already had his own ideas.

> Who are these Cubans of the capital who are buying gigantic buildings, immense skyscrapers, whole blocks in the heart of New York, on a colossal scale that is only comparable to the acquisition of Rockefeller Center, and surpasses those of Henry Ford, Vanderbilt and J.P. Morgan? It is a mystery. Nevertheless, among the real estate agents of the Babel of Iron, who are shocked, it is insistently rumored that the principal axis of the new New York empire in valuable properties is none other than the President of the Cuban Republic, Carlos Prío Socarrás.[39]

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[37] "Cuban Money Takes Choice N.Y. Realty Through Florida Broker Operating Here." *The New York Times,* November 12, 1950.
[38] Baldomero Álvarez Ríos. "Misteriosas inversiones en propiedades hacen en New York millionarios cubanos." *Bohemia,* January 7, 1951: 32-33, 99.
[39] Eduardo R. Chibás. "Respuesta a un reto del gobierno," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 57.

After leveling this rather explosive charge, Chibás recounted that such "fabulous" acquisitions easily superseded those of Batista, Anselmo Alliegro and José Manuel Alemán in Miami – the three of whom had previously set the gold standard for purchases of foreign real estate using stolen taxpayer funds. Chibás also reminded his readers that the rightful recipients of this money were the nation's sugar workers. But if part of Prío's loan were meant to replenish the Sugar Workers Retirement Fund, as Fernández Casas and fellow *Ortodoxo* senator Pelayo Cuervo Navarro believed, the real victims would be the Cuban public. It would, in effect, be subsidizing the thieves and paying interest to unscrupulous bankers at the same time. As such, Chibás asked, "Do the bankers of the government of cordiality believe the Cuban people are such idiots that they will later spend many years paying them the money they lent to Carlos Prío so he could buy skyscrapers in New York?"[40]

Curiously, Chibás did not revisit any of the above themes during his broadcast of January 14. Even more peculiar was the fact that Chibás' article was never discussed during his appearance on *Ante la Prensa* (Meet the Press), a televised political talk show hosted by CMQ. The panel of questioners included distinguished journalists such as Rafael Estenger, Ángel Pubillones and Miguel de Marcos, whose bylines graced the political sections of Cuba's premier newspapers and magazines. Surely each had read Chibás' article accusing the president of buying New York skyscrapers with stolen cash. Perhaps they believed more serious issues, such as when and under what terms Cuban troops should participate in the Korean War, trumped their guest's foray into rumor and hearsay. In any event,

[40] Ibid.

Chibás benefited from the omission and his performance demonstrated why this "candidate of the street" was also favored by so many of the island's intellectuals. Eschewing the tone he had so recently employed in responding to the Minister of Health, his answers were largely well considered and rational with only an occasional whiff of stridence – as when he referred to the Prío administration as "eminently putrid."[41] At one point, Miguel de Marcos was so impressed by a rapid and prudent response to a difficult query regarding the "average provisional sugar price" that he wryly said Chibás was, "ceasing to be a man of shrieks in order to be a man of the State."[42]

From an *Auténtico* perspective, few images could have been more harrowing than that of a statesmanlike Chibás transmitted on national television[43] with excerpts of the show being disseminated in the press. As the 1952 presidential elections loomed, *Auténtico* bigwigs considered Chibás far more dangerous than Batista in their quest to retain power.[44] At the same time, in confronting Chibás' multiple political personalities, they much preferred the irresponsible shouter and reckless accuser to the man who provided compelling answers to the island's

[41] "En Cuba, Política," *Bohemia,* January 21, 1951: 59.
[42] Ibid, 60.
[43] Broadcast television was less than a year old in Cuba and largely confined to affluent homes. However, poorer Cubans who lived in cities and towns often watched in local bars or hotels.
[44] In an interview with Aureliano Sánchez Arango, an *Auténtico* presidential candidate for 1952 and the current Minister of Education, he referred disparagingly to Batista as "the general of Kuquine" and criticized him in terms reminiscent of Chibás and the Ortodoxos. For example, Sánchez Arango (like the *Ortodoxo* councilman Herminio Portell Vilá) deemed Batista's senatorial term a "parliamentary farce" and opined that the ghost of Antonio Guiteras kept the ex-dictator from showing his face in public. Perhaps most indicative was the fact that the interviewer noticed Sánchez Arango was "undoubtedly disquieted" by Chibás' popularity in previous questions but showed no similar unease when Batista's name was mentioned. See "en Cuba, El PRC tiene sus grandezas y Miserias," *Bohemia,* January 14, 1951: 60.

problems[45] and whose stubborn honesty led him to sell his childhood home to pay for his 1948 presidential campaign. Surprisingly, despite the injunction of Cuba's 1940 constitution that the president behave as a "moderating power of national solidarity," Prío responded personally to his adversary. On Wednesday, January 17 at 10:30 p.m. he read an indignant and unprecedented statement over the national airwaves. Prío dismissed Chibás' charge that he had bought New York skyscrapers with the loan money as a "frightful invention." He also targeted Chibás' threat to repudiate the loan, asserting that the *Ortodoxo* leader intended to sacrifice "the honor and credit of Cuba" on the altars of political advantage and personal resentment. Further, Prío claimed Chibás had waged a campaign of "incessant defamation and injury" against him since he became president. Nevertheless, his credentials as an anti-Machado revolutionary and member of the Generation of 1930 allowed him to value "public liberties" over the *Ortodoxo* chief's "excesses." Lastly, Prío summoned the "responsible organs" of the PPC to declare whether they supported their chief's threat to disavow the loan.[46]

The island was transfixed by this "gigantic" polemic. Even commentators who covered non-political topics offered opinions. For example, the literary critic Juan J. Remos devoted his column of January 20 in *Diario de la Marina* to the issue,

[45] The most pressing of these, by Chibás' own admission, was the wretched state of many of Cuba's peasants. One solution he was investigating involved large-scale cultivation of rice, which could be grown from April to December – during the so-called "dead season" of the sugar industry. In addition, there already existed a large domestic market for rice in Cuba, most of which was imported from the United States. The above points were underlined in a letter to Chibás from Julio R. Arellano of the Arrocera Oriental, dated January 16, 1951 in response to a missive the Ortodoxo leader had sent on December 8, 1950. The last paragraph of this letter noted that, "it has made a very good impression on me to know, through direct experience, that a political party occupies itself with the study of national economic problems instead of dedicating itself exclusively to the conquest of power." Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Caja 38, Legajo 1135: 111, ANC.

[46] "Emplaza el Dr. Prío a los ortodoxos por el bien de la República," *Diario de la Marina,* January 18, 1951: 1, 20.

despite confessing that he found the medium of political polemics to be "too debased."[47] Nonetheless, he claimed the need to weigh in because Chibás' accusation represented not garden-variety mudslinging but rather an attack on the nation itself. At the same time, Remos, who was a longtime associate of Batista, could hardly claim to be unbiased.[48] Certainly, objectivity was in short supply on all sides. A *Bohemia* reporter claimed Prío's "involuntary" pro-Chibás propaganda had provided the Ortodoxo chief with "the greatest resonance of his career." It also wondered dryly how "one more political paragraph" was such a threat to the republic in an era marked by a surfeit of scandals and robberies.[49] The *Diario de la Marina* columnist Francisco Ichaso allowed that Chibás had the potential to be Cuba's "Savonarola,"[50] but warned that he should, "accentuate his feeling of responsibility, of not making false steps, of rigorously monitoring his words and deeds."[51]

After two days of unrelenting press coverage and behind the scenes maneuvering, the controversy reached a spectacular denouement over the weekend. On Saturday, January 20, Orlando Puente, the secretary of the presidency appeared on *Unión Radio Televisión* wielding an affidavit from a "certain American businessman," signed in the presence of a New York notary. The document averred that, to the best of his knowledge, neither Carlos Prío nor any member of his family, nor any Cuban government employee nor anyone that represents them was

[47] Juan J. Remos, "Deslindes," *Diario de la Marina,* January 20, 1951: 4.
[48] Remos, for example, had been Minister of Education in 1936 under Federico Laredo Bru (1936-1940), Batista's puppet president.
[49] "En Cuba, "Política: Una gigantesca polémica," *Bohemia,* January 28, 1951: 61.
[50] Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), an Italian religious reformer and Dominican friar who criticized Church excesses, among other things.
[51] Francisco Ichaso, "Política: Catonismo frenético," *Diario de la Marina*, January 20, 1951: 6.

involved, directly or indirectly in the purchase of Manhattan skyscrapers.[52] Then, in a tirade reminiscent of Chibás' most exaggerated moods, Puente claimed the *Ortodoxo* leader harbored a "monstrous aspiration…to sink all that exists in order to achieve power on the ruins of the fatherland."[53] Chibás, whose gambit of arming a scandal and drawing the nation's attention had already proved a fantastic success, responded immediately. Utilizing the radio slot of his friend and protégé José Pardo Llada, Chibás proclaimed that the government, with the immense resources of its propaganda machine, had launched "the most intense campaign of defamation ever realized in Cuba against any political leader." Moreover, as a result of his accusations in defense of the "impoverished masses," high-level government figures were planning to expel him from the senate, dissolve his political party and incarcerate him. The *Ortodoxo* leader, who reveled in the avalanche of attention, related to his legion of listeners that he would not be swayed by threats of any kind and that the party slogan of Shame vs. Money resonated now more than ever.[54]

Later that day, Luis Orlando Rodríguez appeared on the televised news show of *Unión Radio*. "What matters to the country," he began, "is not to know whether, through an American affidavit, Prío has or doesn't have buildings on Fifth Avenue in New York but to know whether it is true that he has them in general, whether in New York or in Havana." Then, addressing himself directly to secretary of the presidency, he continued:

> Tell me it's not true, Dr. Puente, that the current president of the republic won't be the richest ex-leader once his term has finished; that

[52] "En Cuba, Política: Una gigantesca polémica," 61.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 61.

> no other man who has governed Cuba permitted his brothers to become millionaires to such an extent…I'm not going to show a New York affidavit but rather a televised photograph of a building that isn't on New York's Fifth Avenue but on Fifth Avenue in Havana. Show me, Dr. Puente, a new affidavit that proves that this monumental building costing 300 thousand pesos isn't the property of Francisco Prío Socorrás. The essential thing, what you aim to avoid, is the accusation that the Príos embezzle public money, not how, not where the stolen funds are invested; that the current administration enriches itself at the cost of the country and that there is a national conscience that repudiates, with disgust, this farce.[55]

In the same vein, a *Bohemia* editorial from January 28, stated that, "…the country has been living for some time in a period of bonanza and if the treasury runs into difficulties this is not due to a lowering of revenues – which have never been higher – but poor management of public funds…"[56] In a slightly different vein, Néstor Piñango, a Prío sympathizer, asserted that Chibás may have been crazy once but his attack on the loan demonstrated that he was now "perfectly well in the head." After all, his censure was directed at the most "momentous and scandalous" of the administration's shortcomings – namely, the borrowed millions. These were not being robbed, in his opinion, but neither were they benefiting the Cuban people in any tangible manner.[57]

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[55] Ibid., 62.

[56] "Editorial: El Tribunal de Garantías Constitucionales y Sociales ha dicho la "última palabra." *Bohemia,* January 28, 1951: 63.

[57] Néstor Piñango, "Prío y Grau: Sargentos Políticos de Chibás," *Bohemia,* January 28m 1951: 50. In terms of the loan, the author points out that it was initially intended to finance the construction of a tunnel underneath Havana harbor that would connect the city center to sparsely populated La Cabaña on the other side. The government sought to lure foreign investors by claiming the cheap real estate of La Cabaña, heretofore inaccessible without a tunnel, would be worth millions of pesos once it was a mere five minutes from Havana's Parque Central. Later on, the idea of a tunnel was discarded in favor of a bridge. In any event, the project remained grounded because foreign investors were far less enthusiastic than the administration. Thus, Piñango writes, "There is no tunnel. There is no bridge. But there is a loan."

Of course, Saturday's recriminations were a mere prelude. During the preceding days, *Ortodoxo* advertisements promised Chibás would respond on Sunday evening to the "surprising summons of the President of the Republic."[58] These were most assuredly a waste of money as Cubans were already eagerly awaiting the *Ortodoxo* leader's 8 p.m. show. That morning, however, the administration sought the public's attention one last time. Thus, Tony Varona read a statement on behalf of pro-government legislators in both houses of Congress charging Chibás with attempting a "parliamentary *golpe de Estado*."[59] Varona's solemn performance before the microphones of *Unión Radio* was complemented by a frothy obloquy courtesy of Antonio Prío. The president's brother, sensing the momentum tipping toward Chibás, railed against the *Ortodoxo* leader's "diabolical genius" for wiggling out of "compromised situations."[60]

Normally, Chibás spent all day Sunday preparing for his evening radio show. On some occasions, when additional rumination or research was required, Saturday was also devoted to this endeavor. In this case, Chibás and various *Ortodoxo* higher-ups began deliberating on Thursday, January 18 in the residence of Roberto Agramonte. The assembly was delayed until 11 p.m. that evening as it awaited the arrival of Carlos Márquez Sterling, who was charged with writing a position paper that would form the basis of the *Ortodoxo* reply. Chibás opened the meeting by claiming "knowledge of a vast plan," hatched in "La Altura" by the president,

[58] *Diario de la Marina*, January 20, 1961: 6.
[59] "En Cuba, Política: Una gigantesca polémica," 62.
[60] Ibid.

Aureliano Sánchez Arango and others.[61] The *Orotodoxo* chief believed his rivals' threefold objective involved destroying him as a presidential candidate, fomenting divisions in the *Ortodoxo* party and forming alliances in the provinces so as to minimize the chances of PPC victories in senate races.

After Chibás' remarks, everyone read Márquez Sterling's memorandum. A debate soon ensued between those who approved of the text or advocated only minor changes and a group, consisting of Luis Orlando Rodríguez, Herminio Portell Vilá, Pelayo Cuervo and Jorge Mañach, who felt thorough revisions were necessary. In particular, they objected to the personal tone employed by Márquez Sterling. For example, Rodríguez singled out a paragraph describing Prío as "having used all the resources of power" to help install his brothers Antonio and Francisco in high places and his desire to do the same for his sister Mireya in Oriente province – eventually preparing all three for positions in the Senate, a "fantastic" prospect that would be "a first in the history of nepotism." He argued that the *Ortodoxo* response should aspire to "great historical importance" and thus needed to remain on a more intellectual plane.[62] Mañach, taking a similar position, maintained that the final document should, "express the party's political doctrine of order and constructive sentiment."[63] He also found fault with the memorandum's excessive length. Márquez Sterling promptly reminded Mañach of the anecdote whereby Napoleon rejected a verbose document produced by his diplomat Talleyrand and the latter allegedly replied, "Sire, if I had had more time to write it, it would have been

[61] Ibid., 64
[62] "En Cuba, Política: Una gigantesca polémica," 64.
[63] Ibid.

shorter." Mañach, with good humor, smiled. By now, they were immersed in a meeting that would not conclude until 2:30 a.m.

To be sure, the preponderance of intellectual luminaries in Agramonte's house was a feather in the cap both of Chibás and the *Ortodoxo* party. More impressive still was the lengthy intra-party debate, permitted and encouraged by Chibás, during a time when his political future hung in the balance. The initial, vituperative position paper of Márquez Sterling could easily have been written by Chibás himself and certainly embodied the *Ortodoxo* leader's pugnacious style. However, Chibás proved receptive to a more moderate position and a new committee, composed of Rodríguez, Mañach, Marquez Sterling and Cuervo, was assigned to write the final draft. Perhaps most importantly, excerpts of this internal discussion were reproduced in *Bohemia* and *Carteles* – allowing the Cuban public a glimpse of all the goings-on. Among these was a change of venue on Friday morning to Cuervo's hom on 15th Street in Vedado. There, he and his three partners began working on the final draft, which was mostly complete by 11 p.m. that evening. At noon on Sunday, January 21, the *Ortodoxos* convened again at Agramonte's house to vote on the completed document, which was approved unanimously.

At 8 p.m., Chibás faced the microphones at CMQ's headquarters on 25th Street in Vedado. The *Ortodoxo* pronouncement, three of whose four authors were lawyers,[64] was logical, legalistic and conveniently vague. Speaking for the party rather than himself, Chibás affirmed that the *Ortodoxos* believed the loan had been "imposed on the nation without necessity" and had passed Congress on a narrow

[64] Luis Orlando Rodríguez was the only one who lacked a law degree.

partisan basis. For this reason, the Cuban people, in accordance with international law, retained the future right to review and repudiate the loan if, in addition to being unnecessary, it had also been squandered or dishonestly managed.[65] For the moment, Chibás appeared to be the most statesmanlike figure in Cuba, bolstered by the full support of a party that had often proved unruly but now sensed, with good reason, that its leader's popularity would carry it to power in 1952. Guillermo Alonso Pujol, noted that, "Chibás has succeeded. No one would dare deny it."[66] Without a doubt, the eminently fickle Pujol, who had switched from the Democrats to the Republicans in 1944, joined the *Auténtico* coalition in 1948, and, along with the *Auténtico* mayor of Havana Nicolás Castellanos, inaugurated the Cuban National party late in 1950, had reasons for praising Chibás. Specifically, he was interested in aligning with whoever seemed likely to rule Cuba next and had thus spoken with the recently re-incorporated *Ortodoxo* José Manuel Gutiérrez, assuring him of his willingness to "make viable an understanding between (Nicolás) Castellanos and Chibás."[67] At the same time, Chibás' waxing appeal could do nothing but strengthen his conviction that pacts, like the loan, were unnecessary and distasteful – an attitude perfectly summed up by the political cartoonist Antonio Prohias. In a sketch, entitled, "Insinuation" a smiling, cigar chomping Guillermo Alonso Pujol appears at the door of Chibás' home bearing a shoe-shine kit and says, "Listen

[65] "En Cuba, Política: Una gigantesca polémica," 64.
[66] Ibid., 65.
[67] "en Cuba, Política: Un Plan de Pillaje Perfectamente Organizado," *Bohemia*, January 7, 1951: 64.

Chibás, can I be of use in some way? Rather than respond, Eddy turns his squinting, disgusted face to the side and prepares to plunge his finger down his throat.[68]

The Liberal boss Eduardo Suárez Rivas also continued to pursue an agreement. In public declarations, he proclaimed the Liberals' willingness to consider an "understanding" with the *Ortodoxos*, which would include support for Chibás' presidential candidacy. Rafael Guas Inclán, the former Liberal senator (1940-1944) and governor of Havana province (1944-1948), affirmed that senators from his party had negotiated with Chibás regarding a possible alliance. The *Ortodoxo* chief, however, had merely advised them to change sides in order to run as *Ortodoxos* in the next election.[69] In any case, the overtures of Alonso Pujol and Suárez Rivas, if nothing else, were evidence of the growing power of the PPC and surely must have fed the *Ortodoxo* leader's confidence. Chibás was the most charismatic figure in Cuban politics and his main opponents in the next election would be an ex dictator with limited popularity and an unknown candidate from a party that, despite significant achievements, had disappointed expectations over the past eight years.

Perhaps above all, Chibás basked in the supportive telegrams and letters that flowed toward his office from every part of the island. He customarily read them accompanied by a red pencil, underlining phrases that cheered or encouraged him. For instance, a missive from an *Ortodoxo* councilman of Central Chaparra in Oriente province, conveyed the following greeting, most of which was underlined: "…I want you to know that I'm with you unconditionally and it pleases me to inform you that

[68] Antonio Prohias, "Insinuación," *Bohemia,* January 21, 1951: 63.
[69] Virgilio Ferrer Gutiérrez, "Nuestra política es así," *Carteles,* February 4, 1951: 73.

the majority of the people are with you."[70] Another letter from Elida Mallea Sánchez of Central Adelaida in Camagüey province articulated the ire felt by many rural Cubans against the government loan. While listening to Chibás on the afternoon of January 20, she heard a knock on her door and upon opening it saw two poor *guajiros*, a father and son from the neighboring region of Santa Clara, who had arrived for the sugar harvest. Unfortunately, the harvest had not yet begun so the men were without work and going from house to house asking for food in order to keep from starving. Mallea Sánchez relates that their faces were "pained and ashamed" and the scene filled her eyes with tears. Gravid with frustration, she began a new paragraph that was underlined in its entirety by Chibás. The first sentence is instructive: "And the current government hopes to force unhappy fellow countrymen like these two to carry the heavy bundle of the debt which they will have to pay later." A few sentences later, exasperation yields to anger as she exclaims, "No, a thousand times no, Senator Chibás!"[71]

Despite the unsolicited advice of Alonso Pujol, who, after the *Ortodoxo* reply proclaimed, "If I were Carlos Prío, I would leave the controversy right here," the administration pressed its case one last time.[72] During the ensuing week, advertisements appeared in all the nation's major newspapers for a televised announcement at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, January 26. The purpose was to lay open the government's "financial thinking."[73] Hence, the director of the National Bank, a

[70] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 38, Número 1137: 25, ANC. The last word Chibás underlined was "majority."
[71] Ibid., 21.
[72] "En Cuba, Política: Una Polémica Gigantesca," 65.
[73] "En Cuba, "Política: La Noche del Viernes," *Bohemia*, February 4, 1951: 61.

deputy of the Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank,[74] the Minister of Finance and the director of the National Development Council were drafted to defend the loan. While this tactic was sensible, given the rectitude of these figures, all lacked charisma (which made for a boring spectacle) and none could quash the national uneasiness about the loan. Afterward, Carlos Prío appeared and boasted of, "attempting to do an effective job in the economic field" and expressed a desire to "turn the page on this unfortunate chapter."[75]

Two evenings later, Chibás demonstrated once again why, despite periodic lapses into recklessness, he was a force to be reckoned with in Cuban politics. Abandoning the caution he displayed the previous week, Chibás averred it was "logical" to believe Carlos Prío was somehow involved in the purchase of New York skyscrapers by unnamed Cubans. Why else, he asked, would their identity remain such a closely guarded secret? The *Ortodoxo* chief then reminded his listeners that six years before, when he was the first to accuse Batista, Anselmo Alliegro and Jaime Mariné of buying properties in Miami and Venezuela, he was called a liar but in time he was proved right.[76] When, three years ago, he accused José Manuel Alemán of robbing public funds, he was called a calumniator but in time he was proved right. Two years ago, when he accused Carlos Prío of owning "La Chata" and "La Altura," two lavish estates in the Cuban countryside, he was denounced but in time he was proved right. In this instance, cried Chibás, "Time will once again prove me right!

[74] The director of the Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank, Justo Carillo, was a longstanding friend of Chibás and may have declined to partake in the event for this reason.
[75] "En Cuba, "Política: La Noche del Viernes," *Bohemia,* February 4, 1951: 62.
[76] Anselmo Alliegro was Batista's prime minister in 1944. Jaime Mariné was a pro-Batista lieutenant colonel who abandoned Cuba for Venezuela after Batista's presidential term ended in 1944.

History will repeat itself!"[77] Chibás then invoked José Martí, who had been born on that day 98 years earlier, and summoned the government to appoint a special senate commission that would investigate the personal finances and property holdings of himself and the president in order to see how each had acquired what they presently own. Hence, Chibás not only gave the Cuban people a compelling show, his discourse, laced as it was with a catchy mantra and straightforward challenge, easily surpassed in appeal the droning, technocratic rambling of Friday evening. A *Bohemia* reporter quipped, with good reason that Chibás remained, "the incorrigible man of Cuban politics."[78]

CAPORAL

Even as Cubans were engrossed by January's polemic, politics remained a distant second to baseball as the island's most consuming passion.[79] Cuba's professional baseball season reached its conclusion each February and in 1951, the pennant race was particularly intense. The Almendares Scorpions, known as the "Blues" for their uniforms of that color, and the Habana Lions, called the "Reds" for the same reason, completed their schedules with identical records. This unprecedented result required an extra game between the two archrivals to decide the championship. First, however, the league had to alleviate suspicions that the tie had been fixed beforehand as a money-earning gambit. Hence, it agreed to donate

[77] "En Cuba, Política: La Noche del Viernes," 63.
[78] Ibid.
[79] "Los fanáticos cubanos no quieren managers extranjeros," *Bohemia,* September 20, 1953: 74-75. The article contains a survey in which more than 70 percent of respondents considered themselves baseball fans, including 82 percent of the island's men and nearly 60 percent of its women.

the proceeds of the game's ticket sales to the city's *Casa de Maternidad y Beneficencia* – a Catholic charitable organization that housed orphans and abandoned children.

The contest was scheduled for Monday afternoon, on February 19. By all accounts, this was a most unproductive workday. The famed sportswriter Eladio Secades acknowledged that the "all the island" was anxious to know the result.[80] The Havana city council, which customarily met each Monday and Thursday, cancelled its afternoon session so members could attend the game. A *Diario de la Marina* reporter noted that the incessant arguments between *Auténtico* and *Ortodoxo* town councilors, which mirrored those on the national stage, were fleetingly superseded by "baseball fanaticism."[81] He also stated that a majority of the councilmen, along with Mayor Nicolás Castellanos, were Almendares fans although none would confess their preferences publicly out of fear of upsetting supporters of other clubs.[82] In any event, the "Reds" eked out a win by a score of 4-3. Afterwards, Habana's manager was overcome by tears and confessed that he had just experienced the most profound happiness of his long life dedicated to the sport. The team's fans enjoyed a less introspective brand of satisfaction, many of whom stormed the field waving red banners after their team's victory. An overly enthusiastic handful even tried to lower the blue flag of Almendares, which flew over the stadium in recognition of the club's championship the previous year, and

[80] Eladio Secades. "Con su gran heroe Adrián Aabala en el mintículo, los Rojos derrotaron a los Azules en juego decisivo," *Diario de la Marina,* February 20, 1951: 18.
[81] Federico R. Ferrán Ruvero. "Disfrutará de una licencia de 15 días el alcalde Castellanos," *Diario de la Marina,* February 20, 1951: 3.
[82] Ibid.

raise the a red Habana standard in its place. The next day, a cartoon by José Roseñada satirized the consequences of life without baseball. Entitled "Realities," the sketch depicted Liborio, Cuba's everyman, confronted by a tall, ungainly and highly unattractive woman whose black dress was adorned with the word "politics." Full of disgust he exclaims, "The baseball season is finished; now I have to deal once again with this!"[83]

Despite playing second fiddle to the island's national pastime, Chibás managed to keep himself in the news even if sometimes his efforts were unintentional. On Saturday, February 3, Chibás indulged in a rare bit of leisure, visiting "Buena Vista," the estate of his high school friend Miguel Ángel Quevedo. A number of other Chibás intimates were there as well, including Enrique de la Osa and his brother Tony along with José Chelala Aguilera. At one point, Chibás was good-naturedly needled about not being able to roller skate. Eddy claimed he could only there were no roller skates to be had that would allow him to demonstrate. With a smile, Chelala Aguilera walked to his car and produced a pair. The *Ortodoxo* chief promptly laced them up and commenced darting about with ease, delighting all those assembled. Fresh from this triumph, Chibás insisted on mounting one of Quevedo's horses. First, he climbed onto an Arabian steed and subsequently set his sights on an "indomitable" white stallion named Caporal.[84] Ignoring the advice of his host, he made the horse rear up on its hind legs. Shortly thereafter, it dashed off at top speed and crashed into a tree. Chibás was hit in the face by a branch and knocked violently to the ground. Fortunately, he was not badly wounded. In fact,

[83] José Roseñada, "Realidades," *Diario de la Marina,* February 21, 1951: 4.
[84] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 725.

Chibás proceeded to eat lunch with an undiminished appetite and then bowled and played pool with his pals.[85]

The following evening, during his radio broadcast, Chibás thanked everyone who had expressed concern for his well being. He then provided a fanciful account of the previous day's accident, claiming he had mounted a "wild horse" that had been unable to buck him despite thirty minutes of trying and finally resorted to "throwing itself against a tree trunk, breaking its head, while I lightly scraped my nose and face against a tree branch." Then, in a statement bordering on self-parody, he proclaimed, "I never fall from horses."[86] Regardless, the term "Caporal" became the newest condiment in a Cuban vocabulary always on the lookout for piquancy. For example, a cartoon by Niko shows a statue of a smiling horse, mounted high on a pedestal, with its back legs raised in the air. At the bottom, one man tells another, "And this is the monument to Caporal, the one who bucked Chibás."[87] A sketch by Carlos Vidal depicted a bureaucrat warily eying a smug job seeker with his arms crossed. A messenger whispers in his ear that the man, "brings a recommendation from 'Caporal.'"[88] José Roseñada portrays two men, one of them a Habana fan, discussing that team's recent victory over Almendares. The first asks, "What did you think of the last game between Habana and Almendares? The grinning "Reds" supporter replies, "It was exactly the same as when Caporal bucked Chibás."[89] Finally, the feisty steed himself graced the cover of *Bohemia's* March 11 edition,

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Niko, "Datos para la historia," *Diario de la Marina,* February 11, 1951: Sunday supplement, 3.
[88] Vidal, "En una oficina del estado," *Bohemia,* February 18, 1951: 61.
[89] José Roseñada, "Frases modificadas," *Diario de la Marina*, February 17, 1951: 4.

evidence that Quevedo had an ampler sense of humor regarding his friend than Chibás had in relation to himself.

Of course, plenty of Cubans were dismayed by the *Ortodoxo* leader's shenanigans in "Buena Vista." A peasant mother of 10 from Cruces in Las Villas province, whose common sense far outweighed her knowledge of syntax wrote, "you must live in order to save us, the *guajiros*, who I can tell you are tired of suffering and as the only hope of my Cuba."[90] Xiomara Serra of Cascorro, a village in Camagüey province reminded Eddy that he had recently been operated on and urged him to take better care of his health.[91] These expressions of concern, sprinkled as they were among the *Ortodoxo* leader's mail in the weeks after he became an unwitting national punch line, were likely a source of comfort. This was especially so given that many were from humble workaday Cubans, the apple of Chibás' eye and quintessential *pueblo* in the *Partido del Pueblo Cubano.* Maintaining their good will and devotion was essential both for his emotional and political welfare. Learning they were worried rather than disappointed was surely a relief.

Far more than mere solace was offered by a letter of February 5 from Daniel Cortina of La Grifa, a hamlet on the outskirts of Guane[92] in Pinar del Río province. Cortina recently had the good fortune of purchasing ten winning lottery tickets, each of which was now worth 1000 pesos apiece. He enclosed five along with the letter so that, "I will have the satisfaction of having contributed to the great PPC with

[90] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 38, Número 1136, 46, ANC.
[91] Ibid., 20.
[92] According to Cuba's 1943 census, Guane counted a population of 30,954. The town was notable for being the westernmost terminal on Cuba's railway.

something more than my physical, mental and emotional energies."[93] While reading the missive, Chibás underlined most of this sentence with his habitual red pencil, presumably with enormous satisfaction. To put this contribution in perspective, the average salary in Cuba was $378 in 1957.[94] By all appearances, Cortina, who handwrote the letter on a sheet of notebook paper, was very much an ordinary Cuban of the provinces. For such a man, donating $5000 to a political party, an amount equivalent to more than 12 years salary, seems astounding – particularly as he expected no favors, jobs or anything else in return. At the same time, Cortina's letter embodies a significant phenomenon of the era. That is, the degree of faith placed in Chibás by peasant and working class devotees was unrivaled in Cuban politics. Supporters expressed a desire to do anything for the party, even die if need be. Quite a few considered Chibás a family member. An even larger number believed he represented the only chance for the nation's happiness and salvation and prayed to the saints or *Virgen de la Caridad*, whenever Chibás' health was in question. René Ayala Pomares of Santa Clara, echoed the sentiment of these Chibás adherents when he declared:

> I joined the Partido del Pueblo Cubano for two reasons; first, because I have absolute faith that you will fulfill your promises, because you are among those who fought in the past for sincere ideals that, disgracefully, have still not been recognized by the politicians we have suffered through and whom we are still suffering through; and second for the tenacity, constancy and self-denial that you continually demonstrate before the people of Cuba, showing that nothing or no one is capable of making you renounce your resolutions.[95]

[93] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 38, Número 1136, 33, ANC.
[94] *U.N. Handbook of National Accounts Statistics.* (New York: United Nations, 1962).
[95] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás: Legajo 39, Número 1143, 103, ANC.

One such resolution that Chibás continued to honor was his vow not dilute the *Ortodoxo* program by forming pacts with other parties. Even so, *Diario de la Marina* reported on February 7 that the *Ortodoxo* chief and Eduardo Suárez Rivas, his Liberal counterpart, met for discussions at the residence of Millo Ochoa. That Ochoa hosted this interview was hardly surprising.[96] Unlike Chibás, he continued to believe political alliances were a necessary, pragmatic way to win power and govern. Recent Cuban history corroborated his view, as no president since the Constitution of 1940 was approved had gained office without resorting to pacts. In any event, Chibás repeated that certain Liberals were welcome to join the party "one by one" but he was not willing to accept them wholesale.[97] Of course, the *Ortodoxos* were not his only potential ally. That same week, Suárez Rivas spoke with President Prío in "La Chata." He had also been in contact with representatives of Batista and Alonso Pujol.[98] Nonetheless, he publicly stated that, "the ideal pact for me is with Chibás" but "the anti-pact policy is an insuperable barrier."[99]

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[96] Ochoa and Suárez Rivas knew each other well. In 1941, when Ochoa was a 34-year-old *Auténtico* senator and Suárez Rivas was Liberal majority leader of that chamber, the two tussled on the senate floor after a heated argument over a $25,000,000 loan the government was seeking from the U.S. Import-Export Bank. Ochoa punched and kicked Suárez Rivas before the two were restrained but the incident would be primarily remembered for what ensued. This involved the Liberal senator Arturo Illas Hourruitinier, a famously violent man who had previously beaten up a critical journalist and had once smashed a cane over his own uncle's head in a fit of pique. Illas strode up to Ochoa and promptly punched him. Before hitting the floor, Ochoa had the misfortune of hitting his head against the bronze corner of a desk. As he was carried out of the room unconscious with a black eye and concussion, a melee broke out on the senate floor involving 20 senators and lasting 10 minutes. For a fuller description of this incident see, "Libre-for-All," *Time,* August 18, 1941: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,802123,00.html

[97] "Intenta el PL un pacto integral lo cual éste tendría que variar su linea política," *Diario de la Marina,* February 7, 1951: 6.

[98] Suárez Rivas would later be Minister of Agriculture during Batista's second dictatorship (1952-1958).

[99] "En Cuba, Política: ¿Hay Quien De Más?" *Bohemia,* February 18, 1951: 58.

The next day, Chibás attended the wake and funeral of Carlos Hevia's mother. Hevia, a longstanding Auténtico and potential opponent in the 1952 presidential election, was director of the National Development Council. The Ortodoxo leader had not shied from criticizing him, more for his association with a corrupt administration than for any personal dishonesty – of which there was no evidence. Chibás had known Hevia since he was 17 years old, when they and both their families were passengers on the *Lafayette*, a Europe-bound steam ship in July of 1925. In any case, there was nothing unusual about Chibás' gesture. For example, he had also attended the wake of Mario Kuchilán's father, staying until 2 a.m. even though he and the journalist often sparred on political matters.[100] This interlude of magnanimity was to be short-lived, however. At noon on February 8, Roberto Agramonte received an anonymous telephone call, asking whether an *Ortodoxo* meeting would take place that evening as planned and specifically if Chibás would attend. Receiving no answer, the caller hung up. At 10 p.m. that night, Agramonte's servant, a young girl named Margarita Pérez Martín, was leaving after the day's work and on her way out she spied a strange looking package in the walkway covered by a page of dampened newsprint. Apparently, the rainy weather was the only thing that kept the 10 sticks of dynamite contained inside from exploding and thereby destroying the library of Agramonte's house.[101]

Chibás seized on the situation to underscore another *Auténtico* failure: namely, the inability to control violent action groups whose spectacular murders embarrassed the government and enraged the capital's middle classes. During his

[100] Interview with Ana Cairo, June 2, 2007.
[101] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 728.

Thursday spot on *Unión Radio*, Chibás attacked the administration's anti-gangster law, claiming it only served to disarm law-abiding people while at the same time facilitating terrorists who acted with impunity because they were supported by the government. Nevertheless, he concluded by saying that, "The voice of dynamite will never be able to silence the voice of truth."[102] On his Sunday broadcast of February 11, Chibás held Rolando Masferrer responsible. Chibás lacked evidence tying the MSR leader to the bomb but he rarely passed up an enticing target, and Masferrer, one of the nation's most prominent gangsters, was an ideal foil. Also, Chibás, who had earlier been inspired by *New York Times* accounts of Cubans purchasing Manhattan real estate, almost certainly was stirred by *Bohemia's* recent coverage of Masferrer.

The magazine described Havana's latest crime wave featuring the signature murders, kidnappings and tortures that the government had promised to end.[103] This had begun on January 10, when Antonio Bayer, editor of the political page for Masferrer's mouthpiece, *Tiempo en Cuba*, was killed in a hail of 29 bullets. He and three co-workers had been drinking beer at the Corbón bar, a few blocks from the paper's offices in the seedy neighborhood of Colón. Interior Minister Lomberto Díaz had recently designated the area a centerpiece of a new anti-vice campaign. After all, he said, "We can't allow a place so central, that's a short distance from the presidential palace and where many decent families live to continue to be infested by prostitution and public scandal on a daily basis."[104] As a result, policemen were

[102] Ibid.
[103] Enrique de la Osa, "Atentado: Parece que fue Ayer," *Bohemia,* January 21, 1951: 57.
[104] "En Cuba, Entrevista: Lomberto el Terrible," *Bohemia,* January 7, 1951: 59.

conspicuous on every street corner and the sordid figures that formerly prowled the area had all but disappeared. At the same time, the city's gangsters were clearly not intimidated, nor did they appear to show any fear of being apprehended. Rather than vacating the scene immediately, the man who shot Bayer approached his victim, who was lying on the floor, and pulled the trigger again at point blank range. The three other gangsters accompanying him then paused to fire their weapons in the air before driving away in the car they had parked just outside. Enrique De la Osa noted that "for the thousandth time" the police arrived on time to pick up the wounded but too late to arrest the criminals. People nearby were scandalized by the usual display of incompetence demonstrated by the city's lawmen, who were obviously in close proximity but showed themselves to be altogether harmless.[105]

Bayer himself was a rather "turbulent" figure.[106] He had been affiliated with ARG until being expelled as a traitor and fleeing to Argentina, where he remained for a few months. Upon returning to Cuba, Bayer joined the rival MSR, offering inside knowledge of his old comrades in exchange for protection. Just before his murder, he had also spent a year in prison for possession of an illegal firearm. In any case, Bayer's death set in motion an unsavory series of events. The day after his murder, a tearful woman rushed into Havana's seventh precinct police station. In a voice thick with desperation she shouted, "Masferrer has just kidnapped my husband and will surely kill him!"[107] Identifying herself as the wife of Humberto Huguet Domínguez, a docks worker and ARG member, she related that witnesses

[105] "En Cuba, Atendado: Parece que fue Ayer," 57.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 58.

had seen Masferrer and four cronies force her husband into a car at gunpoint. Toward midnight that same evening, a young man, "with a singular air of suffering about him" entered Havana's Bureau of Investigations and asked to see Chief Díaz Biart.[108] This turned out to be none other than Humberto Huguet, who related that Masferrer had indeed abducted him. He had been brought to the Havana forest, threatened with death unless he divulged the names of those who had murdered Bayer and tortured. At one point, his assailants placed a noose around his neck and told him that if he didn't confess, he would be hung – a death that could easily made to appear as suicide. Finally, having convinced themselves that Huguet knew nothing, they freed him on the condition that he not reveal any details of his ordeal. Otherwise, he would be killed, "like a dog."[109]

The following evening, at 1 a.m. a boy burst into the military barracks at Jaimanitas and blurted out, "Run, corporal, run! Near my house there's a group of men beating two captives and I heard one of them say that if they didn't talk, they were going to bury them."[110] The captain and some enlisted men quickly drove off in a pair of jeeps and approached the spot, where they observed various figures arguing in the darkness – one of whom carried a machine gun. Quietly, they encircled the suspects, whereupon the captain shouted at them not to move, that they were surrounded by the army. Immediately, they raised their hands and dropped their weapons except for two men, one carrying a pick, the other a shovel, who fled. When the captain threatened to shoot, they turned around. Realizing they

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

were no longer in danger, one of them, trembling, thanked him for saving their lives. In any case, the entire group was brought to the barracks for questioning. The two men who had been digging were Salvador Hernández Garriga and Luis Díaz Duque. According to Hernández, Masferrer and his group had appeared at their houses claiming to be police officers and forced them to into his automobile. Later on, in their formal statement, the victims asserted that Masferrer pointed a gun at them and demanded to know who was responsible for Bayer's murder. Eventually, the car stopped in a secluded location. The two men were beaten for a while until Masferrer decided on a different tactic. They were given a pick and shovel and forced to dig their own graves.

For his part, Masferrer marveled that he had been surprised and captured by "a simple little corporal."[111] At the same time, he declared the above testimony to be "completely false."[112] He was also quick to point out that as a legislator he could not be detained or tried. However, an official reminded Masferrer that according to Article 127 of constitution, parliamentary immunity did not apply in cases where suspects were caught while in the act of committing a crime. Regardless, Masferrer was released at 4 a.m. that morning, while his henchmen and their two victims were sent to Castillo del Príncipe – the latter as suspects in the murder of Antonio Bayer. Later that week, Masferrer explained himself. He averred that Bayer was killed on orders from the ARG leader Jesús González Cartas. Bayer's published accounts of his "scandalous depredations," which appeared in Masferrer's newspaper, had enraged him. In revenge, he had rounded up a bunch of "common delinquents" to do his

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

bidding.[113] These included Salvador Hernández and Luis Duque, who feared further embarrassing accounts by Bayer could result in their expulsion from the unions they belonged to – where they served as gunmen for the *Auténtico* senator Eusebio Mujal, the *Auténtico* congressman Francisco Aguirre and other unscrupulous figures of the so-called workers' movement. Further, Masferrer contended that the kidnappings of January 11 and January 12 were part of a plan, hatched in conjunction with the Bureau of Investigations and GRAS, to assist in the interrogation of Bayer's murderers. Their identities had already been revealed "privately" to him and he claimed that psychologically, encouraging them believe they were about to die was far more effective than physical violence.[114] In fact, this method had been yielding some very useful information when the Rural Guard interrupted him. Asked to respond to this version of events, González Cartas disingenuously claimed his group sought only to advance working class interests and "is the first to regret, combat and repudiate acts of bloodshed such as those which have recently happened in the capital."[115]

In any case, Chibás accused Masferrer of planting the bomb under Agramonte's library exactly one month after he and his underlings had seized Humberto Huguet off the street in broad daylight and tortured him throughout that evening. Aside from being an unsympathetic figure with a checkered history of violence, Masferrer was an *Auténtico* congressman. Confronting him would afford Chibás the opportunity to underscore *Auténtico* links with gangsters, hardly a new

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

revelation, but one that rankled residents of the capital. Moreover, such a fight promised to further invigorate his party and could attract new adherents. This strategy, assisted yet again by government missteps, succeeded beyond all expectations. First off, Masferrer responded by invoking the much derided gag decree. Among those who immediately denounced this measure were Goar and Abel Mestre, owners of the popular radio station CMQ. To quell the initial uproar over Decree 2273, Prío had arranged a private compromise with the Mestre brothers shortly after it was issued. In exchange for dropping their campaign against the decree, the president promised it would never be put into effect.[116] The fact that Masferrer had done so after consulting with the secretary of the presidency, indicated the administration remained very nervous about Chibás. Thus, Communications Minister Sergio Megías assigned the first ten minutes of Chibás' broadcast to Masferrer so he could respond to the accusation. In breaking one promise, the *Auténticos* were carrying out another, proclaimed on behalf of the party by the young lawyer Nestor Carbonell, who declared: "We're ready to prosecute you, Eduardo Renato Chibás, so as to keep you and your words from destroying Cuba in an immense negation of hatreds and vengeances."[117] On the other hand, the sizeable hatreds and vengeances of *Auténticos* seemed to be undermining the administration's better judgment. This would soon become apparent to all involved.

On February 14, Chibás released a brief statement. He claimed the right of reply was the gravest of all recent *Auténtico* "provocations" against his party,

[116] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," *Bohemia,* February 25, 1951: supplement, 1.
[117] "En Cuba, Politica: La Noche del Viernes," 63.

including the bomb placed under Agramonte's library – which he now believed was planted on orders from the defense ministry. Chibás also pointed out that the *Ortodoxos* never attempted to interfere with the administration's radio transmissions. Citing articles 33 and 40 of Cuba's constitution,[118] which guaranteed individual freedom of speech and authorized resistance against government acts that abridged rights guaranteed by law, he declared Masferrer "will not speak under any circumstances during the Sunday radio hour of the *Partido del Pueblo Cubano.*"[119] The following day, a "manifesto" by the *Ortodoxo* National Executive Committee was distributed to the press and printed by *Diario de la Marina* and *Bohemia* among other publicatons. The text underlined the party's unequivocal support for Chibás and chastised the *Auténticos* for "attaching themselves to the most irresponsible elements" in an attempt to silence Cuba's "only existing opposition."[120] The gag decree was thus portrayed not only as an attack on freedom of speech but also as a boon to gangsters. Adding to the commotion was a statement by Masferrer, who revealed the existence of a "diabolical plan" to murder Chibás and blame his death on the government. According to him, this situation would benefit the estranged *Auténtico*, Miguelito Suárez Fernández – who would assume leadership of the opposition. For this reason, Masferrer claimed he would convert himself into Chibás' bodyguard for the foreseeable future.[121] This did not mean, however, that Masferrer's opinion of the *Ortodoxo* chief had improved. On the

[118] For an English translation of Articles 33 and 40 of Cuba's 1940 constitution see, http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/constitution/title4.htm.
[119] "Niega Chibás al Dr. Masferrer el derecho de réplica por su hora," *Diario de la Marina,* February 14, 1951: 6.
[120] "No acepta el PPC que Masferrer se acojoa al derecho de réplica," *Diario de la Marina,* February 15, 1951: 1, 24. See also, "En defensa de la libertad de palabra," *Bohemia,* February 18, 1951: 53.
[121] "No acepta el PPC que Masferrer se acoja al derecho de réplica," 24.

contrary, he referred to Chibás as a "libidinous satyr" and "old homosexual." Nor was his invective reserved exclusively for Chibás. For example, he charged that Manuel Bisbé "exchanged passing grades in his classes for the caresses of young girls in the faculty of philosophy."[122] Needless to say, such statements, some of which were issued during radio appearances, made a mockery of the government's intent to muzzle Chibás.

On February 16, an *Ortodoxo* plug for Chibás' Sunday broadcast called for an "imposing popular demonstration" in front of CMQ's headquarters on 23rd Street and Avenue L in Vedado.[123] With tensions mounting and the public anticipating yet another extravagant row, Sergio Megías informed the press that he had approved the "pages" Masferrer was set to read over the airwaves. He observed that would expend a paltry eight minutes, hardly worth all the fuss.[124] On the other hand, he affirmed the government would not tolerate "unauthorized street actions" that threatened to impede the proprietors of a radio station from fulfilling their legal obligation.[125] Lomberto Díaz added that a heavy police presence would be called upon to guarantee public order and prevent the owners of CMQ from being coerced or endangered. Police Chief Quirino Uría thus prohibited "masses of people" from forming near the station.[126] This rhetoric conveniently ignored the actual directors of CMQ, Goar and Abel Mestre, who felt neither menaced by prospective protesters nor particularly pleased with their duty under the decree. In an official press

[122] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 2.
[123] *Diario de la Marina,* February 16, 1951: 6.
[124] "Concede el Gobierno el derecho de réplica al doctor Masferrer," *Diario de la Marina,* February 17, 1951: 1.
[125] Ibid.
[126] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 2.

release, they reiterated their opposition to the right of reply from its inception as "unconstitutional" and "disturbing in many respects."[127] Meanwhile, a new advertisement by the *Ortodoxos* reproduced an excerpt from Article 40 of the constitution that read:

> Government laws or any order that regulates the exercise of the rights guaranteed by this Constitution will be nullified if they diminish, restrict or adulterate them. Adequate resistance for the protection of these individual rights is legitimate.[128]

The ad invited Cubans to congregate in front of CMQ's offices at 6 p.m. in order to defend the constitution and block Masferrer from speaking during the party's broadcast. It also taunted Oscar Gans for his *machadista* past and warned the gag decree could provoke another August 7 – the day in 1933 when Machado's reviled police chief, Antonio Ainciart, oversaw the massacre of 18 people during an anti-government demonstration.[129]

On Sunday, February 18, the national police and army cordoned off a five-block radius surrounding CMQ's studios beginning at 1 p.m. The show of force was such that a *Bohemia* reporter remarked that, "To someone who didn't know what was going on, it would seem the city feared a foreign invasion or imminent social revolution."[130] One beleaguered man, who lived within the prohibited area and attempted to return home was brusquely told to, "Go to the movies and stay there

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[127] Ibid.
[128] "Al Pueblo de Cuba," *Diario de la Marina,* February 17, 1951: 6.
[129] On this day, an underground radio broadcast, courtesy of ABC Radical, disseminated the false news that Machado had resigned and called on Cubans to fill the streets. They promptly did so and were fired upon by the police as they marched toward the presidential palace.
[130] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 2.

until 9 p.m.!"[131] Seemingly, only the deceased merited lenience as a funeral procession was allowed to pass through – albeit after some discussion. Before setting out for CMQ, Chibás addressed his followers from the top of a news truck. He implored them to remain calm, come what may, and to refrain from violence. "We are not gunmen," he said. "We are directing a movement of moral and political renewal."[132] At 7:15 p.m., in the dark winter evening, a vast throng headed by Chibás and his party's parliamentary contingent began moving southeast along Avenue L. As the demonstrators approached the main thoroughfare known as Línea or 9th Street,[133] they found the intersection obstructed by a patrol car. Once the crowd began to bypass the vehicle, its lights began flashing. Immediately, a group of sirens wailed as police cars rushed to block the next intersections. Soon thereafter, officers bearing machineguns, rifles and pistols blocked the assemblage. Their commander, Rafael Casals, yelled, "Stop! Not one step further! Back! Back![134] Nonetheless, the multitude continued forward. In response, the policemen fired warning shots into the sky. Even so, the marchers kept going. The police then lowered their aim and fired once again but this too had no effect. Finally, they targeted the mass of protesters. As people fell to the ground, wounded, many carried on but others fled in the direction of a nearby park or the hospital on 13th Street and Avenue L. The police, however, did not allow them to escape. Rather,

[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] The Vedado section of Havana is laid out in the form of a grid. Odd numbered streets (i.e. 1, 3, 5, 7, etc.) running southeast are bisected by avenues denominated by letters (beginning with O and ending with A after which letters are replaced by even numbers, 2, 4, 6 etc.) running southwest. Some streets are also known by names as well as letters or numbers. For example, Línea, one of the neighborhood's main thoroughfares, runs along 9th Street in much of Vedado. In a similar vein, Calzada runs along almost the entire length of 7th Street.
[134] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 3.

they battered them with machine guns. The main group stopped and waited for instructions from Chibás and also assisted the wounded. One of these, a young *Ortodoxo* worker named José Otero Ben had been shot in the eye.

Quirino Uría, the police chief, appeared in the midst of this grisly scene clad in civilian clothes and requested a meeting with Chibás. The two, who were a picture of contrasting temperaments, briefly conversed while bullets still flew in all directions and those who attempted to escape were manhandled. Uría calmly said he had been ordered not to permit the demonstration. Only Chibás and the *Ortodoxo* legislators could proceed to CMQ headquarters. Chibás shouted that the rally was supported by Cuba's constitution and the police should be protecting defenseless men and women rather than knocking them around. Uría offered to personally escort Chibás and his party's lawmakers to CMQ's studios if the *Ortodoxo* chief would tell the crowd to congregate outside the nearby López Serrano building and stay there. Chibás discussed this proposal with Millo Ochoa, Pelayo Cuervo and José Pardo Llada. A few minutes later, he climbed onto the hood of a police car and advised his supporters to wait for him at his residence on 13th Street and L. Despite loud groans of disagreement, Chibás' supporters heeded his instructions. Among the thousands who had been assaulted or wounded were Pelayo Cuervo and the *Ortodoxo* congressman Manuel Dorta Duque – both of whom had been beaten with clubs. Another *Ortodoxo* congressman, Andrés Nazario Sargent, had been jabbed in the chest with a machinegun by the overzealous Rafael Casals. Carlos Márquez Sterling had been attacked by a group of vigilantes. Ángel Castro, director of the party's youth section, was roughed up by a particularly determined policeman who

was called off only at the behest of Police Chief Uría himself. In addition, members of the press attempting to cover the demonstration were harassed and threatened. Reporters and photographers who ventured near CMQ's offices risked being "splashed" by soldiers manning water cannons.[135]

In a twist worthy of the island's soap operas, Chibás and the *Ortodoxo* parliamentarians reached the radio station at the same instant as an *Auténtico* motorcade bearing Rolando Masferrer, Tony Varona, Rubén de León, Sergio Megías and other party stalwarts. Chibás chased after them but was detained by Millo Ochoa and Luis Orlando Rodríguez. Moments later, when the *Ortodoxos* entered the building, they encountered Lomberto Díaz. "Give my respect to the police," shouted Chibás, "who have followed their orders!"[136] The interior minister responded only by removing his foggy spectacles. As the *Ortodoxos* continued down the hallway, they passed studio 3, where Masferrer was preparing to broadcast. Chibás and Luis Orlando Rodríguez directed a final unflattering remark at him before entering studio 4. Pelayo Cuervo reminded Chibás to compose himself, as he would address the nation shortly. While Chibás paced impatiently back and forth in the studio, Masferrer was on the air next door. The MSR chieftain undermined the government's case for the gag decree by inviting the audience to tune into his 9 p.m. show that evening on *RHC-Cadena Azul*, in which he would give a "complete

[135] Ibid., 4.
[136] Ibid.

response, in his own language, to Senator Chibás."[137] As a *Bohemia* correspondent noted, "It was clear [Masferrer] had a radio space to utilize his 'right of reply.'"[138]

When Chibás was cleared to speak, he did so in a voice trembling with indignation.[139] He asserted that the police and army were not responsible for the bloodshed, as they merely followed orders. Those who were truly culpable before the Cuban public were President Prío, Defense Minister Rubén de León, Interior Minister Lomberto Díaz, and, of course, Oscar Gans. Chibás concluded that:

> While the government protects the gangster Masferrer with a grand show of force in order to rob us of our radio time and the right to disseminate our thinking, a right guaranteed by the constitution…honest and decent citizens were not permitted to arrive here as they have done every Sunday evening for seven years. Neither Batista nor Grau restricted these rights despite the fact that we combated them tenaciously. Carlos Prío was the first to do this![140]

Chibás lacked the time or perhaps did not feel the need, given its obviousness, to mention what many residents of the capital were almost surely contemplating. Namely, these very police who were so miserably incompetent on January 10, who proved incapable of stopping gangsters from committing murder in broad daylight or making an arrest even though they were clearly nearby, seemed perfectly assured when faced with a group of ordinary, unarmed citizens devoid of political connections. The next day, with the island's attention diverted by the championship match-up between Almendares and Habana, José Otero Ben died from his wounds. On Tuesday afternoon, February 20, an "uncountable" crowd of *Ortodoxo* leaders

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.

and supporters attended his burial. A *Bohemia* reporter described with unmistakable irony how the funeral procession passed along 23rd Street, which had been so aggressively guarded two days earlier, on the way to the cemetery and how the event came off with nary a single "accident."[141] During his eulogy, Chibás praised the deceased and painted his party as a beacon of legality and cool-headedness. He observed that Otero Ben had fallen "defending the constitution" and promised *Ortodoxos* would remain loyal to his "magnificent example" by seeking redress in the courts because "we are not gangsters and are against criminality." Chibás added that, "When we are in power, we will present your assassins before the tribunals of justice so they may be sentenced to prison. The constitution prohibits the death penalty and we respect it and the law." He concluded by saying, "José Otero Ben, to you as with the people of Cuba, we will bring justice."[142]

With this affair seemingly at an end, the government braced for the nation's wrath. Carlos Prío, who had opposed precisely this sort of brutality as a member of the 1930 Student Directorate, had seriously blundered. Further, the administration could expect no quarter from the island's journalists given the disdain with which they had been treated by policemen. In an article published in *Prensa Libre,* the Republican senator Santiago Rey Perna claimed, "President Prío didn't have a single friend at his side."[143] Sadly for Cuba's chief executive, this piece had been published on Sunday, February 18, before the mass beating had taken place or José Otero Ben had died. His situation had certainly taken a turn for the worse since then.

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 737.
[143] Nick Machado, "¡Remember Artemisa!" *La Correspondencia*, February 20, 1951. See Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, Expediente 1141: 18, ANC.

Nonetheless, the *Auténticos* pleaded their case. Lomberto Díaz, who lacked for words when confronted by Chibás in CMQ's studios, rejected the accusation, put forth by Roberto Agramonte, that he had ordered the police to fire on the crowd. Moreover, he claimed armed protesters had attacked the police and injured some of them – although he failed to produce any wounded officers. Tony Varona opined that Chibás "declared an insurrection against the government and incited the people to attack it."[144] He also argued for more stringent measures that would allow the president to shut down any radio station, newspaper or magazine whose behavior was deemed disrespectful. The columnist Nick Machado replied that, "Varona is in love with press censorship. In Argentina, he would collaborate very well with Perón."[145] Ramón Vasconcelos, who had resigned his cabinet post over government attacks on free expression, expressed his dismay in the form of a parable. He said,

> I have just seen two contrasting scenes on television regarding the events of a few days ago. In one Rolando Masferrer appears smiling, conceited and self-satisfied after having had his way. He was accompanied by the ministers of defense, interior and communications along with the senate president and Senator Tejera. All of them seemed satisfied as if they had won a great battle in favor of democracy or Cuban brotherhood. In the other scene, an injured man appears in a bed, wounded and suffering from terrible pain. A doctor is trying to save him. At his side, their faces filled with indignation and sadness stands various *Ortodoxo* leaders who are worrying over the patient's fate. They are Chibás, Márquez Sterling [and] Agramonte. The first group descends jovially from the staircase of a radio station. The second visits a hospital room. All are Cubans but behold the moral chasm separating them! On one side are those who persecute their countrymen who have differing opinions and confront them with trigger happy police. The others, by contrast, defend the people's rights to express themselves freely…[146]

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[144] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 4.
[145] Nick Machado. "¡Remember Artemisa!". See Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, 1141: 18, ANC.
[146] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 4.

Ortodoxos rallied around their party's first martyr, collecting money in some instances to raise a monument to him. Chibás had been receiving letters for years now in which men and women declared their willingness to sacrifice themselves. Within days of the funeral, an *Ortodoxo* from the town of Santo Domingo in Las Villas province declared that Otero Ben had died "at peace" as he never "sold or tried to make money from his ideal."[147] Others, while lamenting the "assault" were almost delirious at the prospect political advantages they would reap from the government's heavy-handedness. Ernesto Buch López, a lawyer from Santiago de Cuba, wrote to Chibás claiming the party would gain 100,000 extra votes because of the incident. Eddy, with presumable delight, underlined this phrase with his red pencil.[148] The administration's excesses in other areas, particularly its fervor for shaking down wealthy citizens, were also potentially as harmful. In this vein, Ramón Grau San Martín, who always reveled in pointing out Prío's mistakes, told an anecdote about a prosperous farmer in Camagüey province who had been forced to pay 10,000 *pesos* to corrupt treasury ministry inspectors. Furious, the man, who was not an *Ortodoxo*, told him, "I am voting for Chibás because things can't continue like this!"[149]

[147] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, Expediente 1139: 48, ANC.
[148] Ibid., 8.
[149] "En Cuba, La Capital: Página Lamentable," supplement, 4.

Chapter 10

"I am Going to Open My Briefcase"

In late February, Chibás was confronted by a potentially embarrassing situation. At that time, a group of *campesinos* appeared in Havana and claimed they were being exploited. This was fairly commonplace but these peasants also happened to be employees of a coffee plantation near Guantánamo, whose part owners were none other than the Chibás family. Eddy had inherited a one-sixth share of the property from his father, which meant the self-styled protector of Cuba's rural poor was apparently profiting from their misery. Curiously, these oppressed laborers did not direct their complaints to him, as Chibás had always urged on his radio show but rather they spoke with reporters from the capital's major newspapers. This raised suspicions among *Ortodoxos* that the government had staged the entire affair. Regardless, Chibás sensed an occasion for a grand gesture. On February 24, Chibás announced he would donate his earnings from the plantation to found and maintain a free school for the farmers' children so they could "learn to read and defend their rights." He added, "May this example spread among the new rich of our politics."[1] That evening, he journeyed to Guantánamo,

[1] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 738. This statement was actually the sharpest of double-edged swords. In his will, José Manuel Alemán had designated five million *pesos* for the construction of a hospital to treat children with tuberculosis. This caused a heated debate on the island, as the money had obviously been embezzled and many, including Chibás, believed it should return to the state's coffers. In this sense, even acts of charity by Cuba's nouveau riche politicians were stained by thievery. Conversely, Chibás stressed that his family's coffee plantation had been acquired via "legitimate work" rather than stolen funds.

signed the divestment papers and paid a visit to the plantation in question. Chibás and a retinue of *Ortodoxo* eminences, including Millo Ochoa, Leonardo Fernández Sánchez and Beto Saumell also used the trip to inaugurate party offices in the town. Although an impending scandal had been defused and even turned to an advantage, the fact that mid-sized Guantánamo, with more than 60,000 inhabitants, was only now gaining a public headquarters proved *Ortodoxos* were still lagging in their attempts to build a national party apparatus.

THE *AUTENTICO*-LIBERAL PACT

For more than a year now, Eduardo Suárez Rivas had been seeking a home for the Liberals. Their traditional electoral partners, the Democrats, had long ago signed up with the government. Ever since, Suárez Rivas had spent much of his time flitting between *Ortodoxo* and *Auténtico* representatives. With presidential elections on the horizon, talks had intensified in recent weeks. On February 27, Chibás sent Suárez Rivas a missive that all but settled the issue. He pronounced himself unwilling to engage in further negotiations, underlined his commitment to independence and, as he had done numerous times before, welcomed Liberals with clean records to join the party on an individual basis. Suárez Rivas was thus nudged toward the *Auténticos* and settled preliminary terms with Prime Minister Félix Lancís and Senate President Tony Varona. In exchange for Liberal support, he demanded three cabinet positions immediately along with nine senate seats, two to three provincial governments and the vice presidency on the 1952 ticket.

Upon hearing these conditions, *Auténtico* bigwigs gathered to discuss the deal let out a collective gasp. Miguelito Suárez Fernández was the first to object, saying the agreement was "premature" and "imprudent."[2] He claimed the party would gain popularity with *campesinos* after congress approved the Agricultural Development Bank. Suárez Rivas also expressed a preference for "old allies" over the Liberals if assistance was required.[3] To everyone's alarm, Antonio Prío also argued against the understanding, asserting it was needless in light of guarantees by Suárez Fernández not to bolt the party. He also noted that "new directions" policies discouraging corruption meant there was less cash and other incentives to lure additional coalition partners. In fact, he observed that Democrats were already chafing because they had fewer goodies than promised. These opinions were refuted by a red faced Diego Vicente Tejera, who responded in a voice taut with urgency and anger. He protested that,

> I have heard…Miguel Suárez talk of revitalizing the party through its collateral sections, organizing the workers, the *campesinos*, the women (and) the youth; but this makes me laugh. It is true, for reasons we are not here to analyze that we can longer portray ourselves as great social reformers nor anything of the sort. No one believes in us any longer after having been in power for six years…Gentleman, let's not pretend. We are among family and can tell the truth.[4]

In Tejera's view, the pact was about winning and all other considerations were secondary. "On the first of June in 1952," he concluded, "I don't want to find myself

[2] "En Cuba, Política: 'Después de 6 Años ya Nadie Cree en Nosotros…'" *Bohemia,* March 11, 1951: 59.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

in limbo! I want the *Auténticos* to have won yet again."[5] Tensions rose further when Paco Prío denounced the pact, leading some to believe the president himself was less enthusiastic about it than they had imagined. This impression was swiftly and heatedly dismissed by Tony Varona. A visibly perturbed Félix Lancís wondered why, if there was no consensus, he and Varona had wasted their time in the first place. "This is ridiculous," he huffed, "and I'm too old for this!"[6] When news leaked out that the agreement was on hold, Eduardo Suárez Rivas fumed and publicly scuttled the bargain. This prompted Carlos Prío to send his presidential airplane for the liberal leader so they could talk things over in "La Altura." After plying his guest with a sumptuous breakfast, Prío assured him a deal would go through "regardless of what happens" in the *Auténtico* executive committee.[7] At the same time, Prío advised Suárez Rivas to be flexible in his demands as he hoped to bring Grau and Castellanos into the fold before election time.

For his part, Chibás wasted no time condemning what he called a "pact of renegades."[8] This was the ultimate cynical combination and Chibás delighted in identifying the hypocrisy of both parties. The *Auténticos*, as everyone knew, had incessantly vilified their Liberal opponents in the 1948 presidential campaign – equating their possible victory with a Machado style restoration. Indulging in some brazenness of his own, Chibás scolded the *Auténticos* for belittling Ricardo Núñez without recognizing his "undeniable personal prestige."[9] Chibás, after all, had

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] "En Cuba, Política: Las Impurezas de la Realidad," *Bohemia,* March 11, 1951: 60.
[8] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Pacto de Renegados," *Bohemia,* March 11, 1951: 54.
[9] Ibid.

leveled more devastating attacks against Núñez and placed him closer to Machado than any other candidate. Relying on the short memories of his fellow Cubans, he advertised that *Ortodoxos* distinguished between Machado loyalists and regular Liberals who were "deceived and exploited" by the party hierarchy.[10] Chibás was more effective at highlighting the growing divide between *Auténtico* and Liberal chieftains and their rank and file supporters. "What," he asked, "will the thousands *Auténtico* party members say after having been taught for the past 15 years to hate anything that smells Liberal?" In the same spirit, he inquired, "What will Liberal masses say about being used as a trampoline by the *Auténticos* so they can retain power for four more years?"[11] Eddy's intuition on this matter was corroborated by a survey of *Auténticos* published on March 18. Asked which electoral partner would prove most valuable to the party's prospects in 1952, only 8.05 percent chose the Liberals. By contrast, 59.73 thought reuniting with Grau would greatly enhance their chances.[12] Further, a poll of the general population was equally discouraging as 42.69 percent of respondents believed the *Auténtico*-Liberal pact would damage Cuba. Conversely, a mere 13.27 percent held that it would benefit the country.[13] Among Liberals, evidence of discontent was more anecdotal but the signs were ominous. For instance, the Liberal congressman Radio Cremata complained the party had "been turned into a cash cow" and predicted the agreement would herald its demise.[14] The Liberals suffered a symbolic blow on March 18, when Emilio

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo Opina Sobre La Guerra en Correa y el Pacto Liberal." *Bohemia,* March 18, 1952: sup. 24.
[13] Ibid., 23.
[14] "En Cuba, Política: 'Una Sociedad Anónima para Lucrar…'" *Bohemia,* April 1, 1951: 58.

Núñez Blanco, the young nephew of Ricardo Núñez, appeared on Eddy's show and announced he was joining the *Ortodoxos.*[15] Other less prominent Liberals expressed their disgust in personal letters to Chibás. One man, who was a sugar worker, wrote:

> …the person writing to you is a born Liberal who will die a Liberal, one who is not for sale and cannot be bought for any price contrary to what the party leaders believe and I want them and the people of Cuba to know that honorable Liberals with a sense of shame still exist and these Liberals will know what to do with their votes, getting rid of this heap of assassins, thieves and traitors to the fatherland and replacing them on June 1, 1952 with the only man who can honorably rule the destiny of Cuba, Eduardo R. Chibás.[16]

To underscore how bizarre the *Auténtico*-Liberal arrangement really was, Chibás reproduced various statements from Carlos Prío and Eduardo Suárez Rivas regarding each other and their respective parties. For example, in April of 1948, Prío asserted that Liberal higher-ups had "enriched themselves by pillaging the Cuban people."[17] The following month he said that,

> …the Liberal party, which arrived at its climax with the tyranny of General Machado, was characterized by its subjugation to Yankee imperialism and by the utilization of foreign loans to construct public works; the negation of fundamental liberties; the destruction of labor unions; (and) muffling freedom of speech, the press and assembly.[18]

Meanwhile, in September of 1950, Suárez Rivas told a journalist that, "Prío wants to avoid supervision of the treasury so he can use the people's money according to his whims." A month later, he affirmed that the government "lacks a moral basis,

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[15] Emilio Núñez Blanco would later support Fulgencio Batista after his coup in March of 1952. He subsequently became notable for marrying Mirta Díaz-Balart, the ex wife of Fidel Castro.
[16] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, Expediente 1144: 54, ANC.
[17] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Pacto de Renegados," *Bohemia,* March 11, 1951: 54.
[18] Eduardo R. Chibás, "El Pacto de la Desvergüenza," March 18, 1951: supplement, 20.

violates rights, ignores the law and knowingly contradicts the constitution."[19] Vitriolic as they were, the above statements lost all significance once Suárez Rivas gained proximity to the *jamón.* Without further ado, he was named agriculture minister while Ramón Zaydín displaced Democratic chief José Andreu in the island's commerce ministry. Even as many everyday Liberals fumed, the party's nabobs were ecstatic and effusively congratulated their leader. When Suárez Rivas broke the news of his meeting with Prío in "La Altura," a *Bohemia* reporter snidely noted that his audience behaved as if, "their souls had been returned to their bodies" because "There was still an opportunity snatch a slice of the budget even if they would be last in line."[20]

THE INDICTMENT OF GRAU

The pact between *Auténticos* and Liberals occupied the nation's attention only a short time before being eclipsed by something astonishing. On March 17, Judge Federico Justiniani announced the indictment of Ramón Grau San Martín as part of the *Causa 82* proceedings. As Justiniani had promised, the burglary of his office nine and a half months earlier had not derailed or even substantially delayed the case. In November of 1950, he charged Eduardo Sánchez Alfonso, the former director of Havana's customs house, with illegally transferring roughly 9.5 million *pesos* to the national treasury – where they were ultimately siphoned off under diverse guises. Unfortunately, Sánchez Alfonso had fled the country with his booty and was beyond the reach of justice. Grau, on the other hand, defiantly remained in

[19] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Pacto de Renegados," 55.
[20] "En Cuba, Política: Las Impurezas de la Realidad," 61.

his Miramar mansion and had refused to run for public office as a way of avoiding prosecution. Judge Justiniani answered his regular protestations of innocence with a carefully researched brief, covering 17 pages, offering Cubans extensive evidence to the contrary. Much space was devoted to Grau's scandalous enablement of his favorite minister, José Manuel Alemán. Ultimately, this was the crux of unprecedented and by now well publicized acts of shamelessness. These included a bacchanalia of thievery during the final ten days of Grau's term in which 20, 765,872 *pesos*, or approximately 10 percent of the national budget, disappeared. Also documented was Alemán's habit of selling teaching positions in Cuba's public schools for up to 2000 *pesos* and generally using the education ministry as his own personal piggy bank even after he had been replaced. Judge Justiniani averred that Grau was "principally responsible" for this conduct given that he "could have and should have put a stop to these activities."[21]

This was the most spectacular story in Cuba and journalists descended upon Grau's home to hear what he had to say. Mostly, they were treated to a series of bizarre explanations and thinly veiled barbs. Among other things, Grau declared he had been tried under Machado and now history was repeating itself because Liberals were once again part of the government.[22] Subsequently, he asserted that Cuba's polytechnic schools were the "pride of the country" during his administration. He thus staunchly defended Alemán, insisting his erstwhile

[21] "En Cuba, Tribunales: 'Lo Consentía Todo…,'" *Bohemia,* March 25, 1951: 78.
[22] A *Bohemia* reporter wryly observed that Grau's trial under Machado was political in nature while his prospective one promised to be "common" and was not "inspired by the government." See: Ibid.

education minister had "left behind many beneficial things for the people."[23] Above all, Grau was incensed with Carlos Prío and though he never mentioned him directly, many of his remarks targeted his onetime disciple. His reference to the Liberals was a case in point. Another was his assertion that:

> I am willing to demonstrate publicly how I acquired my properties. They are a product of my own hard work, in caring for my patients and though long nights of study. By the same token, I will demand on the radio, in the press and on the street that everyone does the same as I! Let them show how they entered into official positions without a *centavo* and later on, how they enjoy lots of money![24]

Grau had been especially enraged during his arraignment, when Judge Justiniani informed him that Prío's presidency showed signs of dishonesty as well. This was precisely why the trial promised to be so tricky. Any investigation into corruption during Grau's rule would shed light on Prío's foibles and implicate the *Auténtico* party as a whole. For this reason, the Grau stalwart Alberto Cruz lamented that, "We will no longer be able to campaign based on the positive advantages achieved during our government."[25] The party's ultimate pragmatist, Diego Vicente Tejera, spoke more bluntly when asked for his opinion – volunteering that, "There were only two ways out of this: resolving the matter by paying everyone off or letting things play out as they have. And here you see the consequences!"[26]

As the scandal broke on a Saturday, Chibás readied himself to pounce 24 hours later. During his broadcast, he commended Judge Justiniani for "writing an exemplary page in the annals of Cuba's judiciary" and revealing how "modest public

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 78.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 79.

employees or politicians" including Alemán, Alberto Inocente Álvarez, Carlos Prío and Virgilio Pérez had "magically" become "opulent businessmen."[27] Claiming thievery of state funds was a "crime against the fatherland," he said, "Delinquency in government circles should be punished like any other offense" and stipulated that "Sleazy big shots should also go to prison!"[28] In this vein, he urged Judge Justiniani not to forget Fulgencio Batista, saying, "While he was in power, Batista robbed everything he could. If he didn't steal more it was only because he presided over a less prosperous era."[29] Eddy's rant against Cuba's overnight millionaires did not go unanswered, of course. At 8:30 p.m., Antonio Prío appeared on *Unión Radio* with a rebuttal. Employing all manner of colorful language, he styled Justiniani a "venal judge," a "prevaricator," a "zombie" and an "automaton in the hands of Chibás and Pelayo Cuervo."[30] For good measure, he tapped him as a Communist sympathizer too. Antonio had every reason to smear Judge Justiniani for he would likely figure in future *Causa* 82 indictments. As a pre-emptive defense, the president's younger brother asserted that he had never behaved incorrectly in the treasury ministry and as proof of his innocence vowed never to abandon the country or seek refuge in parliamentary immunity.[31]

Curiously, Antonio's tirade made no reference to Grau. The reason for this soon became apparent when a coterie of *Auténticos* and ex *Auténticos*, including Félix Lancís, Miguelito Suárez Fernández, Tony Varona, Nicolás Castellanos and

[27] Ibid., 79-80.
[28] Ibid., 80.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Fernán Villalva, "El Procesamiento del Ex Presidente Grau," *Carteles,* March 25, 1951: 74.

César Casas appeared at Grau's house in an impressive show of solidarity.[32] Also present was the ever protean Guillermo Alonso Pujol along with Carlos Arazoza, a former education minister and acolyte of José Manuel Alemán. Even Luis Caíñas Milanés was on hand. The *Auténtico* congressman was a living testament to the evils of parliamentary immunity, having murdered a fellow *Auténtico* legislator in broad daylight three years earlier. Everyone appreciated the danger *Causa* 82 represented for their political futures and set all grudges aside. However, as Grau issued a new public statement, the decision to surround himself with embezzlers, black marketers and a known murderer seemed dubious. This was especially true since Grau based his defense on ethical deficiencies of Judge Justiniani and the *Ortodoxos.* Rather than offering evidence for his charges, he resorted to folksy aphorisms, noting that "(The *Ortodoxos*) speak constantly of morality and honor but the truth resembles the Spanish proverb that says, 'Tell me what you possess and I'll tell you what you lack.'"[33] He also employed old fashioned name calling, describing Pelayo Cuervo as "acromegalic" and "abnormal" while likening Chibás to a howling monkey.[34] Later that day, a *Bohemia* reporter visited the *Ortodoxo* leader at home to hear his reaction. Not surprisingly, Chibás was in a jovial mood and received him with alacrity. Rummaging through his collection of old press clippings Chibás withdrew a *Carteles* article from July 16, 1939 in which Grau was quoted as saying:

> Cuba must do everything it can to change the prevailing mentality so that the public believes robbing the treasury is infinitely more

[32] After Grau's anti-government harangue on Saturday, Carlos Prío dispatched Félix Lancís to negotiate a truce between both sides. In exchange for official support, Grau dispensed with his criticism of the *Auténtico*-Liberal pact and agreed to assist the administration in its war of words against the *Ortodoxos.*

[33] "En Cuba, Tribunales: 'Ni Acuso ni me Defiendo; soy un Juez,'" *Bohemia,* March 25, 1951: 80.

[34] Ibid.

> dangerous than robbing a bank. We cannot continue with the same moral dissolution our country has suffered since it became independent, in which government employees, after occupying their posts for some time, become fabulously wealthy. Such overnight fortunes at the treasury's expense must be adequately sanctioned.[35]

Grau, of course, never acted upon his lofty oratory. To illustrate the abyss between word and deed, Chibás produced the transcript of a radio broadcast by Carlos Prío from May 30, 1950. He called this "the most forceful reply to the grand corruptor of Cuban politics."[36] At the time, Prío announced that:

> When I took office, the treasury ministry was the scandal of Cuba. It took me more than a year to clean up the embarrassments there. I received a nation in debt so extreme that no supplier was willing to provide medicine to the sick, food for the imprisoned and cement or treenails for public works. I received a country divided by hatred in which men hunted each other with guns in the streets. Upon becoming president, I found 101 unfinished construction projects whose completion required 205 million *pesos*. The public works ministry owed suppliers and workers 20 million *pesos*, of which two million was for salaries. Everyone in Cuba knows that on October 10, 1948 there was no money in the register.[37]

Later that week, *Alerta* columnist Rafael Estenger added a new wrinkle to the polemic. Shunning crude or eye catching phrases in favor of lawyerly logic, he advanced a highly provocative argument. He indicated that Grau was basically being tried for tolerating José Manuel Alemán's sleaze. However, according to the constitution, the prime minister bore responsibility for the government's "general politics" and ruled hand in hand with the president.[38] This seemed to imply that

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Article 154 of the constitution states: "The president of the republic shall preside over the council of ministers. When the president does not attend sessions of the council, the prime minister shall

Grau's prime minister, none other than Carlos Prío, was also culpable for Alemán's offenses.

On March 25, Grau appeared as the weekly guest on *Ante la Prensa* and offered another outlandish performance. Asked why he stubbornly defended a man like José Manuel Alemán, who had been "totally repudiated" by the Cuban public, Grau responded that his former education minister was, in fact, a darling of the masses. As proof, he cited Alemán's election to the senate. He then mused rather wistfully that, "[Alemán] was accused of so many things but people showed up to his funeral, they came to be there with him!"[39] Grau was wrong on both accounts but did not allow reality to besmirch his logic. Alemán obtained his senate seat because he was on a winning party slate in 1948 not due to personal popularity. Regarding his burial, it was modesty attended as befit a man known for depriving schoolchildren of their breakfasts. In any case, Grau offered equally unsatisfying answers to ensuing queries. When asked if Alemán had embezzled state funds, Grau stonewalled. As to how Alemán could have amassed so many properties without robbing the treasury, Grau changed the subject. Forced to contemplate the possibility of Alemán's dishonesty, Grau waxed allegorical, saying, "It's as if you allowed a friend to stay in your house and he kidnapped your child. I wouldn't be responsible because I didn't put him there to kidnap. In this case, it's the same thing: I didn't put Alemán in the education ministry to enrich himself, I put him

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preside. The prime minister represents the general politics of the government, and shall represent the latter before congress."

[39] "En Cuba, Política: Grau San Martín Ante la Prensa," *Bohemia,* April 1, 1951: 60.

there to work."[40] Grau was no more forthcoming about other aspects of his administration. For example, questioned about gangsterism, he rambled about how, "Many of them, although they behaved badly, were not bad people," and denied his administration maintained links with gangsters or allowed them to act with impunity.[41]

Despite this embarrassing spectacle, the *Auténticos* had no choice but to back him. The next evening, the party's executive committee praised Grau and rebuked Judge Justiniani in a public statement. In a parallel gesture, Eusebio Mujal, chief of the *Auténtico* controlled Cuban Workers Confederation, affirmed the "working classes" were behind Grau.[42] He also mimicked a favorite tactic of Chibás by declaiming the injustice of Grau's trial while known murderers such as Fulgencio Batista and "hundreds more" roamed free.[43] Eduardo Suárez Rivas conveniently forgot his long history of Grau bashing by declaring *Causa* 82 "legally unjustified."[44] The Liberal chief, who wished to please his new coalition partners, lamented quite disingenuously that Cuba's courts were destroying "our great national leaders."[45] Responding to this barrage of official disparagement, 14 Havana Instructional Court judges published an open letter in the press. They appealed for an end to "unjustified demagogic attacks against the prestige of the republic's courts" whose object was to "interfere with judicial independence."[46] Aside from its campaign against Judge Justiniani, the government availed itself once again of press

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] "Opinan Sobre el Procesamiento del Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín," *Bohemia,* April 1, 1951: 72.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 71.
[45] Ibid.
[46] "Un Documento Trascendental," *Bohemia,* April 1, 1951: 51.

censorship – this time against the *Ortodoxo* radio host Guido García Inclán. He had recently pioneered a new format that entailed interviewing guests via telephone and broadcasting the conversations over the air. Unhappily, his choice of subjects, including Ramón Vasconcelos, Pelayo Cuervo and Chibás, was not to the administration's liking nor was their tendency to discuss Grau's impending trial and the *Auténtico*-Liberal pact. Thus, Communications Minister Sergio Megías all but banned the interviews by requiring their texts to be handed over for approval five days in advance. Conversely, Chibás was not obstructed in any way. He remarked that:

> The uproar nurtured by the embezzlers against the courts of justice is even less justifiable given that the indictment handed down by the upright Judge Justiniani is notable for its moderation and prudence and shows extraordinary consideration to ex President Grau. For example, he is not being held on bail but is free to enjoy his liberty. Nevertheless, followers of Grau, Prío, Batista and the Liberals who show support for embezzlers never think for a moment about the millions of senior citizens, women and children who have died in hospitals during the past ten years because thieves in the administrations of Batista and Grau robbed the money for medicines. The same thing is happening under Prío. These are the true victims; these are the real unhappy ones. These are the people defended by the Cuban Peoples' Party, not the bandits, the impudent or the cynics who have become multi-millionaires and who have bought palaces and *fincas* with the money they have robbed and who now hypocritically pretend to be unhappy.[47]

On April 3, the administration's relentless harassment of the judiciary sparked debate in Cuba's bar association. The topic was broached by Emilio Núñez Blanco, the recent *Ortodoxo* convert who urged his peers to pass a motion backing Judge

[47] Eduardo R. Chibás, "¡A La Carcel Los Ladrones!" *Bohemia,* April 1, 1951: 55.

Justiniani against "inconsiderate attacks."[48] However, several members were reluctant to involve the organization in what they considered a partisan matter. Mario Lamar remarked that the bar association had remained mum when Chibás accused a judge of taking bribes after ruling in favor of the Cuban Electric Company. While not against a pronouncement of some sort, he argued the one submitted by Núñez Blanco should be shorn of its references to Judge Justiniani so as to be generic and apolitical in nature. Another lawyer named Ovidio Mañalich disagreed, saying:

> What Justiniani has done is so exemplary that it has no parallel in the history of Latin America. The idea that the law should apply equally to the powerful as well as the weak will no longer be just another aspiration. This indictment means that Cuba can truly function as a complete and dynamic democracy. In defending Judge Justiniani, the judge who has tried for the first time in our hemisphere an ex president, we are giving a great lesson to our citizens. This being the case, we can mention him by name and I don't have the slightest doubt the bar association will be fulfilling its duty by approving this motion.[49]

Humberto Sorí Marín added that the time was right to "define ourselves without half measures or euphemisms," especially while government figures such as Tony Varona, himself a lawyer, was assailing the judiciary so aggressively.[50] The naïve Núñez Blanco proved more pliable. He allowed bar association president Gastón Godoy to alter the document if he promised not to alter its fundamental spirit. In fact, this led to a heated row as Godoy rendered his motion entirely neutral after it was approved by majority vote. Even Núñez Blanco's signature phrase about justice

[48] "En Cuba, Abogados: 'La Viva Estampa de la Inercia," *Bohemia,* April 22, 1951: 57.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

applying equally to the powerful as well as the weak was removed because, explained, Godoy, similar words appeared in the constitution. Sorí Marín tried to console his younger colleague by stoically saying, "This is the first time you have been disappointed here. I have suffered the same fate many times."[51]

This minor frustration would pale by comparison to what was in store. On April 27, Judge Justiniani received a complaint demanding that he recuse himself because a relative of his was among the defendants and contending this "intimate friendship" compromised judicial objectivity.[52] While this seemed a reasonable objection at first glance, its author was the infamous spoiler Froilán Núñez. The 90 year old veteran of Cuba's liberation army, who maintained close ties to Carlos Prío, had already gained the recusal of one *Causa* 82 judge on spurious grounds. A day later, Núñez added an additional charge – namely, that Judge Justiniani was an *Ortodoxo* "sympathizer" serving the interests of Pelayo Cuervo.[53] No one believed Núñez was acting alone, particularly as the Grau loyalist Carlos Estévez had been bragging between court sessions that he knew a way to save his political patron. Judge Justiniani responded that he was only distantly related to the man in question, Luis Arango Fumagalli, and claimed the two were not close. Even so, he had no recourse but to leave the case. An outraged Pelayo Cuervo observed that Núñez was a "front man" for the Prío family and a convicted criminal as well, having once murdered a man only to be pardoned by President Alfredo Zayas in the early

[51] Ibid., 58.
[52] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: La Tercera Recusación," *Bohemia,* May 13, 1951: 62.
[53] Ibid.

1920s.[54] Cuervo also derided Núñez's lawyer, Israel Algaze, who was on the public payroll as an agriculture ministry employee and always enthusiastic about serving his patrons. He concluded that, "All these tricks, in total, are little more than a new plan, devised with the consent of the president of the republic, to hinder the implementation of justice in the most scandalous trial in our history as a republic."[55] Ramón Vasconcelos wrote that, "Every time there is an honest judge, the government looks for a stooge whom it can maneuver from behind the scenes by a minister of Injustice."[56] For his part, Froilán Núñez said nothing to dispel the idea that he was a government pawn. In an interview with a *Bohemia* correspondent he was asked to explain his decision to the Cuban public. Núñez replied:

> Let me be frank. When I saw that the presidents of the senate, the Cuban Workers Confederation, the *Auténtico* party and other responsible people signaled that Judge Justiniani sympathized with the party of Chibás and that he and other leaders of his party defended him, I felt that Judge Justiniani should not continue because he appeared partial.[57]

Cuba's cartoonists saw things rather differently. One sketched a beaming Grau driving a truck bearing a sign saying, "Froilán: Available for Rent."[58] Another drew a walking billboard which read, "You Don't Have to Go to Prison! Froilán: He Does All Types of Recusals for Modest Prices!"[59] Regardless of these jibes, there was rejoicing in government circles but this was tempered by the Havana court's unanimous selection of Gilberto Mosquera as Justiniani's replacement. Known as an

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Estoy Orgulloso de mi Conducta y no Tengo de que Arrepentirme," *Bohemia,* May 13, 1951: 69.
[58] Niko, "Frase Comercial," *Bohemia,* May 13, 1951: 64.
[59] Antonio, "Anuncios Clasificados," *Bohemia,* May 13, 1951: 61.

honorable man cut from the same cloth as his predecessor, Judge Mosquera was certainly no flunky.

Grau's lawyers were nonetheless optimistic that Judge Mosquera would prove more sympathetic. In short order, they submitted a brief requesting that the charges against their client be dismissed. As Grau was represented by José Miró Cardona and Carlos Menció, both of whom were among Cuba's leading attorneys, many who were familiar with the case anticipated a favorable verdict. Essentially, their argument was threefold. First, they invoked Article 145 of the constitution – which stated that presidents could only be judged by the Supreme Tribunal. Second, they asserted that Grau himself had not committed any crime. Lastly, they reasoned he was innocent of malversation since no public money had been under his personal control. On May 18, however, Judge Mosquera rejected their appeal. José Miró Cardona's logic had relied heavily on a Supreme Tribunal precedent from 1935, whereby a mayor and his treasurer were tried for fraud but only the latter was convicted. Judge Mosquera ruled this was irrelevant since it was based on a statute from 1870 rather than the current Code of Social Defense. The updated law cast a wider net of culpability, which Judge Mosquera explained to a *Bohemia* reporter in the following terms:

> The problem of profit is a question that should be very clear for a judge. From a popular point of view, profit suggests gaining material benefit from a deal regardless of whether the intent was good or bad, but for a judge, this concept has a wider meaning. If an individual, for example, steals a pair of glasses in order to make a gift to someone who really needs them, he's profiting from the interior satisfaction that comes from the act and even the good reputation he acquires for having done it. But it's a crime that should be punished even if people

> believe he was pursuing altruistic ends and not for his own private gain.[60]

Applying this to Grau, he allowed that the ex president may not have personally robbed the treasury but he certainly profited from Alemán's misbehavior. As for the contention that Grau was only subject to judgment by the Supreme Tribunal, Judge Mosquera noted this applied exclusively to sitting presidents.

No one relished this turn of events more than Pelayo Cuervo, who asked, "What will the government and Grau's defenders say about Judge Mosquera's decision now? Will they accuse him too of being an *Ortodoxo* and aspiring to a senate seat, the way Senate President Varona did, so irresponsibly (with Judge Justiniani)?"[61] The gravity of Grau's situation was beyond dispute, highlighted by a ruling stuffed with foreboding references. Point by point, Judge Mosquera demolished Grau's pleas, legal and otherwise, that he had stood aloof from the sordidness of his administration. He noted that Grau had re-appointed Alemán as education minister and subsequently as minister without portfolio despite the "public scandal" provoked by his "well known" thefts.[62] Judge Mosquera also observed that Grau continued to support his favorite minister in the face of day-by-day press accounts, both in Cuba and abroad, of his "real estate acquisitions worth millions of *pesos*."[63] In addition, he affirmed that Alemán had utilized a portion of his ill gotten gains to form BAGA along with the ex president's "close relative,"

[60] "En Cuba, Tribunales: 'Es un Digno Sucesor de Justiniani…'" *Bohemia,* May 27, 1951: 70.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

Francisco Grau Alsina.[64] Judge Mosquera was all but saying Grau should reserve a cell in Havana's *Castillo del Príncipe.* Given his expansive view of culpability, many high level *Auténticos,* including all three Prío brothers, could easily find themselves behind bars some day as well. The administration thus did not tarry in seeking to remove Judge Mosquera from the case. By early June, he became the third consecutive judge to be recused on flimsy pretenses.

THE LATEST POLL

On May 17, Raúl Gutiérrez appeared as a guest on Guido García Inclán's radio show. Cuba's public survey guru had recently conducted a fresh round of interviews and the results would appear in *Bohemia* shortly. With elections now barely a year away and given the accuracy of previous forecasts, his conclusions were anxiously awaited. Gutiérrez related that his poll was "absolutely national," with rural and urban Cubans in every province consulted.[65] Lastly, he cautioned that his work was not a "prophesy" but rather "a register of current opinion."[66] When *Bohemia* hit the newsstands, readers encountered an admixture of familiar and novel queries but the data once again proved encouraging for Chibás.

Questioned about Carlos Prío's administration, 22.80 percent of Cubans replied that it was "good." This represented a nearly five point improvement on the president's rating from December of 1950 but was still quite low. At the same time, 35.00 percent of Cubans answered "bad," which was half a percentage point worse

[64] Ibid.
[65] "En Cuba, Survey: La Voz del Pueblo," *Bohemia,* May 27, 1951: 68.
[66] Ibid.

than the previous poll. An additional 25.22 percent said it was "average." Another troubling sign was that a mere 40.44 percent of *Auténticos* were pleased with Prío. His popularity among the party's coalition partners was much lower, as only 22.92 percent of Democrats and 18.23 percent of Liberals viewed him positively.[67] Among the 60.22 percent of Cubans who considered Prío "bad" or "average" their four biggest complaints were the poor economic situation, a lack of construction projects, corruption and abuses against workers. In many ways, these problems were interrelated. For example, construction projects served as a prime source of jobs but resentment simmered because they were not distributed evenly throughout Cuba.[68] Moreover, despite Prío's promises to improve the lot of rustic dwellers, their misery sometimes played to the party's advantage. After all, desperate peasants were more likely to sell their votes when elections rolled around. Another sore point was the black market's resurgence, which raised the cost of living. The island's myriad sugar workers were also angered by the one percent tax levied on their salaries to fund the Cuban Workers Confederation, especially as that money was funding the government controlled union's often violent acts against rival outfits. Naturally, some of that cash was bound to disappear into venal pockets as well.

Not only were Cubans broadly dissatisfied with Prío, they showed scant enthusiasm for his probable successors. Carlos Hevia and Tony Varona, who were

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[67] Raúl Gutiérrez, "El Pueblo de Cuba Opina Sobre el Gobierno Actual y los Posibles Presidentes," *Bohemia,* May 20, 1951: supplement, 8.

[68] In areas where public works were carried out, President Prío was popular but regions lacking them rued their absence. For this reason, construction projects were listed in the poll as Prío's greatest achievement and his second largest failure. See Ibid., 9-10.

the president's favorites, polled 2.59 percent and 2.20 percent respectively. Miguelito Suárez Fernández tried to portray himself as a more pragmatic choice but was unloved outside his native Las Villas. Paradoxically, the most desirable *Auténtico* was not even seeking the nomination. This was Pepe San Martín, the acclaimed former public works minister, picked by 7.73 percent of Cuban voters. As in December of 1950, the most popular candidates were Chibás and Batista. The *Ortodoxo* leader remained ahead by a wide margin at 29.70 percent, but this was five points lower than his previous rating. Chibás, who had benefited from an outpouring of sympathy after his surgery, may well have slipped now that he was once again in rude good health. At the same time, Batista had climbed four points to 19.03 percent but Chibás led in all six provinces and was preferred by members of every social class.[69] He was also more admired by *Auténticos* than Pepe San Martín or Miguelito Suárez Fernández. His lone weakness appeared to be among Cubans over 50 years old. Even in this category, he trailed Batista by less than three points. This disparity was remedied by his dominant showing among the nation's youth as Cubans aged 20 to 30 opted for Chibás over Batista by more than 19 points.[70]

Shortly after appearing, the poll was relentlessly parsed by commentators and common citizens alike. "What can be guessed from this survey?" inquired Ramón Vasconcelos, "What we already know: that the government has lost the street definitively."[71] Rafael Estenger ventured that the *Auténticos* would need a

[69] Ibid., sup. 10.
[70] Ibid., sup. 11.
[71] "En Cuba, Survey: La Voz del Pueblo," 67.

"miracle" to win in 1952.[72] The columnist Manuel Alfonso of *El Crisol* observed that this was the third consecutive survey showing Chibás ahead, indicating the *Ortodoxo* chief's magnetism was "deeply rooted" among the Cuban electorate.[73] As expected, those with close ties to the presidential palace such as Antonio Prío, Félix Lancís and Aureliano Sánchez Arango interpreted the results far differently. They argued that respondents who classified the administration as "average" were actually supporters. By this reckoning, 48 percent of Cubans were behind them. This curious logic was also adopted by Gustavo Herrero of *El País,* the pro Liberal broadsheet which now toed the government line. Raúl Gutiérrez himself arrived at a very different conclusion, telling viewers of *Unión Radio-Televisión* that, "If elections were held tomorrow, Chibás would be president with majorities in all six provinces."[74]

Unlike his younger brother or other close associates, Carlos Prío did not publicly mention the survey or its implications. Instead, he took to the radio on May 22 and reminded Cubans of his achievements in a wide ranging speech. Prío was especially proud of his work with congress, which enacted laws creating the National Bank and Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank. He bragged that the newly minted Tribunal of Accounts and State Bookkeeping Law would transform embezzlement from an unfortunate habit to a common crime. Prío also crowed about tax increases recently approved by the legislature that would guarantee solvent retirement funds and raise judicial salaries. In a bid to mollify

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 68.

rural Cubans, Prío alluded to a special four percent levy on utility companies that would help purchase land for poor peasants. Further, he promised five million *pesos* for agricultural reform and one million *pesos* for a children's hospital. Of course, Chibás was unwilling to cede the momentum and during his Sunday show he denigrated or denied each of these accomplishments with characteristic flair. He said Prío deserved no applause for the National Bank, Tribunal of Accounts or State Bookkeeping Law as these were merely "demands of the constitution."[75] Chibás added that the latter two were actually *Ortodoxo* initiatives since Manuel Dorta Duque had introduced the bill to establish the Tribunal of Accounts while Pelayo Cuervo designed the State Bookkeeping Law. These measures would not have been approved without the government's consent, but even this was turned against Prío for Chibás claimed they would take effect too late to ensure honesty in the current administration. Thus, Prío seemed to be telling future presidents, "Do what I say, not what I do."[76] Regarding the other *Auténtico* policies, Chibás found them wanting or insufficient and concluded each criticism with pledges to do things better. For instance, he noted that *Ortodoxo* lawmakers had attempted to amend the tax bill so retirees and veterans of Cuba's independence struggle would receive back pay on their pensions. Although this was rejected by the pro-government majority, Chibás said, "We will do this when we are in power."[77] In the same fashion, he observed

[75] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Respuesta al Presidente de la Republica," *Bohemia,* June 3, 1951: 64. As was often the case, Chibás fashioned the transcript of his May 27 broadcast into a *Bohemia* article that ran the following week.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid. According to the advocacy group Veterans of Independence, the government had paid only 43 percent of back pensions to soldiers from the liberation struggle. Many Cubans assumed that a portion of the public loans would be used to rectify the situation but this was not the case. Personal appeals were made to politicians of all stripes, including Chibás, who was deeply moved and Carlos

that *Ortodoxos* tried to raise judicial salaries by half but the administration held the line at 20 percent. Once again, he repeated, "We will do this when we are in power."[78] As for the four percent duty on public utilities, Chibás claimed the government would use the proceeds to subsidize its electoral campaign rather than acquiring lots for *campesinos.* "We will annul such tricks," confirmed Chibás, "when we are in power."[79] He also calculated that the five million *pesos* earmarked for agricultural reform amounted to just one percent of total government revenue – a proportion he deemed "ridiculous" and "humiliating."[80] By comparison, he pointed out that waiters never received less than 10 percent in tips. Finally, Chibás boasted that Prío could lay the first stone for a Havana clinic but the *Ortodoxos* would supervise its completion and also that of five other hospitals – one in each province. In short, anything the *Auténticos* could do, his party would do better.

Apart from scolding the administration, Chibás sought to expand his lead in the polls by associating with well-liked or emblematic figures. Thus, on his June 3 broadcast, he presented the Afro Cuban boxing champion Kid Gavilán along with the Salvadorian general Gregorio Bustamante Maceo. Gavilán was the island's newest sporting hero, having captured the world welterweight title a few weeks earlier in New York's Madison Square Garden. Pugilism was second only to baseball as a national passion and hundreds of Cubans had attended the bout. In fact, shortly after Gavilán's victory was announced, a delirious multitude of his compatriots

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Prío, who responded with soothing words but nothing substantive. With elections on the horizon, he almost certainly preferred to use the money on his party's presidential campaign.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 65.

rushed the ring to congratulate him – overcoming the determined resistance of Big Apple cops in the process. As an idol of the masses himself, Chibás recognized a popularity magnet when he saw one. Not only did Chibás feature Gavilán on his radio show, but he, José Pardo Llada and the *Ortodoxo* representative Gerardo Vázquez made a public show of having lunch with him as well. Eddy's other radio guest, Bustamante Maceo, represented a different sort of compelling story. A citizen of El Salvador, he nonetheless claimed to be a son of Antonio Maceo; the general and independence martyr reverently known as the Bronze Titan. Most likely, Chibás had learned about him in 1950 when *Bohemia* published an article exploring his background. Bustamante Maceo's current visit had set off a storm of debate, though his putative aunt accepted him as a family member. As Chibás took over the microphone, puffed up with endorsements from an adored athlete and son of a founding father, his moment was ruined somewhat by an odd turn of events. While he addressed the audience, a portion of the wall behind him slowly became detached and produced an unnerving sound before crashing to the floor. Chibás, who had no clue what was going on, briefly ignited a panic throughout Cuba by yelling, "Nobody move, whatever happens!"[81] The confusion was soon cleared up and if his adversaries viewed this as a metaphor for the man they believed was prone to overexcitement; Chibás knew his instincts had carried him to the brink of Cuba's highest office.

[81] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 756.

THE FINAL LOUD KNOCK

In late May, the *Prensa Libre* correspondent Mario Lliraldi conducted an interview with José Pardo Llada. During their conversation, he inquired why Chibás never attacked Aureliano Sánchez Arango. As a close advisor of Carlos Prío and potential presidential rival, Sánchez Arango certainly seemed a ripe target for the *Ortodoxo* leader. "Is there mutual respect?" asked the inquisitive reporter. "Fear, perhaps?"

"No, it's not fear," responded Pardo Llada, "because Chibás is not afraid of anyone."

"Well then?"

"Chibás will attack Aureliano when it's convenient for him not when it's convenient for Aureliano."[82]

For the time being, there was no need to pick a fight. Sánchez Arango had a meager popularity rating of 2.01 percent and Chibás felt he would not be chosen as the *Auténtico* standard bearer. Further, the education minister was currently embroiled in a dispute with Batista's ex police chief, Manuel Benítez. At a *Causa* 82 hearing, Benítez had accused him of spending 50,000 *pesos* in public funds to bribe Judge Justiniani against Grau. Benítez could not prove these charges and a *Bohemia* correspondent called them "an example of irresponsibility."[83] Even so, there was plenty of anger against Sánchez Arango in some quarters – particularly among the thousands of teachers and education ministry employees he had fired. Many of those who had been displaced possessed links to José Manuel Alemán and were

[82] Fernando Villaverde, "Como me lo contaron," *Carteles,* May 27, 1951: 73.
[83] "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: La Recusación de Justiniani," *Bohemia,* June 3, 1951: supplement, 4.

unqualified for their jobs. However, there were also grumbles about schools being shut down for political reasons. For example, in April of 1950 Sánchez Arango decided to close the highly regarded Holguín Normal School in Oriente province even though it covered its own expenses and cost the state nothing to operate. Similar schools in Guantánamo and Manzanillo met the same fate. In each instance, they were simply declared illegal. Regardless of whether their dismissals were justified, Cuba's vast pool of laid off teachers and school inspectors eagerly believed the worst about Sánchez Arango. When the allegations of Benítez were reported, a group of ousted teachers from Camagüey wrote Chibás and urged him to take up the issue on his radio show. Above all, they were anxious to see the education ministry "dictator" ridiculed.[84] Chibás declined to involve himself in the matter, probably because he considered Benítez untrustworthy. At any rate, a full blown polemic developed between Sánchez Arango and Batista's old chum.[85]

On June 1, Sánchez Arango interrupted this quarrel to launch a contumely against Chibás. The *Ortodoxo* leader was unruffled but a spat ensued among his followers. This was because Jorge Mañach, perhaps the most non-partisan of all *Ortodoxos*, saw fit to praise Sánchez Arango in his *Diario de la Marina* column two days later. Mañach had not been impressed by Sánchez Arango's derogatory words but rather his sponsorship, through the education ministry, of diverse cultural

[84] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, Expediente 1144: 15, ANC.
[85] This flare-up merely reprised a longstanding hatred between the two men. During the years 1934-1939, Sánchez Arango belonged to the *Auténtico* party's armed wing – which was devoted to toppling the Batista backed government by force. Meanwhile, Benítez was a military officer who persecuted the outlawed *Auténticos* along with other violent, anti-Batista revolutionaries. Along with other Batista intimates, he enriched himself during this period as well. Later on, he became associated with Cuba's gambling industry. During their back and forth, Sánchez Arango alluded to this, calling his adversary a "racketeer" who had gained great wealth "from the sweat of our people." See "En Cuba, Poder Judicial: La Recusación de Justiniani," *Bohemia,* June 3, 1951: supplement, 4.

events all over Cuba. Recently, the oratorio *Joan of Arc at the Stake* had been presented in Havana's oldest public square.[86] This piece of high brow entertainment had so tickled the Harvard educated University of Havana professor that he rhapsodized unreservedly in favor of its patron. He claimed Sánchez Arango had achieved nothing less than the "fertilization of the public spirit" and concluded that "we will never be able to thank him enough."[87] Naturally, these breathless compliments did not sit well with many *Ortodoxos*. Raimundo Lazo encapsulated their views in an *Alerta* article entitled, "Dr. Mañach Exaggerates." Lazo, who taught literature at the University of Havana, observed that *Joan of Arc at the Stake* had beguiled its primarily middle class audience but few poorer citizens showed their faces. This was not a question of taste but learning. "How can we speak seriously of spreading culture to the masses," thundered Lazo, "when the government has spent three years ignoring the illiteracy and physical and moral misery of hundreds of thousands of children and adults?"[88] At any rate, this disagreement soon petered out because Mañach was poised to visit Paris in his capacity as a UNESCO representative.

Having caused no damage to Chibás and inciting only mild ripples among his followers, the government tapped Eduardo Suárez Rivas for its next round of broadsides. On June 17, the Liberal chief appeared on *Unión Radio* and accused Chibás of overcharging for the coffee produced at his family owned plantation in

[86] Under Sánchez Arango's stewardship, such exalted entertainment was commonplace. A few weeks earlier, for example, the education ministry had sponsored a production of *Les Sylphides* by the Ballet Alicia Alonso in the very same square.
[87] "En Cuba, Polémica: Dos Profesores en Discordia," *Bohemia,* June 10, 1951: sup. 7.
[88] Ibid.

Oriente province. Cubans had been up in arms lately over the rising cost of their favorite drink and Suárez Rivas attempted to direct their anger at Chibás. Eddy had seen this attack from far away as various newspaper advertisements during the week had aimed to drum up publicity for Suárez Rivas' remarks. On his own show, Chibás not only defended himself but retaliated in spectacular fashion. To begin with, he reiterated that all revenues from his share in the plantation paid for the construction and maintenance of an area school. Next, Chibás trotted out Emilio Núñez Blanco for the evening's sensational news. The young ex Liberal who was now a zealous *Ortodoxo* shared a "regretful episode" with his former colleagues and the Cuban people.[89] Specifically, he revealed that shortly before the 1948 elections Guillermo Alonso Pujol had suggested an agreement between the Republicans and Liberal-Democratic coalition. Had the fine points been ironed out, this effectively would have assured Ricardo Núñez of the presidency. Among those entrusted with negotiating the deal was Eduardo Suárez Rivas but instead of doing everything possible to ensure its realization, he had notified José Manuel Alemán and urged him take action. To corroborate this charge, Núñez Blanco read an incriminating letter from Suárez Rivas over the air which had been found among Alemán's papers after his death.[90] In a voice seething with indignation Núñez Blanco summed up the situation thusly:

> …A traitor to Ricardo Núñez Portuondo; a traitor to the opposition; Eduardo Suárez Rivas now wants to win points with the government

[89] "En Cuba, Polémica: La Carta Delatora," *Bohemia,* June 24, 1951: 66.
[90] The text of the letter was as follows: "Dear José Manuel: I have tried to communicate with you by telephone but have been unable to reach you. Just now, Ricardo Núñez Portuondo has told me that I have been designated as a representative in the negotiations with the Republican party and I am now leaving immediately for Miami. You must act quickly to avoid this, otherwise Ricardo will be president and this is convenient for neither of us. Yours, Eduardo." See: Ibid.

> by attacking Eduardo Chibás but fortunately the people know him well and say, Suárez Rivas, enough already with your claims that there is no funny business going on with the price of coffee because you are at the center of it; you are the hero of *café con leche*, capable of making money from the drink of the poor, of the unhappy, of the majority of the Cuban people.[91]

This explosive revelation completely hijacked a senate session, ostensibly devoted to budget issues, less than 24 hours later.[92] Suárez Rivas was so visibly incensed that Chibás had been advised to summon some *Ortodoxo* legislators for his own protection. The Liberal chief, however, resorted to rhetoric rather than fisticuffs and in a long winded speech he blamed Chibás for poisoning the political climate. Chibás retorted that the polemic began when Suárez Rivas slanderously accused him of being a coffee speculator. Most importantly, five hours of recrimination and debate could not erase the scandalous letter to José Manuel Alemán from the public mind. Not only was Suárez Rivas' credibility damaged but another exodus from his party now seemed a distinct possibility. As Chibás exited the *Capitolio*, he was congratulated by the always pliable Santiago Rey – who told him he had just behaved like a "true presidential aspirant."[93] The Republican senator was not merely being polite. His party was currently moribund after losing its place at the government table and being abandoned by Guillermo Alonso Pujol, who had formed a new outfit with Nicolás Castellanos. He was thus on the lookout for a new meal

[91] Ibid.
[92] The congressional correspondent for *Carteles* lamented that Suárez Rivas and Chibás, with the connivance of Senate President Tony Varona, had wasted the final meeting before September on political theater rather than matters of substance. See El Duende del Capitolio, "Retablo Parlamentario," *Carteles,* July 1, 1951: 28
[93] "En Cuba, Polémica: La Carta Delatora," *Bohemia,* June 24, 1951: 72.

ticket. As Chibás gained in momentum, such overtures were certain to become increasingly commonplace.

Meanwhile, the failure of Suárez Rivas meant a new government champion was required. The role was energetically filled by Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who renewed his quarrel with Chibás in an epithet laden broadcast on June 24. Apart from repeating the spurious charge that Chibás was a coffee speculator, he used all the old pejoratives and a few new ones too. By now, the *Ortodoxo* leader was accustomed to terms like "demagogue," "slanderer" and "false prophet" being bandied about. On the other hand, Chibás, who rented his Havana apartment and conspicuously lacked a weekend retreat in the countryside, had rarely been painted as a "feudal lord."[94] At any rate, this was politics as usual although an extraordinary degree of mutual loathing lurked just beneath the surface. During his radio show, Chibás shot back that Sánchez Arango had embezzled education ministry funds and invested them in Guatemalan real estate. Two days later, the pugnacious Sánchez Arango upped the ante by submitting libel charges against Chibás in the Urgency Court. Sánchez Arango supplemented this classic gambit from the *Auténtico* playbook with a novel twist. Knowing quite well that Chibás could no longer be dispatched in a government friendly Urgency Court, Sánchez Arango hoped to sway public opinion by proposing a "tribunal of honor," which would investigate his supposed Guatemalan properties. Sánchez Arango boasted the tribunal could look anywhere between "the North Pole and Patagonia" for his riches.[95] Nonetheless,

[94] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 759.
[95] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 93. Sánchez Arango's suggested candidates for the tribunal of honor were Fernando Ortiz, Miguel Angel Quevedo and Alejandro Herrera Arango, who

Chibás insisted his opponent was corrupt just as Sánchez Arango stubbornly stated at every opportunity that the *Ortodoxo* leader was an exploiter of peasants and a coffee speculator. Eddy's next sally was a *Bohemia* article, published on July 1, in which he noted that the education ministry had budgeted two credits of 175,000 *pesos* each for "very mysterious services."[96] He also claimed the 644,000 *pesos* earmarked for free school breakfasts was being raided because it reached "very few students."[97] Lastly, Chibás asserted that he possessed a "private document," signed by 25 *Auténtico* congressmen, confirming Sánchez Arango's dishonesty.[98] Sánchez Arango replied to these sketchy charges with some of his own, estimating rather lamely that the *Ortodoxo* leader's "black market operation" in coffee had netted 2027 *pesos* and 50 *centavos.*[99] While not a negligible sum, this was hardly the stuff of scandal. Further, he could not prove Chibás had pocketed the cash or played any role in managing the plantation. The education minister also purchased advertisements in various Havana dailies and through them challenged Chibás to a debate at *Parque Central.*

The *Ortodoxo* leader refused this proposition but his explanation left him open to derision. On one hand, he feared Cubans would lynch Sánchez Arango once they found out about the government's shameless behavior. At the same time, he

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headed the National Industrial Association. Ortiz declined the invitation, citing his absence from politics since 1926 and the advice of his doctors to refrain from "polemical activities." He added that the increasing incidence of polemics was proof of the "disorganization and ineffectiveness of the republic's basic institutions." For his part, Quevedo passed due to an excess of work, ownership of an "impartial" magazine and his "longtime friendship" with both men. See: Ibid., 95.

[96] Eduardo R. Chibás, "Los Presupuestos Nacionales, La Cuota Azucarera de Cuba, Los Pesqueros Cubanos," *Bohemia,* July 1, 1951: 62.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 97.

asserted that citizens attending the event were likely to be injured or killed by government thugs. He also chafed at the debate's rigid format, which would examine only two questions – namely, whether Sánchez Arango owned Guatemalan real estate and if he had bought it with education ministry funds. As an alternative, Chibás suggested the senate or education ministry as preferable venues and demanded that a wider range of topics be allowed. Miguel de Marcos, for one, was thoroughly unimpressed. In a *Prensa Libre* column, he wrote that, "After launching a false accusation, Chibás has avoided trying to prove it."[100] He also dismissed the *Ortodoxo* leader's "absurd pretexts" and mocked the notion of him trying to save Sánchez Arango from an angry mob using his "short arms."[101] De Marcos was obviously not well disposed toward Chibás but he hardly qualified as a government hack. Another respected journalist, Francisco Ichaso, criticized Chibás as well. Not everyone in the press lined up against him, however. Carlos Lechuga of *El Mundo* sympathetically counseled him to adopt a more temperate and conciliatory persona. In addition, he warned Chibás that treating politics as a "captivating spectacle" damaged his reputation among "people who think."[102] Chibás gratefully thanked his "friend" Lechuga in a personal letter but defended his brand of politics too.[103] For one thing, he pointed out that opinion polls had consistently validated his style and methods. Moreover, despite living one of the "most turbulent epochs" of his life and

[100] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 98.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 9, Expediente 285: 182, ANC.
[103] Ibid., 181.

fighting "practically alone" against "bad faith, slander and conspiracy," he expressed optimism regarding his prospects.[104] Thus, he explained:

> What is certain – and it bears repeating – is that the presidential palace is waging a campaign to scare the fearful and innocent, trying to make them believe in the myth of a Chibás incapable of exercising power, whose promotion to high office would mark the start of grave public calamities and irreparable institutional disequilibrium. Don't let them fool you, Lechuga. Disgracefully for these figures, the Cuban people have reached the age of their political maturity and will not be frightened by ghosts. When one looks at the quality of those politicians, it is easy not to believe in them. And because the people have never seen Chibás engage in lies, profit from public office, support or exploit the black market, embezzle from the treasury, deal in contraband or any of the thousand hobbies of our adversaries, they will not mind accusations that I am strident, that I come on too strong or that I am overly combative.[105]

The *Ortodoxo* leader's confidence was bolstered not only by auspicious survey results but also because he had consistently extricated himself from similar fixes many times before. In many respects, the situation was shaping up as a rerun of Eddy's skyscraper accusation. He had escaped that bind by deflecting attention from his unproven charges toward the veritable dishonesty of *Auténtico* leaders. His intent to widen the debate with Sánchez Arango beyond its initial parameters indicated that he would utilize this strategy once again.

Chibás spent July 8 in *Parque Central* but rather than confronting his foe he led a rally against the reduction of Cuba's sugar quota and the closing of the Gulf of Mexico to the island's fishermen. Both developments were unwelcome and promised economic hardship, especially as sugar typically accounted for 80-89

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 184-185.

percent of Cuba's exports by value.[106] The diminished quota also stung for political reasons. This was because the United States had elected to buy more sugar from the Dominican Republic and Peru, completely disregarding the fact that they were ruled by dictators. Besides being democratic, Cubans contributed to their northern neighbor's economy. During the years 1948-1950, an average Cuban bought $83 in imports from the United States. By contrast, Dominicans and Peruvians purchased only $20 and $7 respectively in the same period.[107] In short, Cubans had every reason to feel angered and betrayed. However, Sánchez Arango was not anxious to see Chibás rile up the populace and hastily organized something he hoped would divert its attention. Hence, the education ministry sponsored National Song Day hoping musical entertainment would trump Chibás style political theater. This effort was largely for naught as 10,000 people showed up in *Parque Central* and several thousand others appeared on its outskirts. To maximize turnout and infuse the event with a non-partisan flavor, many invited speakers were not *Ortodoxos.* Such generosity of spirit had limits, though. For one thing, Chibás rigidly excluded Communists from the proceedings. Further, while the purpose was to protest decisions taken by foreign governments, plenty of scorn was heaped on Cuba's rulers.[108]

Guillermo Belt, who had served as ambassador to the United States under Grau, was among those who blamed the president. He proclaimed the oft heard motto that, "Without sugar there is no country" and told the audience that Carlos

[106] "En Cuba, Azucar: Los Derechos de Cuba," *Bohemia,* July 15, 1951: 79.
[107] Ibid.
[108] The Mexican government was responsible for excluding Cuban fisherman from the Gulf.

Prío bore "a responsibility so grave" for the diminished sugar quota that he was "resorting to every type of subterfuge, excuse and pretext to absolve himself."[109] Belt noted that Dominican and Peruvian efforts to raise their quotas had begun at the end of 1949 but the administration had responded half-heartedly. "They were notified in advance," he said, "but did not act in defense of our sugar industry."[110] Pelayo Cuervo used the occasion to denounce government manipulation of sugar prices in league with known speculators. Already this year, he declared, a pair of decrees had artificially lowered sugar prices. This benefited insiders and higher-ups who resold their purchases on the world market for a hefty profit. Chibás, who spoke last, suggested that his adversaries should reconsider their priorities. "While the government was busy wasting time with petty and counterproductive attacks against the *Ortodoxos*," he said, "it should have employed its energies in attempting to prevent the present assault on the stability of sugar exportation."[111] For good measure, he added that, "Carlos Prío and his clique are obsessed with attacking us rather than defending Cuba!"[112] No doubt, Chibás was refining this argument for his polemic with Sánchez Arango. As Chibás implied in his letter to Carlos Lechuga, Cubans had always forgiven his foibles but he knew they would be less indulgent with an administration that chipped away the island's economic pillar. As a cabinet minister and close presidential advisor Sánchez Arango was guilty by association. In the future, Chibás could turn this failure against Carlos Hevia with even greater

[109] "En Cuba, Azucar: Los Derechos de Cuba," *Bohemia,* July 15, 1951: 80.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

force. After all, the presumed *Auténtico* nominee had been foreign minister for most of Prío's term.

While Chibás tinkered with this strategy and cast about for other potential advantages, he nearly won his grudge match with Sánchez Arango by default. A few days after the spectacle in *Parque Central*, the education minister crashed his plane. He was carrying dental supplies to some towns in Pinar del Río province but his landing was complicated by an aircraft inexplicably parked in the middle of the runway. To avoid a collision, Sánchez Arango steered clear of the landing strip and touched down in a patch of mud – whereupon his AT6 military plane promptly spun around and flipped over. Sánchez Arango, who very easily could have lost his life in the accident, emerged with only light wounds. Without delay, he immersed himself once more in the polemic. On July 15, he accepted Chibás' offer to debate in the education ministry and outlined nine conditions by which it should be conducted. In short, the education minister recommended that each man argue his case for 30 minutes and a tribunal, staffed by the hosts of *Ante la Prensa*, would decide the winner. Chibás rejected this idea later that night on the radio, saying he was only accountable before the Cuban people.[113] The *Ortodoxo* leader also insisted on "absolute freedom of speech, without restrictions or gags" and claimed he needed "at least an hour" to expound on his points but bragged he could easily spend ten

[113] Chibás had at least two good reasons to avoid being judged by the *Ante la Prensa* hosts. First, one of them was Miguel de Marcos, who had already called him a "defamer." Second, he almost certainly feared the government would offer all manner of inducements to the others. After all, this was how the administration behaved when dealing with the judicial branch. Given the stakes here, he had no reason to doubt the cards would be stacked against him – even though another *Ante la Prensa* panelist, Rafael Estenger, often defended him.

hours detailing the government's misdeeds.[114] In the days that followed, both men haggled over particulars. All the while, Chibás was giddy at the prospect of winning his greatest victory to date. To a group of intimates, he said:

> This publicity is worth millions of *pesos*! These people are offering me the presidency on a silver platter. They cannot claim before the country to be honest, that they have never embezzled money nor engaged in business deals prejudicial to the public. Every move they make is a new scandal and offers further proof of their clumsiness. For any citizen, the situation is clear: they have the money and we have the honor.[115]

The problem was that Sánchez Arango refused to provide Chibás with a forum for ridiculing government shortcomings. During their negotiations, they agreed to hold the debate on July 21 at 9:30 p.m. In addition, they concurred on a moderator, naming Francisco Ichaso. However, Sánchez Arango wanted only to discuss Guatemalan real estate and Chibás demanded free reign. Ichaso sought to resolve the impasse by composing a binding document for both men to sign. However, he too felt the dispute should focus solely on Eddy's accusations and included this among the terms. Sánchez Arango gladly affixed his name but the *Ortodoxo* leader balked. Ichaso responded by resigning, leaving them without a moderator or an agreement 24 hours before their highly anticipated meeting. As the deadline drew closer, Chibás declared he would accept any conditions except those restricting his choice of topic. In other words, he barely budged. The same held true for Sánchez Arango, who entrusted his response to the new moderator, Octavio de la Suarée – director of Cuba's journalism school. He met Chibás, José Pardo Llada and Luis

[114] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 767-768.
[115] Ibid., 768.

Orlando Rodríguez at noon on July 21. All three *Ortodoxos* scoffed at the education minister's proposal to allow freedom of speech providing Chibás did not "stray from the only topic" or mention "the president, his family, or the government as an entity."[116] Nonetheless, Chibás remained eager to take advantage of what he felt was a singular opportunity. He thus signed the revised contract but modified the section circumscribing his choice of themes, which he called "a joke."[117] Predictably, Sánchez Arango nixed this amendment later that evening. After a last ditch round of negotiations proved fruitless, an exasperated de la Suarée quit as well. At 9:30 p.m., Chibás appeared at the education ministry surrounded by an *Ortodoxo* coterie, trailed by photographers and expecting his most sensational victory yet. Upon reaching the entrance, though, he was handed the identical set of rules from earlier that afternoon and ordered to sign.[118] When Chibás crossed out those he considered untenable, he was barred from entering. Sánchez Arango had no intention of engaging in a debate he could not control and was content to address the nation on his own terms.

Chibás was livid at being denied his chance to discredit the government once and for all, with all of Cuba watching or listening. Rather than returning home, he visited the offices of various Havana dailies to register his protest and issue a statement. He told *Alerta*, "Now Sánchez Arango and the government are on the run because they know I have documented, overwhelming, truthful and sensational

[116] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 770. Earlier in the week, the *Diario de la Marina* editor-in-chief Gastón Baquero published an open letter to Sánchez Arango warning, "This polemic is total craziness. You are an honest man and Chibás knows it. During the debate, his speech on Guatemala will be notable for its lack of proof. But Eduardo Chibás not you or the government will, once again, have Cuba's attention and curiosity at his disposal." See Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 112.
[117] Ibid.
[118] "La Polémica Chibás-Sánchez Arango," *Carteles,* July 29, 1951: 57.

proof in my possession, the most impressive evidence that has ever been presented in Cuba against a government functionary."[119] He appealed to CMQ for an hour of air time, boasting that, "I am ready to open my briefcase and prove to the nation that funds for children's breakfasts and school supplies were stolen, that there is a shady land deal in Guatemala and other things even worse, to demonstrate that this administration of Carlos Prío is the most corrupt the republic has ever had."[120] During that week, Eddy's briefcase became the subject of rabid speculation. Sánchez Arango dared him to, "Open your briefcase and show your proof to the nation!"[121] Newspapers ran photos of a smiling Chibás brandishing the "famous" leather attaché case. Even Cuba's songwriters joined in, with one popular verse asking, "Where is the proof, where is it?" and the chorus answering, "When the briefcase is opened, you will see."[122] Chibás also received telegrams and letters from all quarters criticizing Sánchez Arango's performance as education minister. A telegram from the village of Sitiecito in Las Villas province confirmed that none of its 1000 children received free breakfasts and parents were obliged to buy school supplies for their kids, who were taught in crumbling buildings. "We challenge the minister to investigate this," concluded the authors.[123] A couple from the town of Bejucal in Havana province wrote that their son received nothing more than a pencil during the entire school year and added, "(Sánchez Arango) cannot fool the people

[119] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 115.
[120] Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 772.
[121] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 123.
[122] Ibid., 773. In Spanish, the song goes: "¿Dónde están las pruebas, dónde están?" / Cuando abren la maleta ya verán."
[123] Fondo Eduardo R. Chibás. Legajo 39, Expediente 1147: 60, ANC.

by saying he's keeping an eye on the schools."[124] From the *Central Carolina*, a sugar mill in Matanzas province, a man wrote that students at the local school not only lacked free breakfasts and school supplies but also had no desks.[125] Another man, from the town of Yarey de Vázquez in Oriente province, described the familiar dearth of desks, school supplies and free breakfasts but also included another frustrating detail – namely that the local teacher was so overwhelmed by these difficulties that he sometimes disappeared for a month at a time.[126] These and other similar missives reinforced Eddy's belief that money was being misappropriated in the education ministry.

On the other hand, Chibás was running a tremendous risk by hyping the contents of his attaché case. The sub director of *El Mundo*, Raoul Alfonso Gonsé, claimed, "if the celebrated briefcase is not opened or lost or its contents defraud public opinion we can already begin publishing the *Ortodoxo* party's obituary."[127] Gonsé predicted taunts of "Chibás, open your briefcase," would replace "Shame against Money" on the campaign trail if the accusations proved baseless. Chibás also faced skepticism and derision from those within his party. Around this time, the *Ortodoxo* executive committee convened in Eddy's apartment. Most of those in attendance believed their chief had fallen for a trap and deceived them. Pelayo Cuervo was particularly critical. After much heated discussion, the general view was that Chibás should expect no help unless he could prove his accusations.[128]

[124] Ibid., 97.
[125] Ibid., 146.
[126] Ibid., 115.
[127] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* 124.
[128] Prada, *La Secretaria de la República,* 135.

Hence, he once again faced the specter of a divided party. Afterwards, Emilio Núñez Blanco offered to visit Guatemala and look for evidence. Having nothing to lose, Chibás authorized the mission but nothing useful turned up.[129] If Chibás was dismayed by the executive committee's unwillingness to stand behind him, he remained publicly defiant and stoked the embers of his conflict with Sánchez Arango while awaiting his chance in the limelight.[130]

As expected, the owners of CMQ agreed to extend Eddy's upcoming radio show by half an hour for no extra cost. Chibás asked that his address be televised as well because Sánchez Arango had enjoyed the same courtesy a week before, but they declined citing commercial obligations. In newspaper advertisements, Chibás promised to expose, "the enormous corruption of the present regime and Education Minister Aureliano Sánchez Arango's culpability."[131] Meanwhile, Sánchez Arango heckled Chibás all week. Calling him "Renato," a play on his middle name, René, the education minister goaded him to open his briefcase before Cuba's Supreme Tribunal. Chibás emptied its contents instead for a packed room inside CMQ's studios on July 29. However, the island's consummate showman disappointed this audience along with his multitude of listeners by serving up a farrago of recycled charges and fresh unverified allegations. Ultimately, Cubans did not tune in to hear that Sánchez Arango may have held a ghost job under Batista or had been reprimanded by the bar association for slander. The ten photographs Chibás

[129] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* anexo.
[130] Many years later, Conchita Fernández confessed, "I swear I will die convinced that if the party leaders and all the *Ortodoxos* would have closed ranks around him, with no breaches, and without being afraid to fight for him, he would not have feared the people were losing confidence in him and would not have committed suicide." See: Prada, *La Secretaria de la República,* 135-136.
[131] "En Cuba, Polémica: ¡La Tercera Semana!" *Bohemia,* August 5, 1951: 75.

exhibited of ramshackle schools, while gripping, were more suitable for television than a radio broadcast. His mention of a private document signed by 25 *Auténticos* accusing Sánchez Arango of fraud had been mentioned during recent broadcasts. As for the polemic's central accusation, he now said, again without proof, that Sánchez Arango owned a lumber yard in Guatemala rather than residential real estate. Chibás asserted that the venture's beneficiaries also included Carlos Prío, Guatemala's former president Juan Arévalo and the current ambassador of that country in Havana, Raúl Osegueda. After being primed all week for a scintillating finale, the mass of citizens waiting outside the station trudged home disgruntled. Stating the obvious, Enrique de la Osa observed that the performance, "was far from being what the people were anxiously waiting for."[132] He further detected "a different tone of voice" in Chibás.[133] This, no doubt, was because the *Ortodoxo* leader, who usually aroused his countrymen's passions with uncanny precision, lacked the means to do so on this occasion.

Well before Eddy's latest broadcast, Sánchez Arango was scheming to use their polemic as a springboard toward the *Auténtico* nomination. Half an hour after the *Ortodoxo* leader finished speaking, Sánchez Arango commenced with a meticulously planned homage to himself in a Havana theater called, with no lack of irony, *Principal de la Comedia.* The invitees were greeted by a colossal image of Sánchez Arango draped in Cuba's national colors of red, white and blue. Nor could they miss assorted posters publicizing Sánchez Arango's achievements in the education ministry, replete with documentation regarding free breakfasts and

[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

school materials distributed. Official approval was insinuated by a large portrait of Sánchez Arango next to Carlos Prío but, as everyone knew, the former had challenged Chibás precisely because he was not the government's preferred candidate.[134] At any rate, Sánchez Arango lavishly promoted himself and while there was no evidence this effort had been financed by Guatemalan timber, all signs pointed to Cuban taxpayers footing the bill. What they paid for was an extravaganza of calumny and bombast on a par with Chibás in his most reckless moments. One of the education minister's cronies accused Chibás of colluding with Argentina's President Juan Domingo Perón, a proposition both laughable and outrageous. When Sánchez Arango took the microphone, he engaged in a foul-mouthed tirade of such exaggerated proportions that it became fodder for Cuba's cartoonists. Afterwards, Sánchez Arango promised to have Chibás expelled from the senate, deprived of his parliamentary immunity and jailed "in the name of the superior interests of the Cuban people."[135] This torrent of self-righteousness was ill advised for the education minister given that his party harbored gangsters and murderers among its legislators. Nor did the holier than thou Sánchez Arango seem to mind counting a known embezzler like Antonio Prío among his guests and propitiators. Sensing an opportunity to regain the momentum, Chibás challenged Carlos Prío to convoke the senate so he could be judged. In the same breath, he added that, "(Prío) won't do it because each and every one of my accusations, including those referring to the

[134] Addressing this point, Enrique de la Osa wrote that Sánchez Arango "had nothing to lose…and much to gain" by confronting the *Ortodoxo* leader. By the same token, he chastised Chibás for the "error" of engaging in a polemic against an opponent who was his political inferior in every respect. See: Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 76.

enormous thievery of Cuban authorities and those relating to their secret investments in Guatemala are true, rigorously true."[136]

Just as Chibás had never backed down from the allegation that Carlos Prío owned skyscrapers in Manhattan, he steadfastly clung to the notion that Sánchez Arango was conducting dirty business in Guatemala. At first glance, there was no reason to believe this stubbornness would damage him. Guillermo Alonso Pujol, who was no friend of Chibás but very politically astute, believed any fallout from the polemic would be both minor and transitory. Chibás seemingly agreed and appeared before the Supreme Tribunal on August 2 to formally charge Sánchez Arango with numerous counts of malversation. At the same time, there were signs that he was suffering a personal crisis. Chibás had always derived a great deal of satisfaction and well being from his encounters with common people but some were no longer pleased to see him – at least on his jaunts around Havana. On one occasion, Eddy and José Pardo Llada were walking down San Rafael Street and instead of being mobbed by adoring citizens, which was usually the case, they were serenaded by chants of "*la maleta, la maleta*" (the briefcase, the briefcase).[137] For Chibás, this almost certainly recalled the harassment of Manuel Fernández Supervielle just over four years before.

As he prepared his next radio address, Chibás summoned Millo Ochoa and the *Ortodoxo* youth leader Luis Conte Agüero to Havana. Chibás hoped to sound out Ochoa, the party's quintessential political realist. He also wanted to exchange impressions with the 27 year old Conte Agüero, who had strafed Sánchez Arango in

[136] Ibid.
[137] Sánchez Echeverría, *La Polémica Infinita,* anexo.

broadcasts emanating from his native Santiago de Cuba. Chibás consulted the polling expert Raúl Gutiérrez as well and was assured his recent dip in popularity was within the statistical margin of error. Above all, he was determined to press forward against Sánchez Arango and turn the tide of public opinion. Chibás thus accepted an invitation from *Carteles* to continue the polemic in that magazine's pages. On the evening of August 4, he delivered a new article to its director, Alfredo Quilez. While sticking to his story that Sánchez Arango kept sordid investments in Guatemala and "other Central American republics," Chibás added another more devastating line of attack.[138] Specifically, he reproduced two education ministry documents indicating that money had been diverted from the budget for acquiring school supplies to fund "propaganda" activities in February, March and April of 1951.[139] He concluded that Sánchez Arango was depriving Cuban schoolchildren in order to pay for his presidential campaign. Even as the amount, which totaled 6509 *pesos*, was fairly modest, Chibás had hit a soft spot. Sánchez Arango was not a notorious peculator but his presidential bid required cash as did his enormous public relations effort against Chibás. In this vein, the *Auténtico* congressman Gilberto Leyva said, "If I were (Chibás), with the evidence of thievery and embezzlement in the education ministry, I would have published what Aureliano spends on banquets, parties and trips to Guatemala with money taken from the budget."[140] Basically, Sánchez Arango had succeeded by steering the debate toward

[138] Eduardo R. Chibás, "¡Yo Acuso!," *Carteles,* August 12, 1951: 73. In a further jibe, Chibás held that Sánchez Arango did not invest in the United States because past his ties with Communists rendered him unwelcome there.
[139] Ibid.
[140] "En Cuba, La Capital: 'A Chibás Le Duele Cuba,'" *Bohemia,* August 12, 1951: 71.

favorable terrain but he was vulnerable in other respects and could not circumscribe the polemic indefinitely. Once again, Chibás was betting that Cubans would forget his occasional imprudence in the face of government malfeasance.

The following day, on August 5, Chibás invited Luis Conte Agüero over to read a draft of his remarks for that evening. At one point, Chibás absentmindedly picked up the Colt .38 on his desk and inquired of his guest, "Listen, which one is the safety lock?"

"You don't know?" asked Conte Agüero incredulously. After a moment's pause, he proceeded to demonstrate how the gun functioned while remaining certain that Chibás was pulling his leg.

Looking out his bedroom window, with its Caribbean vista, Chibás then asked, "Why don't we try it out? If I fired from here do you think the bullet would reach the sea?"

"I don't think so," replied Conte Agüero. "Besides, the bullet might hit someone."

"Yes, that's true," said Chibás. As he holstered the pistol, a bullet dropped out and fell to the floor. Conte Agüero picked up the projectile and advised him to reinsert it in the clip.

"That's all right," said Chibás. "I already have all I need."[141]

At 7:45 p.m., Pelayo Cuervo showed up with his driver and Chibás, who customarily walked the five blocks to CMQ studios followed by a bulging throng, arrived this time via automobile. He ceded the first 15 minutes to José Pardo Llada,

[141] Ibid., 67. See also Conte Agüero, *Eduardo Chibás,* 782-783.

who had lately caused a stir by resigning from his popular daily gig on *Unión Radio*. The station had recently changed hands and the new owners had named José Luis Pelleyá, a close friend of Antonio Prío, as administrator. Pardo Llada accused the administration of masterminding the purchase as a means of censoring him. He claimed this was part of a larger scheme to "control all the organs of publicity" using the government's "millions of *pesos.*"[142] By the time Chibás took the microphone, only 10 minutes of airtime remained. Employing a favorite trope, he recalled the case of Galileo, who had been deemed a "liar" and "deceiver" for lacking "physical proof" that the earth revolved around the sun.[143] Chibás then reminded listeners that he had been called a "liar" and "slanderer" when he accused José Manuel Alemán of acquiring a real estate empire in Miami. "I did not have physical proof that he was robbing from the national treasury," said Chibás, "but I kept repeating, firm in my moral conviction: 'He's stealing! He's stealing!"[144] Concerning the present situation, he explained:

> Last Sunday, during this same broadcast…I offered irrefutable proof of the enormous corruption of Prío's administration, including photos of schools and hospitals in miserable condition and contrasting them with ostentatious *fincas* and mansions of government officials who, not long ago, lived in poverty. Nevertheless, in spite of continual depredations, Machado, Batista, Grau San Martín and Carlos Prío have not been able to dull the Cuban people's moral sensibility, which speaks very highly of the firmness of its virtues, but still my words from last Sunday did not have the resonance required by such a grave situation. Cuba needs to wake up. But my knocking was not, perhaps, sufficiently strong. We will, however, continue to count on the conscience of the Cuban people.[145]

[142] Ibid.
[143] "Testamento Político de Chibás," *Bohemia,* August 26, 1951: 96.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

Afterwards, Chibás reiterated two ideas which were quite familiar to his regular audience. First, he emphasized that Cuba's "historic destiny" has always been frustrated by the "corruption and blindness" of its rulers. Second, he affirmed that Cuba would never fulfill its "mission" under the current administration, nor would this be possible through Batista's "false opposition" or the "spiteful group" led by Grau.[146] Only the *Ortodoxos*, who eschewed "transactions" and "shady deals" would suffice.[147] Right about then, the transmission was cut as Chibás had exceeded his time limit. While the island's citizens heard an advertisement for *Café Pilon*, Chibás steamed ahead with his final call to arms. "People of Cuba," he yelled, audible now only to those surrounding him in the studio, "Rise up and walk! People of Cuba, wake up! This is my last loud knock!"[148] He punctuated this statement by slamming down his left fist. With his right hand, he searched for something. Moments later, seemingly out of nowhere, a shot rang out. The studio was immediately thrown into confusion. No one had seen a gun as Chibás had fired from beneath the desk. Some *Ortodoxos* reacted by fleeing toward the exit while others pushed forward trying to make sense of things. In the first moments, neither Millo Ochoa, who sat to Eddy's right nor Roberto Agramonte on his left knew what had transpired. Soon enough, Chibás slumped over and his pistol clanged against the floor accompanied by freshets of blood. Voices urging calm were interrupted by orders to detain the supposed aggressor. The would be assassin, of course, was Chibás himself. Finally, a band consisting of José Pardo Llada, Millo Ochoa, Pelayo Cuervo, Orlando Castro

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

and Luis Conte Agüero took charge. They carried the bleeding *Ortodoxo* leader to a nearby automobile and rushed him to the nearest hospital. Before going into surgery, Chibás told them, "I'm going to die, but the party has to unite now more than ever. It must confront the corrupt government and pseudo-opposition."

"Where are you hurt, Eddy?" asked Orlando Castro.

"In the belly…What a shame it wasn't in the heart!" [149]

Although the shot had not been audible over the air, news of it traveled fast and a sizable gathering soon formed outside the Vedado clinic where Chibás was being treated. Men and women from all walks of life lingered throughout the evening, waiting nervously for information on Eddy's condition. Many donated blood as well. Sitting on a nearby patch of grass, some wept openly while others consoled themselves with prayer. At midnight, the medical staff finally provided an update. Chibás had suffered a punctured colon, eight perforations in his small intestine and a fractured vertebra. His condition was critical and may have been worse but for a dash of serendipity. Antonio Rodríguez Díaz, the gifted surgeon who repaired his diaphragmatic hernia nearly a year earlier, had just returned from out of town and led the operation. The next day, Chibás told him in a frail voice, "Doctor, I was able to save myself from the other thing but I won't escape this time." Rodríguez Díaz responded by asking Chibás whether he hoped to survive. "The truth, doctor, is that yesterday I didn't but now I want to live."[150]

The *Ortodoxo* leader's newfound will to endure was confirmed a few hours later by Luis Orlando Rodríguez, who had checked into the same hospital with an

[149] "En Cuba, La Capital: El Ultimo Aldabonazo," *Bohemia,* August 12, 1951: 67.
[150] Ibid.

aliment of his own. Entering Chibás' room, Rodríguez clasped his friend's hand and said, "Eddy, we have to win this battle!" Chibás smiled weakly and agreed.[151] As someone who had always reveled in attention, Chibás may have changed his mind upon learning how many of the island's most prominent men had arrived to wish him well. These included political figures of every persuasion, including Guillermo Alonso Pujol, Nicolás Castellanos, Emilio Núñez Portuondo, and Pepe San Martín along with representatives of the exiled democratic governments of Venezuela and Peru.[152] The eminent hero of Cuba's independence war, Enrique Loynaz de Castillo, was in evidence as well. Of course, old friends such as Miguel Ángel Quevedo and the Mestre brothers also stopped by as did his newer ally Ramón Vasconcelos. Chibás was surely gratified when Conchita Fernández, who had attended to all these guests, informed him of their visits. In his mind, this proved they had heard his "loud knock" and sided with him against Aureliano Sánchez Arango.

As a supremely political deed, Eddy's suicide attempt was naturally pored over and spun throughout Cuba in a variety of fashions. During an *Ortodoxo* meeting immediately after the shooting, Joaquín López Montes called it "an act of historical grandeur" and claimed, "this is not the suicide of a depressed or disappointed man but a self-sacrifice by a great combatant who desired to hand over his life to a great cause."[153] On August 6, Roberto Agramonte, Luis Conte Agüero and Guillermo de Zéndegui published a statement in *Alerta* that sought to inculcate this saintly vision in the public mind. They deemed Chibás, "the most

[151] Ibid.
[152] The *Auténticos* who appeared that evening included Grau's erstwhile education minister Luis Pérez Espinós and the congressmen Francisco Cairol and Gilberto Leyva.
[153] Ibid., 68.

extraordinary, valiant and honest figure of the Cuban revolution" and "the grand titan of national honor."[154] With an eye on the present political situation, they added:

> No one tended to Cuba's historical destiny more carefully than Chibás and yet he was shamelessly plotted against by a vile and corrupt government and a pseudo-opposition bereft of virtue and stripped of all grandeur. In order to inflict a mortal wound on the skepticism spread by the dominant immorality, to shake up the people's souls and awaken Cuba's conscience made lethargic by apostasy and frustration, the great leader tried to take his life in a gesture of heroic idealism.[155]

Conversely, *Auténticos* close to Carlos Prío felt Chibás had engaged in yet another publicity stunt. Many believed he had shot himself in 1939 to amplify his vote totals just before the constituent assembly elections. For them, this was a reprise of the same old show and they worried Chibás would emerge as an even greater threat than before. Asked for his thoughts, the perpetually irascible Tony Varona said,

> I see no reason why I should feel sorry. If the deed been the result of aggression, of chance or a natural accident, then I would deplore it. But an act committed with political and electoral ends in mind and in the security that he would not die it is in no way lamentable.[156]

The *Auténtico* labor leader Eusebio Mujal was even harsher, describing Eddy's suicide attempt as, "an explosion of hysteria" and "a product of his mental state upon finding out that public opinion was fed up with his slanders and lies."[157] This dismissive attitude did not extend throughout the party, however. Miguelito Suárez Fernández and Félix Lancís ignored the president's wishes and visited Chibás in the

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] "En Cuba, La Capital: 'A Chibás le Duele Cuba,'" 71.
[157] Ibid.

hospital. So did the *Auténtico* congressman Luis Pérez Espinós, who declared that, "I don't believe there is a single Cuban who doesn't fervently hope to see Chibás recover."[158] The *Auténtico* governor of Camagüey, Jorge Caballero Rojo, counseled his more partisan colleagues that the "humane and chivalrous" attitude would be to "cease their passions" and "consider the man himself" as he struggles for his life.[159]

While cooler headed *Auténticos* aimed for a magnanimous posture above the fray of politics as usual, Chibás sought to seize every possible advantage for himself and his party. At a devastating cost, he had placed the *Auténticos* in an uncomfortable position – not only by exposing their internal fissures but also because they could not criticize him now without appearing mean spirited and contemptuous of public opinion. Even as Chibás overcame frequent brushes with death, he seemed more interested in what the newspapers were saying and was particularly anxious to read the August 12 edition of *Bohemia*. At one point, Chibás admonished Pedro Iglesias Betancourt to tell him when the end was near as he had final instructions for the *Ortodoxo* executive committee. Subsequently, Chibás notified Conchita Fernández that if he died suddenly, she should tell Millo Ochoa to organize a rally on the second Monday in September at the rural school built with the revenues from his share of the family coffee plantation. "Let the people see," he said, "that while the government has abandoned the schools, we founded one to benefit peasants."[160] On August 13, Chibás eagerly asked José Chelala Aguilera how the people viewed his gesture of self-sacrifice. He was gratified to learn that

[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] "En Cuba, Duelo Nacional: Ha Fallecido una Gran Esperanza," *Bohemia,* August 19, 1951: reprinted in de la Osa, *En Cuba Segundo Tiempo*: 369.

Catholic masses throughout the island had been dedicated to him the day before and Cubans were "fervently praying" for his recovery.[161]

With the passage of time, hopes that Chibás might survive gained traction. His doctors cautioned that the period between 10 and 15 days after the wound, which Chibás was now entering, promised to be tricky but they remained guardedly optimistic. On August 15, Antonio Rodríguez Díaz brashly told Eddy's secretary that, "I am ready to do anything, to operate on his lungs even his heart. This man cannot die on me."[162] Just before midnight, however, Chibás complained to the attending physician of pain in his stomach and said, "Listen, you must do something. Otherwise I'm going to die."[163] During surgery a hemorrhage was discovered, the result of blood thinners administered to ease a clot in his small intestine. He received multiple transfusions but to no avail. At 1:55 a.m. the man cherished by nearly one third of Cuba's population passed into myth.

[161] José Chelala, "Mis Últimas Entrevistas con Chibás," *Bohemia,* August 26, 1951: 57.
[162] De la Osa, *Segundo* Tiempo, 369.
[163] "Falleció en la madrugada de hoy el Senador Eduardo Chibás Ribas," *Diario de la Marina,* August 16, 1951: 1.

Conclusions

1. Despite checks on executive power written into Cuba's 1940 constitution, those who held the island's highest office were, in fact, constrained only by the military – which was temporarily placated by raises in soldierly pay and enrichment opportunities for top officers. The shape of laws in Cuba thus conformed to the whims of its presidents. Ramón Grau San Martín treated the legislature and courts with disdain and ruled by decree. He did, however, allow free reign for Cuba's press. Carlos Prío, on the other hand, worked with Cuba's lawmakers but meddled with the courts at every opportunity. He also had little patience for press criticism and constantly sought to limit expressions of free speech. In this context, Chibás and *Ortodoxos* such as Pelayo Cuervo publicized government breaches of the constitution and exerted pressure for closer compliance with the law. Chibás often explained during his radio show which constitutional provisions were being discarded, spreading knowledge of the document among his considerable audience and proving to be one of its most effective advocates. Hence, it was not sufficient for Cubans to produce one of the western hemisphere's most progressive constitutions in 1940. They also required a charismatic figure that would believe in the document and sell its virtues to the public.

2. In an era when political machines dominated Cuban politics, Eduardo Chibás devised a new approach based on unparalleled mastery of the mass media – particularly radio. His ratings far outpaced those of all political rivals and sometimes his show garnered higher shares than the island's ever popular *novelas* or soap operas. Of course, Chibás' third place result in the 1948

presidential election demonstrated the limitations of this strategy. On the other hand, at the time of his death, Chibás was Cuba's leading presidential contender and boasted leads in all six provinces and among nearly every age group. Moreover, other politicians, most notably José Pardo Llada, followed in his footsteps by utilizing popular radio shows as a springboard to elective office. This new strategy was an attempt to neutralize the often hefty financial advantages of larger, highly organized outfits like the ruling *Auténticos*. While the *Ortodoxos* had improved their party apparatus and were opening new offices in areas of the country where they previously had no official presence, their network was still fairly rudimentary. For example, the *Ortodoxos* did not count a branch in the mid-sized town of Guantánamo until February of 1951 – almost four years after the party was founded. The fact that Chibás was nonetheless able to mount a credible presidential campaign proves that radio had become a powerful political tool in the right hands. This also explains why the Prío administration constantly sought to limit, curb and harass Chibás' broadcasts.

3. Cubans who came of age in the 1930s during the presidency of Gerardo Machado and military backed governments sponsored by Fulgencio Batista often harbored enormous expectations for the nation's political life. Chibás recognized and capitalized on these feelings, which later mutated to grave disappointment during the Grau administration, better than any of his peers. Many of these disillusioned citizens communicated personally with Chibás

via letters and described the many hardships they had suffered as protesters or revolutionaries. Many expressed their wish that Chibás would "save" the nation. Given these outsized hopes, incremental but important advances by Carlos Prío, namely passage of the 1940 constitution's complimentary laws or the relative honesty of his cabinet, yielded him scant plaudits with the public. In many respects, Cubans preferred the messianic style of Ramón Grau San Martín and Chibás. The *Ortodoxo* leader's overwhelming popularity among the generation of Cubans who came of age in 1950 demonstrates that this tendency also was a factor among the island's younger citizens.

4. From a political standpoint, the *Auténticos* aimed to construct a party that would permanently rule the island much like Mexico's *Partido Institucional Revolucionario.* The *Auténtico* party boss from Matanzas, Senator Diego Vicente Tejera, confessed as much to a *Bohemia* reporter in 1951. By bloating the government payroll, purchasing votes and co-opting opposition parties with offers of cabinet seats and other perks, the *Auténticos* believed they could remain indefinitely as Cuba's governing party. By March of 1951, the *Auténtico* coalition counted its old rivals from three years before, the Democrats and Liberals. Moreover, the opposition Communists boasted a history of pacts with the *Auténticos* as did Guillermo Alonso Pujol – leader of the new Cuban National Party. Chibás' insistence on political independence for the *Ortodoxos* was thus of paramount importance.

5. Eduardo Chibás brought politics down to a common level unlike any previous Cuban politician. His habit of jumping into the arms of followers from stages and truck tops after campaign speeches would have been unthinkable for any other politician of national standing. When Chibás was released from prison in June of 1949, he permitted zealous followers to literally shred his clothes. Devoted crowds also followed him each Sunday evening as he walked from his home to CMQ studios where he delivered his radio addresses. This intense emotional communion was fortified though frequent walks in poor and working class Havana neighborhoods. Chibás also did not shy away from visiting some of Cuba's remotest rural areas. As with most Cuban politicians, Chibás often attempted to assist constituents who were desperate for jobs, places in hospitals, scholarships or other favors whenever possible but he also gained a more intimate role in the lives of his countrymen. Many considered him a friend or family member. The novelist Reinaldo Arenas related that his great grandmother died on the same day as Chibás and at one point, his weeping mother told him, "I'm not crying for my grandmother, but rather for Chibás." Arenas added that, "I believe the rest of my family was crying for the same reason."[1] This too represented a new type of politics, designed to diminish voting as a financial transaction in favor of voting as an expression of personal devotion. For his part, Chibás derived an enormous sense of well being from the enthusiasm of his supporters. In fact, the

[1] Arenas, *Antes que anochezca,* 52.

Ortodoxo leader shot himself in large part because he felt Cubans had become deaf to his appeals against the government.

6. While the 1940 constitution was regularly ignored or violated by Cuba's presidents, portions of the judiciary showed a great deal of independence. The quasi legal Urgency Courts were beholden to the island's chief executives but the Superior Electoral Tribunal, Supreme Tribunal and municipal courts sometimes rendered decisions unfavorable to the ruling *Auténticos.* In 1948, for example, the Superior Electoral Tribunal refused to strike down the provision allowing a party's provincial assemblies to veto pacts and presidential candidates. This angered President Grau, who was determined to impose Carlos Prío over the objections of two of his party's assemblies. It also gratified Chibás, who wanted to use his control of the *Ortodoxo* Havana assembly to veto any deals he considered unsuitable. In 1951, Cuba was rocked by the news that ex President Grau would be indicted on corruption charges. This was a direct challenge to the custom of presidential impunity. Further, no party attempted to use the courts as a way of limiting government abuses than the *Ortodoxos.* In 1949, the attempt to revoke an increase in electricity prices was brought by Chibás' friend Ventura Dellundé. Of course, no one resorted to the courts as a counterweight to *Auténtico* power more than Pelayo Cuervo. Chibás heartily approved of this method, although he was not above castigating the nation's judges when he felt their rulings were incorrect. The most famous instance was when he accused a

Supreme Tribunal judge of taking bribes, a charge which subsequently landed him in prison.

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