

Militant Roots: The Anti-Fascist Left in the Caribbean Basin, 1945-1954

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Abstract

This article examines the birth of a militant left in the Caribbean Basin before the Cuban Revolution. Following the Second World War, various anti-dictatorial exiles tapped into anti-fascist ideals and networked with likeminded allies and influential democratic leaders. This *Legión Caribe* threatened the regimes of the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo, Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza, Honduras's Tiburcio Carías, and others. From the Costa Rican Civil War through the Guatemalan Revolution, the *Legión* waged a regional battle over democracy and dictatorship while contributing to the rise of Fidel Castro.

Keywords: Rómulo Betancourt, Tiburcio Carías, Caribbean Legion, José Figueres, Guatemalan Revolution, Anastasio Somoza, Rafael Trujillo

Resumen

Este artículo examina el nacimiento de una izquierda militante en la Cuenca del Caribe antes de la Revolución Cubana. Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, varios exiliados anti-dictatoriales aprovecharon los ideales antifascistas y establecieron contactos con aliados afines y líderes influyentes y democráticos. Esta Legión Caribe amenazó los regímenes de Rafael Trujillo de la República Dominicana, Anastasio Somoza de Nicaragua, Tiburcio Carías de Honduras y otros. De la Guerra Civil Costarricense a través de la Revolución Guatemalteca, la Legión hizo una batalla regional sobre democracia y dictadura mientras contribuía al ascenso de Fidel Castro.

Palabras claves: Rómulo Betancourt, Tiburcio Carías, Legión Caribe, José Figueres, Revolución Guatemalteca, Anastasio Somoza, Rafael Trujillo

Introduction: The 1959 Expeditions

In 1959, Fidel Castro approved expeditions that sought to overthrow the dictatorial regimes of the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo, Nicaragua's Luis Somoza, and Haiti's François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier.¹ Though each plot failed, their impact resonated far beyond their collective disasters and casualties. Most notably on the shores of the Dominican Republic, almost two hundred Dominicans, Cubans, Venezuelans, Puerto Ricans, and Spaniards landed at Constanza, Maimón, and Estero Hondo between the 14th and 20th of June. While Trujillo denounced the invasions as merely a communist conspiracy, the expeditionaries' deaths inspired a series of uprisings and political movements over the following years.²

Reflecting upon the Dominican plot, Castro's officials sought to understand the various forces that shaped its downfall. While acknowledging the role of poor weather and bad geography, the Department of Latin American Affairs identified another factor. With his service alongside Castro in the Sierra Maestra, Enrique Jiménez Moya had brought together the small, transnational brigade for the expedition. However, his association with the Cuban Revolution had not overcome his obscurity among the larger population of Dominican exiles. In fact, Cuban officials reproached Jiménez Moya for not even attempting to approach general Juan 'Juancito' Rodríguez. It was "general Rodríguez," Castro's advisors emphasized, "whom all respect[ed] and admir[ed] for his constant fight and sacrifice." This 73-year-old exile alone had the reputation to ensure "the collaboration of all exiles."³ Unwritten but understood, Castro's officials were admonishing Jiménez Moya for having ignored Juancito's past leadership of *la Legión Caribe* and multiple attempts to overthrow dictatorial regimes since the end of the Second World War.

Baptized *la Legión Caribe*, a transnational band of exiles from various regimes tapped into the ideals of the international struggle against fascism to legitimate their own war to bring democracy to their homelands. From the 1940s into the 1950s, a core group under Dominicans Juancito, Miguel Ángel Ramírez, and Horacio Ornes, Honduran Jorge Ribas Montes, and Cuban Eufemio Fernández organized expeditions and invasions to overthrow the dictatorships of Trujillo, Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza, and Honduras's Tiburcio Carías, later targeting Venezuela's military junta and Cuba's Fulgencio Batista. Along the way, they received support from Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz during the Guatemalan Revolution, Rómulo Betancourt under Venezuela's Trienio Adeco, Costa Rica's José Figueres, and Cuba's Auténticos. By the early 1950s, dictators and military regimes identified democratic governments with the exiles and conspired against the governments while encouraging the notorious CIA-sponsored coup

in Guatemala in 1954. With the 1947 Cayo Confites plot, the 1948 Costa Rican Civil War, the 1949 Luperón expedition, and their vocal association with the Guatemalan Revolution, the Legión represented a regional battle waged between transnational forces of democracy and dictatorship.

Just as Jiménez Moya did, the historical literature has overlooked the *Legión* as part of an essential period of militant, transnational activism in the Caribbean Basin ignited during the anti-fascist environment of the mid-1940s. Despite their prominent appearances from Cuba and the Dominican Republic to Costa Rica and Guatemala, these exiles have generally been marginalized in the historiography due to their being caught between World War II and the Cuban Revolution.⁴ Fortunately, the methodological tools offered by transnational studies and ‘Latin American Cold War’ scholarship allow for the recovery of the Legión’s history. These exiles and their associates together made up units which “spill[ed] over and seep[ed] through national borders.”⁵ Whereas most studies highlight the expansion of the Cold War in these years, their opposition to Trujillo, Somoza, Cárías, and others did not fall neatly into the emerging international delineations of communism and anti-communism gaining credence at the time.⁶ Recovering their voices, goals, and actions, the exiles’ personal collections and newly-available foreign relations and intelligence files reveal that they merged the broader anti-fascist moment of the mid-1940s with local, historical grievances against Caribbean Basin dictatorships. Thus, their struggles illustrated a regional, grassroots conflict revolving around indigenous definitions of fascism, dictatorship, and democracy.⁷ These militant, anti-fascist exiles served as a transnational force that was not contained or limited merely to one nation-state yet played important roles keeping alive the Caribbean Basin’s anti-dictatorial sentiments during Latin America’s democratic openings of the 1940s.⁸

An Anti-Fascist Moment

The mid-1940s saw an unprecedented ideological and militant assault upon dictatorial regimes in the Western Hemisphere. Though long opposed to their respective despots, Caribbean Basin exiles injected the anti-fascist ideals of the Second World War into their local struggles. Nicaraguan exiles summoned the very words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt while comparing Somoza and Hitler.⁹ Throughout, the dictator faced various invasions from Guatemala, protests from students, and new conspiracies. From Mexico to Colombia, Dominican exiles proclaimed themselves “antinazistas” standing against Trujillo’s “nazitrujillismo.”¹⁰ For their part, Trujillo’s officials reported on organizations of exiles, students, and others who denounced the Dominican despot. Honduran exiles excoriated

Carías by translating the Atlantic Charter and parading in celebration of the United Nations.¹¹ In reaction, Carías deployed his military to crush a rebellion among its own troops, uprisings in San Pedro Sula, and marching women, all of which drew international attention.

It was in Guatemala, Venezuela, and Cuba that exiles found bases for anti-fascist sentiment and bastions of transnational support. With the Guatemalan Revolution, the country expelled its own dictator, initiating what Luis Cardoza y Aragón would memorialize as “ten years of spring in the country of eternal tyranny.”¹² Immediately, Guatemalans linked their victory to the fights waged by other victims of despotism. *Mediodía*, *El Imparcial*, and other newspapers lambasted Trujillo, Somoza, and Carías.¹³ Governmental officials, students, politicians, and journalists worked alongside Caribbean Basin exiles.¹⁴ Such energy sparked Honduran exile Amílcar Gómez Robelo to encourage his compatriots in El Salvador, Guatemala, and elsewhere in joining “a new campaign . . . to mobilize the continental press in a decisive battle against CARÍAS, Somoza, and Trujillo” to ensure that the ideals of the Atlantic Charter would not be “forgotten.”¹⁵ From this environment, Guatemalan president Juan José Arévalo reminded fellow citizens to remember the global reach, and stakes, of World War II. “Now begins the second phase of this great war with the purpose of assuring that those sacrifices will not have been in vain and to implant the democratic ideal in all nations,” Arévalo warned. “Particularly our Americans should not consent to the existence of totalitarian regimes under a democratic disguise.”¹⁶ Not surprisingly, his government repeatedly provided sanctuary to the growing number of exiles with military experience, such as Nicaraguan Adolfo Baéz Bone.¹⁷ Yet anti-fascism dominated more than the Guatemalan Revolution.

Likewise, Rómulo Betancourt’s Trienio Adecó brought forth immeasurable support for the symbols of World War II. Long a hotbed of activity, Venezuela under the Trienio Adecos’ young democratic government took up anti-fascism while remembering their previous regimes. Not only did Venezuelan students join others in denouncing Trujillo.¹⁸ Dominican exile Buenaventura Sánchez remained close to former Venezuelan exiles, including Rómulo Betancourt, who insisted upon opposing “totalitarian tyrants.”¹⁹ This networking led to the *Comité de Amigos de Santo Domingo*, composed of Dominican exiles and Venezuelan political leaders. As senator Jovito Villalba proclaimed, the *Comité* would “begin pursuing an extensive campaign for the application of the Four Freedoms of the Atlantic Charter in Santo Domingo.” Deputy Rosales Aranguren expanded the scope of the senator’s proclamation, “The cause of Santo Domingo is not a cause of a group of Dominicans, nor of a group of Venezuelans, but an American cause.” Before the Venezuelan congress and visits of foreign officials, the *Comité* lectured on the country’s “being a signatory to the Atlantic Charter” and

expressed support for anti-fascist movements throughout the Caribbean Basin.²⁰ Soon, Betancourt and Arévalo became not simply democratic leaders but friends opposed to neighboring dictatorships.²¹

Anti-fascism and exiles also washed ashore on Cuba under the governments of Ramón Grau San Martín and Carlos Prío of the Auténticos. Akin to Betancourt's past, Juan Bosch and other Dominican exiles had built close relationships with Auténticos, including Eufemio Fernández and Enrique Cotubanamá Henríquez, who remembered their recent battles against oppression. Cuban newspapers railed against the region's regimes while the country's Federación Estudiantil Universitaria [FEU] helped Caribbean Basin students in disseminating anti-Trujillo propaganda and sheltering exiles from various despots.²² Thanks to these students, Auténticos, and others, various exiles found haven in Cuba where they were able to raise funds, purchase weapons, and organize their plans. For these very purposes, Costa Rican José Figueres and Nicaraguan Rosendo Argüello also made their way to the island.²³

The 1947 *Cayo Confites* Expedition

These transnational relationships and militant ideals led to the 1947 *Cayo Confites* expedition.²⁴ Juan 'Juancito' Rodríguez emerged as the main patron, his largesse going to armaments, ships, aircraft, and more while fellow Dominican exiles planned a coordinated naval and airborne assault upon Trujillo. Still, they drew heavily upon their connections with fellow anti-fascist actors. Betancourt provided financial assistance, Arévalo purchased weapons, and Auténticos offered facilities and a staging ground on Cuban beaches. Cuban student leaders and organizations, such as Fidel Castro and the FEU, rallied support while Eufemio Fernández led an individual brigade. A veteran of conspiracies to overthrow Carías, Honduran exile Jorge Ribas Montes arrived with a blessing from Arévalo and a message of support from Argüello, looking forward to the "culmination of a victory not only for [the expedition] but for America and humanity."²⁵ Ultimately, the aborted expedition counted machine and submachine guns, bombs and mortars, 7 ships and 16 planes, hundreds of Cubans, and exiles from Central America commanded by Cuban Eufemio Fernández, Dominican Diego Bordas, and Honduran Ribas Montes. On one hand, the expedition received great publicity, with newspapers highlighting the crowds who clamored and voiced their joy for such an effort. On the other hand, this attention inadvertently resulted in the plot's termination due to Trujillo's protests and US officials' demands for stability in the Caribbean Basin. Regardless, *Cayo Confites* represented, as

Castro would remember, “the fight against Latin American tyranny, not only in Santo Domingo, but also in other countries.”²⁶

Despite the setback at *Cayo Confites*, Arévalo now took the lead in reorganizing and redirecting the expeditionaries’ efforts. Through the Auténticos, the Guatemalan president acquired most of the *Cayo Confites* weaponry. Next, he brought Dominican, Nicaraguan, and Honduran exiles to Guatemala City to meet, outline their vision, and organize a coordinating unit. Joined by Figueres, the exiles agreed to unite under Arévalo’s guidance. The resulting document, the Pacto de Alianza or Pacto del Caribe, had the signatures of Figueres, Dominican Juan ‘Juancito’ Rodríguez, and Nicaraguans Argüello, Emiliano Chamorro, Pedro José Zepeda, and Gustavo Manzanares at the head of a Comité Supremo Revolucionario. Their organization, according to the Pacto, aimed for “uniting all the efforts and resources for the overthrow of the Dictatorships maintained by the Generals Rafael Leonidas Trujillo M., and Anastasio Somoza” and “guaranteeing the accession and development of genuinely democratic governments.”²⁷

The 1948 Costa Rican Civil War

Arévalo’s alliance was prepared in time for the 1948 Costa Rican Civil War.²⁸ When the Costa Rican legislature annulled the February 1948 presidential election in favor of former president Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, opposition leader and signatory to the exiles’ pacts, Figueres initiated a campaign to install candidate Otilio Ulate. Solicited by Figueres, Cayo Confites veterans and Dominican exile leaders Juancito and Miguel Ángel Ramírez agreed to provide weapons and aid Figueres.²⁹ As Arévalo helped transport the Cayo Confites weapons from Cuba to Costa Rica, more exiles also deployed. They were joined by such Honduran exiles as Jorge Ribas Montes and Francisco Morazán, another veteran of anti-Carías expeditions and future personal secretary for Jacobo Arbenz.³⁰ Soon termed la Legión Caribe, the exiles counted in their ranks Nicaraguans Adolfo Baéz Bone and José María Tercero, experienced in their own conspiracies against dictators.³¹ These exiles provided crucial resources, training, and leadership, as when Dominican exile Horacio Ornes captured Costa Rican locations. Securing victory and installing a junta under Figueres, Juancito described to Ángel Ramírez the Legión’s participation in Costa Rica as proving that the “enemies of Trujillo have the fiber of iron which guarantees success in the attack that we will soon launch.”³²

The triumph in Costa Rica bolstered the reputation of the Legión as not simply conspirators but true champions of democracy. As stated in their agreements before the Costa Rican Civil War, the exiles swore to support all efforts against

Caribbean Basin dictatorships. Leaders of the *Frente de Unidad Revolucionaria Hondureño*, Ribas Montes, Francisco ‘El Indio’ Sánchez, and Marcial Aguiluz, confirmed receiving rifles and ammunition from the Legión in support of the “revolution that continues for the liberation of Honduras.”³³ Another unit of Honduran exiles led by Eduardo Carrasco, Antonio Miralda Santos, and Enrique Aguiluz Rosa identified their own ideals as the same as those of the Legión, describing themselves as “the free men of the Caribbean and the Central American isthmus” who joined “the fight” in Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. Based in Esquipulas on the Guatemalan-Honduran frontier with around 100 others, they offered their respect to Juancito, the “new [José] Martí of the second liberation of these peoples,” and requested assistance.³⁴ A fellow signatory to the Legión’s various pacts, Argüello sought aid for the Ejército de Liberación Nicaragüense in the “fight against the tyranny of Somoza.”³⁵ With la Legión Caribe and their ally Figueres, anti-fascism remained alive with Costa Rica a new staging ground for anti-dictatorial forces.

While Somoza in late 1948 attempted to support an invasion of Costa Rica, he sent an agent of the ousted Calderón Guardia, the brother Francisco ‘Paco,’ to meet with the Legión. Hoping to separate Figueres from the Legión and take away the exiles’ new base of operations, Somoza offered Juancito and Ángel Ramírez at least 100,000 *colones* to not participate in the upcoming invasion.³⁶ Somoza’s bribe failed. The exiles continued to identify their alliance with Figueres in line with their opposition to the region’s dictators. Juancito wrote Figueres about the “threat that circles your country, on the part of the tyrant of the North,” Somoza. Perceiving this threat, Juancito had spoken with “our Great Friend,” Arévalo, and wrote from Guatemala regarding the “necessary dispositions and provisions to ensure the stability of your Government.”³⁷ Fellow Dominican exile leader Ángel Ramírez swore to continue the Legión’s “debt of high patriotism and solidarity” for the Costa Rican junta.³⁸ Ultimately, Somoza’s December invasion failed and brought further intervention on the part of U.S. officials in pursuit of regional stability.

The 1949 Luperón Expedition

While providing material support to various groups of anti-dictatorial exiles, the *Legión* organized another expedition against Trujillo. From the end of 1948 into 1949, Juancito, Ángel Ramírez, and Ornes networked with their various allies. In Guatemala, Juancito and Ángel Ramírez met with Arévalo, Secretary of Defense Jacobo Arbenz, and commander of the Guatemalan armed forces Francisco Arana to secure weapons and planes.³⁹ As with *Cayo Confites* and in

Costa Rica, the Dominicans relied upon the support of their fellow Nicaraguan and Honduran exiles, such as Baéz Bone and Ribas Montes.⁴⁰ Dominican exile leader Juan Bosch provided weapons and helped secure a P-38.⁴¹ In fact, Bosch lobbied Figueres to support the Legión while sending additional money through Ribas Montes.⁴² When betrayals and bad weather tore pilots and planes from the expedition, Arévalo authorized replacements from the Guatemalan Air Force. However, Trujillo's intelligence under Joaquín Balaguer was ready, killing or capturing all those from the one plane that landed in the Dominican Republic. The *Luperón* expedition is still remembered as a failure in the historical literature, but its memory remained.⁴³ Students in Nicaragua distributed pamphlets the following year that commemorated the Nicaraguan exiles Alberto Ramírez and Alejandro Selva who fell during *Luperón* while "combatting the Dictatorships of America."⁴⁴ On the three-year anniversary, labor activists in Honduras published a unique edition of their journal, *El Chilillo*, honoring the Dominicans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans for opposing the rising number of Caribbean Basin dictatorships.⁴⁵ Despite their expedition's failure, the exiles from *Luperón* took an aeronautical chart of the flight from Mexico to the Dominican Republic, signed their names, and wrote their own homage to the memory of their fallen allies.⁴⁶

Into the early 1950s, the *Legión* continued raising resources, networking with fellow anti-dictatorial exiles, and supporting expeditions against dictatorial regimes. Dominican exiles in Cuba worked with the Partido Socialista Popular, including Pericles Franco, the Ducoudray brothers, and more while FEU leaders such as Ángel Castro published denouncements of Trujillo and others.⁴⁷ In Guatemala, Miguel Ángel Ramírez helped foreign minister Enrique Muñoz Meany provide visas for Nicaraguan and Honduran exiles, including Luis Felipe Gabuardi and José Galeano.⁴⁸ He then networked between Arévalo and Enrique Cotubanama Henríquez and other *Auténticos*.⁴⁹ Ribas Montes wrote to Arbenz describing meetings with Cuba's Minister of Defense and Aureliano Sánchez Arango, an influential *Auténtico* sympathetic to the *Legión*.⁵⁰

The *Legión Caribe* and the Guatemalan Revolution

During the early 1950s, the *Legión* expressed great admiration for the Guatemalan Revolution due to their shared democratic ideals. Throughout the *Legión's* maneuvering, Guatemala represented a key source of resources and base of operations. Between 1948 and 1950, the *Legión* worked with Guatemalan lieutenant colonel Francisco Cosenza and Guatemalan ambassador in Costa Rica Francisco Valdez Calderón to purchase weapons through Costa Rica and Cuba to "be used in the defense of the revolutionary interests of Guatemala."⁵¹ Ángel

Ramírez reminded his associates of “the links that united us with the Great and Good Friend [Arévalo] and with Colonel Arbenz.”⁵² As the 1950 Guatemalan presidential elections began, the Dominican exile leader affirmed to the soon-to-be Guatemalan president the *Legión*’s “profound convictions and sincerity for the cause that you defend in the name of the democratic country of Guatemala.” Writing to Arbenz, Ángel Ramírez promised that the *Legión* would use their “contacts with important elements of high politics” in Guatemala and “have our friends contribute their economic support” to Arbenz’s political campaign.⁵³ Ribas Montes agreed with Ángel Ramírez. “We the soldiers of the Caribbean, without hesitation, will be ready, and are already ready, to fight because this Revolution (the one of today) must continue,” the Honduran promised, “We are with the men of the revolution of Guatemala, [even if] this Government continued without giving us a single centavo, for our decision is not because of ungenerous monetary interests but for ideological convictions.”⁵⁴

With the links between the Guatemalan Revolution and the *Legión*, the region’s juntas had multiple reasons to oppose the Guatemalan governments. Furthermore, counter-revolutionary coups in Venezuela and Cuba weakened the *Legión*’s allies. At the end of 1948, a military coup not only brought to power a Venezuelan military junta soon under Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Betancourt and his associates fled the country for Guatemala and Costa Rica. Similarly, Fulgencio Batista in 1952 seized power in a military coup in Cuba and exiled the *Auténticos*. Immediately, his military identified the links between the *Auténticos* and the *Legión*’s leaders as the most important threats. From 1952 into 1955, Cuban military intelligence officials repeatedly warned that the “principal leaders” of conspiracies against Batista’s regimes were the *Auténticos* Carlos Prío Socarrás, Aureliano Sánchez Arango, and Eufemio Fernández due to their material resources and links with the *Legión* members based in Guatemala and Costa Rica.⁵⁵ In one report at the end of 1952, Cuban military intelligence focused solely upon a movement of *Auténticos* under Prío Socarrás and Sánchez Arango that relied upon aid from Arévalo, Arbenz, Figueres, Betancourt, and the *Legión*.⁵⁶

Into the mid-1950s, officials under Trujillo, Somoza, Pérez Jiménez, and Batista shared intelligence, defining their primary threats to be the *Legión* who helped anti-dictatorial leaders ranging from Venezuela’s clandestine AD to Cuba’s *Auténticos* in exile. In the intelligence-sharing, Venezuelan official Elias Casado provided Dominican officials with correspondence between the *Legión* and members of the clandestine AD, such as one letter from Miguel Ángel Ramírez.⁵⁷ The Venezuelan embassy in Mexico City shared intelligence not only with Trujillo but also Batista. As they reported, Pérez Jiménez’s agents were monitoring meetings between Dominican exiles, the clandestine AD, and

the *Auténticos* in exile.⁵⁸ These reports were not surprising, for Dominican officials noted how the *Legión* supported the *Auténticos* in plots against Batista.⁵⁹

In the early 1950s, officials under the Caribbean Basin dictatorships and military regimes denounced the links between the *Legión*, the clandestine AD, the *Auténticos* in exile, and other anti-dictatorial exiles in Guatemala. Dominican officials reported how Dominican exiles under Miguel Ángel Ramírez worked with the *Auténticos* under Eufemio Fernández in Guatemala on Arévalo's lands.⁶⁰ Consequently, Batista joined Trujillo in complaining to Guatemalan officials about the continued links between the *Legión*, Sánchez Arango, Cotubanama Henríquez, and other *Auténticos* in exile based in Guatemala.⁶¹ By mid-1952, the regimes' ambassadors met in the Dominican embassy in Mexico City, agreeing "that a change in government [in Guatemala] was necessary for the Continent and the Caribbean zone."⁶² Despite such persecutions, exiles remained active, drawing upon their relationships. Figueres and Arbenz welcomed *Auténticos* and Betancourt to Costa Rica and Guatemala, and Cuban students protected Dominican exiles such as Tulio Arvelo, veteran of *Luperón*.⁶³ In early 1954 and based out of Costa Rica and Guatemala, Dominicans Amado Soler and Pablo Leal and Honduran Jorge Ribas Montes joined Nicaraguans including José Félix Córdoba Boniche and Adolfo Baéz Bone in an attempt to eliminate the Somoza dynasty, drawing greater ire from the region's dictators.⁶⁴ For such reasons, Caribbean Basin regimes lobbied and supported the U.S. government during Operation PBSUCCESS.

In fact, Operation PBSUCCESS took many *Legión* veterans by surprise. Many were in Costa Rica with Betancourt and prominent *Auténticos*, but others were not so fortunate. As Carlos Castillo Armas organized his dictatorship, his regime captured Dominican exile and *Legión* leader Miguel Ángel Ramírez. Celebrating this event, the new Dominican ambassador in Guatemala City informed Trujillo that Castillo Armas had also "ordered the imprisonment of Dominican Juan ['Juancito'] Rodríguez" for "the crime of the attack against Dominican peace in 1949 together with numerous members of the *Legión del Caribe*," that is, the *Luperón* expedition.⁶⁵ However, the historical networking of the *Legión* saved Juancito. Dominican exile and *Legión* leader Horacio Ornes wrote Figueres about Guatemala. Thanks to lobbying his long-time ally in opposition to Caribbean Basin dictatorships, he secured asylum for Juancito and other Dominican exiles in the Costa Rican embassy in Guatemala while later facilitating the release of Ángel Ramírez.⁶⁶ In a subsequent letter, Ornes promised Figueres, "I continue offering to you my personal cooperation." Following Operation PBSUCCESS, Ornes believed Figueres's government now remained "the only . . . democratic government that remains in the Caribbean area."⁶⁷

After Operation PBSUCCESS

Right before the fall of Arbenz's government, Honduran exile leader and *Legión* associate Jorge Ribas Montes had joined the expedition of exiles that went after Somoza. Captured and tortured in the despot's prisons, the Honduran managed to clandestinely send a few letters to his wife in Costa Rica. In one, he celebrated his service in *Cayo Confites*, the Costa Rican Civil War, and *Luperón* as part of a struggle with other anti-dictatorial Caribbean Basin exiles.⁶⁸ The ideals that brought this Honduran exile leader to the *Legión* continued beyond the coup in Guatemala and Ribas Montes's subsequent execution, bleeding into events in Cuba. In 1955, Batista's military attaché and ambassador in Mexico City sent a handful of reports to Havana, noting meetings between experienced Legionnaires, Eufemio Fernández of the *Auténticos* in exile, and the emerging Cuban exile leader Fidel Castro.⁶⁹ Writing to *Legión* associate, *Cayo Confites* and *Luperón* veteran, and Cuban *Auténtico* in exile Fernández, the experienced Dominican exile commander Ornes confirmed the recent meeting to his democratic ally.⁷⁰ As Castro was organizing his own movement against Batista, Ornes and Fernández represented key sources of influence and resources due to their experience with the *Legión* and contacts with Figueres, Betancourt, *Auténticos* in exile, clandestine Venezuelans, and more. Not only did Legionnaires and *Auténticos* provide key support in conspiracies against Batista; they were crucial to Castro's own movement. In fact, Castro's organization turned to these anti-dictatorial forces even in 1958. That May, Manuel Antonio de Varona, Raúl Chibás, and Juanita Castro met with Figueres and then Betancourt to receive money and armaments.⁷¹ In October 1958, Guillermo Yriarte wrote to Miguel Ángel Ramírez, the Dominican exile and *Legión* leader with over a decade of experience against dictatorships. Three men, Luis Orlando Rodríguez, Gustavo Lora, and Sergio Rojas, representing the "26 de julio" movement were in Caracas and about to head for Costa Rica but needed more assistance from Ángel Ramírez.⁷² The grassroots conflict between democracy and dictatorship ignited by the *Legión* continued into the early days of the Cuban Revolution, for the ideals of such *Legión* leaders and associates as Dominican exile Horacio Ornes, Honduran exile Jorge Ribas Montes, and Cuban exile Eufemio Fernández endured.

However, the Cuban Revolution would both inherit and challenge the structures and ideals of the previous decades. From the mid-1940s and into the 1950s, this transnational force borrowed from anti-fascism, overcoming geography and more in order to confront the Caribbean Basin's regimes. Their loosely-formed network, while reliant upon a central contingent of influential exiles and leaders, was able to assist numerous, diverse expeditions and plots that drew upon a broad opposition to the dictators' stranglehold upon the region's democracy.

Many of its veterans would celebrate the Cuban Revolution for its own victory over one of the region's despots. After all, Betancourt, Figueres, Arbenz, and others had given their support, vocal and financial, to Castro's allies. Some who stood against Somoza, Trujillo, and Carías would join the 1959 Castro-supported expeditions, including Juancito's own son, himself a veteran of the *Luperón* expedition.

Regardless of these connections and alliances, Castro's movement would insist upon pursuing new definitions of dictatorship and democracy as it opened a new chapter of revolution in the Caribbean Basin. Within months of toppling Batista, Castro denounced Figueres's relationship with the United States while encouraging a radical guerrilla insurgency against Betancourt's Venezuelan government. When former Legionnaires criticized Castro and Enrique Jiménez Moya for the disastrous 1959 expeditions, the new regime jailed Miguel Ángel Ramírez and expelled Juancito and his family.⁷³ Although his own movement had drawn upon the experience of the *Legión*, Castro simultaneously transformed the region's dynamics by pushing forward with these new definitions of dictatorship and democracy.

Notes

- 1 See Delio Gómez Ochoa, *Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo: la victoria de los caídos* (Santo Domingo: Academia Dominicana de la Historia, 2010); Jonathan Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
- 2 See *Constanza, Maimon, Estero Hondo: Communist Aggression Against the Dominican Republic* (Ciudad Trujillo: Caribbean Anti-Communist Research and Intelligence Bureau, 1959).
- 3 Jefe de la División A al Jefe del Departamento de Asuntos Latino Americanos, "ASUNTO: Visita del exilado dominicano Tomás Reyes Cerdo," La Habana, 13 noviembre 1959, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, La Habana [hereafter ACMINREX], Expediente sin título.
- 4 For standal one treatments of *la Legión Caribe*, see Charles Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami, 1974); Gleijeses, Piero, "Juan José Arévalo and the Caribbean Legion," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21.1 (February 1989), 133-145; Charles D. Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); and Richard E. Clinton, Jr., "The United States and the Caribbean Legion: Democracy Dictatorship, and the Origins of the Cold War in Latin America, 1945-1950," PhD diss., Ohio University, 2001.
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