

# Cuban Delegation Drops In on U.S.

## New Orleans

Twenty-two Cubans, previously denied visas by the U.S. government, arrived unexpectedly in New Orleans yesterday to attend a sugarcane conference. The U.S. ordered them out, but the pilot refused to fly them back to Cuba.

They were put up at a hotel last night while attempts were made to unravel the diplomatic entanglements.

When the Russian-built turbo-prop airplane landed, the U.S. government ordered the pilot to return to Cuba.

The pilot replied that he would not fly back without instructions from his government, the State Department said in Washington.

The group—19 passengers and three crewmen—were taken from customs offices at the airport, where they had been locked up for more than six hours, to a hotel for an overnight stay.

## SWISS

Meanwhile, a State Department spokesman in Washington said officials were in contact with the Cuban government through the Swiss Embassy in Havana, "in an attempt to work out arrangements for their departure."

A State Department press officer, Charles W. Bray, said the Cuban pilot flatly told American officials that he would not fly his plane back to Cuba without orders from his government.

He had flown the group to New Orleans to attend a meeting of the International Association of Sugarcane Technologists under way here.

Francia Metre, the leader of the Cuban delegation, told a newsman in Spanish that his group has every right to attend the meeting.

"We have the right to attend and because Cuba is the largest sugar-producing country in the world, the conference would not be an international one without our delegation," he said.

Officials of the sugar cane association told a news conference last night that the Cuban delegation had been invited to attend the meeting. They had nothing to say about the action taken by federal authorities.

## PLAN

Their sudden arrival caught New Orleans officials off guard. The State Department said the Cubans had filed a flight plan about 8 a.m. with the Houston, Tex.,

Air Traffic Control for a morning flight from Havana to New Orleans. They landed about 10:30 a.m.

Officials said the flight was arranged so quickly that New Orleans authorities were not notified.

The State Department had denied a September 24 request for visas for the group to attend the sugarcane conference.

"Denial of the visas was consistent with our practice of not issuing the visas to Cuban officials unless they are coming to the United Nations or other inter-government organizations of which Cuba is a member," a state department spokesman said.

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