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Weekly Contributions, B/LA
(CIA Working Paper)
Article 18-49

6 September 1949

The Communist Situation in Guatemala

Communist influence in Guatemala is a reflection of the political influence of leftist sympathizers within the revolutionary government of President Arevalo. This influence to date has been considerable. Communist fortunes are now in a decline, however, due to the removal of some sympathizers from the government, the developing conservatism of others, and the potential inability of leftist groups to oppose an expected army campaign to force all leftist sympathizers out of the government. If there is an open struggle for power, the Communists, except for ability to add to the violence, may well be rendered powerless by the defeat of their supporters.

The situation is somewhat anomalous in that the Communist Party, as such, is illegal in Guatemala, and yet Communist influence in national affairs is greater than in any other of the Central American, or possibly Latin American, countries. The ability of Communists (estimated at not more than 200) to influence political affairs stems directly from the tolerance of Communists and Communist ideas by important officials who support (and are in turn supported by) organized leftist political parties and labor unions. Such officials include President Arevalo himself, Minister of Economy and Labor Bauer Paiz, Minister of Defense Jacobo Arbenz, UN representative Garcia Granados, and (until recently relieved of his post as Minister of Foreign Affairs) Enrique Muñoz Mearny.

Protected by the tolerance of these officials, the influence of Communists on Guatemalan policies has, to date, been considerable. Guatemala has frequently assumed an anti-US attitude on international questions --- for example, in the UN Guatemala has often voted either with the USSR or has abstained from voting, but has comparatively rarely supported the US in opposition to the USSR. Guatemala's diplomatic representatives have also facilitated the international travel of Communists in Europe and America. Within the country, Communists have been permitted to work within the legal political parties, the newly developed and government-sponsored labor unions, and to organize various Communist-front groups. They have also been permitted to transmit and disseminate anti-US propaganda received from sources abroad, and to aid (or instigate) strikes and other measures injurious to US business interests.

Communist fortunes are now, however, on the decline. Since the assassination of Colonel Arana (who had become a strong and popular anti-Communist leader) on 18 July 1949, government officials sympathetic to

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Communism have been replaced or have moved toward the right. President Arévalo has replaced Foreign Minister Muñoz Meany (an ardent supporter of the Spanish Republican government-in-exile, a friend of international Communists, and an anti-imperialist nationalist) with Ismael González Arévalo (pro-US and opposed to the extreme leftists). Minister of Defense Arbenz (who has approved of, and presumably aided in, the arming of labor unions for the militant support of the Arévalo administration) now appears inclined to disavow certain leftist objectives and manifests a more moderate attitude. It is true that the leftist Minister of Economy and Labor, Bauer Paiz, has been retained. It is also true that leftist PAR members and unionists were issued arms (3,000 rifles and 50 sub-machine guns) immediately after Arana's assassination, and thus their ability to use force as a political weapon was increased. But the extreme leftist strength is probably not sufficient to enable them to counteract the strength and influence of the army, within which opposition to Arévalo and his leftist appointees has rapidly consolidated. Should the army seek to gain control of the government, as seems probable, it will undoubtedly have the sympathy of existent conservative and anti-Communist organizations, and of many followers of the moderately leftist FPL. Moreover, if the army does gain control, it may seek to eliminate from power some, or all, of the important administration officials (including leftist sympathizers) who are regarded as the "intellectual authors" of Arana's assassination. These include President Arévalo himself, Minister of Defense Arbenz, Minister of Communications Aldana, Director of National Police Sandoval, and various congressional deputies and high officials of the PAR and FPL.

B/LA believes, therefore, that in the event of an open struggle for power between pro- and anti-Communist forces, the Communists will be rendered politically impotent along with many of their liberal sympathizers. Although the Communists may be able to instigate strikes, riots, violence, and sabotage in an attempt to maintain their position, their political host organizations — the extreme leftist parties and unions — do not have the strength to oppose the influence and strength of the unified, army-backed conservative movement that is now developing.

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