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Labor Institute Hopes to Help Latin Peasants



By LEE WINFREY
Of Our Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A U.S. agency which trains Latin American labor leaders faces the new year of 1966 with a new director and new directions for its policies in the hemisphere.

The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), three and one-half years old, feels that it is now solidly established and ready to move into broader fields of activity.

As part of its new plans, the institute is taking aim at the down-trodden Latin American peasant, hoping to elevate his station in life. In the past, the institute has worked mostly with labor unions in Latin cities.

The institute was established in June 1962, mostly by the AFL-CIO. George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, is also the president of AIFLD.

Sixty-four American businesses are also taking part in AIFLD work, however, including such well-known firms as the First National City Bank of New York, I.T. and T. and Pan American World Airways. J. Peter Grace, president of W. R. Grace and Co., is the vice president of the institute.

The U.S. government also takes part. The Agency for International Development, the government's foreign aid dispenser, contributes more business to the institute's operation.

The goal of the program is to develop more democratic union leaders in Latin America. Latin trade unions grew

out of Socialist and anarchist traditions in the 19th Century and many of them have been strongly Communist since the end of World War I.

The institute is now at work in 21 Latin countries — all except Cuba, Haiti and Paraguay, three dictatorships where the local unions are not free. Praise for its work has been considerable.

"All who believe in freedom and democracy rejoice in the success scored by the AIFLD in combatting communism," said Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York.

"The AIFLD is doing an excellent job," said Sen. Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.). "The results have been beyond all expectations," said Celso Pastor de la Torre, ambassador to the U.S. from Peru.

The institute claims to have reached more than 20,000 Latin workers with some kind of instruction. The work is carried on in three ways.

Mobile teams roam the towns and villages of Latin America, conducting lectures or seminars which may last days or weeks. In 14 countries, AIFLD operates resident institutes where Latins come and live for formal study courses up to three months long.

At the top of the heap is an advanced study school which AIFLD operates in Washington, Latin America, come

here for a three-month study program which includes such subjects as the history of unions, parliamentary procedure, public speaking, collective bargaining, labor legislation, profit sharing and public relations.

"We are not interested in organizing labor unions," said an AIFLD spokesman. "The laws of most Latin American countries forbid foreigners to do that. What we are interested in doing is informing Latins on how we do it here, pointing out the advantages of the democratic way."

The AIFLD is proud of the record its trainees have compiled in Latin America so far.

In Brazil, after the overthrow of leftist President Joao Goulart in 1964, AIFLD graduates were named as trustees of eight unions formerly dominated by Communists.

In Uruguay, four unionists trained by the AIFLD took office on the board of the principal port union in a Communist cleanout.

In Peru, 17 of the first 21 graduates of the first AIFLD national course conducted in that country have since become secretaries-general of their unions.

From its beginning until about three months ago, AIFLD was directed by Serafino Romualdi, a naturalized American born in Italy, who was the AFL-CIO's specialist in Latin America for

many years. Romualdi reached retirement age and was replaced late last year by William C. Doherty Jr., son of a former U.S. ambassador to Jamaica, who was promoted from within the organization.

A shift in emphasis toward the rural worker is now at the top of AIFLD's plans. Doherty sees 1966 as "the year when the campesinos and farm workers will join with the organized labor movement in a mighty push for better food, clothing, shelter and education."

The move into the backlands will bring the AIFLD even more head-to-head with the Communists, the organization's chief enemy. According to some critics at home as well as abroad, the U.S. government supports the AIFLD in part because the CIA uses it as an informal spy network.

Such charges are dismissed as pure propaganda by the institute's friends.

"You'll never get 64 American businesses lined up with a CIA operation," said one. "It would be prejudicial to all their operations overseas."

The institute feels strongly that it is in the front line of the war against communism, however. It is vague about the number of its employees ("several hundred in round figures") and declines to release any figures on its annual budget. "We don't care to have our enemies (the Communists) know more than necessary about our operations," a spokesman said.

The Communists know plenty already, to their sorrow AIFLD feels. The hope is that they will be even further and earlier at the end