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COMMUNISM IN LATIN AMERICA

Memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence 12 October 1953

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12 October 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Communism in Latin America

GENERAL

1. If one considers the CPs of Latin America on an individual (national) basis, it is clear that only a few of them even approximate the organizational standards set for them by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They tend to be small, sectarian, and politically stymied. In areas of maximum opportunity, many of them prove themselves incapable of making a decisive response to the "revolutionary demands" of the hour.
2. Nevertheless, the solid nucleus of each Party is, of course, totally devoted to the Soviet Union and, within its capabilities, it strives to implement Soviet foreign policy. Even the "scavenger" of them waits, vulture-like, to feed on the carcass of economic crisis and political chaos--to contribute to the realization of the Soviet world-design.
3. Furthermore, it is not, of course, as isolated national units, but as sections of the world Communist Party, that these Parties function; and it is this status which gives them a strength which far exceeds that proper to their own capabilities, taken in isolation. Latin American CP leaders have travelled extensively to Soviet/Satellite areas, and, through training there, Communist leadership in some LA countries has been improved. Through its international fronts (WFTU, WFDY, IADJ, WPC, etc.) and their world congresses (mostly in the Soviet orbit, but also in non-orbit countries), the Soviet Union has endeavored, with some success, to exercise influence over important "target" sectors of the Latin American population (e.g., youth, students, teachers, labor leaders, scientists, lawyers, "women"), thus facilitating the "work" of the national CPs. The people's love of peace, desire for cultural exchange, and "need" for East-West trade relations (especially where tension marks economic relation with the U. S.), have been the objects of intensive Communist propagandistic manipulation.

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4. Throughout the year, the Communist movement has taken steps, with only moderate success, to gain strength by achieving hemispheric coordination of its activities. In August, 1953, the CP, USA, called for closer organizational ties between that Party and the CPs of Latin America, citing the essential unity of the movement throughout the hemisphere, and the obligation of Communists in the "imperialist" country to aid the workers (CPs) in the "colonial and semi-colonial" countries.

5. Through the CTAL (hemisphere-wide) and the WFTU increased efforts are being made to bring the largely non-Communist LA labor movement under Communist control. The WFTU has a program for the development of labor movements in "colonial and semi-colonial countries." Special emphasis is to be placed on strengthening the organization and leadership of agricultural trade unions, and on fulfillment of the demands of farm workers and poor peasants.

6. "Agrarian reform" is becoming an active political issue in Latin America and, as in China, Communist Parties are striving to exploit this "popular demand" to the hilt. Their success in Guatemala and Bolivia has been notable, in this regard.

7. In general summary, Communist strength in Latin America stems from:

A. "Historical; Objectively Existing" Sources:

- i. an irrational, irresponsible anti-U.S. nationalism which is ready-made material for the Communists' "national liberation" program.
- ii. a growing demand for agrarian reform which Communists espouse and seek to effect and control.
- iii. the political opportunism of individuals and groups who feel that they can "use" the Communists:
 - a) to maintain themselves in power, and to carry out their "anti-imperialist" (nationalist) programs, or,
 - b) to enhance and elevate their present position in the power structure, or,
 - c) to restore them (e.g., an opposition group) to power.
- iv. economic crisis (inflation, high rents and prices, agricultural shortages).

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B. Doctrinal-Organizational Sources:

- i. The support and guidance of the international Communist movement, led by the U.S.S.R.
- ii. A confidence in inevitable world victory.
- iii. "United Front" tactical principles and practices which make possible the Parties' acquisition of "strength by association."
- iv. A program for luring important sectors of the population into the Communist camp by skillfully exploiting the basic human desires for peace, cultural exchange, trade, etc.

SPECIFIC

1. The most immediately dangerous areas of Communist activity in Latin America are Guatemala, Bolivia, Brazil and (until suppressed by armed intervention) British Guiana.

2. In Guatemala, the small CP (532 registered members) has enjoyed spectacular success in infiltrating the Government. The latter has encouraged the growth of Communist influence by its toleration of, and (at least) indirect assistance to, the Communist movement. Relations between Party and Government have been most harmonious because of their basic agreement on "national independence," (opposition to U. S. "imperialism"), "agrarian reform," and the "need" for subverting anti-Communist ("undemocratic") regimes of neighboring republics, particularly Honduras and El Salvador. Prospering in this benevolent political climate, the CP Guatemala has become the basic Communist liaison organization in Central America. CP rules organized labor (CGTG) affiliated with CTAL, WFTU.

3. In Bolivia (as in Guatemala) Communists are profiting by substantial agreement with leftist measures of the Government, such as nationalization of mines, and agrarian reform. Currently, the Communists are unable to achieve maximum exploitation of their opportunities for power because the ruling party (National Revolutionary Movement: MNR) has declared its hostility to Communism, and the 2000-member CP Bolivia is rivaled by a Trotskyite party (PCR), which is of equal size and of even greater influence in the powerful central Bolivian labor federation (COB). The situation is especially

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precarious because economic crisis and impending famine confront the regime, and thousands of workers still bear the arms they took up in the April, 1952, revolution; the armed Indians, incited by CP Bolivia and Trotskyite agitators, have already engaged in insurrection, and reportedly seized extensive territory outside departmental capitals. The basic Communist program calls for carrying out the full "National Revolution"--drastic agrarian reform (confiscation and free distribution of land to the working peasants), state monopoly of foreign trade, sale of minerals to, and establishment of diplomatic relations with, the USSR and her satellites, greater workers' participation in government, etc.

4. CP Bolivia aspires to see the Bolivian Revolution develop to the point where "it will occupy an honorable place alongside the Chinese Revolution and the revolution of the People's Democracies." At the same time, stability of government is reportedly threatened by a possible rightist coup, aided by defected members of the right-wing of the ruling party.

5. In Brazil, Communist strength is increasing. The CP Brazil, one of the wealthiest and largest, (estimated membership: 64,000), of the CPs in Latin America, is illegal, but it hopes to obtain legal status by the 1954 elections. Recently the Party has been permitted to conduct its propaganda campaigns without government interference. Whether it achieves legality or not, the CP Brazil has already concluded an agreement with the (legal) Brazilian Workers Party (PRT), which will permit CP Brazil to run candidates on the PRT ticket. Although Communists profit by the rise of extreme nationalism among many non-Communist Brazilian political leaders, the immediate cause of the Communists' increase in strength is the policy of Minister of Labor Joao Goulart. Goulart, who is politically ambitious and opportunistic, is endeavoring to build a political machine on the unions, Peron-style, and is utilizing the "willing and able" Communist labor unions to further his aims. The situation is made worse by the facts that Communists and leftists have penetrated the Government to a noteworthy extent, and that the CP Brazil has an extensive arms cache and strong ties with the international Communist movement.

6. In British Guiana, the power-expanding efforts of the ruling pro-Communist People's Progressive Party (PPP) have just been curbed by the intervention of British forces and by drastic Home Office action against the local regime. Prior to this, frequent visits to British Guiana by militant West Indian Communist

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figures were recently noted. Janet Jagan, U. S. born wife of PFF leader and "Prime Minister" Cheddi Jagan, recently returned to British Guiana from the Communist front Women's International Democratic Federation Congress in Copenhagen.

7. While it is impossible in this short paper to deal with each of the LA CPs, a few remarks will be made about some of the more prominent ones.

a. CP Venezuela, with an estimated membership of 10,000-15,000, has its principal strength in urban areas of central Venezuela and in oil-producing regions around Lake Maracaibo. Venezuelan Security Services are believed to be capable of taking swift, effective action against the Communist movement.

b. CP Mexico, with an estimated strength of 10,000 (3,000 card-carrying members), has very active international Communist connections, and carries on activities on a hemispheric basis, principally through the CTAL, headquartered in Mexico City.

c. The CP Cuba (PSP), with about 50,000 actual affiliates, is one of the largest CPs in Latin America. It is influential in education and labor, and would be a significant subversive force if united with other opposition parties.

d. CP Chile, (estimated strength: 35,000-50,000) does not exercise great influence, in spite of the presence of leftists in the Government. CP Chile's influence in organized labor is strong, and the Party is striving to increase it. The Party has very active international Communist connections.

e. CP Argentina (c. 35,000 strong, 1952) is deemed to be no match for Argentine security forces.

f. CP Panama is organizationally weak. It does have as its labor arm the FSTRP, affiliated with the CTAL, WFTU. However, the FSTRP is itself weak.

8. The few Soviet and Satellite diplomatic establishments in Latin America are not known to figure prominently in directing or aiding the local Communist movement, except in "cultural" affairs.

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