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BOSTON, MASS.
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
MONITOR

H-192 399
MAR 25 1968

Right-wing terror unit flashes Guatemala power

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Washington

Right-wing terrorists have again taken the offensive in Guatemala.

If information coming from Guatemala City is correct, La Mano Blanca (the White Hand) is responsible for:

- The recent kidnaping of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Guatemala City.
- A recently unearthed plot to overthrow the government of Julio César Méndez Montenegro.

In fact, both developments may be related.

The evidence so far gathered and released in the Guatemala capital suggests that La Mano Blanca has grown increasingly strong and that it has clearly become the most important right-wing terrorist group in Guatemala.

The Archbishop, the Most Rev. Mario Casariego, was kidnaped March 16 and released four days later, after it had been reported that President Méndez Montenegro received an ultimatum that he must resign if the Catholic prelate was to be released.

Apparently the effort failed—for President Méndez Montenegro refused to resign, and Archbishop Casariego was released.

Nevertheless, the ability of La Mano Blanca, sometimes referred to as simply

La Mano, has been repeatedly demonstrated—and the kidnaping of the Archbishop is the latest example.

The rightist terrorists became a force in the Guatemalan picture something over a year ago when they were formed as a counterforce to leftist terrorist elements, principally the Communist-leaning Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR).

La Mano Blanca is credited with a variety of terrorist activities in the past 12 months. It has frequently carried out raids on rural peasants in Guatemala suspected of collaborating with the FAR. Together with other terrorist elements on the right, La Mano Blanca is believed to have killed more than 3,000 peasants in the past year.

The kidnaping of Archbishop Casariego was apparently an effort of right-wing elements to block the mildly reformist efforts of the Méndez Montenegro government. The President, who came into office on a platform of economic and social reform nearly two years ago, has made some advances in this direction.

Threat shifts

But he has been much buffeted by Guatemala's continuing political instability, particularly in the form of guerrilla operations. When he came to office, it was the leftist rural guerrillas and urban terrorists who appeared to cause the most problems.

But as the Méndez Montenegro term has continued, the rightist elements have grown increasingly powerful and have probably caused more of a threat to political stability than have the leftist terrorists.

The Guatemalan police, according to some sources here, have the names and know the movements in detail of many rightist elements.

Raúl Estuardo Iorenzana, according to these sources, probably carried out the kidnaping of Archbishop Casariego. It is likely, these same sources say, that Roberto Alejos Arzú, a wealthy coffee planter whose farm was used for the Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion forces in 1961, also was involved.

Mr. Alejos is close to right-wing activities here. Earlier this year, he was jailed for

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