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Ripe for Revolution

Bitter Fruit:

The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala

Stephen Schlesinger
and Stephen Kinzer
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A sense of what came before has never been the strong suit of American journalism. Thus, I think, were Americans generally perplexed—even frightened—by the collapse of the Shah and the taking of American hostages which, following not long after the raising of a Viet Cong flag over the U.S. embassy in Saigon and the Sandanista triumph in Nicaragua, seemed to usher in a new age of American impotence and international anarchy.

Of course, our journalists were not totally responsible for our national failure to anticipate these rude shocks. With notable exceptions, they have relied on the official view from Washington or our embassies. It is not surprising, then, that when the wave of McCarthyism washed out the entire top echelon of the State Department's "China Hands"—men who for the most part had grown up in China, knew well the corruption of Chiang Kai-Shek and the efficacy of the communists under Mao Tse-tung, and thus scoffed at the question, Who lost China?—the journalists of the late 1950s and early 1960s, deprived of an historical touchstone, would not properly be equipped to evaluate official propaganda leading us into Viet Nam. More simply put, journalists covering the State Department had no one with a dissenting view to talk to: not only were men like John Stewart Service hounded out of the State Department, the anti-Red hysteria of the times prevented them from getting any job in Washington. Service ended up at a steam-valve factory in Brooklyn.

Partly because of Viet Nam, times have changed. The old foreign policy establishment has been forever cracked. Thus, targets of the new era of State Department purges under the Reagan

Endowment for International Peace from where, high over Dupont Circle they lob policy grenades toward the White House and Foggy Bottom.

During an interview in his office there last July, I asked White whether there was a purge going on in the State Department in the early months of the Reagan administration. Pointing toward his own exile and that of other ambassadors and high-level officials under the Carter administration, White thought there was. I noted that it seemed similar to what had happened in the State Department after the Chinese Revolution. He answered:

Yes, but there's a big difference. In those days, the ideologues of the Right were much more naive, open, and honest. They were out to get those guys in the State Department because they had "sold out China." They said so, and they went after them. The present tactic is much more insidious because they're pretending that everything is just normal and going forward routinely, and that no one is being "purged." This purge, though, is even more complete because the number of people at senior levels who know or who are involved in Central America are really very few. The Reagan team has gotten rid of all of them, and in a very shameful and vengeful way.

The new metaphor for "losing China," White agreed, was to have been in favor of a human rights policy. That is, if an official was in favor of human rights as a policy tactic, he was "soft on communism," White added. "They even talk about the 'traitorous' Carter administration" on the seventh floor of the State Department.

So now the Reaganistas have had a year and a half to apply their big stick and "quiet diplomacy" in Central America. What do they have to show for it? They face an imminent disaster in El Salvador and the failure of their



cult for the Reagan plan to overthrow or rattle the Sandanistas into fatal mistakes, to press a war in El Salvador or nearby Guatemala and Honduras, is their failure to banish dissenting bureaucrats from the political landscape. A complementary factor is the simultaneously emerging secret history of U.S. policy in Central America which, provides in great part through the Freedom of Information Act, provides a critical tool for raking off the pretensions of current Reagan strategies to reveal what is really going on today. It also made this engrossing, startling, and often very funny book, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, possible.

Authors Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer have put just the right comic touch on this story of the brazen plot of the CIA and the United Fruit Company to overthrow a modestly-progressive government in Guatemala.

They lovingly recreate, for example, the bizarre and pathetic events following the CIA's overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. The Guatemalan Army Chief of Staff, Carlos Enrique Diaz had taken over and, to the American ambassador's incredulity, was issuing promises over the national radio to follow Arbenz's policies in nationalizing United Fruit's banana empire. The CIA coup was going down the drain.

"Okay, now I'll have to crack down on that s.o.b.," snapped Ambassador John E. Peurifoy. He sent over two CIA agents to straighten Diaz out and lecture him on the evils of "communism." Diaz objected.

"Wait a minute, Colonel," the agent interjected. "Let me explain something to you." Wagging a finger at Diaz, the CIA man warned, "You made a big mistake when you took over the government."

He paused to let the words sink in. Then he continued: "Colonel, you're just not convenient for the requirements of American foreign