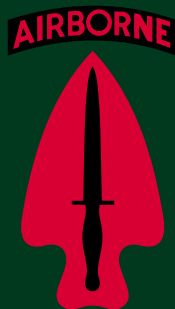


**Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies**

**CASE STUDIES IN INSURGENCY  
AND REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE:  
GUATEMALA 1944–1954**

**REVISED EDITION**



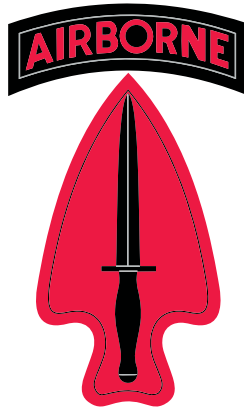
**United States Army Special Operations Command**



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Paul J. Tompkins Jr., Project Lead

Erin M. Richardson, Editor

United States Army Special Operations Command

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## ASSESSING REVOLUTIONARY AND INSURGENT STRATEGIES

The Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) series consists of a set of case studies and research conducted for the US Army Special Operations Command by the National Security Analysis Department of The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

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- Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941–1954 (pub. 1964)*

## INTRODUCTION TO REVISED EDITION

This study was originally published by the US Army Special Operations Research Office in November 1964. As we developed the Assessing Resistance and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) project and work began on the new studies, we determined that this study is still important and relevant and thus should be republished. This study emphasizes the role of the indigenous military during the rise of Communist influence rather than revolutionary organization and techniques. Even today, valuable lessons can be extracted by studying this perspective.

The majority of the book was reproduced exactly as it appeared originally, with some minor spelling and punctuation corrections as well as changes in formatting to conform to modern typesetting conventions and to match the new ARIS studies in presentation. The process for creating this revised edition entailed scanning the pages from a copy of the original book; using an optical character recognition (OCR) function to convert the text on the scanned pages to computer-readable, editable text; refining the scanned figures to ensure appropriate resolution and contrast; and composing the document using professional typesetting software. Then, word by word, the revised text was compared to the original text to ensure that no errors were introduced during the OCR and composition processes.

These efforts resulted in the creation of this revised edition in the following formats: a softbound book, a hardbound book, a PDF, and an EPUB. The EPUB was generated by creating a new set of files from the print-ready files, adjusting various settings in the files to facilitate maximum compatibility with e-readers, exporting the files to .epub, and reviewing and revising the code to allow for optimal viewing on standard e-reading devices. The final step was to test the book on multiple e-readers and then repeat the entire process as necessary to address any remaining issues in the code.

Although the processes for creating the various formats of this edition are for the most part straightforward, they take several weeks to complete and require considerable attention to detail. Several staff members from the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory devoted time and effort to making the various formats of this revised edition possible: Kelly Livieratos, Annie Marcotte, Magda Saina, and Erin Richardson.

This study and the other products from the ARIS project are essential learning tools developed to enhance Special Operations Forces personnel's understanding of resistances and insurgencies. For more than fifty years, Special Operations Forces have conducted missions to support resistances or insurgencies (unconventional warfare); to counter

them (counterinsurgency operations); or to support a partner nation in eliminating them (foreign internal defense). These operations are collectively referred to as special warfare. Special Operations doctrine gives general principles and strategies for accomplishing these operations but in most cases describes the resistance or insurgency only in generalities. The ARIS project was designed to serve as an anatomy lesson. It provides the necessary foundational material for the special warfare practitioner to learn the elemental structure, form, and function of rebellions, thus enabling him or her to better adapt and apply the doctrine professionally. Additionally, these products inform doctrine, ensuring that it is adapted to meet modern social and technological changes.

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*Paul J. Tompkins Jr.*  
*USASOC Project Lead*





**CASE STUDIES IN INSURGENCY  
AND REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE:  
GUATEMALA 1944–1954**

**Primary Research Responsibility**

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**SPECIAL OPERATIONS RESEARCH OFFICE**

The American University

Washington, D.C. 20016

November 1964

## FOREWORD

This is another publication in a series of studies on insurgencies and revolutions conducted by the Special Operations Research Office. From the first report—*Case Studies on Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: 23 Summary Accounts*—four cases were selected because of particular interest for more detailed analysis. Three of these have already been published: *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Algeria 1954–1962*; *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Cuba 1953–1959*; and *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941–1954*. In addition to these a related study, *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare*, has also been published.

This report on the Guatemalan situation between 1944 and 1954 is a special case, however, in which emphasis has been placed on the role of the indigenous military during the rise of Communist influence rather than on revolutionary organization and techniques. Like its predecessors, this study deals with its subject analytically and portrays background, essential causes, persons, parties, movements, actions, and consequences. It is hoped that students of politico-military phenomena may be aided in developing a more general understanding of revolutionary processes.

Because the events discussed in this study are relatively recent and many of the personalities involved are still living, discretion was necessary to protect sources. As will be noted, Parts I and II are well documented, whereas many of the sources in Part III could not be mentioned.

Readers' comments and suggestions on this study will be welcomed.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "T. R. Vallance". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Theodore R. Vallance  
Director

## PREFACE

A few words concerning the style of this case study are required in order to clarify its concept and intent.

Three companion case studies have already been prepared and published on the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962), the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959), and the Vietnam Revolution (1941–1954). The same conceptual framework was used and the same factors in the environment and the revolutionary movements were evaluated in those three case studies.<sup>a</sup> Thus a basis was prepared for comparative analysis that will, hopefully, provide generalizations applicable to more than these three revolutions.

The case study of the events in Guatemala between 1944 and 1954 uses a different approach more suited to that situation. In the first place, rather than being a study of revolution, the Guatemalan study examines and attempts to analyze the rise and demise of the Communist Party in relation to the political activities of Guatemalan military officers during a period between two revolutions: the 1944 revolution which brought to power a liberal government within which the Communist Party gained power; and the 1954 revolution which made a conservative military officer head of state. The study also examines economic, social, and political factors which have been identified as being generally related to the rise of communism in Guatemala.

It is not the intent of this case study to offer any particular “slant” on the Guatemalan Communist movement, the actors and parties in it, or the role of foreign (to Guatemala) powers; rather, it is to present as objective an account as possible in terms of the events being evaluated. Thus, some of the study necessarily deals with how Guatemalans perceived events or, more accurately, how it is believed they perceived events.

Although the aim has been to prepare the case study from the viewpoint of an impartial, objective observer, the sources may be too unreliable or the “observer” too biased in favor of objectives compatible with Western democratic interests. Therefore, no infallibility is claimed and it is readily conceded that the study cannot be the final word on that particular time period in Guatemala. However, any errors of omission

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<sup>a</sup> Paul Jureidini, *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Algeria 1954–1962*. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, December 1963; Norman LaCharite, *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Cuba 1953–1959*. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, September 1963; Bert Cooper, et al., *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941–1954*. Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, January 1964.

or commission are not deliberate and they certainly are not a result of an intent to foster any particular political “slant.”

At the same time, there is no question that many of the subjects discussed are politically sensitive. It must be recorded, therefore, that the above denial of any deliberate attempt to “slant” the case study also means that there was no intent to “cover up” historical facts and interpretations which might be understood to reflect unfavorably on any party. Little would be gained in terms of increasing understanding of revolutions if justification of past particular policies or advocacy of any given current policy were the real intent under the guise of objective analysis.

Beyond the resolve of objectivity in the preparation of the study, sources were selected on the basis of their judged reliability. A balance was sought among sources of known persuasion in order not to unwittingly bias the case study in one direction or another. As a final check, the draft was submitted to Dr. Leo Suslow of the Pan American Union, Dr. Ronald Schneider of Columbia University, and an information specialist of the Department of the Army with experience in Guatemala, Ann Snider. They reviewed the manuscript for accuracy of fact and reasonableness of interpretations and their comments and criticisms provided the basis for final revisions. Although their contributions were substantial, final responsibility for the manuscript, both with respect to substantive content and methodology, rests solely with the Special Operations Research Office. Parenthetically, Part II of this report draws heavily on the excellent work of Dr. Schneider—*Communism in Guatemala 1944–1954*. It would be presumptuous of us to attempt to improve upon this work.

Appreciation and gratitude is extended to Mr. S. N. Bjelajac, OPS SW, for his generous guidance and direction; Dr. William A. Lybrand, Chairman of Basic Studies Division, and Edward W. Gude, Research Scientist, SORO, for their assistance; and Mr. Thomas Proulx, SORO Support Division, for facilitating administrative matters. Among the many others who contributed to this manuscript are two SORO interns, John Heins and Caroline Braddock.

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## **SUMMARY**



## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The objective of this case study is to contribute to increased understanding of the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944 (which included two coups d'état) and the events that followed up to 1954, by examining three types of information—

- (1) Social, economic, and political factors considered relevant to the tactics employed by the Communist Party in Guatemala in the prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary situations.
- (2) Activities of the Communist Party in the politics of Guatemalan development.
- (3) Noncombatant role of the military in a situation of revolutionary change and increasing Communist influence.

The study is not focused on the strategy and tactics of countering revolutions. On the premise that development of U.S. policies and operations for countering revolutions—where that is in the national interest—will be improved by a better understanding of what it is that is to be countered, the study concentrates on the character of the events during the period from 1944 to 1954.

## ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

There are three major parts to this study. Part I describes the economic, social, and political climate of Guatemala from 1944 to 1954—the setting for the rise of Communist influence. Part II discusses the Communist movement in Guatemala and international reaction to it. Part III covers the role of the Guatemalan military establishment during the time that Communist influence increased. A brief Epilogue sketches events after 1954.

The summary is for readers who must restrict their reading and is necessarily selective. It must be added that the study proper is highly dependent on the summary and all readers are advised to read the Synopsis so as to place the study in its proper perspective. A bibliography lists references to the secondary source material used in the report.

## SYNOPSIS

After 13 years of power in Guatemala, Gen. Jorge Ubico was overthrown in 1944. Ubico typified the traditional conservative *caudillo*: the general-president whose authority rested on the support of the army, landowners, and foreign corporations. His primary aim was to maintain an orderly government, and this he did by personally holding a

tight rein on every function of government and administration, including the army and police security forces. Although Ubico prescribed and carried out a number of beneficial welfare projects, he did not initiate the kind of program of social progress that the Guatemalan middle groups considered necessary. Moreover, Ubico suppressed individuals and groups who were suspected of opposing his regime or advocating what he thought were radical changes.

In 1944, inspired by the success of the neighboring Salvadorans who had overthrown their authoritarian regime earlier, a group of intellectuals—including students, professors, and lawyers—demanded political reforms. A state of emergency which curtailed civil rights was proclaimed by Ubico and brought on a series of public disorders that finally led to his resignation.

The revolution underwent four phases of development:<sup>1</sup> a phase of general unrest; a phase of military rule; a phase of planning for constitutional government; and a phase of constitutionalism. During all four phases the military played a leading role in directing and influencing the course of Guatemalan politics. The first phase was of short duration: demonstrations and strikes reached a critical stage on June 24, 1944, and culminated in Ubico's resignation on June 29 after the army intervened.

General Frederico Ponce Vaides, who received Ubico's resignation, was named president by the Ubico Congress after a show of force, and held that post from July 4 to October 20—the second phase of the revolution.<sup>a</sup> Ponce joined with two other generals and formed a ruling triumvirate which excluded from the provisional government the civilians who had initiated the revolution. Capt. Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, who until then had held a post at the *Escuela Politécnica*—Guatemala's "West Point"—was fired from his position and, disaffected, journeyed to El Salvador to organize a revolt with civilian revolutionary leaders. Meanwhile, Maj. Francisco Javier Arana, an army tank commander and a popular junior officer among his associates, joined with Arbenz and the civilians in planning the revolt. Toward the latter part of October, after Ponce had indicated that he would remain in office indefinitely and had armed and incited Indians against his opposition, Arana and a contingent of the Armed Forces deposed Ponce in a swift coup that was over within 2 days.

With a junta composed of Arana, Arbenz, and Jorge Toriello Garrido, a civilian, acting as an interim government during the third phase of the revolution, Guatemalans set about choosing a constituent assembly

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<sup>a</sup> A discussion of this phase has been included in Paul A. Jureidini, et al, *Casebook on Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: 123 Summary Accounts* (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, December 1962), pp. 101–117.

to draft an organic law and to prepare the country for national elections. Some attempts were made by both military and civilian leaders to consolidate Guatemalan politics and to secure a degree of mutual trust among themselves. Civilian political groups organized rapidly and pressed for the immediate election of a legislative assembly. While jockeying for position and attempting to make a better deal for their military supporters, Arana and Arbenz exercised delaying tactics; this cost them some civilian support.

Eventually, through a series of compromises between the civilians and the military, the final draft of the Constitution was signed by the junta on March 13, 1945, and a newly elected president, Juan José Arévalo, was inaugurated on March 15. By that time, the gap between the civilians and the military had widened, opposition parties and groups had begun to form, and an incipient military rivalry between Arana and Arbenz had begun to emerge. Arana as Chief of the Armed Forces was the strongest military figure in the country, as well as an important center of power in Guatemalan politics. In the first few years of the fourth phase of the revolution he enjoyed the support of both the army and most revolutionary parties.

The new government program of social change got underway with a burst of enthusiasm that soon faded. A Social Security Institute was established, a labor code was passed, and an electoral law and other general statutes came into effect. The Government, however, was faced with an inefficient bureaucracy, inexperienced personnel, and a shortage of tax funds. Moreover, almost immediately after taking power, Arévalo discovered a plot against him and his first executive order placed restrictions on newly won constitutional guarantees. Under pressure, the Government was forced to abandon its ideology of "spiritual socialism" and adopt a policy of expediency.<sup>2</sup> Policy implementation fluctuated so much that it is difficult to evaluate Arévalo's true attitude toward communism and the extent to which he would have turned the revolution toward the extreme left. It is safe to say, however, that Arana's influence was enough to prevent the Government from taking any positive action favoring the Communists.

Political developments reached a critical stage in 1948. The Government lost its initial zeal and could conjure no effective social myth to prevent the ranks of its supporters from splintering. A wave of plots against the Government was discovered; labor leaders demanded that workers be armed to defend the Government, but Arana refused to comply. Arana might have taken over at this time but he feared that labor would call a general strike and take up arms should the Government fall.

By 1948, two major political factions opposed each other on issues of reform and presidential succession. One, which included conservatives and moderates, had helped to overthrow Ubico but had not become “deeply committed to anti-militarism”;<sup>3</sup> Arana became its spokesman. The other group, the left, included all the Government parties and advocated (1) a leftist solution to Guatemala’s problems, (2) parliamentarianism, and (3) the growth of political parties as alternatives to the force of the military in Guatemalan politics.<sup>4</sup> Arbenz, who still maintained some military support, was its favorite. Arana’s informal announcement that he would run for president in the next election brought the antagonism between the groups to a head. Both sides prepared for a showdown.

This came in July 1949 when Arana was assassinated. One sector of the army who were Arana supporters immediately went into a revolt. It was put down within a week by a pro-Arbenz faction of the army backed by organized labor. Although the connection between Arana’s assassination and the Government is unclear, Arbenz and the Government benefited from the elimination of their strongest opponent. The Arévalo-Arbenz group clearly came out on top.

Arévalo first and Arbenz later attempted to “democratize” the army by politically neutralizing the military establishment or transforming it into a pro-government institution. This was done by purging members of the officer corps who did not support the Government and by rewarding with good jobs and increased benefits those members whose views were considered to be “progressive.” The rank and file of the army, “indoctrinated” by the Government, were drawn from the Indian population—an apolitical sector of Guatemalan society. Disorders in 1950 compelled Arévalo to call on the military and temporarily make the Chief of the Armed Forces head of state; the army reestablished order and handed the reins of Government, further weakened, back to Arévalo.

Arbenz, groomed for the presidency, went into office in March 1951. He took strong stands in favor of agrarian reform and against foreign enterprises, particularly those of the United States. Under Arbenz the army did not play a decisive role in politics but remained a powerful factor to reckon with. Although Arbenz in his rise to the presidency depended heavily on the army, he found it extremely difficult to maintain a grip on the military and came to depend on civilian support.

During the year preceding the fall of Arbenz, army officers began to fear that Arbenz had chosen the interests of the Communists above the interests of the army. They also felt that communism in Guatemala had disrupted and jeopardized the interests of the nation and had increased tension in the international situation. The extensive program

of agrarian reform disrupted them. When Arbenz ordered the army to arm and train 5,000 workers, the officers feared that their functions were to be usurped by Communist labor leaders; they believed that the formation of a “people’s militia” meant not only the decline of their influence but physical elimination of the officer corps. Thus, when the Arbenz Government was threatened by the invading “Liberation Army” of Carlos Castillo Armas the army was not inclined to defend it. The General Staff recommended that Arbenz retract and moderate. When their plea was rejected they joined in demanding his resignation in June 1954.

## SELECTED ANALYTIC CONCLUSIONS

What were the factors in Guatemala that encouraged Communist growth? What was the role of the military during the period of increasing Communist influence? A study of the record of Guatemala from 1944 to 1954 should help to answer these questions. The first part of this analysis will attempt to highlight factors which seemed to have special importance in shaping Guatemalan history during that period. The second part will list a number of general findings that may help in understanding the relationship of the rise of communism to the role of the military in developing areas.

### Highlights

The leaders of the groups that emerged from the events of 1944 carried with them an eclectic body of convictions directed toward reform. Looking at their economic system, for instance, they saw that it was at a low stage of industrial development. Most Guatemalans depended on agriculture for a livelihood; at the same time there was little agricultural diversification. Both the Arévalo and Arbenz Governments (1945–54) were unable to change these basic features of the economy.

The two Governments, however, did institute land reform. In 1944 most of the arable land was in the hands of a small group of landowners; efficient and profitable production of coffee and bananas, the country’s two export crops, called for the concentration of land. Although Arévalo experimented with land reform in the late 1940’s, it was not until 1952 under Arbenz that a meaningful land reform program was instituted. The program was not excessively radical, but in many areas of Guatemala administrators went beyond the provisions of the law, and the program became harsh and indiscriminate. In addition, it was apparently manipulated for political reasons. Landowners

resisted the law and looked to military circles for support in opposing the Government.

The United Fruit Company, a U.S. corporation which reported assets of nearly \$600 million in 1953, and controlled the major railway and power companies, became the Government's number one target for the expropriation of land. Reaction against the company was nurtured by the nationalistic fervor which grew out of the revolutionary activity of 1944. United Fruit was a living symbol of Guatemala's close economic ties with the United States. Such foreign business interests, nationalists felt, were non-Guatemalan and exploitative and therefore hindrances to self-sufficiency and economic independence. Nationalists were prominent in all political factions.

Prior to 1944, three major social groups—middle-class professionals, urban workers, and rural laborers—were marginal to the traditional society. That is, they were denied full social acceptance and participation by the ruling elite—large landowners, military officers, representatives of foreign enterprises, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Indians, a self-sufficient ethnic group making up over half the country's population, formed the lowest social stratum. After 1944, the middle-class professionals became the political leaders and both urban and rural workers were organized into a politically powerful labor movement loyal to the Government. The Indians, who were given increased attention by the new political and social leaders, maintained a separate culture and traditional village life.

In 1944, Guatemala held its first relatively free election, after years of *caudillo* rule. Although political parties began to flourish, politicization had a slow beginning; the Government had to live down the constitutional transgressions of past governments before many people would take active interest in politics. By 1948, parties with some mass support flourished, each claiming leadership of the revolution and the Government reached a mutually beneficial working relationship with most of these parties. At the same time, a small and relatively insignificant group of opposition parties began to form.

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Arévalo and Arbenz Governments was laying the groundwork for the extension of administrative power to outlying areas that had formerly been controlled by the local upper class. In certain large government *fincas* and in U.S.-owned corporations, newly created groups formed a network of control and influence which brought many rural dwellers under the power of the national government for the first time.

From this turbulent environment arose the Guatemalan Communist Party, creating anxiety in this hemisphere and a stir throughout the rest of the world. Its rise has been explained in a number of ways.



For instance, it has been said that communism came to Guatemala because of internal cleavages caused by the changing economic, social, and political situation. Or that Guatemala was chosen by international communism as a base from which the Communist Party could subvert other Latin American republics. A noted scholar, Kalman Silvert, writes that the “. . . rise of this group is . . . to be expected in underdeveloped areas as they begin to budge out of their social apathy and cast about not only for enemies to excoriate, but also philosophies to guide them.”<sup>5</sup> In Guatemala, after 1944 and for the first time in its history, there was significant interplay of ideologies ranging from one end of the political spectrum to the other. Adherents to the Communist ideology used nationalist symbols in their appeals to Guatemalans and eventually gained perhaps the most forceful following.

The Communist Party, basically composed of new converts rather than old-guard party members from the Ubico era, had a very modest beginning in the middle 1940's. Even at its peak in the early 1950's, the party consisted of no more than a reported 4,000 card-carrying members: middle-class professionals and students, who made up the party leadership; urban workers; and rural laborers. Two facts should be emphasized. First, a significant number of the members of this small party were able—with the help of Arévalo and Arbenz—to get high places within the government administration and civil service, and to dominate the growing and politically powerful urban and rural labor movement with nearly 300,000 adherents. Second, they appeared to share with non-Communist parties certain characteristics that tended to obscure ideological distinctions between the left-wing parties: they expressed a common resentment of the old regime, a fervent nationalism, and a general antipathy toward the United States. This combination of parties, at least on the surface, influenced and consistently supported the Government.

Conflicting pressures of the kind faced by individuals who belong to two or more social groups with differing outlooks hardly existed in Guatemala from 1944 to 1954. Most of the social groups in Guatemala were headed by labor leaders, pro-government politicians, or leaders who belonged either to the Communist Party or parties aligned with it. Anti-Communists charged that many social clubs were “Communist front organizations,” transmitting Communist ideology to the lower levels of society. Few anti-Communist organizations or institutions were able to compete with the pro-government groups. The Church as a social institution played a small role in the anti-Communist movement and did not offer its faithful an “either or” alternative.

Although pro-government parties joined together on many government-sponsored issues, it could not be said that there was

general consensus among them. Shuffling of political blocs—a continuous cycle of political mergers and splintering into personal factions—characterized the unstable party structure of Guatemala from 1944 until the National Democratic Front was formed toward the end of the Arbenz regime. The Communist Party itself was not a monolithic movement: split on ideological and organizational issues, it followed the unstable course of the other parties. Only through the intervention of outside influence—from the Soviet Union and Latin American Communist labor leaders—was the party able to mend some of its fences. This political pattern of rapidly shifting alliances followed by Communist cohesion in the National Democratic Front was perhaps to have been expected from revolutionary activity. It was these developments which determined in a large measure the role played by the Guatemalan military during the same period.

A similar lack of unity and consensus characterized the Guatemalan military during the 1944–54 period. Factions emerged and allegiances shifted in the military as well as in the political arena. According to the Guatemalan Constitution of 1945 and military regulations, the Armed Forces was to remain apolitical; it was not the function of the military as an institution to judge the constitutionality of government policy. Military leaders, however, became directly involved in the political process, and their various ideologies resembled those of their political counterparts. They split into several officer-dominated cliques. Some of these cliques were loyal to the Government and were rewarded with key commands and other benefits. Other cliques showed little or no enthusiasm for government policy and, on occasion, plotted military revolts. Their members were removed from command posts, placed on inactive duty, or purged and imprisoned. Purged officers formed Arbenz's most active opposition.

Traditionally, the Guatemalan Armed Forces would have presented no such complex picture of disunity. The officer corps of the “old” Guatemalan Army was selected from established families and was part of the ruling elite. Their social background affected their political behavior, and military officers generally were intent on protecting the *status quo*. In recent decades, technological advances produced social changes that also altered the character of the military. It became more professional as an institution. Most of its members, selected from more modest social levels, supported and even promoted social change. Segments of the Armed Forces differed, however, as to the extent and speed of this social change. Violent clashes sometimes resulted.

Only toward the last few days of the Arbenz regime did the Guatemalan Armed Forces achieve unity of purpose. The country had been invaded by Castillo Armas' rebel force, and Arbenz was demanding

that his military officers arm and train urban workers and organize them into a people's militia. Conservatives in the officer corps pictured the demand to their fellow officers as a plan by Arbenz to replace reluctant military officers with labor leaders, and to control the military through a system of political commissars. Officers therefore saw in the plan a complete usurpation of the functions of the established Armed Forces and pictured themselves as being seriously undercut and possibly eliminated. Under these circumstances the military factions joined to demand Arbenz's resignation.

There were other significant reasons why the military did not protect the Arbenz regime from outside attack. Some officers saw the traditional position and political influence of the military endangered by the extensive changes taking place. Others resented the assassination of Arana and the purge that followed. Still other officers felt that their personal prospects would be enhanced if Arbenz were overthrown.

In summary, the following occurrences and events highlighted Guatemalan history in the period from 1944 to 1954:

- (1) The second coup in 1944.
- (2) The rise and assassination of Arana.
- (3) The political mobilization of urban and rural labor.
- (4) The formation of the National Democratic Front.
- (5) Failure of Arbenz's policies for handling the military.

## General Findings

The following are, in the author's opinion, significant findings that have come out of the Guatemalan case study. They have a broad implication for understanding the nature of Communist operations, the relation of military politics to the rise of communism, and the interaction of social, political, and military aspects of modernization during a period of extensive political crisis following the downfall of a traditional *caudillo*-type regime.

1. The Communist Party drew its major support from urban and rural labor groups who had not previously been mobilized politically in Guatemala. In fact, under Ubico, these groups had been deliberately kept in a nonpolitical role.

2. The leadership of the Communist Party was drawn largely from educated middle-class professionals and students who were marginal to the traditional Guatemalan society.

3. Nationalism, characterized by reaction against U.S.-owned enterprises in Guatemala, was a major appeal of the Communist Party, as well as of other political factions.

4. The Communist Party, like most other political parties in Guatemala, was beset with personal factionalism and ideological differences which seriously hampered its effectiveness until outside influences helped to unify its ranks.

5. The Communist Party appealed to the general population almost exclusively through non-Communist symbols, at one point specifically dropping the party label to broaden its appeal.

6. Aside from gaining support of mass groups, the Communist Party made no attempt at mass conversion but relied on a small number of party members to gain control of large organizations.

7. Sharp cleavages within Guatemalan society had resulted in compartmentalized social groups. The Communist Party was able to capitalize on this structure in devising special appeals. Individuals were normally restricted to one type of group, rather than being in a variety of groups with conflicting demands.

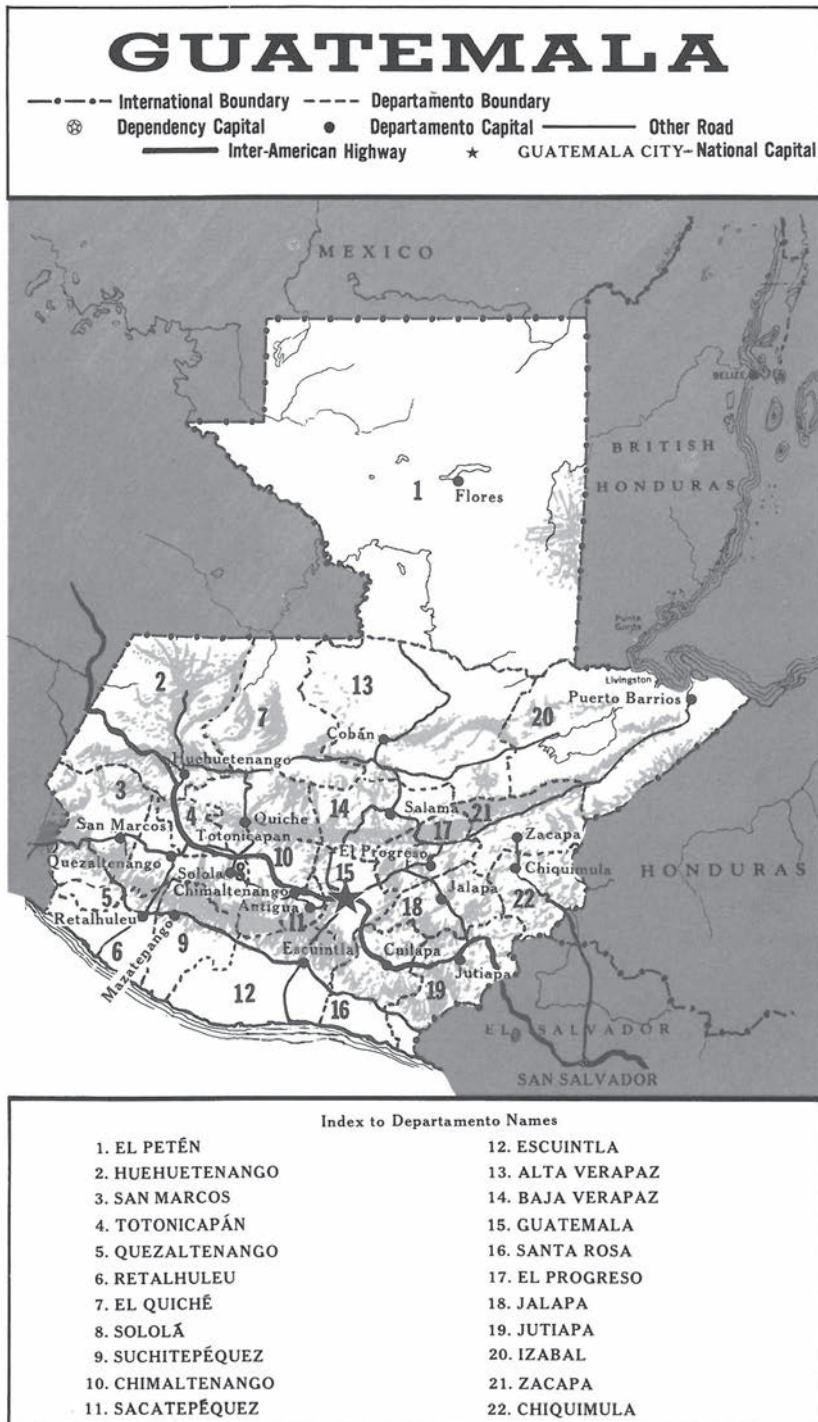
8. Anti-Communist but pro-reform groups were unable to attract a large following because of their association with rightwing antireform groups.

9. The Catholic Church failed to become a significant force in countering Communist appeals, since it did not occupy a position of power within society and did not initiate positive action.

10. The Guatemalan military itself was beset by serious factionalism, which limited its influence on government and the effectiveness as an anti-Communist force.

11. The major stimulus to military cohesion and action was not political belief but rather the fear that the People's Militia would usurp the functions of the military, undercut its political influence, and possibly lead to the elimination of many officers.

12. The Guatemalan military often operated as a political pressure group, especially with regard to issues concerning military appropriations and declining U.S. military aid.



Map of Guatemala.



## **PART I—THE SETTING**





## SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

### The Guatemalan Economy

As in the days of Spanish colonial rule, Guatemala's economic structure in the early 1940's was based primarily on a rigid plantation system. The small group of wealthy Spanish landowners who had dominated the country's commercial life shared their position with representatives of private U.S. enterprises and, until World War II, with recently immigrated German coffee growers. This structure produced what the revolutionary leaders of 1944 viewed as economic weaknesses, which they hoped to eliminate through reform.

Without reform, these leaders, described later, thought Guatemala incapable of achieving agricultural diversification and industrial development. The few landowners concentrated on growing coffee and bananas for export, and nearly the entire economy depended on the cultivation and sale of these two crops. World prices were highly competitive and fluctuated from season to season. A good year brought prosperity; a bad year spelled disaster. Furthermore, the quasi-feudalistic land system tied most of the rural population to farming at a subsistence level. Antivagrancy laws required members of the Indian population to work a varying number of days on plantations. Whether they had thought out the economic issues or not, the workers demanded land reform.

In the cities, manufacturing enterprises represented little capital outlay, operated on a small scale, and employed few workers. Factories processed agricultural products<sup>a</sup> and a few light consumer goods, but the country depended on imports for a large number of basic items. Local businessmen who might have invested in their own economy were often discouraged by government practices favoring foreign enterprises. The national market was further limited by the population's low purchasing power. Major imports included such commodities as textiles, petroleum products, medicines, and motor vehicles. Most of Guatemala's business was done with the United States. In 1941, the United States supplied 78.5 percent of Guatemala's imports while buying 92 percent of her exports.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Land Question*

The land question became one of the major political controversies of the early 1950's, a controversy which neither of the two governments

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<sup>a</sup> In 1946 Guatemala's gross value of production in industries using agricultural and animal raw materials was 79.8 percent of total production. Over 65 percent of the labor force was employed by these manufacturing establishments.<sup>6</sup>

of the 1944–54 period were able to resolve. It presented reformers with a dual problem: redistribution of cultivated land (60 percent of which was owned by 2 percent of the population in 1950);<sup>8</sup> and resettlement of landless Guatemalans in unoccupied and often inaccessible land on the northern and eastern frontiers.

President Ubico had made some earlier effort to distribute land to landless agricultural workers. In the thirties he offered up to 1,107 acres of land to each rural inhabitant who wished to become an independent farmer and guaranteed seed, tools, and transportation to those who could not afford to pay for them. He soon withdrew the offer, however, when politically influential landowners complained that this would reduce the rural labor supply and disrupt the most productive and most important segment of the Guatemalan economy. Ubico is therefore better known for his antivagrancy laws and his liberal concessions to landowners at the expense of the agricultural workers, apparently made on the theory that he dare not jeopardize the production of the plantations, or *fincas*. It is true that small farms manned by inexperienced peasants would not for years have produced as efficiently as the well-operated plantations.

Plantation owners were not the only hindrance to land reform. The problem was further complicated by the lack of adequate government property records and surveys. As late as 1944, only some 20 percent of the land was privately owned; the remainder was nominally public land, and large areas were still unexplored.<sup>9</sup> In some cases the Government did not even know the boundaries of its own administrative units. It could not relocate a large segment of the overcrowded Indian population without ensuring that the newly distributed land was suitable for agriculture and the boundaries well defined. New roads, proper sanitation facilities, housing, and capital were also essential to a large-scale land program. For these and many other reasons, the problem was not a simple one.

Land reform was one of the major goals of the 1944 revolution. Once installed, however, the Arévalo Government met so many constitutional and administrative problems that such reform as was instituted up to 1950 was inadequate and poorly administered. Arévalo established some collective farms on public lands and organized voluntary cooperatives among small landowners to promote mechanization of agriculture and adoption of modern methods of stockraising. However, many of these farms and organizations soon stopped operations—often because of the Government's failure to extend much needed credit facilities.<sup>10</sup>

Another Arévalo experiment, the Law of Forced Rental, required large landowners to rent uncultivated land to landless workers at a rate

not to exceed 5 percent of the value of the crops produced. This effort not only fell short of its intended goal, but also broke up the complicated but workable custom of land rental which the smaller landowners and their tenant farmers had followed for years.<sup>11</sup> Apparently this law came into effect again under Arbenz and was enforced in regions where land holdings were too small to be affected by agrarian reform. It established the right of a renter to pay no more than 5 percent of the value of his crop for a parcel of land.<sup>12</sup>

It was the Arbenz Government which made the first meaningful move toward land reform in Guatemala: in 1952, with Communist cooperation, it instituted the Agrarian Land Reform Law. This law had broad social and economic implications; it was to create a new propertied class having little or no technical knowledge in the application of modern agricultural techniques. Passed in Congress under the watchful eye of Communist labor leader and chairman of the congressional Special Committee on Agrarian Reform, Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, the law called for the expropriation of uncultivated land in excess of 664 acres and the distribution in small parcels of this and state-owned land to landless peasants. Former owners were to be compensated with government bonds. The law also stipulated that farms holding between 221 and 664 acres were liable to expropriation unless two-thirds of the land was under cultivation by the owner or by someone working directly for him. A key provision in the law forbade any appeal to the courts by the dispossessed landowners. Appeals could be made only to the president through special committees set up to administer the law, in effect removing the law from the jurisdiction of regular courts and placing it directly under the control of the executive. Since the committees had often recommended the confiscation of the land in the first place, they were usually hostile to any protest.<sup>13</sup>

The Agrarian Land Reform Law was not in itself radical. In application, however, it often appeared harsh and indiscriminate. Moreover, political considerations overshadowed economic realities. Land was distributed to individuals only for their lifetime, and no property rights were transferred; the Government became the landlord and peasants became tenants subject to political manipulations. A group of deputies who objected to the laws' "socialistic" character raised protests in the congress. Supporters justifying expropriation pointed out that Manuel Estrada Cabrera earlier in this century had promulgated an expropriation law which had given the Government even more latitude. Castillo Armas, Chief of the junta that held power after Arbenz was overthrown in 1954, almost immediately declared the Agrarian Land Reform Law unconstitutional. This reversal affected only a few thousand peasants who by that time had actually settled on their newly won plots.

### *United Fruit Company*

The increasing tempo of land expropriation in the early fifties was equaled by the Government's attack on the United Fruit Company, the only foreign corporation of any consequence in Guatemala. In the eyes of most political leaders the company became a living symbol of Guatemala's close ties with the United States, ties which, over the years, had become a major factor in influencing Guatemalan commerce. The desire for self-sufficiency and economic independence had been expressed by many Guatemalans prior to the 1944 revolution. From 1944 to 1954, one way of expressing their nationalistic tendencies was to denounce close ties with the United States as political and economic subservience to a foreign power.

When Ubico came to power in the early thirties, the United Fruit Company held two large tracts of good land in Guatemala, one tract on the Pacific coast and the other on the Atlantic coast. Growing and exporting bananas, an enterprise which accounted for approximately 10 percent of the value of total exports,<sup>b</sup> was the company's major concern. Bananas were second to coffee in cash value, and brought employment for approximately fifteen thousand workers. Countless more Guatemalans were indirectly dependent upon the company for income through sales of goods and services.

The United Fruit Company controlled or owned other important enterprises in Guatemala. One, the International Railways of Central America, which employed five and one-half thousand Guatemalans, owned 580 of the 732 miles of track in Guatemala.<sup>14</sup> The railway system was established to ensure the rapid transportation of highly perishable stems of bananas from the plantations to the ports for shipping to northern markets. The control of the railroad also enabled the company to pay cheaper rates for rail freight. Other enterprises included the Tropical Radio and Telegraph Company, which had a monopoly on Guatemala's communications, and the Empresa Electra, which supplied the United Fruit Company's electrical power.

Ubico's Government extended extremely liberal concessions to the United Fruit Company. Puerto Barrios, Guatemala's important Caribbean port, was operated almost entirely by United Fruit. The company was given long-term leases on unused public lands. It was exempted by Ubico from all Guatemalan taxes on profit and normal duties and imposts. Whenever labor disputes occurred—and they were infrequent because Ubico forbade the formation of labor unions—the Government sided with United Fruit.

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<sup>b</sup> Coffee accounted for nearly 80 percent of the total value of exports.

On the other hand, the United Fruit Company extended many worker benefits to its employees. United Fruit workers were generally the best paid and the best housed in the country. The company maintained 49 schools for children, and two modern hospitals cared for the workers. Through a company sanitation program, malaria was controlled on the company's land. It ran a chain of commissaries where any employee could buy staples at a cost far lower than at local markets. Workers also benefited from a substantial retirement program.

Other features of the United Fruit Company were viewed negatively by many Guatemalans and offered fertile ground for labor organizers. For example, while wages of about \$1.50 a day were comparatively high, total annual income was low because of the seasonal character of the work. Even during good years employment was not steady for the average worker. The Panama disease, an uncontrollable banana plant killer, forced constant replanting in new districts and caused the company to shift operations from one area to another, making job security even more uncertain. Guatemalan workers also recalled the twenties, when the United Fruit Company required a 7-day week and forcibly broke up the sporadic and unorganized protest strike which resulted. The company had encouraged a policy of racial discrimination that required "all persons of color to give right of way to whites and remove their hats while talking to them."<sup>15</sup> Workers also recalled that United Fruit had not participated in Ubico's land redistribution program. When Ubico required landless rural workers to devote 150 days per year to the tillage of another person's land, some plantation owners, recognizing workers' desires to have their own little family plots, allotted a small amount of land to them. United Fruit Company made no such provision.

These policies partially explain why United Fruit, in some ways the model North American employer in Latin America, was not free from labor problems. But perhaps the most important reason, and one not attributable to the company, was that extreme leftists in the Arbenz administration made the United Fruit Company the object of a sustained and virulent propaganda campaign. Concessions granted to the company by previous governments were characterized as exploitation, and the network of company interests throughout the country was viewed as an imperialist takeover of the Guatemalan economy.

### *Agrarian Reform and the United Fruit Company*

Although the United Fruit Company met with some government interference during Arévalo's term of office, it was not until the Agrarian Reform Law was passed under the Arbenz Government that it felt seriously threatened. Until 1952, the Government had generally sided with United Fruit in labor disputes.<sup>16</sup> Until that time, the strength of

the anti-Communist banana workers' unions seems to have equaled that of the Communist unions, but under Arbenz the Communists became more powerful and the Government became less tolerant of company policies. Many non-Communist Guatemalans in the Government also felt that existing agreements between the Government and the company were outdated and an infringement upon Guatemalan sovereignty.

Under the Agrarian Reform Law, the Arbenz Government initially expropriated over two hundred thousand acres of United Fruit Company land. Although uncultivated land had for some time been liable to seizure and redistribution by the Government, the move took the company by surprise. There were special problems of banana production that accounted for their uncultivated holdings. A certain percentage of company land was purposely held idle as a hedge against Panama disease, since the only remedy for the disease at the time was to plant new areas to keep production up. Even so, although the company had been given no advance notice, it accepted the Government's action with no resistance.

Six months later, the Government expropriated almost as much land again. This time the company protested. The Government offered compensation of half a million dollars in government bonds, but the company viewed the offer as inadequate.<sup>17</sup> A protest was lodged with the U.S. Government which, in turn, formally protested to the Arbenz Government in a series of notes requesting \$16 million in damages.<sup>18</sup> The Arbenz Government took no action on the notes, but neither did it expropriate any more land from the United Fruit Company.

Other holdings of the United Fruit Company also were subject to Government pressure. For instance, Arbenz decided to try to undercut the monopoly held by the International Railways of Central America. He began construction on a highway paralleling the railroad which was to divert enough traffic to make railroad operations unprofitable. Construction proved to be too expensive, however, and was not completed. The railroad company was also charged for nonpayment of "charity" taxes, though it questioned its liability, and was eventually placed in receivership. The Government then filed a claim for \$10% million in back taxes.<sup>19</sup>

The American-operated power company also felt the pressure brought to bear by the Arbenz Government. On one occasion, the Government threatened to divert the water from the company's turbines to its own envisioned power plant; as the Government never built the plant, the threat was an empty one. The power company was also plagued, as were other American-owned enterprises in Guatemala,



with work strikes over wages and working conditions and with government demands for taxes which it had not had to pay previously.<sup>20</sup>

### *Labor Conditions*

Up to 1941, labor conditions had changed little since the country achieved its independence from Spain. Guatemala's economy depended heavily on agriculture, and profitable agricultural enterprises depended particularly on the backward and illiterate Indian population as a cheap source of labor. Economic prosperity for the country was predicated on the government policy of keeping the Indians in continued submission to a system that allowed them no freedom of action and had little regard for their social well-being. (Although this policy appears to be discriminatory against the Indian, it may also be explained in terms of the attitudes of Guatemalans toward work.) The two Governments of the 1944–54 period made some headway toward improving the lot of the Guatemalan worker.

Prior to and following the declaration of independence from Spain, there had been some modifications but few basic changes in the treatment of agricultural laborers. Under the Spanish crown, labor was tied to the plantations by the *encomienda*, a system in which agricultural workers, namely the Indians, were required to give a certain number of days of labor each year to plantation owners. Large numbers of laborers were needed for the indigo industry, and the *encomienda*, for all its humanitarian failings, seemed to be an efficient method of providing them. Later the crown developed the system of *mandamiento*, whereby agricultural workers owed the Spanish administration a stipulated number of work days in lieu of taxes. The *mandamiento* did not differ from the *encomienda* except that it made the workers liable to government control rather than to the personal control of plantation owners. In practice, this difference was often negligible. Although the Guatemalan Assembly in 1824 declared all men free and abolished all forms of slavery, agricultural laborers, particularly the Indians, continued to provide cheap and virtually forced labor for the plantations.

Even the drastic economic reorientation of the middle of the 19th century made little change in the position of the Indians. Until that time the major export crop of Guatemala had been dyestuffs (indigo and cochineal). This highly specialized market collapsed when aniline dyes were developed. President Justo Rufino Barrios (1871–85) used the power of his office to rechannel the country's production effort to coffee. In a short time, Guatemala became one of the major producers of high-grade coffee for export. During this changeover, strict control of Indian labor through the local administrators, the *jefes políticos*, was instituted. Owners of the coffee plantations were given all possible

government support in extracting labor from their workers, particularly the Indians. In instructions to the *jefes políticos*, Barrios directed them to “see to it that any Indian who seeks to evade his duty [to the landowner] is punished to the full extent of the law and that each Indian is forced to do a full day’s work while in service.”<sup>21</sup>

Periodically, gestures toward reform were made. Barrios officially abolished the *mandamiento*, although in practice the system continued as before. In 1899, a *Dirección General de Agricultura* was established to colonize the vast undeveloped areas with freed Indians, but the project never really got underway. In 1909 a special court system was established to dispense justice to fugitive Indians who had become indebted by accepting credit from landowners. These courts were set up to take matters out of the hands of the local *jefes*, but they did not necessarily represent any improvement as far as the Indian was concerned. As one writer has stated, “Protection of the rights of the Indians was good window dressing, but protection of the interests of the planters was good politics.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1934, additional laws reasserted the Government’s role in providing a cheap labor pool for the large plantation owners. The Vagrancy Laws, as they were called, made work an obligation. For a time prior to 1934, Indians who were able to keep out of debt were free from government harassment even if they were unemployed. The new laws required everyone to hold down a job; and the penalty for conviction as a vagrant was 30 days in jail, with an additional month added to the sentence for each successive offense. To guarantee enforcement, the Department of Labor was administratively joined to the offices of the National Police. Each farm worker was required to carry a “labor card” in which the terms of employment were transcribed by the employer. If a worker’s card did not show that he had held a job for a certain number of weeks per year, he could be prosecuted as a vagrant.

The history of labor legislation in Guatemala, at least up to the middle of this century, was colored by constant tension between the Indians and the Government. The Indians had been content, by and large, with a simple existence within the context of their traditionally self-sufficient culture, and had avoided when possible contact with non-Indians. The Government, on the other hand, had sought through legislation to utilize this isolated but essential labor force. Many Indians went to some length to circumvent the laws. For instance, to avoid carrying the labor cards required of all agricultural workers, an inordinate number of Indians claimed to be “traveling merchants,” exempt from the requirement, until the Government plugged the loophole.<sup>23</sup>

Until the revolution of 1944, the Guatemalan Government prohibited labor organizations of any kind. Immediately after Ubico was



overthrown, the new Government encouraged the formation of labor unions. With the aid of experienced Mexican labor organizers who were officially invited by the new Government, urban unions were quickly established. It took a much larger campaign to organize agricultural laborers, most of whom were illiterate and isolated from city activities. At its peak in 1952, nevertheless, the agricultural workers' union claimed a membership of two hundred thousand individuals—twice as many members as its urban counterpart.<sup>c</sup> It must be mentioned, however, that this rural union was much more loosely organized and leaders had much less control over activities than urban unions. Its membership was not a measure of power.

Arévalo's Government made efforts to redress what up to 1944 had been a permanent imbalance between the bargaining power of the large landowners and the individual workers. With the passage of the Labor Code and the establishment of the Social Security Institute in 1947, plantation owners and the managers of foreign concerns found that the Government was no longer willing, as in the past, to support them against the claims of the workers. The new labor laws, although liberal, were perceived as disadvantageous by the foreign corporations. In effect they guaranteed—with qualifications—the right of urban and rural workers to organize, to bargain, and to strike. They also established a system of independent labor courts. Additional amendments required employers to withhold union dues and extended many of the urban workers' benefits to the rural workers. Social security, mainly concerned with improving the health and economic security of workers, included workmen's compensation, maternity benefits, vocational rehabilitation, and accident prevention. Social Security benefits made a slow beginning in Guatemala City, fanned out to other areas, mostly to major cities and the largest *fincas*. Many of the benefits were rescinded after Arbenz was overthrown in 1954; labor and Government parted ways and labor was subjected to stricter Government regulation.

## Guatemalan Society

### *Social Structure*

Up to the early 1940's Guatemalan society had undergone few changes since the days of Spanish colonization. Even in the present century, power still rested in the hands of large landowners, army officers, representatives of foreign corporations, and, to a lesser extent than during the 1800's, the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The elite—about

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<sup>c</sup> Agricultural laborers far outnumbered industrial workers. In 1950, 75 percent of the labor force was employed in agriculture.<sup>24</sup>

2 percent of the population—held 60 percent of the cultivated land; about two-thirds of the Guatemalans who owned land held only 10 percent of the farmland.<sup>25</sup> Of three and a quarter million Guatemalans in 1940<sup>d</sup> over 50 percent were Indians—backward, illiterate, and speaking little or no Spanish; over 40 percent were *ladinos*—part white and part Indian, nominally of Spanish descent, relatively literate, and in control of national and local government; and a very small minority were wealthy educated whites.

Although the upper strata of Guatemalan society was considered impenetrable by members of the lower classes, there was mobility from Indian to *ladino*. The differences between these two social groups were not so much based on skin color, for it was hardly possible to differentiate the color of one from the other, but on economic and social considerations. Guatemalans having civic responsibilities, dressing in European fashions, speaking Spanish, and following Spanish customs were *ladinos*; Guatemalans wearing Indian clothes, speaking one of the 21 Indian dialects, following Indian customs, and submitting to the authority of the *ladinos* were Indians. All an Indian had to do to become a *ladino* was to learn Spanish, wear western clothes, and have enough money to move into the *ladino* community. However, Indians rarely made the change even if they could acquire the necessary wealth and education. Indian communities were tightly knit in-groups isolated from *ladino* life.

### *The Village: Indians and Ladinos*

In the 1940's more than three-quarters of the population lived a rural life centered around small villages, or *municipios*.<sup>e</sup> The population of a typical village ranged from one to two thousand inhabitants, consisting of two-thirds Indians and one-third *ladinos*. Approximately 70 percent of the village lands were in *ladino* hands. Indians usually kept to themselves in the villages and rarely visited neighboring villages except to carry goods to markets. Electricity and running water were generally found in *ladino* houses, but not in the Indians'. Unless a village was close to the capital city, most of its inhabitants' only active role in politics was voting, and they were little informed about community and national affairs.

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<sup>d</sup> This figure may be inflated. It has been reported that the 1940 census was falsified on Ubico's instructions. Schneider records an estimated two and one-half million inhabitants for the year 1944.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>e</sup> Indians were close-knit to the extent that each village usually had its own very distinct style and color of dress, for men as well as women. A traveler could easily identify the home town of an Indian carrying merchandise to market merely by looking at his dress.

Administratively, the villages had two groups of government officials—one made up of Indians, and the other of *ladinos*. Each village had an Indian mayor, or *alcalde*, and a *ladino* mayor. The Indian mayor concerned himself totally with local Indian problems. The *ladino* mayor, who was in the employ of the national Government and an appointed representative of the local administrator, was mayor of the entire village, having authority over his Indian counterpart. The few Indians who did work for the villages in official capacities generally held menial and poorly paid jobs.

In everyday affairs the inferior position of the Indian was continually emphasized. Indians tipped their hats when passing the *ladino* mayor, who merely nodded in return. *Ladinos* treated Indian landowners with respect, but did not associate socially with them.<sup>27</sup> Local justice was not impartial, often unpredictable in its variety of judgments, and apt to be strict or lenient according to the temper of the local administrator. Because of this, Indians approached the law with misgivings. Although they respected the authority of the local officials, they did not have much faith in the “majesty” of the law. It would never occur to an Indian, for instance, to seek redress for a wrong by protesting to an authority higher than the local official. While he had little trust in the machinery of municipal law, he had none at all in the law administered by the departmental administrator.<sup>28</sup>

Attitudes toward education and labor differed between Indians and *ladinos* in the villages. Most Indians, for instance, were inclined to be hostile to schools, if such facilities existed, because they kept children away from what Indians considered more useful work. The poorest Indians in the villages could see no benefits for themselves or their children in education—to them a mystical process.<sup>29</sup> Education, they felt, was a *ladino* preoccupation. In the strong work ethic of the Indian, manual labor was the measure of man.<sup>30</sup> *Ladinos*, on the other hand, considered manual labor undignified. Professional positions in the villages were usually held by *ladinos*, and most of the skilled work was done by *ladinos*. Most of the Indians were agricultural laborers who worked for the landowning *ladinos*.<sup>31</sup>

In comparison with the white or *ladino* temperament, complacency or passivity might seem to be the outstanding characteristic of the village Indians. However, it would be more accurate to characterize the Indians as an ethnocentric people—self-sufficient and isolated, culturally very distinct from *ladinos*, and attempting to adjust to new ideologies, values, and beliefs while still committed to their traditional way of life. Striking examples of the tendency of the Indian to take whatever comes his way without objection and without any attempt to improve his condition are easy to find. Village Indians, for example, traditionally

held their land on a communal basis until 1944. They never acquired legal title to their lands, however, for fear of increased taxation. Property ownership was thus a matter of custom and disputes were settled within the Indian community.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, *ladinos* took advantage of this extralegal possession of the land by filing claims with government authorities and obtaining title. Again, when the Government attempted to standardize the system of landownership in 1952 by issuing formal titles to all those individuals who owned land, many Indians did not understand the Government's intent and failed to file claims for land they had worked for years. These lands fell by default to government ownership.

### *The Revolution and Social Change*

After the 1944 revolution, a significant change in the attitude of the Government toward the Indians was apparent. Under the Arévalo Government a new constitution was adopted which in effect abolished the Vagrancy Laws. A Social Security Institute was established. A new Labor Code was drawn up with the aim of securing for the lower classes, the Indians in particular, certain social and economic rights. Trade unions were formed in the cities. Later, after the passage of the Agrarian Land Reform Law in 1952, a looser union of agricultural laborers, which had begun organizing in 1948, was established. The National Peasant Confederation of Guatemala eventually became twice as large as its urban trade union counterpart.

In 8 years the rural Indians had grown from ignored and scattered social nonentities to potentially important elements in the political life of Guatemala. All the legislation favoring the Indians and all the attention given them by aspiring political groups, however, had not managed to impress upon them their potential political force as a special interest group. The vast majority of Indians remained detached and wedded to their own culture and their traditional village life.

It can be seen, at any rate, that rural Guatemala has been undergoing a continuous and significant social change of which the revolution of 1944 was a part. Before that time, the local upper class exercised social control over a scattered and unconnected set of regional cultures. After 1944, the revolutionary governments introduced political and social innovations which not only initiated a breakdown of the traditional social control, but at the same time initiated an "evolving and nationally centered culture."<sup>33</sup>

Political parties, urban and rural labor unions, land reform committees and other "new and powerful" groups established by the Arévalo and Arbenz Governments, "created for the first time informal networks of influence and control linking the national capital directly with the

individual rural dweller.” In less than 10 years after 1944 most Guatemalan citizens came under the control of a “new and centralized structure.”<sup>34</sup> Newbold also writes that the “. . . democratic regime established after the 1944 revolution set in motion the processes by which local exercise of political action became possible; during the Arbenz regime, however, these processes became channelled and controlled by certain organizations, mainly political parties, and to a lesser degree *union campesina*, labor unions, and in later years, agrarian committees.”<sup>35</sup> Suslow, however, in a conversation stated that although the Arévalo and Arbenz regimes attempted to link outlying regions to Guatemala City, they achieved little success.

## POLITICAL FACTORS

By 1944 Guatemalan governments had operated under five or six different constitutions and constitutional changes. Constitutionalism had been accepted in theory since the early 19th century. In practice, however, Guatemalan constitutions became mere symbols; a wide gap existed between government ideology and government practice. During this period Guatemala saw the rise of the system of *caudillos*—political strongmen. Although there were few attempts at revolution, the lack of revolutionary spirit should not be taken as an indication of a satisfied population. It was rather a sign that Guatemalan society was either unable or unwilling to implement alternatives. Those who did revolt were successfully suppressed.

The political system contributed in its way to instability in Guatemala. This system was characterized by a strong executive, little opportunity or willingness on the part of the majority to participate actively in the political process, and lack of cohesion among parties or groups opposing government policy.

### Executive Powers

Each of the Guatemalan constitutions called for separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government. In fact, however, this division has never been operative, and Guatemala has never known anything but a disproportionately powerful executive supported by the military establishment. Although consulting with ministers and government agencies, and at times acquiescing to pressure from special-interest groups, the president, as the final determinant of policy, generally exercised a preponderance of political power. He appointed all governmental and administrative

officials without congressional consent and he could have the constitution amended to suit his style of government.

Changing the constitution to conform to the desires of the executive has been frequent in Guatemala. Between 1887 and 1944, for instance, the length of a presidential term of office was changed four times as various presidents took it upon themselves to extend their rule. Ubico did not even bother to change the constitution when he decided to remain in office, although his candidacy for another term was constitutionally prohibited. On the basis of a plebiscite (allegedly rigged), he “suspended” that portion of the constitution which would have prevented his extended term.<sup>36</sup> This alteration of fundamental laws at the whim of presidents did not inspire much faith or even interest in the government from the electorate. Most of the people remained ignorant of governmental operations; even those in the cities who could have interested themselves in politics and exercised some measure of control or influence on wayward officials remained apathetic.

The unicameral congress was subordinate to the president in policy initiation and formulation. Furthermore, the president was able to control to some extent the election of congressmen by extending government support and his personal influence to favored candidates. An “opposition” congress has therefore never been elected in Guatemala. It is also interesting to note that the congress could not impeach the president for what could be considered as “tyrannical” politics. Even under the 1945 Constitution the congress could discharge the president only for physical or mental incapacity, and then only on the professional advice of five physicians from San Carlos University.<sup>37</sup>

The Guatemalan judiciary has also reflected the attitude of the president more often than the tenor of the law. Ubico, for instance, thought nothing of instructing local legal officials to look out for the interests of the landowners and use their office to see that the labor supply was used “most effectively.” In practice the courts’ jurisdiction often did not extend to private lands, where the landowner was frequently the interpreter of the laws. Moreover, the constitution gave the president certain powers by which he could bring a recalcitrant judge to heel. For instance, if the high court declared unconstitutional a particular measure which the president wanted to make legal, the president had two weapons: he could, with a compliant congress, remove the objectionable justices from the bench by impeachment; or he could, again with a compliant congress, change the constitution to fit his measure. Arbenz had four of five justices impeached in 1953 when they handed down a decision against the Government in a case of land seizure under the Agrarian Land Reform Law.



Another great source of power exercised by the presidents in Guatemala was their authority to suspend constitutional guarantees of individual rights in times of national emergencies.<sup>f</sup> This happened often in Guatemala prior to 1944 and continued to be frequent after the revolution. Guatemalans accepted these suspensions as a matter of course, often objecting only as a matter of form. Some governments encountered so many “national emergencies” that constitutional rights were suspended almost as much as they were in effect.

## Political Participation

Drafters of Guatemalan constitutions have been torn between two tendencies in their approach to suffrage. On the one hand, they knew that a democracy requires the active participation of the population in elections; on the other hand, they have questioned giving the vote to two million Indians who can neither read nor write and who do not even know the name of their president. The problem has never been solved, but the extent of suffrage has been changed many times to reflect the different views of successive governments. In 1879, only males over 21 (and soldiers over 18) who were considered good and reputable citizens and who were either landowners or wage earners could vote. Literacy was not a requirement. By 1887, however, voters had to be literate, but were not required to own property or have an income as required previously. In 1935, the law was changed again, restricting the vote to those who either were literate or owned property. According to the 1945 Constitution, all male literates over 18 were required to vote by secret ballot, but all illiterates over 18 who wished to vote could do so only by public ballot—an effective form of disenfranchisement. Voting became optional and secret for women over 18 in 1945.

A Guatemalan who made an effort to take his civic duties seriously had every reason to be disenchanted with the “democratic” process. Arévalo’s election in 1944 was the first free election in Guatemalan history. In the past, election returns, when published (most of them were not), had always shown an overwhelming majority for the victorious candidates. Barrios was elected by 36,552 votes to 75; Herrera by 246,976 to 14,135; Ubico by 308,334 to 0.<sup>38</sup> Indian votes were easily bought, and on one occasion in 1898, Cabrera used the army to ensure good attendance at the polls. Under such circumstances it means little to note that Cabrera was elected with the largest popular vote that had been recorded to that date.

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<sup>f</sup> A good example is the suspension of constitutional liberties on 8 June 1954 during a critical period when the Arbenz Government was threatened; many anti-Communists were arrested arbitrarily or simply disappeared, never to be seen again.

## Political Process

The Government in Guatemala has generally kept national politics under its close supervision. Control of communication facilities, the electoral system, and other services vital to the functioning of party politics gave the Government the mechanisms with which to aid and support favored parties. Moreover, government power to declare political parties and groups illegal and send their leaders into exile or prison made opposition even more precarious.

Two major political groups competed in the political arena in the 19th century: the Conservatives and the Liberals. The political creed of the Conservatives stressed the predominance of established institutions such as the church and the army, localism, and cultural isolationism. Liberal ideas, developed during the advent of large-scale coffee cultivation, stressed secularism, internationalism, and Europeanization of Guatemalan culture. The Liberal leader of the late 1800's, Barrios, succeeded in reducing the power of the church; but other than that his style of rule differed little from that of the Conservative presidents before him. From his era and until the 1944 revolution, opposition parties was continually discouraged. Only one political party was sanctioned by Ubico in the 1930's—his own.

In spite of the record of violent change in Guatemalan politics and the often vociferous claim of some administrations to "liberalism," political life remained deeply conservative prior to 1944. In many people's minds, the Government and the vested interests of foreign capital were associated. This association was one reason the educated metropolitan Guatemalan did not normally engage in politics. The literate *ladino* took for granted the influence of the power groups, and most of the time did nothing to make his own voice heard. Even after 1944 the majority of those eligible to vote continued to remain away from the polls through force of habit.

After 1944 the tone of political activity was different. An energetic, imaginative man could organize a party and exert some influence on events. The sense of political efficacy greatly increased, but the absence of a stable political tradition in the nation's history made many citizens both ignorant of and wary about political participation. The Constitution of 1945 appeared to be as good as any of the earlier versions, but, as usual, there was no guarantee that it would be adhered to. The Arévalo Government had to live down the constitutional transgressions of past governments before many people would take an active interest in politics. As it turned out, Arévalo did not have enough time to build up the confidence needed; after 1948 his regime was continually plagued with plots.



The 1944 revolution produced a proliferation of political parties, each holding on to its own platform and each claiming the right to lead the revolution. A year and a half later these parties patched up their differences and joined forces under the popular banner of *Arévalismo*, the ideology of the Government. The Communists, having no legal party of their own, were compelled to join other parties which supported the Government. (The constitution outlawed parties and groups expressing foreign ideologies, and thus Arévalo did not allow a Communist Party to organize.) During the Arbenz regime (1951–54), however, the Communists were granted greater latitude and finally were able to organize their own party openly in 1952.

The first anti-Communist group to make itself known, the Party of Anti-Communist Unification (PUA), was organized in the closing days of Arévalo's term. Its leaders, large landowners whose positions had been shaken by the revolution and the impending land reform legislation, opposed all types of social reform and attacked Communists, liberal reformers, many members of the Government, and union organizers all with the same indiscriminate vigor. This party was handicapped from the start by its stand against reform; its negative platform provided no rallying point for non-Communists who sought reform but who did not want their efforts to be dominated by Communists. Other anti-Communist groups failed in the same way to build a sound base of support. Membership was also limited by Communist intimidation of landowners and shopkeepers, which kept many Guatemalans from expressing their true feelings. Soon opposition to Communists was labeled opposition to the Government and was proclaimed a crime against the state.

The Catholic Church as an institution did not greatly influence popular opinion in Guatemala. Furthermore, it had been gradually stripped of political power over the period of a century and could not exercise influence over the Government.<sup>39</sup> However, the Archbishop of Guatemala did speak out against communism in the Government and urged in 1954 that "the people of Guatemala rise as a single man against this enemy of God and country."<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, this pronouncement from the Archbishop came too late to be of much help in rallying support against the extreme leftists. The Government in general did not reprimand the church for "meddling" in politics beyond a few mild notices in the government papers which referred to the Archbishop's "action" as "deplorable."

Other "anti-Communist" activities took various forms. Market women in 1951, for instance, precipitated the first anti-Communist riot in Guatemala by objecting to the replacement of nuns in a church school with alleged Communist teachers. In Guatemala City a determined

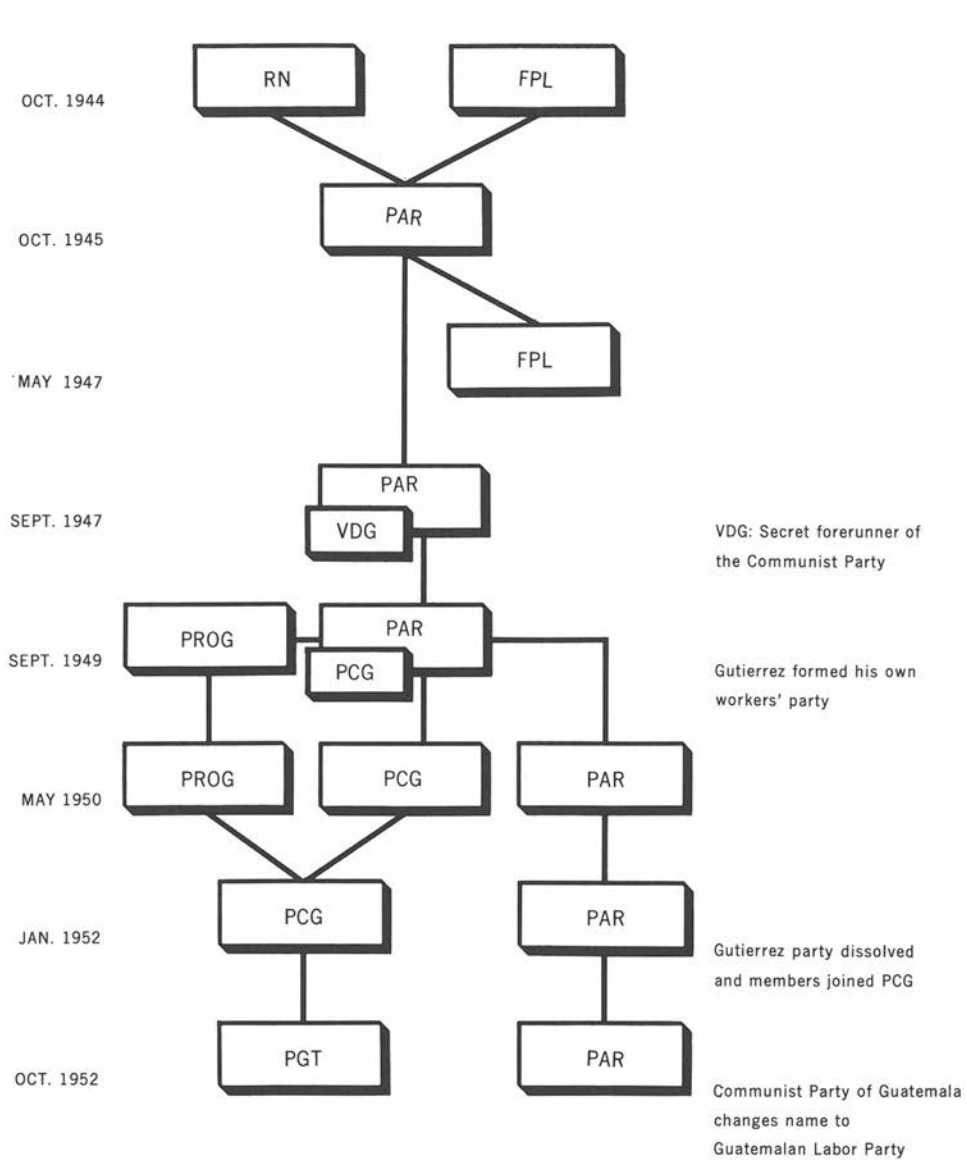
anti-Communist mayor was elected. Once elected, however, he found it extremely difficult to gain support for his policies. José Manuel Fortuny, the Communist Party boss, was defeated in his campaign for congress, in spite of all-out Communist support. These little pockets of success were ineffectual, however. For the most part, Guatemalans remained aloof from violent politics and protests,<sup>g</sup> and hoped that somehow when politics calmed down most of the revolutionary gains achieved since 1944 would be salvaged.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>g</sup> An on-the-scene observer remarked that although many Guatemalans hoped something would happen to rid the country of Arbenz and his close associates, few were willing to take the risk of doing anything about it. In fact, some Guatemalans of the upper strata felt that the United States should intervene.



CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS			1949	18 JULY	Arana assassinated.
1	24 JUNE	General Jorge Ubico y Castañeda resigned as President of Guatemala.	1950	12 NOV.	Arbenz elected President.
9	4 JULY	General Frederico Ponce Vaides named President.	1951	15 MARCH	Arbenz inaugurated President.
4	3 SEPT.	Juan Jose Arevalo returns from exile.	1	15 MAY	Swedish freighter Alfhelm arrived at Puerto Barrios with arms for Guatemala.
4	20 OCT.	Major Francisco Javier Arana, Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and Jorge Toriello Garrido backed by military contingent deposed Ponce and established Junta.	9	18 JUNE	Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas and forces of Liberation Army invaded Guatemala from Honduran base.
	19 DEC.	Arevalo elected President.	5	28 JUNE	Junta headed by Chief of the Armed Forces Colonel Carlos Enrique Díaz takes over Guatemalan Government.
	13 MARCH	Final draft of Constitution signed by Junta.	4	29 JUNE	New Junta headed by Colonel Efraim Monzón assumed power.
1945	15 MARCH	Arevalo inaugurated President.		2 JULY	Agreement reached between Monzón and Castillo Armas. Castillo Armas became head of Government.



This chart is selective and by no means presents a complete picture of all party splits and mergers. It merely graphs the changes within parties discussed frequently in the text.

PARTY SPLITS AND MERGERS



## **PART II—THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN GUATEMALA**





## GROWTH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

"The shortlived Communist movement of the 1920's had little relation to the development of communism in the years after the revolution of 1944."<sup>42</sup> Ubico, after coming to power in 1932, eliminated many of the radical elements that he accused of being Communist. The survivors of this extermination drive played only a secondary role when a new Communist movement emerged after 1944. Arévalo, although tolerant toward Communist activity in the labor movement, forbade the open organization of the Communist Party; but in a switch of policy, President Arbenz permitted the party to participate openly in Guatemalan politics.

The growing Communist Party in Guatemala after 1944 attracted three groups of adherents who made up the majority of the "card-carrying" membership, leaders, activists, etc. The first group, which provided the upper-echelon leadership, was composed of middle-class professionals and recently graduated university students. The second consisted of urban workers, a traditional source of Communist strength. The third was made up of the rural proletariat, the "mobile *ladinos*." All three groups were relatively new to Guatemalan society as elements of power and could be called marginal in the traditional order.

The members of the first group, professionals and recent graduates, were often frustrated by the lack of suitable jobs open to them. Schneider characterized this group rather succinctly:

These ex-students who eked out a living through part-time teaching, journalism, and office work were a marginal group in Guatemalan society. In addition to finding Communism the key for understanding the perplexities of society and a blueprint for social change, these young intellectuals found some degree of security and recognition in the party . . . [and were] offered . . . a chance to gain recognition commensurate with their own estimates of their own abilities.<sup>43</sup>

A large percentage of the urban workers, the second group, consisted of the "uprooted"—men who had migrated from rural areas, breaking traditional social and family ties to seek their fortunes in the big city. The discontent, frustration, and slum living resulting from unemployment, uncertainty, and very low wages made them highly receptive to the promises of communism and to the guidance of party labor organizers.

Until the revolution of 1944 attempts to organize the urban workers had been stifled; therefore, labor had never been politically vocal. After

1944, Communist labor leaders told the workers, for the first time, that “communism is the ideal political expression of the worker throughout the world.” The response was enthusiastic; through the efforts of World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) propaganda, Communist organizers, training schools and study groups, many workers were indoctrinated. Those with leadership potential were given further training and taken into party membership.

Politics in Guatemala had been urban-oriented; no real attempt had been made by any party to build up popular rural support. The Communist Party broke this tradition by attempting to take the revolution to the *campesinos*, or rural laborers—the third group. The Indian population living in self-contained isolated communities generally ignored the party; but the rural proletariat—the small-town *ladinos* who worked for wages on nearby plantations—did respond to Communist promises and exhortations. For many, the attraction lay in the prospect of owning land. For others, the opportunities for political activity and advancement were the incentive. It should be kept in mind, however, that this mobile wage-earning sector constituted only a small minority of the total rural population.

Rural governmental agencies were established under the aegis of Communist deputies. Control of the agrarian reform machinery thus enabled the governmental officials who were Communists to establish close personal and official relations with the rural workers, providing them an excellent propaganda apparatus. In addition, it gave them control over land distribution. Major Communist successes occurred where the “rural proletariat” had its greatest concentration—the coffee and banana country of the Pacific slope and southern coast.

The Communist Party was successful among these three groups because it was presented by its leaders as a party of the people. Where traditional parties had formerly eliminated these groups from their ranks, the Communist Party, at least outwardly, became a vehicle by which they could participate in the political life of the nation, or at least a voice through which they could express their interests. International communism as a political doctrine meant little to these new party members; they were more concerned with their material well-being: better food, housing, medical care, job security, higher wages, and personal dignity.

The real importance of the Communist Party in Guatemala is not to be understood simply in terms of its numerical strength or its proportion of legitimate political representation. As a matter of fact, the actual Communist Party membership was limited to a small, well trained, and dedicated elite, although the rank and file of various front organizations amounted to a considerable force in later years. An insight into

the party's growth in influence and its role in the political arena can best be gained by analyzing the party's position and activities in relation to the other parties in the government coalition party; no overt Communist Party appeared as a distinct political entity until 1949.

In the decade between 1944 and 1954, 24 different political parties were legally recognized. Many were short-lived personal parties, organized merely for electioneering. Others lost their original identity through mergers with other parties. In fact, Guatemalan politics following Ubico's deposition was characterized by combinations of parties to form blocs and the subsequent splintering away of dissident factions to form new parties.

The Government received extensive support from what were known as "revolutionary" or "government" parties. These parties formed a coalition, as distinct from a complete merger, in which individual parties retained separate identities but joined together in a working union to pursue common political goals. Beyond the unquestionable unanimity of their desire to enjoy the benefits of office, three major points of agreement, which obscured fine ideological distinctions between Communists and non-Communists, bound these parties together: (1) a common resentment of the old regime and its supporters; (2) a fervent nationalism; and (3) a general feeling of antipathy for the United States. The Communist Party, playing down themes of international communism, concentrated on nationalistic and anti-American symbols. Other revolutionary parties were motivated by no more than a resentment of personal injuries supposedly suffered by individual members under powerful landlords and foreign companies during the Ubico era. Still others consisted of persons with a strong social consciousness who were dedicated to rectifying what they considered injustices of the social order. The majority of the members of the parties which made up the coalition were not Communists, but rather left-wing liberals or Socialists. There were also political opportunists, animated by the desire for personal advancement and enrichment.

The leaders and most of the active members of these government parties came from the middle-income sector of society. They were educated and were determined to rise above the traditional social and economic status of their families. It was in this environment that communism gained its initial foothold in Guatemalan politics. The two main revolutionary parties, the National Renovation Party (RN) and the Popular Liberating Front (FPL), merged in November 1945 to form the Party of Revolutionary Action (PAR).<sup>a</sup> Julio César Méndez Montenegro was the party's first secretary general; but José Manuel Fortuny

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<sup>a</sup> Although the PAR generally received the greatest electoral support, internal rivalry between dissenting groups prevented it from gaining dominance in Guatemalan politics.<sup>44</sup>

Arana, the number one Communist in Guatemala, came to the forefront as the most influential leader. Fortuny, was the PAR Secretary of Education and Propaganda, editor of the *El Libertador*—the party newspaper—and a leader in congress. Through these positions he was able to increase his influence within the PAR.

At the PAR's national convention in November 1946, the “progressive” or radical wing defeated the moderate faction, consisting of ex-leaders of the FPL. Fortuny was named secretary general. The PAR was composed of a heterogeneous assortment of persons with a wide range of political beliefs, and thus factions split on ideological and personal differences.

The convention did not settle the many disputes concerning control and policy of the PAR. Three months later the moderate faction declared that the leadership selected by the convention had indulged in “demagogic, extreme and violent conduct” with adverse effects on the function of the Government and prestige of the nation. They demanded that extremists resign from the party. Bitter and prolonged intra-party contention followed. Eventually a temporary compromise was arranged: Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela of the dissidents replaced Fortuny as secretary general and Fortuny returned to his old post of secretary of propaganda. In May 1947, a number of PAR leaders resigned in order to reestablish the FPL. Among those leaving PAR were Secretary General Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela, Mario Monteforte Toledo, Mario Méndez Montenegro, Alfonso Bauer Paíz, Ministers Manuel Galich, Víctor Giordani, and 28 members of congress. A stated reason for this action was their disagreement with “theories which only have as their object placing us at the service of foreign interests.”<sup>45</sup> Not publicly discussed was the moderate's charge that the leaders of PAR were becoming Communist-dominated. After the split, the FPL became the leading party in congress and the cabinet. The PAR was reduced to a secondary position.<sup>46</sup>

The defection of the moderates gave the left-wing extremists even greater control over the PAR. Many of the vacated seats in the party's executive committee were filled by Fortuny supporters. With Fortuny as secretary general, the next 2 years saw the attempt to convert the PAR into a worker and peasant party. The most important development, however, was the formation of a secret Communist group within the PAR—the Guatemalan Democratic Vanguard (VDG)—founded on September 28, 1947. The group's members, politicians and labor leaders, remained active in the PAR until 1949 when they failed in an attempt to take over complete control of the party.

The VDG represented a clandestine organization of a Communist party in Guatemala. Its existence was kept secret because, at the

time of its founding, President Arévalo was still unwilling to tolerate an overt and legally established Communist Party within the nation. The Communists also recognized the fact that premature revelation of their organization would bring about the miscarriage, rather than the birth, of the party. They needed time to consolidate their control over the labor movement before allowing communism to become a political issue. Therefore, most Guatemalans remained unaware of the VDG until Fortuny revealed its existence in a 1951 press interview.

The VDG, then, was the forerunner of the Communist Party of Guatemala, later called the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT). Aside from Fortuny, its membership was unknown until its records were captured by Castillo Armas 7 years later. Those documents revealed that all of the officers of the secretariat and political commission of the PGT (the powerful Communist Party in 1954) originally had been in the PAR and later had become members of the secret VDG. Two of these were destined to become the most influential Communists in the nation: Victor Manuel Gutiérrez,<sup>b</sup> a labor leader, and Fortuny, a politician.

In many respects the most valuable human asset in Communism in Guatemala was the honest, humble and soft-spoken Gutiérrez, the revered leader of the Guatemalan workers. Through hard work and devotion to the interests of the working class, Gutiérrez built a reputation which he used to the interests of the Communist Party.<sup>47</sup>

Fortuny was the opposite, conforming in no sense to the ideal of the selfless leader devoted to the welfare of his fellow man. In 1947 he established himself at the head of the Communist movement in Guatemala, but commanded little respect or love from his associates because of his arrogance and his questionable moral behavior.

Relations were not cordial between the two leaders; their approaches to communism—apparently at the tactical and not strategic level—differed considerably. Fortuny's chief concern seemed to be for political power and the manipulation of political parties. His interpretation of communism followed "internationalist" lines. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, had a reputation for being concerned for the workers. He saw communism as a means of promoting their welfare rather than as a master to whom they owed their service. This fundamental schism in the interpretation of communism led to the establishment of two separate Communist parties in 1949. A question here arises as to whether the split was real or whether it was invented to draw support from

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<sup>b</sup> Gutiérrez was nicknamed the "Franciscan" because of his humility and ascetic way of life.

Guatemalans who would not support a party with Communist international ties.

The planning of an official Communist Party program was the major issue at the First Congress of the Communist Party of Guatemala (PCG), held on September 28, 1949. The opening address was delivered by Gutiérrez, who had resigned from the Central Committee of the VDG only a week earlier because of the conflict with Fortuny. Gutiérrez had argued that nothing could be accomplished in the PAR after failing to transform it into a Communist Party. He claimed he wanted communism to work through the political action committees of the labor unions, thus avoiding the “bourgeois” entanglements of the PAR. These associated Political Action Committees (CAP) would constitute a “transitory legal instrument” which could later be converted into an out-and-out Communist Party; this would then be a true worker’s party, derived from and led by “authentic workers,” and giving the working man’s problems and aspirations top priority.<sup>48</sup>

Fortuny, on the other hand, felt that the principal objective of the Communist Party should be the “struggle against imperialism, against war and for national sovereignty and peace.” This could best be carried out by an organized Communist Party active in the political arena, leading the other progressive parties in the “fight against the new expansionist plans of North America.”<sup>49</sup> The majority of the congress followed Fortuny.

Gutiérrez decided to strike out on his own. He resigned from the new Communist Party (PCG) a month later and, with the aid of his labor lieutenants, started organizing the Revolutionary Workers Party of Guatemala (PROG). Its statements of purpose coincided in some respects with those of Fortuny’s PCG—particularly in its opposition to foreign imperialism, reactionaries, and war. The PROG, however, placed primary emphasis on the need of the worker to have his own party—a political instrument which would be free from middle-class leadership with its “bourgeois mentality.” The party would work in a united front with other “democratic” and “progressive” groups, but would aggressively forge ahead to become a majority party in its own right.

The program would entail “the formation of a single labor organization supplemented by reform of the labor code, agrarian reform, curbing of foreign capital, and civic education.” The party would advocate the diversification of foreign trade in order that “the coming crises in the United States would not drag Guatemala to economic ruin.”<sup>50</sup>

The big opportunity for the PROG came in 1951. One of the major trade union federations of that period, The Guatemalan Trade Union Federation (FSG), decided to switch its political affiliation from the



PAR to the PROG. The underlying complications of this move will be discussed later. Let it suffice to say that their affiliation with the PROG had great significance in the ultimate unification of labor under Communist control.

Despite the fact that the PCG and the PROG signed a secret pact of cooperation for the 1950 elections—a political maneuver to combat a non-Communist party—relations between the two parties were not always cordial. In May 1951, the chief Communist labor leader for Latin America, Vincente Lombardo Toledano, in company with other international Communist labor leaders, visited Guatemala—reportedly to mediate differences between the two parties and restore unity to the Communist effort. As a result, relations between the PCG and the PROG rapidly improved, and within a few months they were combining forces against the anti-Communists. Ultimately the only real dispute between them concerned the matter of which party “had the greatest right to use the hammer and sickle<sup>c</sup> as its emblem.”<sup>51</sup> Gutiérrez went to Moscow in December 1951 for the WFTU conference. He sent a letter from the conference stating that his perspective had widened:

Today more than ever we understand the urgent necessity of the organic sindical (sic) unity of the working class as well as the unity of a single party: the Communist Party of Guatemala. To this grand task we must dedicate our effort.<sup>52</sup>

A few weeks after returning from the U.S.S.R., Gutiérrez announced the formal dissolution of the PROG. It was not incorporated into the PCG as a unit; instead, each member was given a free choice as to the party he wanted to join, but all were invited to accompany Gutiérrez into the PCG. The majority followed Gutiérrez.

Gutiérrez had originally broken away from PCG for two fundamental reasons: (1) the lack of progress toward forming an independent party outside the PAR, and (2) Fortuny’s foot-dragging approach to agrarian reform. However, the PCG decisively broke with the PAR in May 1950 and also took up the cry for agrarian reform. Moreover, a growing indication of increased presidential favor placed a need for immediate unity above person, tactical, and slight ideological differences. On that basis the two parties of the Communist movement, for all practical purposes, reunited.

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<sup>c</sup> At its inception, the PROG did not openly proclaim itself as a Communist Party. It did, however, use the slogan “Workers of the World Unite” on its red star emblem. Often it displayed the hammer and sickle. Its organization was conceived along Leninist lines, stressing discipline and militant action.

The period from the unification late in 1951 until Arbenz allowed the party to take part in politics a year later under the name of the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT), was spent in consolidation, program planning, and tightening of intraparty discipline. One of the major achievements of this period was the winning of total acceptance from President Arbenz, in addition to gaining the good opinion of the other government parties.

By the time of the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Guatemala, held in October 1952, the PCG was ready to move into high gear. At the Congress, Fortuny presented the new seven-point program called “The Guatemalan Way:”

1. Denounced without respite the feudal-imperialist reaction and . . . combat its plans to liquidate the democratic and revolutionary process of our country.
2. . . . elevate the level of combativeness and strengthen the organization of the workers of such foreign enterprises . . .
3. Fight for the correct application of agrarian reform . . . aid the campesino leaders in the solution of the problems of their class and daily strengthen the bonds of the alliance between the workers and the campesinos.
4. Strengthen the bonds of unity among the working class . . . combat the agents of feudal-imperialist reaction who operate within the unions.
5. Augment the action of the workers for better conditions of life . . . and elevate the capacity for leadership of the labor cadres.
6. Develop the mobilization of the masses beneath the direction of the organizations of the workers, campesinos, youths, and women, and strengthen these organizations in order that they be converted into true popular fronts . . .
7. Develop the unity of action . . . of all the democratic and popular forces in our country toward the formation of a grand patriotic front with the prospect of completely transforming the democratic and revolutionary movement into the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution of Guatemala; strengthen the various alliances already reached and those which may be reached in the future between our party and the democratic parties . . . establish more solid bonds and push the unity of action between the masses of these parties and our party.<sup>53</sup>

The most important aspect of this new program was the development of the “united front” tactic. The object was to gather all the members of the working class, the peasants, and the progressive elements of the



bourgeoisie into a mighty force which would be led by the organized vanguard—the Communist Party.

At the Second Party Congress it was also decided that discipline should be tighter: a more frequent practice of “criticism and self-criticism” was suggested. Another party rule combated backsliding into the evils of careerism by requiring that any party member elected to public office should turn his salary over to the party. He would then be allotted an amount which would “permit him to live in a dignified manner.”<sup>54</sup>

Before the calling of the Second Congress, the Communists had been assured by President Arbenz that the Communist Party would be given equal recognition, full rights in the government coalition, and an election ticket of its own.<sup>d</sup> The Congress decided, however, that it would be advantageous as well as discreet to change the name of the party to the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT); this name would be acceptable to peasants and Catholic workers who were sensitive about the word “Communist.”

Full acceptance of the PGT on an equal footing with other government parties gave the Communists a freer hand. An all-out recruitment campaign resulted in rapid growth; the party doubled its membership in the first months of 1953.<sup>55</sup> In the first phase of the campaign Communist organizations appeared throughout the countryside where small cells had been quietly preparing the groundwork since 1945. “The Puerto Barrios organization alone pledged 150 new members in three months, and by the end of August the new party was at least twice the size it had been at the first year and growing at an even faster rate.”<sup>56</sup>

The second phase of the campaign was the integration of the work of the various local Communist organizations. Each cell was required to draw up a plan of action which would fit into the Communist national plan.

Preparatory to carrying its organizational efforts to the departments of the interior, the PGT undertook a large-scale program of familiarizing the public with its principles and programs. Five thousand copies of the PGT program, 15,000 copies of its manifesto on the political situation, 50,000 copies of its call to the campesinos and rural laborers, and hundreds of public meetings marked the first stage of the campaign.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>d</sup> Prior to this time the Communists were required to use the tickets of other parties to present candidates for elections. An arrangement with the sponsoring party promised Communist support for its candidates.

The program of strengthening the party and enlarging its base continued right up to the 1954 overthrow of Arbenz.

The successful organization of the Democratic Front was the final achievement of the planning and effort of the PGT. The Front was organized during the 1953 congressional election campaign without much difficulty, because the leadership of the other government parties had gradually gotten into the habit of relinquishing decision making responsibilities to the PGT. The Communist Party was determined to entrench itself “so deeply into the political process of Guatemala [that it could] withstand any . . . proposals or attempts to curb its activities and influence.”<sup>58</sup>

## TARGET AREAS FOR COMMUNIST PENETRATION

The successful establishment of communism in the political process of Guatemala resulted from well-planned and deliberate maneuverings.<sup>c</sup> It was based on the eventual control of some of the key organizations of society. Among these were labor, the agrarian reform movement, popular “mass” organizations, and, in some cases, government administration.

### Labor

The most important and successfully penetrated of the above social groups was labor. At its peak in 1954, the Communist-controlled labor federation, the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers (CGTG), claimed a membership of 100,000 workers, while its rural counterpart, the National Peasant Confederation of Guatemala (CNCG)—also Communist-led at the upper levels—boasted double that figure. The combined membership of these two organizations accounted for one-fourth of the total adult male population of Guatemala.<sup>60</sup> However, it would be inaccurate to claim that the Communist Party had complete and unquestionable control of any such large number of Guatemalans.

Labor provided the chief base of support for the Communist Party. The control of urban labor and its vote, and urban labor’s ability to mobilize demonstrations of power, provided labor leaders with a lever in the National Congress and a means of expressing political power. President Arbenz was quick to realize that the support of the labor sector was essential to his Government, and it soon became apparent to

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<sup>c</sup> See a thesis by William Franklin Johnston in which the author draws principles of unconventional warfare from the experience in China (1927–45) and attempts to test the validity of those principles in the Guatemalan case (1945–54).<sup>59</sup>

him that the Communists were the spokesmen for that sector. Indeed, the Communists had virtually made themselves indispensable to his Government; it was partly their control of labor that made them so.

After Ubico's ouster in 1944, labor had been free to organize for the first time. The response had been great; even before the second coup in October of that year, the teachers, railroad workers, and others had formed unions. These new unions banded together during the October crises in which Ponce was overthrown. A few months later they formally combined as the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers, the CTG. Although schoolteachers were the most active leaders in this early phase of union organization, experienced union leaders who had returned from exile in other Central American countries and Mexico also participated, and influenced the labor movement. Some were Communists and most had strong Marxist learnings.

The Communist and Marxist-oriented faction of the CTG pressed for immediate affiliation with the Confederation of Latin American Workers (CTAL), the powerful Communist-dominated labor federation of Latin America led by Lombardo Toledano. The proposal was unfavorably received by the non-Communist secretary general of the new federation, whose obstinacy in the matter resulted in his expulsion from office 6 months later. Three CTAL organizers imported from Mexico directly assisted in his ouster. Affiliation with CTAL quickly followed.

Further conflict within the CTG stemmed from the federation's decision officially to support the *Escuela Claridad*, despite vigorous objections from moderate elements of the membership. The *Escuela* (school) had been organized by a few exiled Salvadoran Communists and one of the "old guard" Guatemalan Communists who had managed to survive the Ubico drive against Communists in the 1930's. The announced purpose of the school was to help the new labor leaders gain a political orientation.

Ten unions withdrew from the CTG in January 1946, in reaction to internal Communist pressure forcing affiliation with the CTAL and support for the *Escuela Claridad*. A few months later they organized the rival Guatemalan Trade Union Federation (FSG). This split of the labor movement slowed the growth of the CTG, temporarily curtailing its power. Reunification of labor under the CTG became a chief Communist objective. Several attempts were made to bring the FSG back into the fold, the chief argument being that the enemies of labor were taking advantage of the rift. Although some progress was made in coordinating political action for common objectives, efforts toward organic unification were invariably stalled over the question of affiliation with the CTAL.

By 1949, by constant infiltration and a barrage of propaganda, the Communists in CTG had managed to build a strong force within the ranks of the rival FSG. The unification effort was stepped up in an all-out endeavor, but again unity was thwarted by the stiff core of resistance within the leading FSG union, the railwaymen's Action and Improvement Union (SAMF).

The assassination of presidential candidate Col. Francisco Javier Arana in 1949 (discussed in a later section), and the subsequent election of Colonel Arbenz provided the Communists with two overwhelming advantages against their rivals. First, much of the anti-Communist resistance had centered in Arana, and his assassination broke down the unity of his followers. Second, President Arbenz, upon assuming office in 1951, showed a definite preference for the CTG.

During the political maneuvering of the election year 1950, the major obstacle to labor unity was removed. A Communist faction remaining within the FSG managed to push through the proposed affiliation with the CTAL. This caused a furor within the SAMF, but actual affiliation was achieved in 1951 with the establishment of the new labor central, the CGTG (composed of the former CTG, the FSG, and other smaller federations). After the resistance of the SAMF was effectively eliminated, it too was taken into the new federation and its newly-elected president was induced to accept this arrangement.

The takeover and absorption of the FSG and the SAMF are good examples of Communist maneuvers to gain power within Guatemalan labor. It will be remembered that the FSG was formed in 1946 as a reaction against CTG affiliation with the CTAL and support of the *Escuela Claridad*. The new FSG had attracted the best organized and most stable urban unions, whereas the opposition (the Communist CTG) had been left with only the teachers union and the shaky little agricultural unions. As to why the FSG failed to keep the labor movement out of Communist control, Edwin Bishop, a student of Latin American labor, gives this explanation:

In dealing with the social environment in which they dwelled . . . the FSG leaders were not so well equipped, nor did they have the grasp of the situation which personified the leaders of the CTG. The FSG never appeared to exercise a firm and well-formulated approach either to their internal or to the national problems. They were always reluctant followers unable to seize the initiative.<sup>61</sup>

Founded on a modern program, the FSG started out with a clear statement of independence from Communist influence:

The federation will defend its ideological independence and will be energetically opposed to the meddling of exotic doctrines which do not fit into the Guatemalan social movement . . . <sup>62</sup>

Despite many conflicts between Communist and anti-Communist sympathizers within its ranks, the FSG experienced a fairly successful period of growth during the first few years after its founding in 1946 and maintained at least partial resistance to Communist influence. As more unions joined the federation, its problems of internal cohesion increased. Many of the new unions brought in extremist leaders and members, many of whom were later to identify themselves as Communists. As early as 1947, there was enough pro-Communist influence in the FSG to prevent a SAMF proposal to place the federation clearly on record as “anti-Communist” rather than merely opposed to “exotic doctrines.” Slowly but surely the FSG swung leftward as the Communists infiltrated the chief member union in the attempt to neutralize it as a core of opposition. This railroad union (SAMF), was the backbone of the federation,<sup>f</sup> and the key to control of the FSG.<sup>g</sup>

In mid-1947 the moderate Secretary General of the FSG, Morales Cubas, was replaced by Manuel Pinto Usaga of SAMF. Pinto Usaga has variously been called a Communist sympathizer, a political opportunist, a Communist dupe, an outright Communist, and a muddled Marxist. He was, perhaps, a mixture of all of these, with emphasis on opportunist. A Communist was elected to the post of Secretary of Organization and Propaganda. Under this new leadership, the FSG changed rapidly. Its official publication began carrying an “easy lessons” course in Marxism and dialectical materialism. The Federation’s stress shifted from “national” and “Guatemalan” aspects of labor to “international brotherhood” and the need for labor unity in the political struggle. By 1950, its general orientation had altered to such a degree that Pinto Usaga and the pro-Communist sector were able to push through FSG international affiliation with the CTAL and WFTU. On the national level, political affiliation was switched from the PAR to Gutiérrez’s newly formed PROG.

Pinto Usaga had become an influential figure by 1950. He simultaneously held the secretary generalships of the FSG and two other large national organizations, the National Committee for Trade Union Unity

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<sup>f</sup> SAMF had been able to take the lead in the early days of unionism because it had existed before the revolution as a railroaders mutual aid society and was thus experienced in organization and union procedure. Compared with other unions it was quite advanced and had evolved a fairly sophisticated, moderate approach to labor problems.

<sup>g</sup> By the end of 1949, the FSG claimed 54,000 members, some 20,000 more than the CTG.<sup>63</sup>

and the National Workers' Political Committee, while continuing as a member of the National Congress and a leading figure in the PAR. His prestige in SAMF played an important part in his rise to power. But the added responsibility of his new positions caused him to lose touch with his own union, SAMF. In reaction to his high-handed manner of placing the FSG in the CTAL-WFTU orbit, SAMF leaders withdrew their union from the FSG; after a series of short strikes they even expelled Usaga from union membership.<sup>64</sup>

Emotions ran high as communism became the political issue of the labor movement in 1950. The PAR was split by the withdrawal of Fortuny and his PCG, and Gutiérrez's Marxist Labor Party (PROG) was under suspicion. In removing Pinto, the moderates sent around a letter accusing him of attempting to deliver the labor movement into the hands of the "satellites of Stalin."<sup>65</sup>

Pro-Communist forces and the Pinto supporters began a concerted effort within SAMF to discredit the moderate leaders in every way possible. "The weight of all the labor organizations controlled by Pinto and the Communists was thrown into the battle. Claiming that the Communist issue was a red herring used by reactionary opportunists, they depicted anti-Communism rather than Communism as the subversive movement."<sup>66</sup> They demanded that the moderate leaders of SAMF be investigated by the Government.

Dictatorship, graft, selling out to employers, these and many more charges were made by the Pintoists within the ranks of SAMF and echoed by the FSG. Prominent Guatemalans such as the pro-Communist diplomat Enrique Muñoz Meany were called upon to support the Pintoist line that "anti-Communism is the synonym of fascism" and that the moderates were really attacking the "elemental demands" and "legitimate aspirations" of the workers.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, Pinto had to scramble to save his position in the FSG, because he was no longer a union member. He was quickly accepted by the Chauffeurs Union, however, and was able to retain the leadership of the FSG.

For a time it appeared that the moderate core of SAMF would be able to hold out on its own long enough to attract other non-Communist unions, and so set up a new federation to battle the increasingly monolithic power of communism in Guatemalan labor. However, President Arbenz delivered the final blow by ordering official investigation of the union's tangled affairs. Although this may not have been Arbenz' intention, moderate leaders were discredited. By late 1952 almost all



resistance had been crushed. The Communists were in such complete control of Guatemalan labor that the Department of Labor customarily checked with the CGTG before allowing new unions to register.<sup>68</sup>

The achievement of labor unity marked a great victory for communism in Guatemala. Much of this success was due to careful preparation. Infiltration of opposing unions and conversion of leftist leaders to communism played a large role. The Communists' most successful tactic, however, was to identify both the moderate opposition and the outright anti-Communists as reactionary forces opposed to the revolution. Opponents were branded as tools of the "imperialists." Some of the allegations of graft and corruption among the rival leaders were based on fact; many of these had become overly concerned for their own economic well-being and advancement.

The consolidation of urban labor under the Communist-controlled CGTG enabled the Communists to turn their attention to the rural areas. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 and Communist predominance in the National Agrarian Department (DAN), the administrative branch for carrying out agrarian reform, provided a means of reaching both the peasant and the rural wage worker.

Two years prior to the passage of the Agrarian Reform Law, the National Peasant Confederation of Guatemala (CNCG) had been organized by 25 *campesino* unions. At this time the leader of the CNCG was Leonardo Castillo Flores, an ex-schoolteacher, who as a member of the CTG had felt that he could "get ahead" by working in the almost virgin field of rural labor organization. The Communist hierarchy of the CGTG was at first alarmed by the activities of this young "opportunist" and "deviationist" because it felt that organizing labor should come under its exclusive jurisdiction. For this reason, the CNCG did not immediately receive Communist cooperation and so alternated its affiliation between the Socialist Party and the Party of Revolutionary Action (PAR).

When the Agrarian Reform Law was passed in 1952 and it became evident that the National Agrarian Department (DAN), was under the influence of the CGTG, Castillo Flores recognized the importance of a closer association with the CGTG. In bringing this about, he purged almost all of the cofounders of the CGTG and allowed this organization to play an increasingly active role in Communist front activities. The CGTG then decided to work through the CNCG rather than to oppose it.

The CNCG was placed firmly in the Communist orbit in 1953 by its affiliation with the two international Communist labor organizations, the CTAL and the WFTU. By 1954, the Communist Party (PGT), the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers (CGTG), and the

CNCG were so closely linked that their combined votes supported a majority in the National Democratic Front—a coalition of revolutionary and political organizations which became in 1953 the chief policy-making body in Guatemala, leaving no question as to who was in control. An interesting side effect was the legal affiliation of the CNCG with the PAR while, at the same time, it was receiving its directives from the PGT; these directives had a discernible impact on subsequent PAR policy. The CNCG followed the CGTG line, and the CGTG followed PGT directives; since the CNCG had considerable influence in the PAR, the PAR often voted along with the PGT, CGTG, and CNCG in the National Democratic Front.<sup>69</sup>

Ronald Schneider sees this Communist control of virtually all aspects of Guatemalan labor, and the manner in which the two large competitive labor organizations—the FSG and the CNCG—were taken over as a partial explanation of why a non-Communist revolutionary force failed to develop and make itself effective:

Taken together, these two cases go far toward explaining why no strong revolutionary force capable of limiting Communist influence took root in Guatemala. Such a political force would have required a strong base among workers and campesinos. This the Communists were able to prevent through their control of organized labor and their influence with the leaders of the campesino movement.<sup>70</sup>

## **Agrarian Reform**

In Guatemala, the desire of the landless for land has been longstanding; land distribution was one of the espoused goals of the 1944 revolution. The Arévalo Government pledged solemnly in 1945 to initiate land reform. Resolutions were made and committees set up, but, as in other fields, the Arévalo Government failed to enact a general program. It was only in 1952—8 years after the revolution—that the Arbenz Government approached the problem with any determination. By this time the Communists were well prepared. Victor Manuel Gutiérrez, key Communist in the labor movement, had been planning his moves in the field of agrarian reform for 5 years.<sup>71</sup>

At least part of the reason for Gutiérrez's interest in agrarian reform was that the party had been criticized in 1952 for depending too heavily on city workers for support.<sup>72</sup> The number of workers in the cities was limited and the party, by 1952, had already managed to unionize the majority. However, there were three times as many rural laborers and



the party had only begun to realize the support that could be drawn from the countryside through *campesino* unions. While it is true that the Communists made their first decisive gains in the urban labor movement, it must be stressed that it was their work in the field of agrarian reform which was later to give them the mass support they needed to ensure the Government's cooperation.

Arbenz himself was not blind to the need for agrarian legislation if his government were to continue to claim its reform character. To many national leaders it seemed that land reform was the essential first step toward national economic improvement. The Communists were in an ideal position to promote agrarian reform; Arbenz had grown to think of them as his most reliable backers. Where some politicians had hesitated, the Communists had actively rallied support for the Government's policies. Gutiérrez, though younger than most leaders, had already gained more experience in organizing labor than any other man in the Government. He was also chairman of the congressional committee on agrarian reform.

The Agrarian Reform Law, passed in the summer of 1952, contained 107 articles. In many respects it resembled the earlier Mexican Agrarian Reform Law, though it was perhaps not as radical.<sup>h</sup> In effect, it was designed to double the number of small landholders by expropriating the uncultivated land of the *latifundistas*. Farms of up to 225 acres were exempted, as well as those of less than 675 acres on which at least two-thirds of the land had been tilled. Owners of expropriated land were to be paid off in 25-year government bonds. As soon as the Agrarian Reform Law had been passed by the National Congress, the Communists acquired important positions that placed them in virtual control of its administration and direction. The administrative machinery was set up in the National Agrarian Department (DAN), which was headed by Arbenz's political ally, Maj. Alfonso Martínez, who proved to be little more than a figurehead.<sup>i</sup> Under Martínez, real power was exercised by his right-hand man, Waldemar Barrios Klee, a known Communist. The third man in line, the Inspector General of the DAN, and the heads of the special courts were all Communists. Schneider writes that at least 35 percent of the DAN's full-time staff were Communists; and that some estimates go as high as 85 percent.<sup>74</sup> The provincial level also was staffed largely with Communists. Local agrarian committees were

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<sup>h</sup> See Whetten for a comparison between the two laws; and comments by C. C. Cumberland, who holds that the law did not differ greatly from that in other Western countries with advanced labor legislation.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>i</sup> This same Martínez was said to have been deeply involved in the assassination of Colonel Arana. It was rumored in Guatemala that this "figurehead" appointment as head of DAN was in the nature of a reward.

established to include strong representation of the *campesino* unions that, under Castillo Flores, had not been Communist but were gradually coming under Gutiérrez's control.<sup>75</sup> In addition to national and provincial domination of the DAN, the Communists had a strong voice in the policy of the *Banco Nacional Agrario*, which had been organized to give credit to small, new landowners who needed equipment and advice to make their ventures profitable.<sup>76</sup>

Another provision in the law called for a system of courts to rule on whether land could be expropriated. An unusual stipulation provided that once land had been expropriated there was no appeal other than to the president through special executive committees. Lower court judges who nevertheless agreed to hear appeals and supreme court judges who favored consideration of these appeals became targets of Communists who mobilized campaigns for their removal.<sup>77</sup> A further provision, instigated by Gutiérrez, provided that landowners who opposed the reform law by violent or subversive means could have their land expropriated in its entirety.

If the Communists wanted a method to rally support for the party rather than a really fruitful reform, the Agrarian Reform Law was admirably suited to their purpose. They were fully aware of the difficulty in engaging the Indians' interest in political matters. Therefore, the one means of attracting the Indians to the party was to offer them an immediate and concrete reward—land. Almost before the DAN had been set up, the Confederation of Guatemalan Workers (CTG), whose policy was dominated by the Communists, began to criticize the organization for dragging its feet,<sup>78</sup> even though the Communists themselves were responsible for whatever delay there may have been. The tactic here was to identify the party in the eyes of the public with positive action on agrarian reform matters. Widespread propaganda characterized agrarian reform as an especially cherished Communist goal.<sup>79</sup>

The Communists found that once the rush for land reform had begun it was impossible to stop or slow it down without seeming to be guilty of a waning enthusiasm. As a result, lands were distributed with little care in the recording of measurements, so that the DAN did not know precisely what it had given, the new landowner what he had received, or the old landowner what had been expropriated.<sup>80</sup>

Not all Guatemalan Communists supported agrarian reform. Late in 1940 Fortuny and Gutiérrez, and consequently the PAR, had split over the issue. Fortuny, influenced by his trip to Iron Curtain countries in 1949, at first did not support agrarian reform in Guatemala. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, felt that it was the party's obligation to take the lead on major policy matters, including agrarian reform, and implement the aspirations of the urban and rural workers. Fortuny later

reversed his position, in accordance with the new Moscow line of 1951, and advocated that the Guatemalan Communist Party should be built on grass-roots *campesino* support through primary emphasis upon land reform.<sup>81</sup> Despite the reunification of the PAR, differences in approach to agrarian reform still existed when the law was passed in 1952. But Gutiérrez's original views dominated.

The leaders of the newly Communist-dominated National Peasant Confederation (CNCG) went out to the Indian villages, often where no representative of the Government had been for years, to gain support for the new program.<sup>j</sup> The Indians responded in great numbers. Nathan L. Whetten, after an evening visit to the CNCG headquarters in Guatemala City in 1952, explains the success of this appeal:

The illiterate, bare-footed peasants sat on the floor around the walls of the rooms . . . They were listened to attentively, one by one, and in each case suggestions were made as to what might be done about it . . . In all cases, the peasant seemed grateful for the attention given to his problems and acted as if he had really found someone genuinely interested in his welfare.<sup>82</sup>

Although the Indians showed considerable enthusiasm about receiving land, once they owned a parcel they no longer wanted what they considered administrative interference from Government officials, thus defeating the purpose of the Communist Party.

Local CNCG organizers took the same sympathetic approach, and the CNCG headquarters in small villages began to resemble club-houses, providing game rooms, radios, reading material, and a place to commiserate over one's problems. An American visitor has characterized the Communist activity in these terms:

When a poor man's shack burned down, the Communists rustled up some boards and tin and built him a new one. When an Indian's child was sickly Communists rallied around with aspirins and hot water bottles. People who were hungry, or broke, or in trouble had virtually nowhere else to turn . . . but they could always go to Communist headquarters for tortillas, pennies, help, and friendship.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>j</sup> By mid-1953 it was easy to see that many remote villages had been visited by the CNCG; the usual anti-American posters and banners were in evidence. Rather amusingly, small villages where only a tiny minority could read had huge banners reading "*contra intervencion extranjera*"—against foreign intervention.

Because the political side of the CNCG was not made apparent, in many cases the *campesinos* must not have known with any certainty what they were joining.

Idle government property and uncultivated land of the United Fruit Company were the first to be expropriated and redistributed. During the first month of implementation, agrarian reform seemed to proceed smoothly. Then newspapers began to publicize instances of illegal expropriation. The number of violent land seizures by renegade *campesinos* urged on by Communist peasant leaders, often acting without the formal knowledge of the DAN, increased.<sup>84</sup> In certain provinces, particularly the rich department of Escuintla, the situation became so serious that landowners became convinced that no justice or protection could come from the Government and fled before the land-hungry *campesinos* could take their land from them. Sometimes the law's provision that only uncultivated land was liable to expropriation was flagrantly violated; crops were purposely destroyed by fire to make the land "uncultivated." *Impacto*, an impartial and influential Guatemala City newspaper, asked: "When will the authorities put the brakes on these groups of half-crazy elements that have begun to carry the country to the abyss of the most complete anarchy." At one point the peasants even made a move to expropriate La Cajon, Arbenz's own lavish personal estate in Escuintla.<sup>85</sup>

The violence and illegal seizures could have been unanticipated effects of policy promulgated by Communist DAN administrators like Carlos Manuel Pellecer, who sought to win *campesino* support for the party. Progress toward land reform had been slow before the Agrarian Reform Law, but now the *campesino* was being drawn into political affairs and taught to expect rapid action. Communist peasant union leaders taught him that taking land reform matters into his own hands was quicker and more effective than waiting for careful surveys, even if it was too often uselessly destructive.

According to the Arbenz Government's official records (which may very well err in his favor), 917,659 acres of land were distributed to 87,569 persons, or 10.5 acres per person.<sup>86</sup> About 40 percent of this land had previously been part of the Government's holding of uncultivated land; 60 percent had been private property. According to these reports, about 86 percent of all recipients did not receive title to the land, but only the right to work it during their lifetime, after which the land was to revert automatically to the Government.<sup>87</sup> The Agrarian Bank, organized to provide capital at low interest to *campesinos* needing farm equipment, fell short of meeting the needs of the new landowners, with the result that many *campesinos* found themselves with land but with little or no capital to cultivate it profitably.<sup>88</sup> Some evidence

suggests that DAN administrators at times distributed land to people from whom they expected special consideration, but who otherwise did not qualify for it.<sup>89</sup>

## Government and Administration

### *The Communists and President Arbenz*

Although young liberals of Guatemala tended to express their progressive ideals in Marxist terms, they were not necessarily Communists. President Arbenz at least on the surface appears to fall into this category. He indicated both in his public statements and by his actions that he knew or cared little about communism as a political doctrine or an international movement. He also said he could not become a Communist because he was accustomed to the ways of a property owner. Schneider writes:

It would appear that Arbenz favored the Communists more for their abilities and virtues than from any belief in Communism. Although Marxist doctrine did serve to give his regime some degree of ideological underpinning, he was more concerned with the immediate problems than the shape of things to come.<sup>90</sup>

Arbenz's election to the presidency had depended heavily upon the labor vote, which was controlled to a large extent by the Communists. The Communist electoral bloc had proved to be the hardest working, most honest, and best organized. It is possible that Arbenz made an agreement with Fortuny, for it was in the middle of the campaign that the Communist Party came into the open. Arbenz's policy of accepting the Communist Party in free party competition drastically changed the course of events in party politics. With its new freedom, the Communist Party was able to grow rapidly, consolidate its control over labor, gain further influence in the government, and develop a more intimate working relationship with the President. As stated previously, Communist Party discipline and militancy made a most impressive contrast to the opportunism and frequent corruption of the politicians of other parties who constantly sought favors and political spoils from President Arbenz.

The Communists further endeared themselves to the President by their firm support of his major program—agrarian reform. They not only mobilized enthusiastic mass support for the project, but also helped in its technical and planning aspects. By the time the Communist Party had achieved full status in mid-1952, Arbenz, according to Schneider, had begun “to look upon the Communists as his most

reliable supporters and the truest interpreters of the wishes of the people.”<sup>91</sup>

Individual Communists upon whom Arbenz came to depend for suggestions, policymaking, and speech writing became cornerstones of Communist influence in the Government. But the role played by Communist-controlled groups, and in particular labor, had greater importance. Large demonstrations in favor of Communist-inspired government policy or against opposition pressure indicated “mass popular support” for the Government.

With nearly 40,000 union members in and around the capital, Gutiérrez and his associates could fill the streets in short order. A telegram from Gutiérrez to the CGTG affiliates could bring hundreds of messages pouring into the national palace. During vital sessions the galleries of the National Congress were filled with shouting, banner-waving workers, whose placards made clear their support of Communist-favored legislation.<sup>92</sup>

Communist courtship of President Arbenz led to the placement of many Communists in responsible administrative positions. Among these appointments were: Mario Silva Jonama, Under Secretary of Public Education; Gabriel Alvarado, Chief of Normal School Education, Ministry of Education; Edelberto Torres, in charge of the press for Ministry of Education; Waldemar Barrios Klee, Deputy Chief of DAN; María Jérez de Fortuny, wife of the PGT leader, Secretary General, DAN; Mario Sosa, Inspector General, DAN; Hugo Barrios Klee, Secretary of the Administrative Department of Labor; and Carlos Alvarado Jérez, Director Press and Propaganda Agencies. The posts held by Communists gave them direct control of certain agencies concerned with vital government programs and the shaping of public opinion. For the most part, however, they were content with indirect control and influence in policymaking, leaving the top offices to be filled by political allies. Their subtle influence over the President was of far greater importance than the major posts in the agencies that they controlled.

Ultimately, Communist influence with the leaders of other political parties, control of the mass organizations of workers and peasants, and positions of leadership in government policymaking were coordinated and institutionalized in the National Democratic Front. This organization was composed of representatives of the government parties, the labor confederation, and the peasant confederation. The President himself presided over the Democratic Front, the seat of political and government decisions.<sup>93</sup>



### *Governmental Bodies and Agencies*

*Congress.* A very small number of Communist deputies in the National Congress—4 out of 56 in the early 1950's—succeeded in maintaining an influence far out of proportion to their numbers. This is explained by two chief factors.

First, the two major parties of the government coalition in Congress—the PAR and the PRG<sup>k</sup>—were frequently at odds. The little Communist bloc often held the balance of power between them and, with the aid of a few close collaborators from other parties, could sway the vote.

Second, and more important, was the fact that the Guatemalan National Congress was controlled by a small elite of some 18 members; the four Communists were part of this clique. In the last congress of the Arbenz regime, the average number of committee assignments to non-Communist deputies was 1.7. The PGT representatives were kept busy with at least four assignments per person, while Gutiérrez and Pellecer each had five. Most of the legislative work in the congress was conducted by 14 commissions (committees). One of the four Communists was a member of each one of these commissions. All four served together in the politically strategic Extraordinary Commission on Reforms of the Labor Code; one of them was its president. The Agrarian Reform Commission included two Communists; one of them, Gutiérrez, was its president. Gutiérrez also served on the Congressional Steering Committee and for a time was the First Secretary of Congress.

*Ministry of Education.* The Ministry of Education and the Colleges of Humanities and Economics in the University of San Carlos were infiltrated to the degree that Communists controlled textbook selection and teacher examinations. By 1952, the Ministry of Education was publishing a number of books by such avowed Communists as Guerra Borges, César Godoy Urrutia, Huberto Alvarado, and Silva Jonoma. Two Chilean Communists—Virginia Bravo Letelier and César Godoy Urrutia—played an early role in the propagation of communism among the teachers of Guatemala. They attempted to establish a Marxist-oriented teachers training school, circulated numerous pamphlets and books, and advised school libraries on what books should be selected for stock. This task was simplified by the fact that a large percentage of Communist leaders came from the teaching profession. It is also estimated that 20 percent of the teachers of Guatemala were Communist Party members or sympathizers.<sup>94</sup>

Gutiérrez's simplified version of Marx's *Des Capital*, entitled *Breves Resúmenes de Economía Política*, became the official text on political

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<sup>k</sup> Party of the Guatemalan Revolution.

economy. Schneider points out that the normal school examinations on political economy were so worded that the “right answer” was an answer acceptable to the party. A teacher, then, might not have been a Communist but was required to teach from Communist-selected textbooks. Since most of the teachers were young and inexperienced, the field-training courses and supplementary materials from the Ministry of Education made a significant impact upon them.

The Guatemalan Union of Educational Workers (STEG) assured its supremacy in rural education by attacking and forcing the withdrawal of the Inter-American Cooperative Educational Service, which had been doing valuable work in the field of rural education in Guatemala since the end of World War II and had been invited to Guatemala by President Arévalo. The Communist leaders claimed that the educational mission was “a camouflaged form of North American imperialism” and a threat to peace.<sup>95</sup> They also claimed that the North Americans were using their influence in the rural schools to “discard Guatemalan teachers and belittle Guatemalan modes of life.”<sup>96</sup>

Communist control of teacher training, curriculum, and textbooks, and exclusion of all conflicting sources of information and ideas was, perhaps, one of the most useful of Communist operations in Guatemala.

*National Agrarian Department.* The Communists dominated virtually all levels of the National Agrarian Department from its very inception and were able, therefore, to dictate the expropriation and distribution of land. The Communists within the DAN worked in direct collaboration with the Communist Party. Documents show that agrarian inspectors wrote to party headquarters suggesting the opportune time and procedure for obtaining certain lands. These directions were passed along to the interested local branch of the party.<sup>97</sup>

This intelligence was a great benefit to the Communist Party. The Communists made it clear to those who received land that they owed it to the party. Others who wanted land discovered that joining the party might help them obtain it. Schneider writes that through their control of the administration of agrarian reform the Communists were able, in some departments, “to build a mass *campesino* base which more than trebled the party’s membership.”<sup>98</sup>

*Ministry of Economy and Labor.* Through their control of both the major labor organization and the agency of government that supervised the labor movement, the Communists had a lead on any rival in the labor field. The first Inspector General of Labor installed immediately after the enactment of the Labor Code of 1947 was a Communist. Labor inspectors investigated labor disputes and testified in the labor courts in cases between labor and management; most of these



labor inspectors were selected from a list of candidates prepared by the CGTG.

*Civil Guard and Judicial Guard.* The Communists were more successful with the civilian security forces than with the military. The civilian forces were for all practical purposes an agency of the executive. Through their influence on President Arbenz, the Communists enjoyed the close cooperation of his “private” police, the Civil Guard and the Judicial Guard. In the last few years of the Arbenz regime the two police chiefs, Rogelio Cruz Wer (Director General of the Civil Guard), and army Major Jaime Rosenberg (Chief of the Judicial Guard), worked hand-in-hand with the Communist labor chiefs. “The local organizations of the OGTG and the CNCG furnished the police with the names of reactionaries, anti-Communists and ‘opponents of agrarian reform’ while the [police chiefs] reciprocated by appointing nominees of the labor organizations to the local civil guard posts.”<sup>99</sup>

*Press and Radio.* The Communists placed great importance on acquiring positions from which they could influence public opinion. As early as 1946, they gained a foothold in the national radio station, TGW, and later maintained virtual control of this important propaganda medium. The semiofficial government newspaper, *Nuestro Diario*, relied heavily upon the Soviet news agency for its material. Its editor was usually a Communist. Communists also held prominent positions in such government agencies as the Publicity Office of the President and the Department of Propaganda, Information, and Tourism.

## INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Although the Guatemalan Communist Party received no continuing direction from the Soviet Union, as do the parties in countries within the Soviet Bloc, its leaders came to look to the Kremlin for some guidance. A few important party policies were conditioned by the guidelines of the international movement as directed by the Soviet Union. Within this movement, the Guatemalan situation was to be “exploited” for three general purposes: to weaken the bonds of hemispheric unity, to establish a Communist base for subversive operations in Central America, and to present Guatemala as a model for other Latin American Communists to copy.<sup>100</sup>

International Communist leaders pointed out Guatemala as a country threatened by the “imperialism” of the United States.<sup>101</sup> Hence, some Latin American nations were led to believe that the charge of Communist “intervention” was no more than a smokescreen to be used by the United States for the rescue of its beleaguered business enterprises in Guatemala. Because of the effectiveness of this propaganda,

the question of what to do about communism in Guatemala in the early 1950's stirred up impassioned international debate on the issues of intervention and national sovereignty.

## **The International Debate**

In December 1951, the Organization of Central American States (ODECA) was formed. It scheduled its first meeting for Guatemala City in September 1952. However, the Arbenz Government postponed the meeting shortly before it was to be held because Salvadoran Foreign Minister Roberto Canessa had proposed that the question of Communist infiltration be placed on the agenda. This proposal led to the removal of Guatemalan Foreign Minister Manuel Galich, who had played a major role in establishing the ODECA, and set off a barrage of Communist propaganda. Guatemalan Communists branded the Salvadoran Government a tool of North American "imperialists."

On April 1, 1953, Arbenz's foreign minister made a formal protest to the Secretary General of the United Nations, stating that Guatemala was the victim of a "vast international conspiracy" that "involved the United States, the Dominican Republic, and her Central American neighbors." Soon after this protest Guatemala withdrew from the ODECA on the ground that the proposed investigation of communism in Central America was "unwarranted interference" in her internal affairs. Throughout 1953 the Communist press played up the idea of an "imperialist threat" to Guatemala and repeated the slogan: "Hands off Guatemala."<sup>102</sup>

Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello attended the Tenth International Conference of the American States, held in Caracas in March 1954, intending to exploit traditional Latin American resentment of the "Colossus of the North." Latin American resentment was particularly apparent at the time because the United States was refusing to go along with Latin American ideas on economic development. Toriello was successful in his objective; although U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles succeeded in getting an anti-Communist resolution passed, it was definitely an unpopular measure among a majority of the OAS members. One author states that Dulles received their support because he made it clear that only nations which followed the United States in its condemnation of international communism could expect to receive vital American economic and technical assistance.<sup>103</sup> Guatemala was the only country that voted against the proposal, with Mexico and Argentina abstaining, but delegates from various countries made clear their discontent. Uruguay's representative stated, "We contributed our approval without enthusiasm, without optimism, without

joy, and without the feeling that we were contributing to a constructive measure.”<sup>104</sup> Even the delegate from Brazil, generally a close Latin American friend, claimed that the United States had reached “its lowest ebb in its role of hemispheric leader of democracy.”<sup>105</sup> At the termination of this conference, the Guatemalan Congress renounced its ratification of the 1947 Rio treaty on collective defense of the hemisphere.

Following an attack by the anti-Communist forces of Castillo Armas on June 18, 1954, Guatemala made simultaneous appeals for support to the Peace Committee of the OAS and the Security Council of the United Nations. After the Soviet Union vetoed a move to have the matter officially transferred to the OAS, the Council adopted a cease-fire resolution. The Soviet Union preferred to have the matter on the agenda of the United Nations where it could exercise a veto. Guatemala withdrew its protest from the Peace Committee within 24 hours after it was lodged, on June 19.<sup>106</sup>

On June 25th, Toriello and the Soviet representative pressed Security Council President Lodge to call a second meeting immediately. The fighting had continued and Guatemala charged neighboring Honduras and Nicaragua with complicity in the affair. Lodge’s answer was to urge that OAS rather than U.N. action be taken, on the grounds that the situation in Guatemala was a civil, not an international war.

### **Communist Exploitation of Guatemalan Situation**

The Guatemalan situation was quickly picked up in various Communist communications media. The publications of the Communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions, for instance, frequently requested articles on the Guatemalan Communist program and its progress from local leader Manuel Gutiérrez. International Communist journals, such as *Noticiero de la Confederación de Trabajadores de America Latina*, gave wide coverage to the agrarian reform and labor organizations of Guatemala as models for other Latin American nations.

The WFTU propaganda film, “*La Gran Cita*” (“The Great Appointment”), in 1954 featured Guatemala in a prominent role. In the words of the WFTU Executive Committee, the section concerning Guatemala should:

... show the workers and people of Guatemala struggling against the United Fruit Company and its subsidiaries, the railroad company, Puerto Barrios, etc.

The case of Guatemala is essential to the motion picture because it will show the aggression today in

Guatemala, political aggression at the other end of the world.<sup>107</sup>

Guatemala had become an important source of propaganda propounding the Soviet view of world affairs. The country was deluged with a Spanish-language edition of the magazine, *Soviet Union*, while local Communist newspapers reprinted stories and feature articles on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. They contrasted the “hard-working, peace-loving” Communist with the “decadent capitalist” who had supposedly started the Korean War in order to create a market for his weapons manufacturing industry and bolster his crumbling economic system.

Some of the stories were startlingly vicious. Besides supporting China and North Korea in the Korean War, they gave prominence and credence to germ warfare charges against the United States. Alleged Yankee atrocities in Korea were described in gruesome detail.<sup>1</sup>

Extensive newspaper coverage was given to the Communist inspired “world peace” conferences . . . placed in juxtaposition to articles on the machinations of Wall Street and the U.S. Government. The anti-Government propaganda used by the Communists in El Salvador was printed in Guatemala. The Guatemalan radio, controlled by Communists, beamed provocative programs urging the revolt of neighboring peoples against their governments. Because of their subversive activities and abuse of diplomatic privileges Guatemalan diplomats were expelled from Panama, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras as *persona non grata*.<sup>109</sup> Thus Guatemala, during the decade, served the prime Communist purpose of being a base for the dissemination of propaganda, first throughout the country, and then throughout the hemisphere and the entire world.

In early 1954 the United States criticized Guatemala for purchasing arms from a Communist country. Both Communists and anti-Communists denounced the Yankee criticism as “imperialism” and “interference.” They also pointed to U.S. willingness to supply arms to right-wing dictators in the Western hemisphere, while refusing Guatemala’s needs. Radio and newspapers condemned the United States for this “intervention” in Guatemala; their accusations brought on anti-U.S., pro-Communist demonstrations in neighboring countries. Chilean students burned a U.S. flag and an effigy of President Eisenhower. The Chambers of Deputies in both Chile and Uruguay passed resolutions condemning the U.S. action; Uruguayan students carried out a

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<sup>1</sup> Typical were claims that American soldiers were hanging pregnant women and machine-gunning thousands of defenseless women and children. (Document Y-334. “The Manifesto of the Committee of Solidarity with the People of Korea.” Guatemala Transcripts.)<sup>108</sup>

24-hour protest strike and stoned the U.S. Embassy, while several Honduran students were wounded in a pro-Guatemala demonstration. In Ecuador the Student Federation recruited volunteers and sent a message of support to Arbenz. In Argentina the Radical Party and both the pro- and anti-Government press loudly criticized the United States for "imperialism." In Mexico the students and even the Government showed an anti-U.S. attitude.<sup>110</sup>



(World Wide Photos)

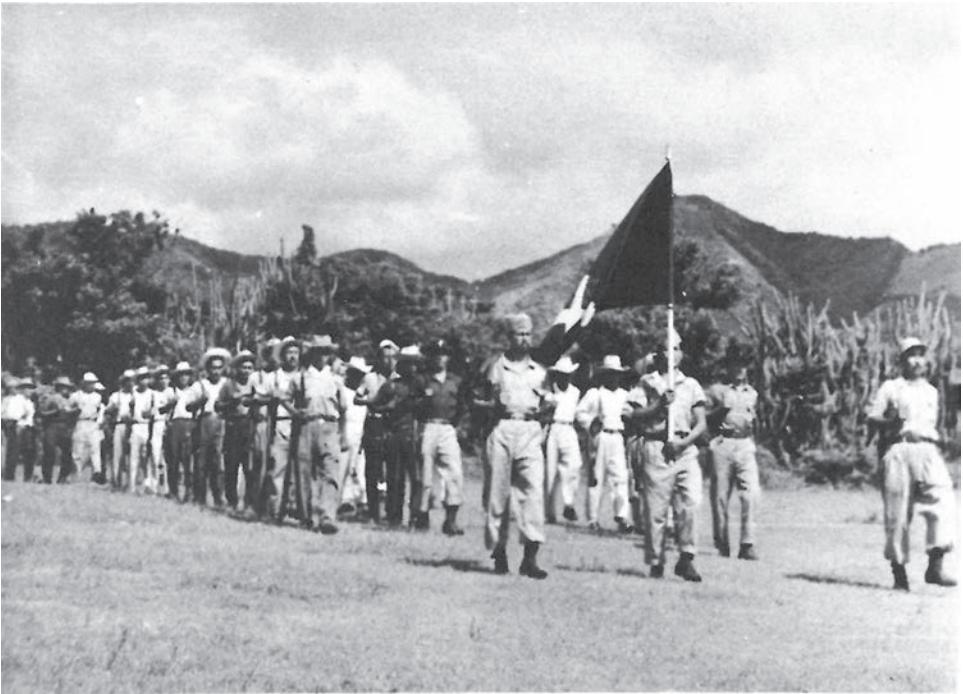
Mid-day in a lonely Indian village on the shores of Lake Santiago De Atitlan.





(United Press Photo)

A Puerto Barrios housewife walking under a sign proclaiming against foreign intervention as employees of United Fruit Company get leisurely shoe shines outside a company office in June 1954. Guatemalan Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello charged that the Fruit Company, owned by North American, was supporting the movement to overthrow the Government.



(World Wide Photos)

The Guatemalan Revolutionary “Liberation Army” parades for Castillo Armas late in July 1954 after it helped to overthrow the regime of Arbenz. Castillo Armas was forced to disband the “Liberation Army” after a day-long revolt by disgruntled National Army regulars.



(World Wide Photos)

Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, wearing white cap and dark glasses near center of picture, talks with aides from plane to rebel headquarters in July 1954.



(United Press Photo)

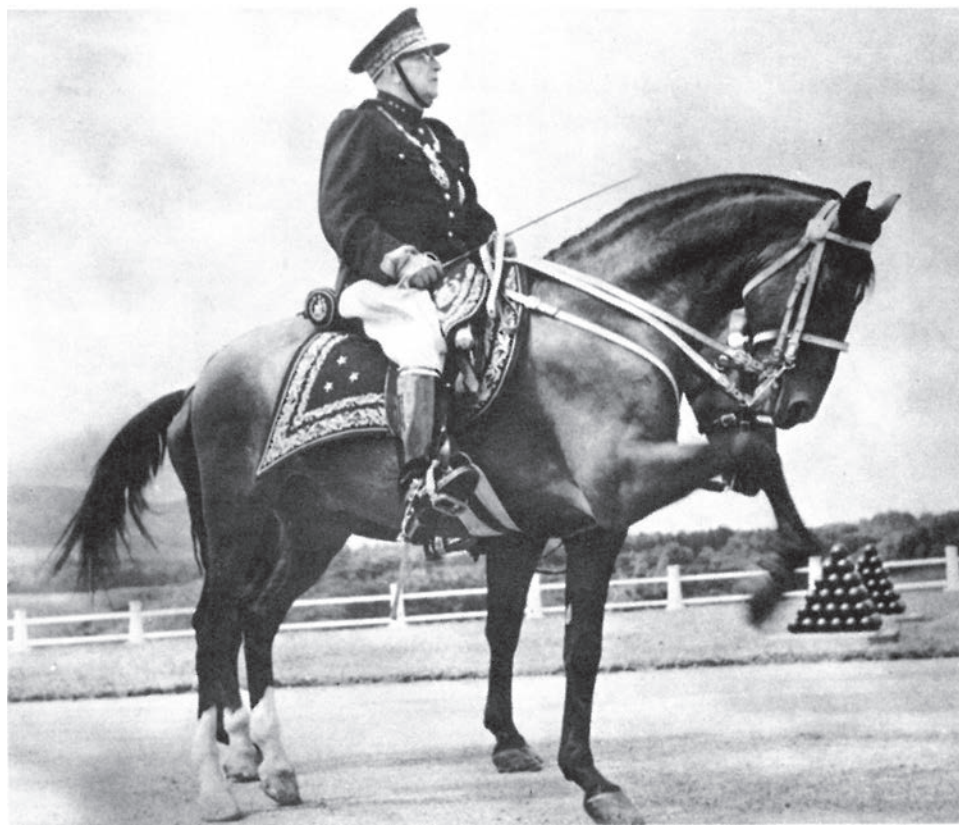
Plodding along the Pan American Highway, Indian porters carry loads which the average man would be hard put to lift.





(World Wide Photos)

Three soldiers at the Guardia de Honor in Guatemala City show rifle, submachinegun, light machinegun, and anti-tank mine. The arms were part of the shipment that the Guatemalan Government received from the Soviet Bloc in May 1954.



(Acme)

Gen. Jorge Ubico, President of Guatemala until 1944, parades in the annual Campo De Marte Fiesta in Guatemala City in 1942.



(World Wide Photos)

Waving their wide-brimmed straw hats, a group of peasants cheered as they received plots of ground in 1953 under Guatemala's Agrarian Land Reform Law.





(World Wide Photos)

As Guatemala rival chiefs, Col. Elfego Monzón, leader of the junta that replaced Arbenz, and rebel Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, flew to San Salvador (1) June 30, 1954 for peace talks, the junta rushed troops to Escuintla and Concepcion (2) where a threatened uprising was reported among farm workers. Reports also claimed a police chief was stoned to death June 29 near the village of Pinula (3). Guatemala City was calm and continued with roundup of Communists following the resignation of Arbenz.



(United Press Photo)

Col. Castillo Armas is shown being escorted into the National Palace by an armed military guard shortly after his arrival in the capital at the end of fighting between National Army regulars and members of the "Liberation Army" in August 1954.





(Acme)

An Indian market, at the edge of Guatemala City, is a constant scene of activity as gaily costumed Indians sell their produce and handicrafts. All Indians wear distinctive hats which identify their tribes.

**PART III—ROLE OF THE GUATEMALAN  
MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT**





## SELECTED FACTORS WHICH AFFECTED THE ATTITUDES, VALUES, AND BELIEFS OF THE MILITARY ELITE

### Socio-Economic Background

Important social changes occurred within the Guatemalan military in the 20th century. Traditionally, members of the military elite were selected from the offspring of established families. These officers were closely associated with other aristocratic groups and middle-class professionals, and with them formed the ruling elite. Social background thus influenced their political behavior. They became the guarantors of quasi-feudal social institutions, and in general the guardians of the *status quo*.

In this century, particularly since World War I, the pattern of selection and the social origin of the military elite has undergone many changes, and an increasing professionalism and a growing "social consciousness" have been manifested. Militarism—the domination of politics by the military—declined as technological advances and new social forces developed an increasingly powerful middle group. As aristocratic families lost interest in military appointments, a military career became less fashionable for the upper-class younger set; receiving a university degree was more prestigious than graduating from the military academy.<sup>111</sup> By 1944 the Guatemalan military elite had become largely middle and lower-middle class, and had lost much of its aristocratic character.

As the social basis of the Guatemalan military elite broadened, its political behavior was more and more influenced by professional considerations. Outside influences perhaps gave professionalism its greatest impetus.<sup>112</sup> French and German military missions in South American countries and U.S. forces in Central America and the Caribbean area trained and reorganized Latin American armies, changing them from regional militias to true national armies. By the early 1930's Guatemala had a well-organized army, interested chiefly in maintaining its special position.

Two additional characteristics of the Guatemalan military elite of the early 1930's should be mentioned. In the matter of promotions, there was great importance placed on a strictly military background; the higher grades in the officer corps had a large proportion of officers who had attended military academies and had no other profession prior to entry in the service. Many of the recent generation of officers had strictly military backgrounds; the proportion of officers who had attended military academies and had not been engaged in any other

profession was greater among the active officers than among officers who had by then retired. (Although approximately 50 percent of the officers at all grades had been engaged in agricultural pursuits prior to entering service, most high ranking staff officers in the early thirties had no background other than military.)<sup>113</sup>

From the 1930's on the military officer corps in Guatemala had many social and economic opportunities. For instance, a military career offered an opportunity for the socially ambitious; they could rise up the social ladder no matter how humble their background. As the military became more professional, the personal worth of the individual became more important than his social background. Moreover, high-ranking officers were accepted by Guatemalans as members of the upper social strata. This social acceptance of the military elite by no means implies that high-ranking officers integrated harmoniously with other Guatemalan social groups. On the contrary, military officers reared in rural environments did not readily accept the urban values of the political elite whom they often thought of as being too self-indulgent.

In general, the military had a relatively high standard of living. The political elite, aware of the military's position within the power structure of the country, saw to it that the officer corps' manner of life befitted their social position. In the post-World War II era, for instance, Arévalo, Arbenz and, later, Castillo Armas extended a number of economic benefits, especially to politically reliable officers. Aside from high salaries, officers often enjoyed travel privileges, duty-free imports, below-market-price goods at the commissaries, highly favorable terms on government loans for housing lots in fashionable districts, and excellent officers' clubs. However, there is some evidence that high-ranking officers were living beyond their means and had to supplement their military incomes by operating businesses or holding positions in non-military enterprises.

The growing "social consciousness" was characterized by the younger military officers' increased concern with social problems in the 1940's and the 1950's. The group that led the second coup in 1944 that overthrew Ponce almost immediately began to institute social and economic changes which won the approval of many of the officers. As a consequence, the traditional feelings of resentment and hostility toward the military abated and even turned into popular acceptance. Once having felt this, some officers were reluctant "to jeopardize their new popularity with the populace with unpopular acts."<sup>114</sup> This may have been a key factor in restraining the military from moving against Arbenz until June 1954.

It must also be added that the social consciousness of the younger officers led to some serious problems. Significant antagonisms arose, for instance, between young officers with highly professional training and senior officers whom they considered to be old fashioned and extremely conservative. These antagonisms came to a climax in the two military coups in 1944 and may even be a partial explanation for them. Later, after some of these social and economic changes had taken place, new groups, such as political parties, labor unions, and economic organizations, came to oppose the political role of the military. This second struggle reached a peak in 1954 when the military perceived its very existence to be threatened by a proposed government-sponsored "people's militia." The military once again took the upper hand, withdrew its support of the Government, and even aided in its overthrow.<sup>115</sup>

### **Organizational Aspects of the Guatemalan Military Establishment**

The Post-World War II Guatemalan military establishment developed into the largest and most adequately equipped and drilled armed force in Central America. By the early 1950's it was considered by military observers to be the only army in Central America capable of operating as a "modern force." Shaped along lines of World War II forces, it was designed to preserve internal order and defend Guatemala against possible external invasion. Because Guatemala's neighbors represented no serious threat to its security, its defense needs were relatively small. In 1954 when Guatemala's political order was completely disrupted, the army was the only institution capable of restoring order and formulating policy.

Guatemalan armed forces at that time included an army, an air force, and a navy. The 8,000 men and 900 officers in the army made that force the most powerful and decisive in national politics. The air force was 350 strong, and the navy included 150 officers and men. Approximately 25 percent of the army officers were full colonels: promotions were thus limited and the army was open to disaffection on the part of frustrated junior and middle-grade officers. According to military observers, however, the topheavy rank structure (and no doubt a number of other factors) limited effectiveness and reliability.

Military service was compulsory for all Guatemalans, according to Article 150 of the 1945 Constitution. Because the Guatemalan Army could not accommodate all who were required to serve, exemptions released many from active service. In fact, nearly everyone except the illiterate Indians and other Guatemalans in the lower socioeconomic groups were exempt. In this way the Government had an opportunity

to educate and train persons who would otherwise remain unskilled. Infantry troops, for instance, acquired useful mechanical training in the handling and repairing of machinery.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the career noncommissioned officer corps tended to be unprofessional and often incompetent because exemptions eliminated its potential recruits.

Even before an arms shipment was received from the Soviet Bloc in 1954, the Guatemalan Armed Forces was estimated to have one and one-half times the number of small arms and equipment necessary to equip its troops. No other Central American country compared with the Guatemalan Army in the number of artillery pieces and armed vehicles.<sup>117</sup> This equipment was mostly World War II vintage, purchased from the United States, although some came from European sources, particularly after the U.S. Government refused to sell military supplies to the Arbenz Government in 1952.

The army, according to Chapter III of the 1945 Constitution, was an “apolitical” body, “essentially professional, obedient and nondeliberative.” Aside from its general duties of preserving order and security, it also performed certain nonmilitary tasks within the area of civic action. The President of the Republic was the Commander in Chief; the Minister of National Defense and the Chief of the Armed Forces respectively were designated next in line in the command structure.<sup>118</sup>

A strictly military consultative body, the Superior Council of National Defense, dealt with technical and professional matters. The Council included the Minister of Defense, Chief of the Armed Forces, Chief of Staff of the Army, and the chiefs of military zones or corps. It was under the direction of the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the Armed Forces. Congress was delegated the authority to name the Chief of the Armed Forces from a list of three officers submitted by the Superior Council; he was to serve a 6-year term and was subject to removal by the Congress or the Superior Council. The Superior Council also acted as Superior Tribunal of the Armed Forces “to judge and be informed” on military affairs or on matters involving both military and political affairs. The President of the Republic, the Minister of Defense, or the Chief of the Armed Forces had the power to convoke the Tribunal, and any member of the Armed Forces had a right to be heard by it.

Military appointments were normally initiated by the Chief of the Armed Forces through the Defense Ministry. The Superior Council could demand nullification of appointments. All promotions from second lieutenant up had to be authorized by the President upon a motion by the Chief of the Armed Forces through the Defense Ministry. Again, approval on the basis of competence and vacancy had to be given by the Superior Council.

The four principal army installations in the early 1950's were located in Guatemala City. These included the Fort of the Honor Guard (*Guardia de Honor*), the *Base Militar*, the *Escuela Politécnica*, and the *Escuela de Aplicación*. Aurora Airport, Guatemala's major commercial airport, accommodated a few air force planes but was not considered a military installation. Outside of the capital, the country was divided into five military zones.

The Fort of the Honor Guard was the headquarters of the First Infantry Regiment. This regiment was similar to a reinforced battalion of the U.S. Army. The Fort storeroom contained arms and ammunition from U.S. and European sources. A few tanks and artillery pieces were also present. The *Base Militar*, quarters of the Second Infantry Regiment, was located near Aurora Airport. The Second Regiment was approximately the same size as the First Regiment.

The *Escuela Politécnica*, Guatemala's West Point, had approximately 100 young men enrolled in 1951. It offered a 3-year program: 1 year of academic college training and 2 years of military service. Many cadets completed a final year of training at a USARCARIB school.<sup>a</sup> At that time several U.S. Army officers were serving as commandants and military advisors at the *Escuela*. The military training at the *Escuela* was patterned after the U.S. system and was considered necessary for new officers. Guatemalan naval officers were generally trained at Peruvian or Argentine naval academies.

The *Escuela de Aplicación*, located close to the *Base Militar*, was primarily a middle-level officers' training school. Courses corresponding to those in U.S. Army company officers' school were used to train groups of company-grade officers.

Other armed groups in Guatemala included the Civil Guard, the National Police, and an elite Border Patrol as well as the Judicial Guard (secret police). There were close to 1,000 men in the Civil Guard,<sup>119</sup> 3,000 officers and men in the National Police, and 800 men in the Border Patrol. These units were under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry. However, since both the Civil Guard and the Judicial Guard were directed by military officers key appointments were under the direct control of the army.

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<sup>a</sup> USARCARIB refers to United States Army, Caribbean Command, which has since 1951 been renamed United States Army, Southern Command. The U.S. Army training school attended by Latin American officers and cadets is now referred to as the School of the Americas.

## **U.S. Military Missions and Guatemalan Arms Purchases**

Post-war military relations between the United States and Guatemala were based primarily on bilateral agreements and the regulations of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB). The agreements relating to the establishment of U.S. military missions in Guatemala were signed in the spring of 1945. The American-inspired IADB, which included a high-ranking Guatemalan officer as representative of his country's Armed Forces, was set up in the fall of the same year. The main objectives of the missions, broadened by the IADB, were to introduce U.S. methods of organizing and training Guatemala's Armed Forces, and to standardize military equipment and tactics. They also facilitated the attendance of Guatemalan officers at U.S. military schools. There was a general relationship of friendliness and cooperation between officers of both countries. The United States was the only foreign power that kept military missions in Guatemala after World War II.

The United States, however, did not maintain a monopoly on the sale of arms and equipment. Many Latin American countries, including Guatemala, purchased arms from European manufacturers; the "go-slow" policies of the U.S. Congress in passing the necessary measures to strengthen the inter-American defense system partly explains the European purchases.<sup>120</sup> It was not until the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 was expanded by the Mutual Security Act of 1951 that the same military, technical, and economic assistance available to Europe was extended to Latin America. Until then, U.S. pricing and selling policies restricted purchases.

Although Arbenz did not sign a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with the United States, he was able at the beginning of his term in office to purchase U.S. arms under reimbursable provisions of the Mutual Security Act. In late 1952, after the United States had placed an arms embargo on shipments to Guatemala, Guatemalan officials applied to foreign governments for arms purchase licenses. An officer on the General Staff stated at that time that the army and air force were badly in need of military equipment and that the Armed Forces were in a poor state of training. Some of the leading high-ranking officers expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which military funds were spent for the acquisition of materiel.

In 1953 the Government of Guatemala was trying to buy aircraft, military vehicles, and small arms and ammunition from the United States, Sweden, France, Great Britain, and at least one African nation. The president of a small American commercial airline was named official purchasing agent for Guatemala. Guatemala's Chief of the Armed Forces went abroad to Geneva as official representative in an attempt



to negotiate arms purchases.<sup>121</sup> In some instances high-ranking officers were unaware of government arms purchases. An army colonel in January 1954 considered it an affront to himself and the army when he discovered that the Government had purchased 500 submachine guns from Belgium for the Civil Guard.

One of the most significant incidents that occurred during the Arbenz regime was the arms shipment from the Soviet bloc that involved the Swedish vessel the *Alfheim*. An army major, a close friend of Arbenz and very active in politics and agrarian reform, reportedly negotiated for the shipment in Prague in January 1954. He later went to Switzerland to arrange payment. The *Alfheim*, arriving at Puerto Barrios on May 15, 1954, was met by the Minister of Defense and other ranking officers. "Extraordinary security procedures" were followed when the ship was unloaded, and military escorts—20 to 30 guards at all times—accompanied the trains transferring the cargo to Guatemala City. Reportedly an unsuccessful attempt was made to derail one of the arms trains from Puerto Barrios. Most of the equipment was delivered to the headquarters of the Honor Guard (First Regiment) and the *Base Militar* (Second Regiment). It was also reported that some of the equipment was delivered to the airport to be sent to unknown points.<sup>122</sup>

Army officers in general were happy to receive the new arms, but many had misgivings concerning possible reactions. Some felt that Guatemala was demonstrating dangerously close ties with the Soviet Bloc. They feared that the U.S. military mission would be replaced by Soviet instructors who would later displace Guatemalan officers. They were even more concerned about the shipment's being used as evidence of an attempt on the part of the U.S.S.R. and Guatemalan Communists to take over Guatemala, thus prompting the U.S. Government into taking drastic action. They felt that the shipment could have only terrible consequences for Guatemala and that it was time to take a stronger stand against communism.

The U.S. arms embargo in 1952 did nothing to lessen the influence of the Communist Party in the Government, its position depending more on the political attitudes of the elite than on the level of arms buildup. However, the maintaining of U.S. military missions in Guatemala at the same time may have inspired some Guatemalan officers to take a neutral position toward the Arbenz regime. Also, the stopping of arms shipments to Guatemala hampered Arbenz' attempt to establish a people's militia that would have competed with and threatened the military establishment.

## Factionalism Within The Military Officer Corps

Throughout most of the period from 1944 to 1954 the attitudes of Guatemalan military officers toward the Government varied considerably. Officers at all levels tended to form rival cliques that voiced a variety of opinions, often conflicting. Some officers completely approved of the revolutionary Government and actively participated in implementing its new reforms. Others, disapproving of both Government and reforms, plotted and took part in subversive acts, or at least supported fellow officers who were inclined toward rebellion. Very few remained truly neutral or apolitical, supporting and defending their Government as they were required to do under the 1945 Constitution and their own regulations; and even these few eventually withdrew their support in the last few days of the Arbenz administration. The enlisted personnel followed their officers and seldom expressed any opinion about political affairs.

In the first few months after Arévalo's inauguration a *modus vivendi* was reached whereby the army pledged support to the civilian leadership in return for a pledge by civilian leaders to keep out of strictly military affairs. This seemingly cordial working arrangement lasted until 1948 when a series of military plots to overthrow the Government was discovered. Arana at that time was the only officer with enough power to rally the necessary support for a successful coup and he was approached time and again by conservative civilians and military officers who wanted him to lead a movement against the Government. On at least one occasion a group of officers presented him with an ultimatum that he either lead a military coup or they would proceed without him.

One of the outstanding observers of the Guatemalan scene suggests that there were at least three possible explanations for Arana's hesitation. First, he may have felt that there was no workable alternative to the Arévalo regime, and since he literally shared power with Arévalo, probably felt that he could succeed him simply by taking over the reins of government. Second, Arana had great respect for the labor movement and the strongly pro-Government labor leaders had threatened a general strike should the Government fall into the hands of military leaders. Third, a significant group of young military officers supported Arbenz, who was loyal to the Government.<sup>123</sup> However, there are indications that Arana was seriously considering leading a coup late in 1948, planning for a junta to serve out Arévalo's term while Arana prepared himself for his own election.

On July 18, 1949, Arana was ambushed and killed by a "group of armed men" as he was returning from an inspection tour in an outlying



section of the country. "According to the best available evidence," writes Schneider, "the group who killed Arana included the chauffeur of Sra. de Arbenz, who later became a deputy in the Arbenz congress, and was headed by Lt. Alfonso Martínez Estévez, a close friend of Colonel Arbenz who afterwards served as Private Secretary of the President and the Chief of the National Agrarian Department. The masterminds of the plot reportedly included Augusto Charnaud MacDonald (who later become Minister of Government under Arbenz) and the Communist firebrand, Carlos Manuel Pellecer. While we cannot be sure who made the decision to kill Arana, it was done in the interest of Arbenz, and Arévalo cannot be considered blameless, since the Government failed to conduct any inquiry into the matter."<sup>124</sup> After word of Arana's death and the circumstances surrounding it reached Guatemala City, a sector of the Army—Arana supporters—attempted a military uprising. Within one week a pro-Arbenz faction of the military aided by organized urban workers had put down the revolt.

After this, the frequency of military plots seems to have subsided. Arbenz appeared to have cemented the various military factions together and to have gained the support of the entire Armed Forces. It must be stressed that Arbenz did not have the sympathy of the majority of military officers but, as Defense Minister under Arévalo, he had placed loyal officers in key commands. Toward the end of 1950, a few months after his candidacy for president had been announced, it was reported that he could count on the loyalty of the Chiefs of Staff, all the base commanders in Guatemala City, and the military zone commanders located in outlying provinces.

Probably the largest contributing factor to the general sentiment favoring the Government at that time was the constant purging of officers of doubtful loyalty. The biggest of the purges began shortly after Arana's assassination: Arana supporters who did not shift their allegiance to Arbenz were weeded out. A number of anti-Government officers were relieved of their commands, some were placed on inactive duty, and still others were sent into exile. The remaining officers were kept in a constant state of apprehension by an extensive internal intelligence system. Fear of being purged presumably quieted many officers who might otherwise have expressed opposition, and their silence helped make it appear that all military elements in 1950 were pro-Arbenz and were supporting the Government.

It was within the group of purged officers that Arbenz faced his most active opposition. Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, who had been placed on inactive duty and later retired to civilian life because of his doubtful loyalty to Arbenz and the Arévalo Government, spearheaded the "liberation movement" that eventually led to the overthrow of Arbenz in

1954. In 1950 he already had considerable support from civilian groups and from a faction within the officer corps. He lacked arms and equipment and considered appealing for military aid to Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, although he was not contemplating immediate action.

One faction of military officers in 1950 was caught between what appeared to be two incompatible forces: pressure and influence from the Government and the urgings of military and civilian conservative elements. The Chief of the Armed Forces, for instance, at one time praised Arévalo's social reforms, although he was a strict disciplinarian and considered to be sincere in supporting constitutional government and in upholding the integrity of the military. A minority of young officers held similar views; but they had much less influence in the officer corps than did the factions that strongly supported the Government and the factions that expressed their opposition.

There were indications of an increasing number of dissatisfied officers below the top military leadership in 1952. These officers appeared to be confused by the rapidly changing state of affairs. Relations between Guatemala and the United States were worsening. The Guatemalan military feared intervention from the Organization of Central American States. They saw what they thought were signs of an impending invasion from neighboring countries, and felt that the Guatemalan Armed Forces were ill prepared to ward off any external attack. They blamed the Government for the intolerable international situation. Moreover, administrative reforms, thought to be inspired by Communist elements in the Government, further split the Armed Forces at a time when the country was threatened. These dissatisfied officers tried to rally their brother officers into a closely knit group so that in the event the Government should fall, the Armed Forces would not fall with it. They felt their duty to be to "defend their country and its constitution," not to support the Government. Observers reported that these officers had the support of the air force, as well as the majority of officers in the Honor Guard, the two military schools, and four military zones. They had no plan for any action against the Government. The Chief of the Armed Forces appeared to be ready to support this group in some circumstances, although it was assumed that he would move against them if they were not strongly enough organized or if they brought pressure against him personally.

Only in the late spring of 1954, at the onset of external invasion, did the majority of the military officers act in unison. to demand the resignation of the President. Officers who were close to Arbenz stepped down from their high positions, and the less active supporters of the Government combined with anti-Government officers to present

Arbenz with an ultimatum: rid the Government of Communists and moderate his policies or resign. The General Staff of the Army, in conjunction with the Secretariat of Publicity of the Presidency, issued a bulletin denying that any ultimatum had been given and insisting that the national army was fully supporting President Arbenz.

## LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE MILITARY

Military regulations, executive decrees, and agreements between military and civilian leaders, as well as the 1945 Constitution, granted freedoms and imposed restrictions on the political activities of Guatemalan military officers. However, formally established rules were frequently altered and modified by the exigencies of rapidly changing politics. In the period from 1944 to 1954 politics in Guatemala was based to large extent on the mutual fear and distrust of the political elite and military officers.

Arana, through his own personal power and influence, perhaps contributed more than any other individual to increasing the strength of the military establishment. As Chief of the Armed Forces, a nonexistent position prior to the 1944 revolution, Arana wielded more power than any other single individual in Guatemala; he is credited with having prevented the Government from openly favoring communism from 1944 to 1949,<sup>125</sup> and the Communist Party has been said to have gained its greatest influence in Government as a result of his death.<sup>126</sup> At any rate, Arana gained two concessions for the military establishment. The first of these, included in Decree No. 17, was issued in November 1944 and excluded the executive branch—namely the President—from having any voice in the technical or professional organization of the army. This former presidential prerogative was placed in a strictly military council—the Superior Council of National Defense.<sup>127</sup>

The first concession eliminated the executive branch of the Government from matters primarily within the competency of the military, while the second gave to the army—and to Arana personally—direct and extensive powers in executive and legislative matters. In December 1945 an agreement commonly referred to as the “Pact of the Ravine,” allowed Arana to become head of state should Arévalo be unable to finish his term of office. This in effect made Arana the Vice President, for which no provision had been made in the Constitution. In an attempt to lessen the threat to his position as President, Arévalo gave Arana a tacit veto over all of the Government’s major policy decisions.<sup>128</sup>

Another result of negotiations between military officers and civilian leaders was that political authority over the Armed Forces was strangely

divided. As in most Latin American countries, the Guatemalan Armed Forces were not greatly concerned with matters of national defense and took on domestic functions along the lines of civic action. Civilian leaders, fearing that the military would take too large a part in nonmilitary affairs, felt it necessary to restrict them through legislation. Military leaders, on the other hand, felt that all military matters should be handled by the Superior Council of National Defense. As it turned out, the President remained the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces; but the Chief of the Armed Forces, himself a Congressional appointee, each year had to swear obedience to the Congress and pledge support of the constitutional provisions for choosing a president. In effect, the Chief of the Armed Forces was required to reject the President as Commander in Chief and take orders directly from Congress whenever the President attempted to prolong his term in office.<sup>129</sup>

Aside from Chapter 3, which dealt primarily with the organizational and administrative aspects of the military establishment, the 1945 Constitution contained other articles that set down the extent to which military persons were to be allowed to take active roles in politics. Article 113, for example, prohibited anyone in the Armed Forces from becoming a deputy in the Congress. Leaders of coups or armed revolutions and their relatives or anyone in high command at the time of a revolt, according to article 131, were ineligible for election to the presidency “for the period in which the constitutional order is interrupted and the following period.”<sup>b</sup> Article 140 restricted the Chief of the Armed Forces from becoming a cabinet minister.<sup>130</sup>

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL ACTIONS OF THE MILITARY AND ACTIONS OF THE VARIOUS GOVERNMENTAL ORGANS AND AGENCIES**

When preparations for establishing a new revolutionary government got under way in 1944, actions of both military and civilian leaders reflected the traditional lack of mutual confidence.<sup>131</sup> The authors of the 1945 Constitution had had their fill of military rule and worked persistently to transform the Armed Forces into an “apolitical, essentially professional, obedient and nondeliberative” body. On the other hand these same civilians, fully realizing the power relationship between their group and the high military staff gave in to military demands for *quid pro quo* harmony. As a result, the military establishment received political guarantees and was provided with extremely liberal economic

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<sup>b</sup> This remarkable provision for the coup d'état bears out arguments to the effect that some Latin American countries have literally institutionalized illegal seizures of power.

benefits. While on occasion governmental organs attempted to remove military influence from politics, in the long run they failed to get the upper hand.

### **Arana's Power and Influence**

Arana's power and influence in Guatemala in the period just before his assassination can hardly be overstated. He had the strong backing of conservatives both inside and outside the military and had the admiration and support of many revolutionary groups and parties. Although he was discredited by leftist elements as a reactionary traitor and a tool of the United Fruit Company,<sup>132</sup> he was at the same time feared and respected by them. As a major and tank commander he brought into play the elements of the army that made the coup of October 1944 successful.<sup>133</sup> He was a member of the three-man junta that ruled Guatemala until Arévalo's inauguration in March 1945. And from that time until his death in 1949 he dominated Guatemalan politics, using the office of the Chief of the Armed Forces as his power base.

Arana's position was not seriously threatened by any individual or power group until 1948, when a plot to have him assassinated was discovered. Most observers have linked this plot and others that followed, including the one that led to his death in 1949, to Arbenz and his supporters. There is much evidence to support this contention. However, Arana incurred hatred from military officers and civilians on both sides of the political spectrum over several years, and there were a number of individuals who might have wanted to take action against him.

Ill feeling between Arana and the Arévalo Government stemmed from various sources. Arana held up important Arévalo reforms and in some instances delayed crucial government projects that did not win his approval. In 1948 he blocked negotiations for a loan of 50 million dollars for highway construction. The loan was sponsored by a colonel who was serving as Minister of Communications, and Arbenz, then Minister of Defense. Both men were bitter Arana rivals.

Arana, who at first appeared to be a friend of labor, attempted to block the growing influence of communism in organized labor. He closed down indoctrination and propaganda centers and insisted on the expulsion of certain Communist labor leaders. In August 1948 Arana turned down a petition from labor leaders for arms when a plot against the Government was discovered, and in November he ordered all automatic weapons removed from the presidential military staff in the national palace. Arana endeavored to keep army control over all arms, and Arévalo complained that Arana was not making enough arms available for his security.<sup>134</sup> At times Arévalo would counter; for

instance, he once removed from his post a governor who had been nominated and supported by Arana.

Arana also had a run-in with the National Congress in early 1949. His presidential aspirations had become evident by that time. He was talking like a presidential candidate, seeking support from political parties, and running his own candidates for Congress. However, in order to run openly for the presidency Arana was required by law to resign his post as Chief of the Armed Forces. In November 1948 he gave a dinner party for the President of the Congress and other deputies at which time he attempted to convince them that he had no political ambition. In January 1949 it was rumored that Congress would take action against Arana on the question of his continuance in office, for his alleged complicity in a recent uprising, and for his inability to maintain public order. Arana squelched this by threatening to use the Armed Forces to dissolve Congress.

### **The Armed Forces and the Issue of Communism in Guatemala**

A part of the Armed Forces in Guatemala had always been concerned with the rising Communist influence in government and would have welcomed a change to have it halted. Arana, as mentioned earlier, took action against the labor movement and closed down indoctrination and propaganda centers in the later forties. Discontent continued to be expressed privately by some officers, and several eventually took action in September 1950. At this time a lieutenant colonel who had been named Minister of Interior accompanied by two other officers, closed down another indoctrination center and the Communist newspaper *Octubre*.

On a number of occasions delegations from the Armed Forces called upon the President to tell him of military concern over the issue of communism. One delegation of three, headed by a colonel who was then Minister Without Portfolio, confronted the President in July 1951 to inform him that their group was not in agreement with his policies, and to remind him that three months earlier he had promised to rid the Government of Communist influence. The same colonel sounded out the Minister of Defense, also an army officer, and other persons high in the Government early in 1954. He was not successful with the Minister of Defense, who, it was rumored, expected to succeed Arbenz as President with the aid of the Chief of the Armed Forces. It was also rumored that the Chief himself was seeking support for the presidency. Attempts to persuade Arbenz to rid the Government of Communists



and to change the government's policies continued on to the last hours of the Arbenz Government.

Arbenz did not stand idly by fretting about a dissatisfied military withdrawing its support from his Government. He in turn attempted to persuade the military officers that his policies were sound and unchangeable, with or without the Communists. In August 1951, for instance, Arbenz personally addressed officers in three major military installations in Guatemala City in an attempt to enlist their support and unify the Armed Forces under his leadership. In November 1953 he met with high ranking officers so that they might ask questions on several issues, including communism in government. His replies were not concrete: he stated that there were few Communists in Guatemala, none of whom was important, and that at any rate no one in the Government actually practiced Communist doctrine.

There were at least three such meetings called by Arbenz in June 1954 and held at the headquarters of the General Staff with other military leaders present. Arbenz reportedly attempted to convince the officers that there was some good to be found in communism. The questions asked of Arbenz revealed a general fear that labor unions were to be armed and that the Armed Forces were to be transformed into a people's militia. Arbenz at that time failed to elicit the support of the concerned officers.

Other governmental officials also sought the support of the military by explaining the position of the Government. In February 1952, for instance, 90 officers attended a lecture given by a specialist on economics at the *Escuela Politécnica*. The lecture, on the Government's position on foreign capital, was in effect a bitter attack on the United Fruit Company and the International Railways of Central America. It was to be the first in a series designed to guarantee military support in case the Guatemalan Government ever had a confrontation with United Fruit. An observer believed that this particular lecture favorably impressed the majority of those in attendance.

Attempts were also made by the Ministry of Agriculture to attract the common soldier. A propaganda campaign for agrarian reform was launched. One pamphlet, prepared for classroom presentation, contained a discourse between an officer and an enlisted man discussing the economic and social benefits that peasants and Indians could realize through the Government-sponsored agrarian reform program. This particular pamphlet was written by the Chief of Publicity and Propaganda for the Ministry of Agriculture.



## **Some Factors Strengthening the Influence of Arbenz in the Armed Forces**

Other Arbenz measures were successful to the extent that the majority of officers, at least in 1950, sincerely wished to see a continuation of the revolutionary government in Guatemala. These measures consisted primarily of military commissions, governmental appointments, and extremely liberal economic benefits. The majority of younger officers at that time had all received their commissions under the revolutionary government. The more “progressive” among the older officers received choice governmental posts. The attitude of the Guatemalan officers in August 1952 was that they had never been treated better: they were receiving good salaries, cut-rate prices on goods, credit facilities, and travel allowances. Many received extra payments in addition to regular salaries, and there were rumors that large sums of money were given outright to key commanding officers. In 1954, the President of the Congress and seven other congressional deputies, the Chief of the Agrarian Reform Department, the Director General of Highways, and 22 departmental governors were military officers.<sup>135</sup>

One measure to maintain the support and morale of military leaders was the construction of homes for officers in the preferred districts of Guatemala City, financed with loans obtained from the Production Development Institute (INFOP)—a government agency. Included among those who had received loans by the end of 1953 were the Private and Assistant Private Secretaries to the President, Chief of the Civil Guard, Chief of the General Barracks, the Inspector General, Chief of the Judicial Guard, the Minister Without Portfolio—a colonel, and a lieutenant colonel in G-2. Although terms for these loans were easy, in most cases payments were in arrears. It was reported that INFOP employees were told not to press for payments.

Guatemalan newspapers reported cases in which the Government granted lots for homes to those officers who were considered loyal to Arbenz. *Prensa Libre* in May 1954 reported that 34 lots awarded to several of Arbenz’s military staff as well as to politicians were in the nature of compensation to those who “supported” the revolution rather than attempts to solve the housing problem. The lots were sold for 10 cents a square meter rather than at the going price of \$5, and the recipients had 20 months to pay. Another newspaper, *El Imparcial*, revealed that 40 persons employed by the Department of Agriculture were refused lots in the same area because it was declared a “dangerous zone.” The paper considered these incidents to be signs of favoritism for the military.

Some of the property awarded by the Government to ranking officers may have been expropriated arbitrarily and the Government may

not have had legal right to grant the titles. *El Espectador* reported in November 1953 that property for houses awarded for “meritorious service to nation” by the Minister of Defense to three colonels was involved in a lawsuit. The plaintiffs felt that the Government had no right to transfer title of the lots.

### **Congressional Action Against Military Officers**

On occasion the National Congress stood up against powerful military leaders in attempts to exercise its authority and to prevent the Armed Forces from usurping congressional powers. Rumors had the Congress ready to take action against Arana early in 1949, partly to force him to account for his political activity while Chief of the Armed Forces, which was strictly against both military and civil law. In September 1950 a lieutenant colonel who was Minister of Interior was called before the Congress and subjected to “hostile” query after he personally closed down a labor indoctrination center and a Communist newspaper. His action was declared illegal by the Congress and he was forced to resign his cabinet post.<sup>136</sup> Arbenz later appointed him Minister Without Portfolio to satisfy conservative military officers that the Government was not radical.<sup>137</sup>

There were other instances when the Congress took a firm stand against the military hierarchy and initiated action which the Guatemalan military officers felt was a usurpation of strictly military functions. In early 1954 Congress stripped two anti-Government army officers who were then in exile of their ranks. Military officers expressed their fear that this type of action, which should only have been taken under advisement by the Chief of the Superior Council of National Defense, would result in Congress’s gradually encroaching on strictly military matters, and leave officers without protection. This became an extremely touchy area in administrative relations with the military, and further signs of transgression on military authority were watched for with anxiety.



## **PART IV—EPILOGUE**



On July 8, 1954, after much negotiation, leaders of the Guatemalan National Army and chiefs of the "Liberation Army" chose Castillo Armas as head of a three-man junta. After a September election, in which he received 99 percent of the popular vote, Armas was installed as president and served until his assassination in July 1957.

The new regime immediately set to work to "moderate" the policies of the former Arévalo and Arbenz Governments. One of Castillo Armas' first acts as chief of state was to declare parts of the Agrarian Land Reform Law unconstitutional and to suspend it, pending the formulation of a new one. He then froze property ownership retroactively, after learning that many Arbenz supporters had transferred title to a third party when an Armas victory seemed likely. The Castillo Armas Government also reclaimed 120 plantations which had been turned over to peasants. Increased U.S. nonmilitary aid helped Guatemala get back on its feet, for the treasury had been emptied by the time Armas assumed power. Reform has since been slow, however, and many social and economic problems persist.

The first real efforts of the Armas Government were directed against Arbenz and his colleagues; criminal charges were brought against many of the old regime's major supporters who had taken refuge in several embassies in Guatemala City. The Guatemalan Labor (Communist) Party (PGT) was outlawed, as were other parties, unions, and organizations that were suspected of being "Communist influenced." A list of Communists which the Government kept in order to check on their activities contained more than 70,000 names in November 1954; those on the list who had not gone into exile were barred from public office and some were imprisoned. Unions that were allowed by the Government to continue operations were given 3 months to rid their ranks of Communists and to present a list of executive committees for Government approval.

The Government's attempts to completely dissolve the PGT failed, and a few party members remained in Guatemala to rebuild and reestablish its influence among workers and students. By the summer of 1956, after careful study of past failures, the party outlined a new program. Its overall strategy emphasized the winning over of the "masses" through propaganda activities, and the establishment of a democratic front of workers and peasants. Eventually, party leaders felt, the people would rise up against the reactionary dictatorship and establish a democratic government in which workers would play a leading role.

The clandestine organization was at first weak and ineffective. However, in the period between the assassination of Castillo Armas in July 1957 and the election of his successor, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, the following January, the party was able to improve its position. During

that time, the anti-Communist laws that had been instituted by Castillo Armas were not strictly enforced. Many former party members who had been in exile since the fall of Arbenz returned to Guatemala. The party continued to build until Ydígoras Fuentes was overthrown by his Defense Minister, Col. Enrique Peralta Azurdia, in March 1963. Under Peralta, the Government reactivated the old anti-Communist laws and instituted a new series of decrees providing for military trials for violators. At this writing it appears that these decrees have set back but by no means ended the work of the Communist Party.



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- <sup>80</sup> Whetten, *Guatemala*, p. 162.
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- <sup>88</sup> Jensen, *Guatemala*, p. 187.
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<sup>118</sup> Silvert, *Government*, pp. 229–231.

<sup>119</sup> United States Government, *Penetration*, Annex C, p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on American Republics Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States and Latin American Relations*, 86th Congress, 2nd Session, Document #125 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 31, 1960), p. 37.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 1–2.

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<sup>127</sup> Silvert, *Government*, pp. 9–10.

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