

# The Roots of Communism in Central America

By STEPHAN F. DE BORHEGYI

A short-lived success of Communist infiltration right in our own "backyard" brought the Republic of Guatemala frequently to the headlines last year. In order to understand how the Communists gained success in the Guatemalan government and in the Guatemalan labor organizations and how they were able to appeal to the large Indian population, we must first understand the background of the present economic status of the country and the conditions which ultimately prepared the working classes to become an easy prey to leftist agitation.

The territory of Guatemala comprises 45,000 square miles. The last census (1950) shows its population at about three million. Of this population 54% is Indian, belonging to the Maya linguistic stock; 36% Indian and Spanish mixture, commonly called *Ladinos*, while the remaining 10% consist of European and Mexican immigrants. Guatemala is economically and technologically an underdeveloped area. Seventy per cent of the population is illiterate, and class and race distinctions are prevalent. The life is semi-feudal in character; large masses of *campesinos*, or peasants, live on a subsistence level and are exploited by a monopolistic and semi-feudal sixteenth century system of land tenure. Guatemala is a country where there is a lack of widespread education and a lack of capital for investment. Improper nutrition, lack of sanitation, and little knowledge of modern agricultural techniques are widespread. In short, the Guatemalan economy as it stands today benefits only a chosen few.

As early as the 1930's the small-scale introduction of electricity, potable drinking water, medical facilities, and better education to some of the rural areas, all through the aid of the United States, opened new horizons for the Guatemalan people. The intention was, of course, that the Guatemalan government would carry on these improvements throughout the rest of the country but a lack of financial resources caused the plan to be virtually abandoned. Since these new and desirable goals were still unobtainable to the majority of the population, they became a source of friction and dis-

content. The United States had introduced a way of life to a people and to a country, technologically and economically unprepared to accept the challenge.

As in other such areas throughout the world, these luxuries soon became the exclusive property of a restricted upper class and served to emphasize the already exaggerated inequalities between rich and poor. Thus, strange as it may sound, the major revolutionary agent of this century, in Central America at least, has not been the Soviet Union, as we might suppose, but the United States, through the introduction of its highly developed technology and "know-how" to underdeveloped areas. Had we been willing or able to introduce ways and means by which these highly desirable goals might have been attained by all classes of the population, the situation might be different. But where we have been shortsighted or negligent, the Soviet Union has profited. In Central America, Communist agitators seek out the areas of discontent and offer a simple solution to the deprived masses: "These things should be yours by right; if they are not given to you, then follow us and we will take them for you."

The Industrial Revolution, which caused such a major social and economic upheaval in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reached the boundaries of Guatemala belatedly—a little more than a few decades ago. As a consequence, century-old traditions of land tenure and class distinctions are being questioned, and for the first time in the history of the people the neglected Indian farmers and laborers have been thrust into the foreground as a new economic and political force.

In Pre-Columbian times the Maya farmers and artisans existed at the bottom of a complex native hierarchy governed by autocratic priest-rulers. After the Conquest of 1524, the Spaniards found it a relatively easy matter to usurp the ruling position and the Indian farmers continued their subsistence economy little affected by the change in masters. During the last four centuries, therefore, the Indians of Guatemala have lived within the nation but not as a part of it.

Two distinct cultures have lived side by side; the Indian and the Ladino. Distinction, however, was in rank and class rather than in skin color, and the unequal distribution of privileges naturally favored the Ladino group. In order to maintain their cultural and social position the Ladinos kept the differences obvious. This was facilitated through the fact that the two groups shared very different cultural patterns, values, and goals. The type of house and its location within the village, the style of dress, the language, and the occupational aims of the Indian were different from those of the Ladino. After the initial period of the Conquest, there was relatively little intermarriage between the two groups. The Ladino based his prestige system upon the accumulation of wealth, the ownership of land, political power, and social standing. On the other hand, the Indian achieved prestige within his own culture through the more intangible values of character, experience, age, wisdom, and industriousness. Thus the Indian element was easily and successfully subdued because the Indian found his way of life satisfying and because he knew no other. It was only the misfit in Indian society who wished and dared to break through the cultural segregation and enter the world of the Ladino, but when he did, he found no physical barriers. Thus, as long as Ladinos and Indians lived side by side sharing different cultural patterns, the political situation was a relatively quiet one with practically no overt aggression.

Since the advent of the machine age in Guatemala a drastic change has been made in the way of life of both Indian and Ladino. New desires have been induced, such as processed foods and drinks, radios, sewing machines, bicycles, automobiles, refrigerators, and movies. The introduction of regular bus and air transportation has practically forced the Indian itinerant foot merchant out of business. The use of modern agricultural techniques and devices has seriously reduced the need for hand labor and created an unemployment problem in some areas. Urged by the United States and assisted by us to some degree, the govern-

ment of Guatemala greatly expanded its rural school facilities so that an elementary education of a sort was available to most lower class children. At first Indian parents offered considerable resistance to the schools, but gradually they came to realize the advantages offered by an education and the more they learned the more they wanted to learn.

At about the same time the government extended suffrage to all Indian men and women. At the beginning the Indian was unimpressed, but the political leaders were quick to exploit the Indian vote. Members of the different political parties were eager to visit the villages to campaign, and the Indian became aware that there were political alternatives and that he had a choice. Since more and more Indians were becoming literate, newspapers began to filter into the villages and through the aid of radios and an expanded system of communication, the Indian populace no longer felt remote and unaffected by national or even international problems. Education also affected the power and prestige of the native *curanderos*, more popularly but less correctly known as *shamans* or medicine men. Protestant missionaries, most of them from the United States, introduced new religious concepts, and the Indian found that he was no longer bound to even one variety of Christianity.

All of these alternatives and desires came as a severe shock to the traditional and unquestioned "Indian" way of life. Since the younger Indian generation no longer felt the security of the "old ways" they looked for a different form of security and found it within the newly organized political or social groups which promised to defend them against "exploitation." Thus the political parties, collectives, and labor unions began to absorb the uprooted Indian elements and gave them a false feeling of security. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the new goals and alternatives were constantly re-enforced through movies, closer contact with city life through better transportation, and through the medium of radio and the newspaper.

Since the traditional Indian way of life is in opposition to the new ways, some Indians, in order to take advantage of them, must become Ladinos. They may do this by becoming literate and educated, acquiring wealth and ready cash, discarding their native language for Spanish, acquiring material possessions, changing their work habits, moving to a different village or to the cities, and living with and like Ladinos. The major problem, as might be expected, is that of acquiring ready cash and material possessions. How can an individual living on a subsistence level achieve relative

wealth? The Indian is traditionally an artisan and clever with his hands, so many have found opportunities in new types of jobs, such as auto mechanics and truck or bus drivers. However, these new positions are pitifully few in comparison to the number of applicants. The many who are not able to obtain such jobs find their way to the new life blocked by financial difficulties. The result of course is a frustrated state of mind. The Indian has been uprooted from his former way of life but is still beyond reach of the new. As countless examples elsewhere in the world have demonstrated, an uprooted society is an easy prey to Communism. The following epigram expresses the general situation in Guatemala, and may be applied to other Central American countries with under-developed economies: "The uprooted, and the roots of the uprooted, are roots of revolution."

**T**HE political scene that exists today in Guatemala was born of the contact between modern western machine-age civilization and a semi-feudal, sixteenth century environment. It pits the Ladino city workers, the Indian and Ladino farmers, and some intellectuals of the growing middle class against the old vested interests, the large landowners, foreign industries, the military class, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. There has been a definite change in the attitudes of the lower classes. Poverty is no longer a God-given situation; changes can be wrought, either quickly and violently or gradually and peacefully. The chief symbol of the awakening masses in Central America is the labor organization. A by-product of the new cultural change, the labor union plays an important economic role, seeking the protection of its members from "The North American Colossus" and native exploiters, with the major blame usually on the former. As frequent-

ly happens, some of the labor organizations have evolved into political pressure groups or even into political parties. A result of social change, the labor organization gradually becomes an agent of social change. Since these various labor organizations are by now too well established to be eliminated completely, the leaders of the Central American countries are left with only one alternative. They may give the labor organizations the "freedom" to fight and complain against "Gringo imperialists" and other foreign or local interests, or they may protect themselves from a possible military *coup d'état* by winning the loyalty of the labor element and controlling the unions.

In Guatemala Juan José Arévalo, doctor of philosophy and education, and former university professor in Argentina, was chosen president in December, 1944, in what was the freest election in Guatemalan history. Coming after Jorge Ubico, a military dictator who had ruled the country with an iron hand from 1931 until 1944, Arévalo quickly learned that his people had little understanding of democratic processes. Arévalo granted personal liberty to the Guatemalan people. He made an effort to raise the standards of living by introducing a variety of social reforms: social security, co-operatives, free compulsory education, free labor unions, labor courts, child-labor laws, minimum hours, paid holidays and vacations. As mentioned earlier, voting was granted for the first time to the Indian population to literate and illiterate alike. A land reform was started to give "land to the landless." Arévalo's program was immediately opposed by all major newspapers, the large landowners, the wealthy merchants, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. With an illiteracy of approximately 70% and with two-thirds of the population subsistence

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Indian agricultural workers, the job to build a democracy could not be hurried. Arévalo should have chosen a long but more gradual route.

Most of the freedoms which Arévalo has granted have been turned against him. Within four years of his regime there were about twenty-two attempts at revolution. Opposed and antagonized by the middle and upper classes, Arévalo was forced to rely heavily for support upon the labor organizations. In July 1949, the big military *coup* against Arévalo was subdued mostly with the help of armed labor forces. In this way the labor organizations in Guatemala were able to gain an important position in the political scene.

No doubt many of the labor leaders in Guatemala were Communists and they found it advantageous to exploit the turmoil and unrest in the country and to strengthen their personal power. The *Confederation of Guatemalan Workers* became affiliated with the *Latin American Labor Confederation* led by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a well known Communist fellow-traveler tempered by Mexican nationalism. When Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán took over the presidency in 1951, the situation in Guatemala was grave and in some areas the split between the laborers and peasants on one side and the landowners, Church, and wealthy merchants on the other, was complete. The new government was known to be openly sympathetic with Communism and the population had begun to take sides as "Communist" or "Anti-Communist."

However, the association of the President and leaders of the labor organizations with Communists brought about their downfall. Great power lies in a word, and the word Communism carried a stench. The masses of Indian and Ladino peasants had no idea what it was to be "Communist" or "Anti-Communist" in any true definition of the term; but they were taught by the Church, their employers, many of the teachers in their schools that to be a Communist was an evil and irreligious thing. Even though many were eager for the reforms offered by the labor organizations, they shrank from the association with Communists, and when General Castillo Armas and a group of the military organized an "Anti-Communist" *coup* against the Arbenz government in June of 1954, he found many supporters from among the rural population. After considerable bloodshed his troops marched against Guatemala City and were greeted with great ovations. Arbenz fled the country, followed by the labor leaders, and Guatemala reverted to its pre-revolutionary standards.

After his election as president of the country, Castillo Armas lost no time in clarifying his position regarding the social reforms inaugurated by his predecessors. He announced that many would be continued as before, others would be revised so as to be fair to all elements of the population, and all would be cleansed of Communist elements in favor of a healthy democratic nationalism. His program, although essentially sound, was soon opposed by the wealthy, landed interests. The national treasury was empty and without financial resources he found, as had Arévalo and Arbenz, that he would have to rely for strength and backing on the labor organizations and the organized campesinos or abandon his liberal ideas for the co-operation of the upper classes. How he will solve this problem and what will be the future of Guatemala is still to be seen.

It is obvious, however, from all this that Central America has the political ideas necessary for democracy but that the democracies cannot function as such without a sound economic and social basis. Furthermore, the creation of a democracy in a sixteenth century semi-feudal environment cannot be accomplished solely through a rapid technological or industrial development. The United States, in providing the Latin American countries with the marvels of twentieth century technology, has often neglected to send along "instruction sheets" explaining the ways in which they can be made available for the best use of most citizens of the country. Since the Soviets have a ready-made formula, "take by force what belongs to you by right," it is no wonder that Communist propaganda has been successful among the lower and illiterate classes in Guatemala and elsewhere. Recent examples from other parts of the world have shown that the Communist and Fascist leaders are exploiting these labor organizations in order to achieve power for themselves. This, however, is not generally known by the politically unsophisticated members of the Central American labor organizations. They are victims of ruthless agitators who seek personal power under nationalistic pretenses. It is our duty to enlighten them to this effect, but how can it be done?

Negative anti-Communism is, I think, insufficient. To become emotional or panicky about Communism is equally unsatisfactory. The effort of amateur politicians, guided by personal hatred against Communism, only serves to widen the gap and makes the situation worse. In order to fight Communism successfully in Central America, we should have an outlook uncolored by emotion and a constructive program for

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## An Affirmation of Man's Freedom

By J. CLAYTON FEAVER

A GOOD DEAL of confusion prevails as to whether man may make any positive affirmations. Human knowledge is limited. Are we thus left solely with relativism? Or can we formulate valid propositions and principles? What is truth, and can we know truth?

Let us admit our finitude, admit that nothing as *we* know it is precisely this or that. And yet, observe that without knowledge we do little; without it altogether we do nothing. As practical men and women (which we all are though we sometimes deny it) then, we *act* in the light of our knowledge; we *verify* what we know in action; and our knowledge verified and accrued stands as the basis for further *action*. May we know with certainty? No. May we know with sufficient certitude for confident action? Yes.

And what are the tests—aside perhaps from Divine authority? *Plausibility* and *significance for living*. Does a proposition or principle or plan of action make sense? Is it amenable to reason? After all, man is a rational creature. As the Greeks saw, this is a definitive characteristic. And, is the proposition or principle or plan of action practically significant? Can man *do* more things and do them *better* and for a longer period of time and for *more people*? One never quite gets around the test of living, even so for the "pure" theorist, so-called. No, living shows up the kinks in theory; and theory, and vision too, suggest further plans of action. Theory and action belong together; they complement each other. As such they are reliable tests of truth.

We assume, then, limited knowledge. This is the lesson of skepticism. Human knowledge is relative, tentative. But we also stress the legitimacy of positive affirmation. Indeed, we live and develop in the light of our questions on the one hand and of our affirmations and faith on the other.

What, then, may we affirm as plausible

we speak of a community of love, of giving and acceptance, wherein each person freely renders responsible service and receives deserved benefits.

A word about goals or ideals: *we live by them*. Put this way, it becomes a bit silly to speak of them as "impractical," as we sometimes do. If we live by them, they are surely practical. Of course, our ideals differ, especially with respect to loftiness; some shoot for bigger stakes, so to speak. Some live in larger worlds than others; thus their ideals are more comprehensive. Some have more mature imaginations than others; and their ideals are more sublime—for some the heavens declare the "glory of God," for others the heavens are at best the source of sunshine and rain, and, where the imagination is quite limited, the heavens may rarely be seen. Some live in the bright light of a great *faith* and envisage the "kingdom of God"; others live in the dimmer light of a more circumscribed faith, and vision is shortened. Yet, probably none is quite *without* goals: they serve as frames of reference, prompting, prodding, giving direction to present activity, making it possible to "Remould life nearer to the Heart's Desire."

And here we speak of *the Goal* as a community of persons. Why the capital-letter "goal"? To suggest that man's highest vision is always transcendent, always beyond, the unrealized ideal pointing onward, the inexhaustible cause of advance. But it is also within, realized thus far in human experience, as in close friendship or between man and wife; elsewhere we would have no vision. And see how the circle completes (perfects) itself: our knowledge gives the hint; imagination or insight takes us beyond to grasp the Goal; the Goal serves as directive for further knowledge, larger experience.

A closing note: *In giving himself to the Goal man gains greater power to act, and opens the way to "endless advance."* So far as we can judge, man gains strength—power to act—from goals envisioned; and this activity may go on indefinitely long. Is this common experience in the loving devotion of husband and wife in planning the ideal home, in the commitment of the scholar to his work in his search for truth, and so on? Is this "religious voice" at its finest, everlasting life in unreserved devotion to God and neighbor?

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labor organizations in under-developed areas. If the leaders and members of labor organizations cannot receive guidance and

assistance from the United States in practical democratic techniques, if they are ignored by us or just simply hated, they will turn for help to the ever-eager radicals and Communist agitators. The "instruction sheets" to our "gift parcels" and technological marvels should be filled out with suggestions of ways and means for a peaceful integration of workers, merchants, peasants, and landowners into a sound national economy. The workers and peasants in Central America need social reforms badly and most of all they need "bread and land." We can help them. If we do not, they will fall prey to the Soviets. The Soviet remedy calls for violence and destruction and will ultimately bring along the loss of freedom and the enslavement of the mind. Our approach, therefore, should be a peaceful and constructive one. We should offer techniques and ideas to the labor organizations and a working program for democracy rather than arms for small military cliques. I am convinced that we can go after the Communist workers in the labor organizations in Central America with an unemotional, but aggressive and constructive program, to show that the laborers and peasants "can have their bread, their land, and maintain their freedom, too." Without nourishment the roots of Communism will soon shrivel and die.

### *The 1954 Election . . .*

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Carthy debacle. And there is no doubt that he can get the nomination again if he will take it. The Democrats will presumably nominate Mr. Stevenson. But how could he hope to win, even though he richly deserves the office? He could only conduct a "me-too" type of campaign or throw overboard the Democratic program which has been painfully hammered out since 1932. The Brackin Lees, the Malones, and those reflecting the *Chicago Tribune* mentality may find the 1956 fare extremely putrescent, but they could hardly be expected to join the Stevenson dinner party. They are tied to Mr. Eisenhower with strands of steel. All of their talk of a third-party, composed of the intelligent Republicans and the intelligent Southern Democrats—and there are no others—appears only as a feeble effort to pull the President a bit toward the right. If they are serious, they need no more adding machines than they already have in their counting houses to tally the intelligent vote, for the American electorate will not forego the opportunity of choosing again between two of the most popular candidates who ever battled one another in our presidential sweepstakes.

From the present vantage point, I would think that the Democrats should hope, and pray, that the President would make a serious mistake within the next fifteen months or that the national economy would suffer a noticeable decline. Under such circumstances, if war did not come, they might win in 1956. Could we be about to witness the emergence of an entirely new phenomenon in our national politics—the election of a Republican President and Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress?

### *America's Defense Frontier . . .*

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ever, never be 100 per cent air defense possible.

Especially acute is the present security posture of the United States in the Arctic, both with reference to defensive and offensive operations, which would be launched in event of Soviet attack.

However, improvement of United States Arctic air capabilities along the lines recommended by Colonel Fletcher should do much to rectify this situation and enhance our ability, in the event of war, to seek out enemy air forces and their supporting installations. Much of it may have to be done by tactical fighter-bombers rather than long-range strategic aircraft. A tremendous geographical advantage will lie with such tactical forces, owing to the relative proximity of many military as well as economic and political targets to the Polar regions. The extent to which this advantage could be exploited will be dependent upon the rapidity and effectiveness with which such forces are developed, trained, and equipped for Arctic-type operations. In this connection, the most pressing military-technical problems are the development of Arctic-adapted aircraft and means of supplying them with fuel and lubricants.

Improvement of our Arctic offensive capabilities will serve to make the oft-repeated threat of our devastating retaliatory attack more real, and thereby serve as a more effective deterrent to Soviet aggression. Improvement in Arctic operational capabilities will also vastly increase the effectiveness of Air Defense over the North American Continent. Considering our relative weakness in the Arctic at present, there is a pressing need to become Arctic-minded, especially among both military and scientific-technological people.

In view of the critical nature of the present situation, with the danger of substantial and sizeable Soviet nuclear and thermonuclear attacks in the near future a real