

RS#05: Source 2 - American Ambassador to Guatemala, John E. Peurifoy, Telegram to Department of State, Dispatch No.522, December 18th, 1953

John E. Peurifoy was appointed the position of Ambassador to Guatemala in November of 1953. Peurifoy was a well-known anti-communist who known to "love action." Peurifoy met with President Arbenz on December 16th, 1953. The dinner meeting lasted six hours and was their only face-to-face meeting. During the conversation, they had several disagreements over communism in Guatemala and the United Fruit Company. The telegram (excerpted) was written by Peurifoy and sent to CIA Director Allen Dulles two days after the meeting. This telegram was said to be the document from which Eisenhower gave his final approval to launch Operation PBSUCCESS.

"The President (Arbenz) stated that the problem in this country is one between the Fruit Company and the Government. He went into a long dissertation giving the history of the Fruit Company from 1904; and since then, he complains, they have paid no taxes to the Government. He said that today when the Government has a budget of \$70 million to meet, the Fruit Company contributes approximately \$150,000. This is derived solely from the one-cent tax applied to each stem of bananas that is exported (from Guatemala).

I interrupted the President at this point to tell him that I thought we should consider first things first and that it seemed to me that as long as the Communists exercised the influence which they presently do within the government, I did not see any real hope of bringing about better relations....The President then said there were some Communists in the government and that they had a certain amount of influence. He launched on the usual line that these Communists are "local" (have no ties to the Soviet Union). He went into the past friendship with Gutierrez and Fortuny (both well-known Communists), both of whom he claimed were honest men. I told him that many countries had thought they were dealing with honest men in the past but awakened too late to the fact that the Communists were in control...He said this could not happen here (Guatemala). The Communists were no threat to the country...

I ASKED THE CURRENT President why it was that his Congress had during the current year held memorial services for Stalin when he died. Mrs. Arbenz interjected to state that the reason for this was that the people of Guatemala had regarded Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin as saviors of the world and that perhaps when Mr. Churchill passes on, Congress will hold memorial services for him, that all during the war (WWII) the Guatemalan people had been led to believe that these three men were the saviors of the world...

Arbenz then reverted to the Fruit Company and said this was the biggest stumbling block; this was a large American organization which dominated the press of the United States. I told him the Fruit Company was relatively a small corporation by American standards and that, in so far as I knew, no corporation by American standard dominated any press in the United States. After all, I pointed out there have been many newspapermen who have come to Guatemala and have determined on the spot the facts. They have talked with all types of people here in the city and have reached their conclusions independently...

Peurifoy goes on to say:

“It’s hard to understand why this country tolerates the great Commie influence from so few people. “

“Normal approaches will probably not work in Guatemala... The candle is burning slowly and surely, and it is only a matter of time before the large American interest will be forced out completely.

“ If Arbenz is not a Communist, he will certainly do until one comes along.”

Source: American Ambassador to Guatemala, John E. Peurifoy’s telegram to Department of State, Dispatch No.522, December 18th, 1953, in *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 136-139.