

RS#04: Source 1 - Official CIA Document, October 1952

This excerpt is from the official CIA document, titled "Personal Political Orientation of President Arbenz/Possibility of a Left Wing Coup." The Central Intelligence Agency was formed in 1947 through the National Security Act, in response to the rising threat of communism worldwide. The CIA began its investigation of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz as soon as he took office in 1950.

Guatemala City, October 10th, 1952

COUNTRY: Guatemala

SUBJECT: Personal Political Orientation of President Arbenz /Possibility of a left-wing coup

PLACE ACQUIRED: Guatemala

DATE ACQUIRED: Sept. 1952 and earlier

Summary

1. Although President Arbenz appears to collaborate with the Communists and extremists to the detriment of Guatemala's relations with the U.S., I am quite certain that he personally does not agree with the economic and political ideas of the Guatemalan or Soviet Communists, and I am equally certain that he is not now in a position where they can force him to make decisions in their favor. The reasons for my opinion are as follows:
 - (A) The President's social reform ideas stem from the U.S. New Deal rather than from Soviet Communism
 - (B) President Arbenz is still convinced that he is "using" Communists and Communism to further his own ends
 - (C) He is fully aware of Guatemala's economic dependence on the U.S.
 - (D) Arbenz has no fear of a conservative coup and has taken no active steps to guard against one
 - (E) The "opposition" of business groups and conservatives (with the exception of a few landowners) has been greatly exaggerated. This is evident by the "surprising" lack of serious concern in most business circles about the effects of the new land reform bill.

[Later within the report, the CIA states:]

Rather than setting up a Communist state, Arbenz desires to establish a "modern democracy" which would improve the lot of its people through paternalistic (*a fatherly manner*) social reforms. Arbenz's personal idol is F.D.R. and his reforms are patterned after New Deal reforms and adjusted to the backward economy and social structure of Guatemala.

His [Arbenz's] goal is to assert the rights of the Guatemalan Government to dictate the terms under which foreign firms shall operate in the country, especially where the exploitation of natural resources is concerned. Knowing that his country will never be a large industrial nation and yet needing a sound economy to carry out his reform programs, Arbenz sees the only answer is expanding production and keeping a larger share of what is produced...