Approved For Release 2006/10/12 : CIA-RDP79-00927A006400060004-4

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

The Uruguayan Government and the Left

Secret

№ 36 MORI/CDF Pages 3-11

10 May 1968
No. 0019/68A

Approved For Release 2006/10/12 : CIA-RDP79-00927A006400060004-4

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THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT AND THE LEFT

The leftist movement in Uruguay now stands at a crossroads, its future course and prospects for power directly tied to the rise or fall of Uruguay's economic fortunes. If economic conditions continue to deteriorate, popular dissatisfaction will increase and the leftists, particularly the Communist Party, will have an opportunity to exploit the resulting disillusionment to expand their influence and eventually attain political power. The government, however, has planned a wide-ranging program to revitalize the country and reverse the economic decline. If it succeeds, the left will be the long-run loser.

Both the government and the leftists have their strengths and vulnerabilities. The government has the upper hand at present, but during the coming months, as it strives to get its economic program off the drawing board, it will face an increasingly strong challenge. Agitation will heighten as the left attempts to defeat the government's efforts and workers rebel at proposed austerity measures. The outcome of the struggle will determine whether the Communists will continue in a position to increase their power or whether they will exist only as a vocal and irritating, but relatively unimportant, political minority.

Communist Organizational Gains

Until a few years ago, economic conditions were relatively good, and generous government social security benefits robbed the left of a dissatisfied proletariat from which to draw support. Under these circumstances the Communist Party of Uruguay (PCU) was in no position to threaten the government and the government was willing to tolerate its existence.

Indirectly, however, this economic euphoria made possible the first Communist organizational gains. In a country eager to grant worker benefits and to provide for the well-being of all, democratic labor leaders had, for lack of a cause, lost their dynamism. Union members took little interest in labor elections and were not overly concerned when Communist Party members engineered the elections to obtain high offices.

Communist influence in the labor movement reached a high point during World War II and immediately afterward (in 1946 the party polled

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five percent of the total vote) but declined with the start of the cold war and during the Korean conflict. PCU leaders were then devoted followers of Stalin and they made the mistake of side-tracking local issues and trying to appeal to the Uruguayans on strictly ideological grounds. It was not until a party shake-up in 1955, which brought to power the present leader, Rodney Arismendi, that the PCU began to shift its emphasis back to the local scene and again concentrated on the bread-and-butter trade union issues. In its comeback the party was greatly aided by the economic decline that began in the mid-1950s.

Gradually, PCU members began taking over leadership in individual unions and joining these unions together in federation. By 1966, more than two thirds of Uruguay's organized workers had been brought into the Communist-dominated National Workers Convention, and the last significant democratic labor confederation passed quietly from the scene. Renewed efforts by democratic union members to become an important force in the labor movement are showing some signs of success, but major gains are not expected for some time.

The emergence of younger, dynamic leadership in the PCU enabled it to match this performance in the student movement. The National University's Federation of Uruguayan University Students is dominated--although not yet controlled--by Communists. Only about 20 percent of the university's student body is politically active, but that fraction by virtue of its organization, can appear to speak for the whole.

In the political realm, the PCU succeeded in 1962 in bringing a number of competing leftist groups into a party-dominated electoral alliance called the Leftist Liberation Front (FIDEL). The Front's percentage of the vote has gone from 3.5 percent since its birth to 5.7 percent in 1966. Prior to the Front's formation, the Communists had only won 2.2 percent in 1954 and 2.7 percent in 1958.

The PCU has 18,000 to 20,000 members, of whom about 8,000 are active. In addition, its youth organization has an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 members, about 1,500 of whom are militants. The party, one of the largest in the Western Hemisphere, is disciplined and well organized and receives substantial support from the large Soviet Embassy in Montevideo. This contrasts sharply with most of the

RODNEY ARISMENDI
President of the
Communist Party of Uruguay

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GENERAL ELECTIONS IN URUGUAY SINCE 1954

PARTIES	NOVEMBER 1954				NOVEMBER 1958			
	Votes cast	Popular vote	Seats won		Votes cast	Popular vote	Seats won	
			Senate	Deputies			Senate	Deputies
		%				%		
Colorado	444,429	50.5	17	51	379,062	37.8	12	38
National	309,818	35.2	11	35	499,425	49.7	17	51
Independent National*	32,341	3.7	1	3	.....	.....	.....	.....
Christian Democrat	44,255	5.0	1	5	37,625	3.7	1	3
Fidel (Communist)	19,541	2.2	0	2	27,080	2.7	0	2
Socialist	28,704	3.3	1	3	35,478	3.5	1	3
Other	154	0.0	0	0	26,692	2.6	0	2
Total	879,242	.....	31	99	1,005,362	.....	31	99
Total eligible voters	1,295,502	.....	.....	.....	1,410,105	.....	.....	.....
Percent voting	67.9	.....	.....	.....	71.3	.....	.....	.....

PARTIES	NOVEMBER 1962				NOVEMBER 1966			
	Votes cast	Popular vote	Seats won		Votes cast	Popular vote	Seats won	
			Senate	Deputies			Senate	Deputies
		%				%		
Colorado	521,231	44.5	14	44	607,633	49.3	16	50
National	545,029	46.5	15	47	496,910	40.3	13	41
Independent National*	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Christian Democrat	35,703	3.0	1	3	37,219	3.0	.....	3
Fidel (Communist)	40,886	3.5	1	3	69,750	5.7	1	5
Socialist	27,041	2.3	0	2	11,559	0.9	.....	.....
Other	1,130	0.1	0	0	8,691	0.7	.....	.....
Total	1,171,020	.....	31	99	1,231,762	.....	**30	99
Total eligible voters	1,531,869	.....	.....	.....	1,658,368	.....	.....	.....
Percent voting	76.4	.....	.....	.....	74.3	.....	.....	.....

* The Independent National Party in 1956 became a faction of the National Party.

** Number of senators reduced to 30 under 1967 Constitution.

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other leftist organizations, where infighting and lack of leadership are more the rule than the exception. Despite gains in labor and student organizations, however, the PCU has never garnered more than 6 percent of the vote and is still short of exerting great political pressure on the government.

Economic Deterioration Aids Communist Cause

The party's development has been affected as much by events outside its control as by its own efforts.

When economic conditions were good, the party either was forced to mark time or actually suffered setbacks. Since the end of the Korean War boom in 1955, however, the economy has been sliding steadily downhill because of inept government policies and weakening world markets for wool and beef. Output per capita has fallen and the cost of living has risen more than 1,700 percent.

The resulting discontent has enabled the Communists to promote strikes and student demonstrations that have disrupted government efforts to introduce stabilization programs and have thus perpetuated conditions favorable to Communist gains.

Communist influence over labor on economic issues has, in fact, increased to the point where the PCU has been able not only to call strikes but to persuade labor to persist until its demands are met. Indeed, the party has often had difficulty getting the strikers to return to work and workers have on occasion accused the PCU of putting the party's safety and interests over those of the unions.

Generally, however, the party has been able to use its strength in labor effectively enough to interfere with government stabilization programs. Its efforts have in large measures been aided by chronic fragmentation and dissension within the ruling party which have prevented the executive from carrying out a concentrated program of economic reform.

Dissension Develops on the Left

All has not run smoothly for the PCU, however. Recently it has developed a number of problems that endanger its gains and its long-run power position. Most of the problems stem from the party's reliance upon peaceful, gradualist tactics to achieve power.

The PCU has always maintained that it would concentrate on legal methods, and because its electoral gains have been unspectacular, the government has been content to let it go about its business. Students and young people, generally found the party's pro-Moscow ideological views heady enough to attract them as members and to keep them enthusiastic and loyal. It was not until several years after Castro's triumph in Cuba that the party's policies were seriously questioned or challenged.

At first, the PCU struck up a warm relationship with Castro, and party leader Rodney Arismendi

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was a frequent guest in Havana. The PCU admired the Cuban success but maintained that Uruguay's flat topography was unsuited to guerrilla warfare and that the "objective" conditions existing in the country prevented the PCU from following the Cuban road to power. This position appears to have been generally accepted and even now, when relations between Arismendi and Castro are somewhat strained, the Cubans appear willing to admit that Uruguay may be the exception to the doctrine that violent revolution must begin in the countryside.

As Cuban disagreement with the Soviet line on revolutionary strategy intensified, however, the polemics began having an effect in Uruguay. The more radical parties challenged the PCU's right to speak for the Uruguayan left. At Cuba's Latin American Solidarity Organization (LASO) conference in the summer of 1967, the Uruguayan delegation--although it was put together by the PCU and included a majority of pro-PCU organizations--split openly on resolutions related to the Cuba/Moscow debate.

For the first time in many years the PCU found itself threatened from within. Its young people, perhaps spurred on by the example of Argentina's Communist youth in defying conservative party elders and by a romantic admiration for the guerrilla as a man of action, began to desert the party in significant numbers. Many are believed to have joined the pro-Cuban Revolutionary Movement of Uruguay (MRO), led by Ariel Collazo, which grew from about 100 members in late 1966 to an estimated 1,000 by December 1967.

Leftist Ferment

Other radical parties, roused from their lethargy by Castro's revolutionary pronouncements, jealous of the PCU's dominance, and encouraged by the MRO's success, gradually began intensifying their political activities. As early as December 1966, usually placid Uruguay found itself harboring a fledgling terrorist organization--Tupamaros, or the National Liberation Movement (MLN). Inspired by the writings of Mao, Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Debray, its members set about robbing banks and stealing ammunition and explosives. A few gun battles with police were fought in and near Montevideo. Other leftist groups began invading the PCU's labor stronghold, forcing the party to campaign hard to win union elections. Street fights

ARIEL COLLAZO
Leader of the
Revolutionary Movement

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between PCU members and radicals broke out in Montevideo.

The Cubans in the meantime had been quietly giving some funds and advice to the MRO and, although they may have retrenched somewhat by now, in October 1967 they were stepping up their efforts. Their purpose was twofold. They saw in the organization a means to propagandize their ideological views, and they also hoped to use it eventually as a funnel for clandestine distribution of propaganda, men, and materiel to Cuban-sponsored revolutionary groups in other Latin American countries.

The MRO began immediately putting the Cuban money to use and organizing the radical left against the Communist Party. Together with five other radical groups, the MRO reopened its defunct newspaper Epoca and began publishing a stridently revolutionary line supporting the LASO resolutions. The MRO also began organizing guerrilla training camps and setting up clandestine communications networks in the interior.

The PCU reacted by adopting a more radical position itself. Party leaders sent youthful militants to Cuba for training, with the idea that eventually they would fight in wars of liberation in other parts of Latin America. To prove its militance and to shore up its prestige among the workers, the party organized strikes and antigovernment demonstrations. By December 1967, the entire left was in ferment, and public dissatisfaction with the government had been brought to a new high.

The Government Retaliates

The government, however, has the police power on its side and its response to the new leftist militance was to ban the radical parties and their newspapers. The parties' leaders were arrested, and their meetings proscribed.

The Communist Party was unaffected by the ban--its recruiters and publications were left to carry on their activities free from open competition from other leftist groups. Furthermore, President Pacheco's action supported the PCU's argument that the time was not favorable nor the left yet strong enough to risk direct confrontation with the government. The Communists protested the government's repressive action, but in lackluster tones that barely disguised their contentment with the misfortunes of their rivals.

The radicals' defeat was by no means complete, however. Their polemics had forced the PCU to adopt a more active revolutionary position. Furthermore, after its initial crackdown, the government eased up on the banned organizations. The Socialist paper, banned along with Epoca, is being published under a new name, and the government has made little effort to discover and break up secret meetings of the proscribed organizations. The pro-Havana/pro-Moscow debate is heating up

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again in the leftist press. The MRO is again talking about committing "revolutionary acts of violence," and the leftists are trying to build labor agitation and political unrest back to the pre-December level.

This militance is more likely to take the form of urban unrest than rural terrorism. Both the Communists and the extremists are better organized in the cities, especially Montevideo, and have a better chance of creating successful disturbances there. The security forces are capable of controlling isolated incidents but probably would be unable to handle widespread, sustained outbreaks of violence.

Thus far this year there have been no spectacularly successful leftist demonstrations or strikes, even though the traditional May Day demonstrations were larger and more violent than usual, and the workers seem somewhat dispirited. Nevertheless, a basic discontent exists and the PCU should be able to creat significant disturbances if it decides to mount an all-out campaign.

Future Communist and Government Tactics

Whether a high level of agitation will be sustained over a long period of time depends in large measure on the success of government efforts to halt economic deterioration and to get the economy moving upward. Even should some progress be made, much will depend upon the government's ability to convince the people that it can be sustained and that it will eventually permit tangible improvements in living standards.

Economic measures adopted thus far have had little practical or psychological effect. The government has stopped publishing

COMMUNIST-ORGANIZED MAY DAY DEMONSTRATION, 1966

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monthly cost-of-living reports, but inflation was approximately 30 percent during the first three months of 1968. Communist propaganda against needed austerity measures, such as a proposed wage freeze, is gathering steam. If the party can defeat such vital stability measures, the environment for continued leftist gains will steadily improve as the economy stagnates.

The government still sees little threat from the left, but it has awakened to the dangers of continued economic decline. It has finally devised and begun to implement an economic program which, if followed through, should start the country on the road to recovery. The program stresses promotion of agricultural exports, reduction of budget deficits, and increased reliance on foreign aid to support more investment.

President Pacheco is committed to the success of this program. He and his top economic advisers also realize that much depends on preventing inflationary wage increases. If the leftists appear to be interfering with this goal, Pacheco is likely to move against them--this time including the Communists. He might be encouraged to do so by persistent reports--vehemently denied by all parties--of Brazilian and Argentine plans to intervene should economic deterioration appear to be producing enough discontent to make a Communist take-over a real threat.

The possibility of such a general leftist crackdown will force the PCU to plan its tactics carefully. In the first place, it will want to exercise some control over the radical parties lest their activities antagonize the government and bring about retaliatory measures against the entire left. Therefore, the PCU will probably take the initiative in labor agitation, in the hopes of keeping it within reasonable bounds, and will try to pre-empt or swallow up radical demonstrations. A stepped-up program of agitation will also be needed to keep the allegiance of the party's youth.

The government will consider itself lucky if it can keep the cost of living increase in 1968 to half of 1967's 136-percent rise. But even a 68-percent increase in 1968 should produce enough discontent to keep Communist propaganda appeals attractive to the workers. The government is determined to press ahead with its economic stabilization efforts, however, and should succeed unless it is intimidated by labor's demands. If it falters and allows economic deterioration to continue, the PCU will be in a good position to reap political gains in 1971 when the next national elections are scheduled. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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