

BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT IMPOSES STRICT CONTROLS OVER OPPOSITION

The "plot" to overthrow President Victor Paz Estenssoro last weekend appears to have been fabricated by the government as an excuse to crack down on the opposition and restore law and order under a state of siege.

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Former president Hernan Siles Zuazo and ex - Vice President Juan Lechin had engaged in plotting for several months, but they did not have the capability to overthrow the government at this time. The government moreover, would not have left Lechin free if it had convincing proof of his involvement in a coup attempt. No important military leaders or units were implicated in the plot, and any serious attempt at a coup would have required some military support. The government also claims that the so-called guerrilla activity in Santa Cruz Department was part of the plot; yet, the army announced last Friday that the last of the guerrillas had been driven across the border into Brazil.

Several factors contributed to Paz' decision to crack down on the opposition at this time. Riots, violence, and terrorism associated with the nationwide teachers' strike had become increasingly serious by the end of the week. Miners, threatening to strike for higher wages, had already seized four mine officials to protest the government's failure to pay salaries. Opposi-

tion leaders had been trying to turn this labor unrest into manifestations against the government, and Paz was concerned that the situation might get out of hand during De Gaulle's 28-29 September visit.

State-of-siege powers permit Paz to ensure internal security during the visit and control labor unrest. They may also provide a pretext for re-establishing government authority in the mines.

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Circumstances surrounding the reported attempt to assassinate Vice President Barrientos on 20 September--the seventh try in a year--are unclear. It may be part of a campaign designed to drive him out of the country. Barrientos may himself have staged the bombing to bolster his public image and strength. Many people nonetheless blame the government, creating growing resentment against Paz. Barrientos has steadily gained power and strength since the elections, and is currently engaged with Paz in a struggle for control of peasants in La Paz Department. Paz has made repeated attempts to remove Barrientos from the political scene by offering him foreign diplomatic posts, but so far he has refused. It seems only a matter of time before a showdown occurs.

Approved for Release
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