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# Communist Penetration of South American Labor

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A Research Paper

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Communist Penetration of South American Labor [redacted]

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Summary

Information available as of 26 August 1987 was used in this report.

Although the Soviet track record to date has been mixed, manipulation of local labor movements probably offers Moscow the best chance for building covert political influence in South America in the future. The USSR and, to a lesser extent, Cuba have long targeted South American labor and have mechanisms well in place to exploit the opportunities presented by the return of democratic rule in a number of countries in the region. [redacted]

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Research indicates that the Soviets and Cubans, with Moscow generally taking the lead, exercise influence over target labor unions and confederations through extensive guidance and funding to local Communist parties that intensively target organized labor; use of Soviet-controlled front groups, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions; and establishment of union-to-union ties to the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions and the Cuban Central Organization of Trade Unions. Moscow and Havana have been particularly successful in drawing both Communist and non-Communist unionists to their substantial and well-funded training programs. East Germany and Czechoslovakia support Soviet and Cuban penetration efforts by providing training as well. [redacted]

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Although Havana has supported Moscow's labor programs, primarily through training, it has generally given lower priority to targeting labor organizations. In recent years, however, Cuba has begun to mount its own limited operations to penetrate labor movements, aiding ultraleftist groups in competition with local pro-Moscow Communist parties. These activities are apparently more an effort to maximize opportunities for Cuban influence than an attempt to undercut Soviet labor programs. [redacted]

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With Moscow's backing, local Communist parties in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay have achieved significant labor influence that serves several purposes:

- Moscow and Havana have used this influence to rally Latins in a variety of foreign policy causes, such as

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opposition to the Pinochet regime in Chile and to assistance to the Nicaraguan insurgents.

--In the cases of Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay, the Soviet-backed parties have been able to take advantage of traditionally radical labor movements to develop strongholds in key economic sectors and to press moderate opposition policies intended to prevent the return of military rule.

--In Colombia, superior organization, proven performance in obtaining favorable labor agreements, and a 10-year decline in democratic labor have given the Communist Party substantial labor influence, which it is exploiting in its efforts to enhance the party's political standing. [redacted]

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In three other countries--Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador--the Communists have had only limited success, but recently have significantly increased in their penetration efforts:

--The Argentine Communist Party has won positions in several local unions.

--As part of its efforts to oust Pinochet, the Chilean Communist Party is increasing its efforts to improve the party's influence in labor.

--The Ecuadorean Communist Party has established a new trade union school to improve cadre labor training. [redacted]

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Although South American governments are generally aware of Communist efforts to penetrate national labor movements, their responses--with the obvious exception of Chile--have largely been limited. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, Soviet and Cuban efforts to penetrate South American labor are constrained by a number of other factors: the position of the penetrated union in the country's labor movement, the political power of organized labor overall, factionalism within South American labor, internal dissension within the Communist parties themselves, and competition from the ultraleft. Competition from the ultraleft probably poses the most significant limitation. By moderating their demands on newly democratic governments to prevent the return of the military, the local Communists

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have generally made themselves vulnerable to challenges by more radical labor elements. [REDACTED]

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There are indications that Moscow is beginning to make overtures, both directly and through local Communist parties, to some of the ultraleftist labor groups that Havana supports. Durable cooperation between Communist party-sponsored labor groups and the ultraleft could pose significant political challenges to several governments in the region. Nonetheless, in light of General Secretary Gorbachev's expected visit to Latin America within the next year, Moscow probably will not risk undermining its efforts to build diplomatic credit in the region by lending full support to ultraleftist labor groups. [REDACTED]

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## Communist Penetration of South American Labor [REDACTED] 25X1

## Introduction

Although the USSR continues to be wary of high-risk ventures in Latin America, General Secretary Gorbachev appears to accord South America a higher priority than did past Soviet leaders. There are indications, for example, that he plans to visit several countries in the region this year or early in 1988. Havana, like Moscow, reportedly views South America as the choicest target for building long-term influence in Latin America. Thus, the Cubans have been working hard in recent years to expand ties to South America. [REDACTED] 25X1

The Soviets and Cubans target many sectors of South American society, but they value labor in particular because it is a powerful tool of mass mobilization and can directly threaten a government's stability. A number of factors make South American countries especially attractive targets for exploitation. Because of the well-developed labor movements in these countries, Communist success can yield substantial political benefits. Perhaps most important, many countries are in precarious financial situations, with faltering economies and heavy foreign debt obligations. As South American governments try to manage their debt obligations, often through austerity measures, the likelihood of labor unrest--and the opportunity for Communist exploitation--increases. [REDACTED] 25X1

In addition to using labor as a general-purpose tool for building influence in the region, Communist labor penetration probably serves a variety of Soviet policy goals. Depending on the country targeted, such penetration is used as:

- A lever to pressure South American governments to change their domestic policies or to oppose Western policies on such issues as Nicaragua.
- A counterweight to the influence of more radical political parties, whose policies might induce military takeovers.
- An instrument to further the political position of Communist parties in the target countries.
- A tool for mass mobilization to oppose or destabilize a regime.

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--A mechanism to build international support for Soviet and Cuban foreign policy positions. [REDACTED]

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#### Mechanics of Penetration

Research indicates that the Soviet Union and Cuba exercise influence over South American labor unions in several ways:

--Guidance to local Communist parties from the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU/ID) and, to a lesser extent, the America Department of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC/AD). [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] local Communists are the primary tools Moscow uses in penetrating South American labor. While both the Soviets and Cubans deal with an array of leftist unions, they work predominantly with unions influenced by the local party. All of the South American Communist parties--with the exception of that in Venezuela--work in labor coalitions to some degree, with the ultimate goal of unifying the labor movement in a national organization under their control.

--Contacts with the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), based in Prague, and its de facto regional affiliate in Mexico City, the Permanent Congress of Trade Union Unity of Latin American Workers (CPUSTAL). WFTU and its associated organizations sponsor labor training and seminars in the region.

--Bilateral ties to the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU)--which oversees WFTU--or the Cuban Central Organization of Trade Unions (CTC). The AUCCTU's International Department takes the lead in developing contacts with South American labor groups. [REDACTED]

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#### A Major Investment in Labor Training

The Soviet Union, Cuba, and East Germany reportedly have extensive training programs for South American unionists. Labor training in the USSR is conducted by the AUCCTU Higher Trade Union School in Moscow, where courses run 10 months. The Fritz Heckert Trade Union College near Berlin, which is run by the East Germans, prepares Latin

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American and other Third World unionists to be teachers at trade union schools in their native countries, offering a three-year program. Cuba also [redacted] provides labor training to Third World unionists at the Lazaro Pena National Trade Union Cadre School in Havana. The school is directed by the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) but is administered by the Cuban Central Organization of Trade Unions. WFTU also uses the leftist Lombardo Toledano Workers University (LTWU) in Mexico City to train midlevel Latin American--primarily non-Mexican--labor officials. [redacted]

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[redacted] Moscow and Havana also try to cultivate regional unions by offering scholarships for the children of labor unionists. [redacted]

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[redacted] a Soviet labor course in the early 1970s indicated that the curriculum included economics, Marxist philosophy, Soviet history, social psychology, labor law, and "Soviet reality." Although Bloc labor courses still contain considerable ideological training, Moscow [redacted] has since updated its curriculum to include subjects more attuned to worker interests, such as unemployment and labor activity. The Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) [redacted] can now organize labor courses especially geared toward Latin America, and is publishing an instruction manual for labor education in Latin America to be distributed to regional Communist labor training schools. [redacted]

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Moscow and Havana have trained hundreds of Communist and some other leftist unionists from South America:

--The Soviet Embassy in Bolivia [redacted] provides labor leaders and young workers with scholarships to attend training courses and universities in the USSR. Czechoslovakia and the GDR offer similar scholarships. In addition, about 15 labor leaders and workers are sent to Cuba every three months for labor training that includes instruction on Marxist-Leninist ideology. Havana also grants 20 scholarships annually for long-term university training, awarding many of the scholarships to children of labor leaders, especially those of miners.

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--In 1981 about 75 unionists from the Communist-dominated Trade Union Confederation of Colombian

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Workers (CSTC) completed a yearlong labor training course in Moscow. Two years later about 40 Colombian unionists were scheduled for labor training in Communist countries.

--In the early 1980s about 200 Ecuadorean unionists, many from the ranks of the Communist-dominated Ecuadorean Workers' Confederation (CTE), [Redacted] traveled to Communist countries on annual exchange and training programs.

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The Soviets and Cubans also support local Communist party labor schools. For example, the labor college of the Communist-dominated General Confederation of Peruvian Workers has strong links to Bloc countries and makes use of training from the Fritz Heckert Trade Union College. Soviet Bloc training often involves highly coordinated efforts between several countries and organizations. [Redacted]

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#### Apparent Methods of Funding

Soviet Bloc funding to local Communist parties for labor activities--other than training or travel expenses--is more difficult to document. Presumably all of the pro-Moscow parties receive some Soviet money, but only in rare instances are uses for the funds specified. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Since all of the regional parties emphasize labor penetration efforts, however, it seems inevitable that some Soviet funding for local Communist parties goes toward infiltrating labor. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] the Soviet Union has several ways to fund labor penetration efforts. Moscow can give money to Communist parties specifically for their labor activities. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Presumably the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union provides most such funding in that it oversees relations with nonruling foreign Communists. [Redacted]

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The Soviets also provide money through the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU). International [Redacted]

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Department section for Latin America.

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In addition, Cuba lends limited financial support to some regional trade unions.

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Soviet and Cuban Competition?

Although the Cubans have generally taken a backseat to Moscow in the labor arena, in recent years Castro has increased ties to groups that are in direct competition with local Communists for influence in labor. In Bolivia, the Cubans are building ties to the ultraleftist Movement of the Revolutionary Left-Masses that is challenging the Bolivian Communist Party for dominance in key labor federations, such as the mine workers.

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Havana's policy of building ties to ultraleftist labor groups apparently is more an effort to maximize opportunities for expanding influence than an attempt to undercut Soviet labor penetration activities. Cuban dealings with Communist rivals appear to be significant almost in Bolivia. Although Cuba seems largely to be pursuing its own policy agenda, Castro would be unlikely to act without having at least Moscow's tacit consent. Cuban ties to ultraleftist labor in the region provide Havana with opportunities for influence that are independent of the fortunes of local Communist parties, some of which are experiencing internal problems or are losing support to more 'vigorous' parties.

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Labor Penetration in South America

Tactics

Soviet-and Cuban-backed Communist parties usually begin their penetration efforts from the bottom up by attempting to place their members in local union positions or by

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recruiting new party members from among local unionists. In Argentina, for example, the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) has been working for several years to insert its members into the work site and regional levels of labor organizations. Although not entirely successful, the PCA has made some gains: in March 1986 a slate of far-left labor leaders sponsored by the PCA and the Movement Toward Socialism reportedly won control of an important local union of the Federation of Meat Workers in Buenos Aires. [redacted]

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Even when a local Communist party has its own labor confederation, it may choose to work through a larger front organization with parties of roughly similar political orientation. For example, while the Ecuadorean Communist Party (PCE) maintains its own labor confederation, it is also influential in the Unitary Workers Front (FUT). In a country with a myriad of political actors like Ecuador, working in a coalition with other parties improves PCE chances of building influence. [redacted]

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#### Functions

In addition to serving as a tool to influence government policy, Communist labor penetration serves as:

--A base for attempting to prevent the return to military rule. The Soviets and Cubans reportedly view the recent transitions to democratic governments in several South American countries as permitting freer action by local Communist parties. In a number of countries, including Uruguay and Peru, the moderate opposition policies of the Communist-influenced confederations attempt to prevent destabilizing labor unrest by radical leftists that might cause the military to step in. That is especially the case in Peru. Because Moscow wants to coax the Peruvian Government into closer ties, it has kept the pro-Soviet, Communist-dominated General Confederation of Peruvian Workers on a tight leash since Garcia took power in July 1985.

--A complement to Communist participation in the democratic political process. The Colombian Communist Party (PCC) has developed a well-funded and well-organized labor program that it uses to build its political support and that of the Patriotic Union, the political front of the PCC-associated insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of

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Colombia. The political payoff of PCC efforts--in a country with a well-developed democratic system--has apparently been limited.

--A tool for regime destabilization. In Chile, the Soviet-influenced Chilean Communist Party (PCCh) has been attempting to increase its influence in labor to help mobilize the Chilean population against the Pinochet government. [redacted]

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#### Successes and Failures

[redacted] local Communist parties have achieved significant labor penetration in four countries:

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--The Bolivian Communist Party, despite setbacks in recent years, continues to maintain strong influence in several unions, including the mine workers, factory workers, state employees, urban school teachers, and bank employees.

--In Colombia, the Communist party, which previously controlled the nation's second-largest labor confederation, is moving quickly to exploit the recent formation of a new national confederation.

--Despite ultraleftist opposition, the Peruvian Communist Party virtually controls the country's largest labor confederation.

--In Uruguay, the Communist party dominates the only officially recognized labor body.

In three of these countries--Colombia is the exception--the Communists have been able to take advantage of traditionally radical labor movements to develop strongholds

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in key economic sectors. In Colombia, superior party organization, proven performance in obtaining favorable labor agreements, and a 10-year decline of the country's democratic labor confederations have contributed to the Communists' success. [redacted]

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In four other countries, we believe that the Communists have had only limited success but are increasing their penetration efforts: The Argentine Communist Party has recently made gains in several local unions and federations, often by forming working alliances with non-Communist leftist parties.

The Chilean Communist Party is pushing hard to build grassroots labor support as part of its efforts to oust Pinochet and stands to gain from widespread opposition to the government and determined Soviet and Cuban support. The Ecuadorean Communist Party--with substantial help from Moscow and Havana--has opened a new trade union school to improve labor training of cadres. Despite intensified Communist activities, the makeup of the labor movements in these countries has seriously hampered Communist efforts.

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#### Constraints on Bloc Influence

While Moscow and, to a lesser extent, Cuba have devoted considerable resources to penetration of South American labor, the success of their efforts often depends on factors over which they have little control, such as the significance of labor as a political actor. In addition, changing economic fortunes can alter--perhaps radically--the traditional influence enjoyed by a particular union or confederation. Government policies can also frustrate Communist efforts to exploit labor penetration. [redacted]

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Moreover, Soviet and Cuban efforts to penetrate South American labor appear to be constrained by several distinctive features of the South American political and labor scenes:

- South American labor is highly factionalized. Unified labor movements that local Communist parties might potentially penetrate and control are few.
- The anti-Soviet nationalism of many South Americans reduces the appeal of Communist parties with known pro-Soviet orientations.

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--The Communists face strong competition from the ultraleft for influence in the labor movements of many South American countries.

--Some local parties are experiencing internal dissent resulting from generational changes in party membership and leadership. The leadership of the parties has aged and many parties have been accused by younger, more militant members of being forces advocating the status quo rather than meaningful change. [redacted]

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Challenges from the ultraleft and internal Communist party dissension pose a major dilemma for Moscow. On the one hand, the Soviets advise local Communist parties to formulate moderate opposition policies to counter ultraleftist policies that might bring on military rule. On the other hand, moderate opposition leaves the Communists vulnerable to criticism from more militant party members and accusations from the ultraleft that the Communist parties are losing their credentials as 'revolutionary' parties and are allying with the state. Moderate Communist opposition, consequently, risks gains by the ultraleft.

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#### Outlook

Moscow and Havana regard labor penetration as a long-term investment and labor training is one of the most powerful tools they possess for expanding their influence in regional labor movements over the long run. Increasing numbers of South American confederation officials have attended Soviet Bloc labor courses, including both Communist and non-Communist unionists. The impact of this effort on South American labor will be evident when unionists who have gone through Bloc training programs attain positions of importance in future years. [redacted]

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The Soviets and Cubans have the mechanisms of labor penetration well in place and will undoubtedly continue to exploit the new opportunities for influence--especially greater freedom of action for local Communist parties--presented by the return of democratic rule in a number of countries in South America. [redacted] Moscow's guidance to Communist parties in the region indicates that Moscow is pushing them to rejuvenate their leaderships and formulate more dynamic party policies. Soviet interest in improving relations with regional governments--as evidenced

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by General Secretary Gorbachev's proposed trip to South America--is unlikely to lead to a decrease in their labor penetration activities. Rather than cut back its labor penetration in its efforts to court Peru, for example, Moscow has instead used its influence to try to limit labor unrest that might harass the government. [redacted]

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Soviet and Cuban labor penetration activities are likely to continue to be successful in Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay--although competition from the ultraleft in the latter two countries will challenge party efforts. In Bolivia, ultraleftist competition, coupled with the collapse of the key Communist labor stronghold--the mining sector--may overturn the Bolivian Communist Party's traditionally dominant position in Bolivian labor. [redacted]

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Moscow and Havana are likely to benefit less from the labor operations of the Communist parties in some South American countries, largely because of the strength of other political parties active in labor. Although the Argentine Communists are making some inroads into the Peronist-dominated labor movement at the local level, they will probably not attain any significant national influence in the near future because of the overwhelming influence of the Peronists. The Venezuelan Communist Party, overshadowed by the Democratic Action Party in Venezuelan labor, has even less of a chance of success than the Argentine party. In Ecuador, Communist labor penetration efforts will enjoy limited success but probably will continue to be hampered by competition from numerous parties. [redacted]

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In Chile, Moscow and Havana will continue to assist the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh) in its labor activities as part of their campaign to remove Pinochet from power. Nonetheless, the PCCh's ability to mobilize labor against Pinochet is constrained by anti-Communist sentiment in the country, and PCCh success will largely be determined by the overall level of economic hardship and opposition to the government that develops. [redacted]

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Given the unevenness of Western programs to strengthen democratic labor elements South American labor over the long term will continue to be susceptible to inroads by local Communist parties and by the ultraleft. The programs of radical-left labor groups are threatening to Soviet-backed labor organizations. Havana and Moscow's overtures to the ultraleft probably will not result in durable cooperation between the ultraleft and Moscow-backed Communist parties

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