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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

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2003

EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry F. Holland
Assistant Secretary of State
State Department
Washington, D. C.

SUBJECT: Sidney Gruson, NEW YORK TIMES
correspondent in Guatemala City.

1. Reference is made to my two memoranda to you dated 26 May and 27 May respectively concerning Sidney Gruson. In those memoranda I furnished to you, pursuant to your expressions of interest, certain information concerning the background and recent activities of Gruson together with a brief commentary on the tone and content of Gruson's dispatches from Guatemala.

2. I do not doubt that you have been following, at least to some extent, the dispatches of Gruson since his return to Guatemala. But in any case, I should like to underscore a few points in case you have not considered them fully. Gruson's dispatches have -- at least superficially -- undergone a very marked change since his return to Guatemala. He did file some pretty sour stuff from Mexico while he was there in some of his dispatches; but, as just stated, he now appears almost to be going out of his way to set the record straight. I was particularly interested in Gruson's dispatch which appeared in the NEW YORK TIMES edition of Saturday, August 7, in which he states at the conclusion of a fairly involved discussion of the recent disturbance that if the revolt of the cadets and certain elements of the regular military had succeeded, the situation would have been much easier for the Communists, since Arbenz's military friends were involved. Gruson goes on to quote a diplomatic observer (unnamed) for the following statement:

"Only an idiot could fail to understand now how thoroughly Arbenz was dominated by the Communists."

Gruson then continues in this dispatch as follows:

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"Nothing has yet been found in Communist files captured after the civil war to prove beyond a doubt that Senor Arbens was a Communist party member. However, the libraries at both his private home and Presidential residence contained little else but Communist literature. His closest adviser during his last days as President was Senor Portuny, who is with him now in the Mexican Embassy."

3. This current reporting on the part of Gruson is a far cry from his dispatches of late May and early June. Then, when the chips were down, he was not only going all out in reporting the Toriello-Arbens line -- he was going out on his own to support it. In fact only one day after his re-entry into Guatemala [on the basis of some kind of deal with Toriello] Gruson was able to report that the people of Guatemala supported their Government unequivocally on the purchase of arms from behind the Iron Curtain, and the State Department's expression of concern over this purchase had "boomeranged." You will, of course, recall Ambassador Peurifoy's expressions of alarm concerning Gruson's reports and other activities during the critical phase. You will also recall how widely Gruson's dispatches which appeared prominently in the NEW YORK TIMES were used and quoted by the international Communist propaganda media.

4. It is my own personal and tentative conclusion that this is one leopard which has not really changed its spots, but rather has been sniffing the wind and has temporarily altered his course in accordance therewith. In sum Gruson remains in my book a man to be watched.

FRANK G. WISNER
Deputy Director (Plans)

FD/P-FCM:ndw
9 August 1964

Orig & 1: Addressee
1: Ray Leddy
1: C/WH Division
1: FD/P Subject ✓
1: FD/P Plans

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