

# GUATEMALAN REDS SEEK FULL POWER

Using Land Reform as Lever,  
They Would Increase Their  
Already Extensive Role

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MEXICO CITY, Feb. 22—Using the controversial agrarian reform law as a lever, Guatemala's Communists are trying to turn the powerful influence they wield in the governing of that country into outright control.

To experienced diplomatic observers of the Guatemalan scene, the tip-off came in a little-publicized speech by José Manuel Fortuny, party secretary general, to the Communists' recent annual congress, at which their official name was changed to Labor party.

"We Communists recognize that, due to its special conditions, the development of Guatemala must be accomplished, for a period, through capitalism," Señor Fortuny declared. However, he insisted that the example of the Soviet Union, the satellite countries and Communist China "demonstrated clearly that in our days it is no longer historically inevitable that the people, in order to overcome economic backwardness, must pass through long capitalist periods."

Since their emergence from cover into an open political party in June, 1951, the Communists had agreed with President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman that Guatemala was seeking to establish capitalism as its way of economic life. Now they have revealed their desire for the shortest possible period of capitalist preparation for a Socialist state, Soviet style. Therein, according to many observers with whom this correspondent spoke in Guatemala, may lie the seeds of a break between President Arbenz and the Communists whose influence on his Government is out of all proportions to their numbers.

## 5% Are Basis of Regime

Guatemala is a country of 2,750,000 persons of whom possibly 20 per cent take any interest in politics. Of these probably 15 per cent oppose the Government. The remaining 5 per cent provide it with its strength and stability.

The highest estimates list the number of card-carrying Communists at no more than 1,200. In an effort to explain how they had become so powerful, one observer said: "Within the 5 per cent of Government supporters, the Communists are the toughest, best or-

ganized and hardest working, and probably the only ones who have any clear idea of where they are going, what they want and the means to use to get it."

Another observer put it this way: "The Communists do not make a spare-time job of their politics. They do not work a forty-hour week and golf during the week-ends. And a part-time basis in opposing them is not good enough."

The avowed party members are supported by sympathizers and crypto-Communists whose actions and speeches parrot faithfully those of Señor Fortuny and company. Together they control the two labor federations—those of the city workers and the agricultural workers—the Government's newspaper and radio propaganda organs, the teachers' union, the powerful autonomous social security organization and key positions on many of the most important Congressional committees.

The land reform has given the Communists their greatest opportunity to supplement their tough city cadres with peasant battalions. The law stipulating that petitions for land must originate with the peasants has served as an enormous incentive to labor organization in the back country.

## Land Reform an Opportunity

There the Indians are almost 100 per cent illiterate. By being the ones associated with getting them land, the Communists can hope to break down the Indians' strongly religious feeling and their age-old fear of doing anything against the rich landowners for whom they normally work.

There are many foreign observers in Guatemala who agree with the political opposition that if President Arbenz is not himself a Communist, he is already under the party's complete domination. When this correspondent asked for an interview with the President, the President's office requested a written questionnaire in advance. The questionnaire, seeking his views on relations with the Communists and asking where his sympathies lay in the "cold war" between East and West, was not answered and the interview was not granted.

But the most knowledgeable of foreign observers dispute the theory that Señor Arbenz no longer is his own boss. They picture him as a man so politically naïve that he believes he can use the Communists indefinitely for his own ends. It is believed that his political thinking does not go beyond the Guatemalan scene, and in this narrow framework he is said to view the Communists as men dedicated like himself to the ideals of the 1944 revolution he helped to bring about and to win.

The Communists have complete-

ly annexed these ideals, and the slogans that went with them, as their own. As a result there is a tendency to lose sight of the fact that if there had not been a single Communist in Guatemala, the revolutionaries who overthrew dictator Jorgé Ubico still would have insisted on the present program, including a new labor code, social security and agrarian reform, that is generally condemned as Communist-inspired.

Señor Arbenz, who is 39 years old and had spent all his adult life in the Army until assuming the Presidency two years ago, is said to see the Communists as a local force on which he can depend for the most militant support of his aims.

So far as is known, the President has kept one preserve—the Army—comparatively free of the Communists. The Army still is the source of political power in Guatemala, and they can be expected to try to extend their influence into it in their stepped-up campaign to gain control. How Señor Arbenz reacts if this happens probably will provide the best clue to where Guatemala is heading.