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By

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AIR POUCH

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

Emb. File

OCT 22 1960

FROM : AmEmbassy BUGOTA

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DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

October 19, 1960

DATE

REF : Embassy Despatch 213 of October 7, 1960

SUBJECT: Anti-Communist Campaign

The referenced despatch described the establishment of an organization to combat Communist propaganda and agitation. Embassy officers have recently held two further conversations with Aurelio CORREA, Executive Director of the group, and were able to obtain further and more precise information as to the organization's nature and plans as well as its desires for US assistance.

The organization is called "Centro de Estudios y Acción Social (Center of Social Action and Studies). It has been formed as a legal foundation for tax purposes, to permit tax-exempt donations. The immediate directing body of the Secretariat will be a five-man Executive Board: Hernan ECHAVARRIA, José GOMEZ Pinzon, Alberto SAMPER, Gregorio OBREGON and Andrés RUISEPO. The Secretariat, which Correa will head, has not been completely formed. The overall supervising body will be a twenty-man council. This council has likewise not been completely formed, and Correa has promised to provide the names of the council members later. These members will be representative of various fields of activity and will be responsible for securing such support and action from leaders in that sector as may be required for specific objectives. According to Correa, there is as yet no labor representation in the organization nor student representation per se, although in both cases he feels the organization will have access to these sectors.

Broadly speaking the Centro's purpose is to combat Communist and extreme leftist infiltration in all sensitive sectors. The group has not defined specific goals other than on an ad hoc or project basis, its specific actions being related to the broad goal of containing and, where possible, eliminating Communist influence. Principal target groups will be students, labor and campesinos. The general line of action which the organization will take will be ideological rather than social action programs, that is the group will concentrate more on combating Communist ideas, maneuvers and influences rather than attempting to undertake programs to improve social and economic conditions. The Centro intends to operate behind the scenes and indirectly rather than openly. What is planned is that the Centro will be something of a coordinating and planning group which, having picked or established a project or

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limited objective, will seek the assistance and cooperation of the persons and facilities necessary to carry it out. It will use for this purpose the influence at its disposal possessed by the prominent persons associated with it. The Centro will, therefore, not have a large program staff of its own but will rather work through established circles and existing facilities.

Correa gave two examples of how the group will operate. The University Sectors' Association, he said, recently had a problem in that the head of the association, Jaime POSADA, wished to resign. The person who would succeed him was felt to be a remarkably malleable person who would be easy prey for the leftists. Consequently the Centro has begun to mobilize influential persons to place pressure on Posada to remain, and they believe they have been successful. A second case involves the drafting of university reform law which, in the form proposed by some circles would, Correa said, leaves the way open for easy infiltration of higher education by Communists. The Centro has, therefore, begun to seek the cooperation of various interests and influential persons to modify the drafting of these regulations.

Correa also described some other projects, mentioning that the group was studying the university situation carefully because of the importance of that sector. The Centro hoped to compile a list of things that should be done, and would consider such matters as provision of equipment, housing for poor students and similar actions. In other areas, Correa mentioned that the Centro would have access to radio facilities in Tolima and the Quindío which might be put to good use.

In still another area, Correa said that the Centro was interested in publicizing information such as that being released during the current Inter-American Press Association meeting regarding Cuba. If this information could be publicized in form aimed at both students and campesino types it might be useful. The Centro would also like to link Castro, Communism and Lopista elements together.

In response to a question, Correa said that the Centro had no established channels of communication of its own with target groups other than established facilities such as existing newspapers, and influence with existing organizations, such as Acción Cultural. The group does not plan to establish its own mass media outlets because it does not wish to compete with existing facilities. Correa, nevertheless, felt that sufficient cooperation would be obtained to make propaganda distribution and communication effective.

Asked about the Centro's relations with the Government, Correa said that these were entirely informal and maintained through the personal influence and friendships of such members of the Centro as Gomez Pinzon, Eduardo Zuleta and Carlos Arango Velez. The group's plans have been discussed with the President, and Correa felt that there would be effective Government acquiescence and even cooperation where necessary. Correa emphasized the scope of activity open to the organization and the marshalling of influence and resources represented by members of the group. As described, the Centro's operations are theoretically unlimited and can take place in any variety of fields and in any number of ways.

Correa explained that various companies and individuals would contribute a financial quota to the Centro to finance current expenses, the amount of this quota and the expenses not yet having been determined. In special cases where more financing would be needed, recourse would be had to the industries and businesses represented. Correa stated that he had approached the American companies to see about financial support and felt that something would be worked out there.

In discussions with Correa, the facilities available through UBIS were explained as well as possible suggestions for use of unattributed material, such as mass distribution of books at low cost. Correa expressed great interest in the acquisition and distribution of educational and anti-Communist titles which might be distributed to students and professional groups at a low price and on a mass basis. He further expressed interest in the use of films, specifically educational films for campesinos, which could be distributed by the large number of mobile film units owned by several of the large companies represented in the Centro. This would make possible saturation displays in key areas and among key target groups. He expressed interest in possible use of pamphlets and other material and thought of possibly obtaining specially tailored anti-Communist material. Further discussions will be held with the Centro group over possible use of available materials and exploitation of distribution outlets which the Centro may be in a position to provide.

In discussions regarding activity among students, the suggestion was made that the Centro consider financing visits of large numbers of students to the United States or western European countries. Some specific suggestions regarding what such tours might entail and estimates of cost were given to him.

Correa indicated that the Centro's great need was for competent professional guidance and assistance in working out a program of ideological action within the group's broad objectives. The group, he said, was not competent to define a planned program and tended,

at the present, to react rather than take the initiative. What they had in mind were professionals, knowledgeable in Communist tactics and methods and skilled in countering them, as well as persons skilled in communications and psychological techniques, who could assist in the programming of action projects. He, therefore, raised the question of "technical assistance". It was pointed out to Dr. Correa that identification of the United States with the direction and operation of the Centro's program would be counter-productive to both the group and to the US position in Colombia. Correa acknowledged this, pointing out that the Centro itself would have to be discreet in its own actions. He suggested, however, that technical assistance might be available from private non-government sources who are professionally competent, if they could be put into contact with such sources.

As indicated in the referenced despatch this organization is an impressive collection of influential persons representing a truly significant amount of power and influence. It, therefore, provides a potentially excellent mechanism to influence Colombians both constructively and negatively against Communism. There are, on the other hand, as was pointed out in the referenced despatch, potential dangers from the standpoint of US cooperation. As presently constituted, the motivating forces in the Centro represent a comparatively narrow range of vested interests which will have a difficult time communicating with the target groups it wishes to influence. It is also clear, from the operations described by Correa and summarized above, that the Centro will be deeply involved in internal and controversial matters, such as university reform. Consequently official US identification with the direction and operations of this organization could be damaging to our interests and our position vis-a-vis the target groups.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the Embassy concludes that any cooperation extended must be carefully considered and discreet. It is felt that there are some things which can feasibly be done, others in which the official US hand should not appear, and possibly still others that cannot be handled at all. Assistance in the provision of both white and grey propaganda appears to be the most feasible type of assistance that can be offered, and the Embassy intends to explore this further to establish a discreet liason on such matters. Assistance in such matters as helping arrange for student tours appears to also be a legitimate and feasible project.

With reference to technical assistance in providing operational guidance and advice, it is the Embassy's considered opinion that this should not be extended as official US aid, and that US Government personnel should not be involved, because of the dangers of

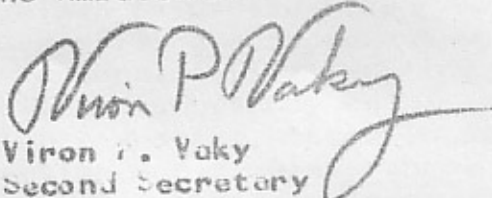
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being identified with delicate internal problems. As long as the Centro intends to involve itself in such situations (and it will inevitably be involved in matters affecting such established groups as Lopistas which could not be classified as strictly Communists), US assistance would be tarred with the same brush of intervention even if US personnel were not directly involved in that specific instance. Consequently, it would seem that any such technical assistance should be secured by the Centro from third and non-governmental sources.

The Embassy recommends that consideration of this whole situation be made jointly by the Department, USIA and CAS headquarters specifically with reference to suggestions for utilization of the organization's unique facilities. It may become desirable, for example, to provide backstopping, particularly in grey and black propaganda efforts, and if so prior consideration and preparation would enable prompt action to be taken when a specific request arises. The Department's views on the possibility of putting the Centro in touch with private sources able to provide competent professional advice on communications techniques and organization (for which the Centro would probably be willing to pay) would also be appreciated.

For the Ambassador:

  
Viron P. Vaky  
Second Secretary

cc:AAA/WST-AllGerberich

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