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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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*Intelligence Note* - 796

October 10, 1968

52

To : The Secretary  
Thru : S/S  
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TH*

Subject: Mexico: Current Unrest Springs from Widespread Student Disaffection and Alienation

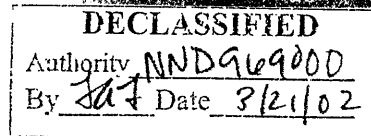
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Unrest may abate during Olympics. The student/government conflict, now 11 weeks old, shows some tentative signs of abating temporarily as the Olympics open on October 12, but isolated acts of violence are possible. Student strike leaders have declared that they will not hold further public demonstrations because the government has already shown that it cannot maintain order and because the security forces would only kill more students. Press reports indicate that some students may be talking with presidential representatives, probably for the purpose of scaling down the dispute, at least during the two week period of the Olympics. There is no firm evidence, however, that student opposition to the government has lessened. Reportedly <sup>2</sup> student brigades composed of five or more persons plan to roam the city during the Olympics to pass out material setting forth the student case. The government will almost certainly be unwilling to permit student bands to besiege tourists with propaganda material. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that any combination of student leaders could insure that extreme militant elements would honor the terms of an agreement. There are several reports that some hard core groups might attempt to sabotage some Olympic installations and perhaps kidnap participating athletes.

Government prefers to view problem as minor social disorder. The government has so far shown little inclination to view the student problem as anything more than a

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CONFIDENTIAL/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 2 -

minor rebellion. At the beginning when violence erupted almost spontaneously out of a peaceful demonstration it immediately employed overwhelming force to quiet the situation. Subsequently the security forces were restrained and the students were permitted to demonstrate peacefully until it became obvious that the unrest was growing instead of diminishing. At this point, President Diaz Ordaz sought to put an end to the conflict by making it unmistakably clear in the September 1 state of the union message that no further violence would be tolerated. Since then, the conflict has developed in a cyclical pattern of apparent tranquility and extreme violence.

In pursuance of Diaz Ordaz' pronouncement the government occupied the national university on September 18 when it learned that a demonstration was planned near the Olympic village. Such action served to polarize the conflict, and students and the security forces clashed violently on several occasions. Later, the university was returned to the academic authorities and the rector was allowed to retain his position after the government had obviously sought to discredit him. Shortly thereafter a group of strike leaders, claiming to speak for the students, announced that differences with the government would be pressed in a peaceful manner. Almost at the same time, other strike leaders asserted that the conflict would not be held in abeyance during the Olympics and set about organizing several demonstrations that resulted in the bloody clashes on 2 October in which an estimated 150 to 200 persons died, including 40 military personnel.

Continuing agitation reflects widespread dissatisfaction. The government has sought to place blame on the communists and has periodically announced that foreign elements are involved. Yet it has not come forth with any persuasive evidence to

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Authority NND 96900  
By JAF Date 3/21/02

CONFIDENTIAL/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 3 -

substantiate these claims. The administration seems not to realize that extremists, even with the aid of foreign elements, could hardly have sustained the unrest over such a long period if student dissatisfaction were not deep and widespread. The persistence and magnitude of the protests suggest that the students feel that the issues are real and worth the risks involved.

Most recently, the government arranged to have a captured student leader charge publicly that several disaffected members of the official party (PRI) have contributed to the unrest. The government's motives in doing this are as yet unclear, but it may have been trying to shift the blame for its inept handling of the affair to persons that it feels can be destroyed politically fairly easily. All of the individuals named have emphatically denied the charges, and the strike council has disavowed any connection between it and the disaffected party types. It is possible, however, that one or all of the accused have attempted to use the student unrest to get back at the government and to further personal ambition. It is also possible that the administration is using the charges to warn other more powerful persons that it will not tolerate efforts to exploit the student issue. Whatever the explanation may be, the disaffected PRI elements could not have exploited student dissatisfaction if the students were not already deeply concerned and willing to defy the government.

Conflict will persist so long as students feel alienated. The government has so far shown little inclination to accede to any of the students' demands, which are principally that the government take steps to eliminate police brutality, publicly acknowledge university autonomy, compensate the families of students who have been killed and injured by the police or military, and release the estimated 300 to 500 students being held as prisoners. At this point, however, the dispute may have progressed

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority NND96900  
By SAJ Date 3/21/02

CONFIDENTIAL/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 4 -

beyond the stage where specific demands are still meaningful in working out a settlement. The students will likely continue to agitate and foment difficulties for the government as long as they feel alienated and without a voice in the decision making process. They probably feel that they have already won a victory in demonstrating that the government, and thus the official party, is vulnerable. The students probably believe that in failing to force a settlement of the dispute the government has lost face in the eyes of many Mexicans who are unaccustomed to seeing the all powerful PRI tolerate any opposition that is the least bit threatening. So far, however, the unrest has not spread and there seems little likelihood at present that the students will succeed in obtaining significant support from labor.

It seems unlikely that the PRI can bring about a fundamental solution to the problem without changing the widespread conviction that it is entrenched, stagnant, and primarily self-serving. The students have to be convinced that, despite the enormous graft and dishonesty which have become hallmarks of the PRI, the party is still, or will become again, a vital force for political and social change, as well as economic growth. The present leadership does not appear to be disposed to comprehend the magnitude of the problem of student alienation and to accept it as a serious warning that the party is not responding to the legitimate needs of an increasingly vocal segment of Mexican society.

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