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9/4/68

FROM : AmEmbassy MEXICO

DATE: August 23, 1968

SUBJECT : Review of Student Disturbances in Mexico in Recent Years

REF :

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF
INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
AUG 29 1968

SUMMARY

In the light of current student unrest in Mexico, the Embassy has reviewed for background purposes major student disturbances of the past years. This review indicates that the major focus of these disturbances has been on local issues with the degree of involvement of Communist groups ambiguous. The Embassy will discuss the latest unrest at length in a forthcoming airgram but certain tentative conclusions seem apparent in comparing the present situation with incidents of the past. As in the past, the degree of Communist culpability is ambiguous. However, the July-August disturbances have thus far involved higher levels of violence by the students, unprecedented numbers of those involved, and a greater degree of animus against the central government than has ever been the case in the past. In the past, the government has been able to isolate the students from the rest of the population and to keep trouble confined to one area. This clearly remains its aim at present but the current student-government impasse perhaps is the most difficult one in several decades to confront a Mexican government.

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Drafted by: <i>LMT</i> POL: LThomas / MRothenberg :sd	Drafting Date: 8/16/68	Phone No.: x 844	Contents and Classification Approved by: <i>MM</i> POL: WWStuart
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INTRODUCTION

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1. In the early sixties, student disturbances had a more political and pro-Communist cast than has been the case subsequently. The over-riding issue of Cuba provided a pretext for turning almost any student protest into an anti-American demonstration, i.e. for changing the focus of discontent from intra-campus to international. The Dominican issue and Vietnam had a similar though less pronounced effect. However, at this time, U.S. Vietnam policy carries little emotional impact even though widely and frequently condemned by all leftist factions. Vietnam demonstrations continue, but with many fewer participants and much less enthusiasm than characterized the pro-Cuba demonstrations of a few years ago.

2. In the past five years most protests including both student and faculty strikes and demonstrations have focused on local issues. Some have been lodged against university officials in complaint against conditions in the schools. The most common complaints are low faculty wages, poor professors, and inadequate physical facilities. Low academic standards are condemned but specific efforts to improve them are often effectively opposed by the very students who complain. In general, the list of specific problems which provoke student and at times faculty protest is virtually endless.

3. At times the state authorities are the target of university protest. In the spring of 1967, the University of Sonora backed by the local community of Hermosillo vigorously challenged state officials, who they claimed were imposed by the PRI, the ruling national party. The incident was one of the most prolonged and bloody of recent times. Several persons were killed and finally the University was seized by federal troops. Other incidents of this kind have occurred where students protesting local issues have directed their attacks against the state authorities. However, demonstrations against the national Government have been virtually unknown until the most recent demonstration in Mexico City.

4. Disturbances among the students in Mexico also result from competition among student groups for power and from rivalry among various schools. At the National University a half dozen or more major student groups from far right to equally far left vie for the allegiance of the 94,000 students. In Puebla during July, 1968 one student was killed and several others injured in a battle

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demonstrating students. To date the government has been able to isolate all instances of student disorder either within the academic community or within one area of the country.

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR STUDENT INCIDENTS (1963-68)

8. September 23, 1963 - Students at the University of Nuevo Leon went on strike to force the ouster of the Rector who had been trying to raise academic standards. The Rector attempted to deny academic credits to the strikers, but the students remained united and he was forced to resign on October 18.
9. March 1964 - Students in the normal schools of the state of Chihuahua demonstrated in support of peasants who had invaded private lands there. The land invasions were instigated by the UGOCM (General Union of Workers and Peasants) of the PPS (Partido Popular Socialista).
10. October 13, 1964 - Students of the University of Puebla joined the Union of Small and Medium Producers of Milk in a protest against a new state regulatory law. The demonstration turned into a riot in which the police injured 30 persons. The students then demanded the resignation of the governor. Martial law was declared, the governor took a six month leave of absence, and order was restored. The PCM (Communist Party of Mexico) and other leftist groups helped organize the original protest and Ramon Danzos Palamino, well known communist figure, was released in the settlement.
11. November 6, 1964 - Students at the University of Chihuahua went on strike to protest the discontinuation of night classes. Attempts of the UGOCM to turn the protest into a riot were thwarted by the students. One sympathy demonstration was held at the University of Veracruz.
12. January 14, 1965 - Two rival groups at UNAM both claiming to be FUSA (University Federation of Societies of Students), clashed, and several students were seriously injured. Campus police stood by without intervening.
13. February 9, 1965 - 400 non-striking students of the University of Guerrero ousted 48 of their classmates from a building which had been seized in protest against a new rector.
14. March 17, 1965 - 20 to 30 students at the University of Nuevo Leon occupied the philosophy building in an attempt to force the dismissal of the Director of the School of Philosophy. The Rector of the University had the students ejected by the police, but others took their places. The University Council then effected a compromise which included censure of the Rector for involving the police.

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15. November 27, 1965 - Attempts by the now defunct MLN (National Liberation Front) and the PCM to organize anti-Vietnam war demonstrations failed. (At least 3 other attempts to spark similar demonstrations in cooperation with the international anti-war movement also failed during the year.)

16. February 7, 1966 - Students rioted in Culiacan, Sinaloa, over the refusal of local theaters to give discounts. Seven theaters were sacked.

17. March 14, 1966 - Law students at UNAM, angered by administrative practices of the Law School Director, seized the school to force his resignation. The faculties of philosophy and political science joined the strike and several preparatory schools were closed because of the general climate of unrest. A stalemate ensued. During the fifth week students, incensed by a false rumor that one of their number had been seriously injured, seized the administration building and held the Rector (Dr. Ignacio Chavez) hostage for several hours. Following this incident the Rector resigned along with a number of other high officials. A settlement was reached three weeks later by Chavez' successor, Barros Sierra.

18. April - May 1966 - Students at two preparatory schools in Puebla remained on strike for over two months in protest against the firing of the schools' directors both of whom were widely known for their leftist political activity. JCM (Communist Youth of Mexico) tried to organize sympathy movements in Morelia and Monterrey but with no significant success.

19. June 4, 1966 - Trotskyists (Revolutionary Workers Party) dynamited statue of Miguel Aleman, former president of Mexico, on the UNAM campus.

20. June 10, 1966 - In Mexico City police broke up a demonstration of 1,000 students protesting US-Vietnam and Dominican policies.

21. June - July 1966 - Students at the National Teachers College (Escuela Nacional de Maestros) went on strike for increased scholarships and guaranteed jobs. School director offered some concessions which were accepted by the student leadership. By this time CNED (National Central of Democratic Students) had become involved and formed an ad hoc committee to reject the offer. The strike continued until greater concessions were offered. The final outcome enhanced the prestige of the leftist spokesmen.

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22. June - July 1966 - Students of the Durango Technological Institute seized an iron mine in support of demands by the people of Durango that the company build a processing plant on the site. The mine was held for two months until the company promised to begin construction immediately on the proposed plant and also pay royalty to the town on ore taken from the mine. During the course of the conflict student anger turned against the governor (Dupre Cinicerros) for allegedly not defending the interests of the state. Dupre was removed shortly after a settlement was reached when Pres. Diaz Ordaz charged that "constitutional authority" had disappeared in the state as a result of the governor's "total lack of responsibility and direction." The ouster was in response to the governor's poor handling of a local problem rather than to student demands, but nevertheless the student disturbance did result in the downfall of the state authority.
23. July 18, 1966 - Ignacio Medina, appointed Director of the Law School of UNAM, was forced to resign before assuming the office by hostile students.
24. July 26, 1966 - Communist and Trotskyists organized pro-Cuba demonstrations. Around 2,000 persons participated but little public interest was shown.
25. August 1966 - Students at the National Teachers College went on strike for two more weeks. No consideration was given to their demands and the strike was broken by a threat to withhold academic credits.
26. September 1966 - 20 students seized the economics building at the University of Sinaloa in protest against the firing of a communist professor. Later the entire university was occupied and the Rector forced to resign.
27. October 2, 1966 - A student at the University of Morelia was shot and killed by a member of the State Judicial Police. The University has a tradition of communist influence and leftist leaders tried to take advantage of the incident to destroy the reputation of the moderate governor. Demonstrations became violent and federal troops occupied the city on October 8. Attempts by leftists to gain labor and campesino support failed completely, and a sympathy demonstration at UNAM attracted little interest.
28. October 25, 1966 - 100 students of the University of Guerrero occupied university buildings demanding the ouster of the Rector and according to some reports to embarrass the generally unpopular

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governor. After five weeks non-strikers regained the buildings by force. In January of 1967 a new Rector was appointed and disturbances broke out again. This time state police restored order without regard to autonomy. Support for the strikers came from communist sources, CNED, and from individuals within the state and federal governments.

29. January 5, 1967 - 50 students seized the economics building at UNAM in protest against the appointment of an interim director of the School of Economics during the vacation period. The building was returned the next day following a promise of an investigation.

30. January - February 1967 - The Chihuahua local of the National Teachers Union struck for about 2 months in demand of higher wages. The Secretariat of Education offered concessions which were accepted by the national union but rejected by the local. A member of the Secretariat of the PCM was reportedly sent to the scene to encourage a continuation of the strike. A settlement came after concessions, threats of dismissal, and threats of expulsion from the national union.

31. January - February 1967 - A strike at the National Teachers College demanding the resignation of one of the directors failed when non-striking students overwhelmed the dissenters by force of numbers. The PCM was reported to have paid a fixed amount daily to perpetuate the strike.

32. February 10, 1967 - The Law School of the University of San Luis Potosí struck in protest against the absenteeism of the Director. Simultaneously the School of Business Administration protested the forced resignation of its director.

33. February 15, 1967 - One student was killed and many injured in a fight between rival student organizations at University of Juarez in Tabasco.

34. March 1, 1967 - In Mexico City PCM, PPS (Popular Socialists Party), and the Trotskyists united to organize a Vietnam protest but only 150 of the anticipated 5,000 attended.

35. February 24, 1967 - University of Tamaulipas went on strike demanding autonomy. The strike ended two weeks later with a compromise between students and the state governor.

36. February 26, 1967 - Students at the University of Sonora in Hermosillo began a protest against the methods used by the PRI to choose candidates for the state governorship and other offices. The students had the support of many of the townspeople who closed their shops during certain hours as

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a demonstration of solidarity. As the University strike and other protests continued a number of violent clashes occurred in which several people were killed and many more injured. In late May, after all attempts at compromise had failed, federal troops seized the University and other schools. The conflict centered around resentment against domination of local issues by the central government. In the following municipal elections a mayor was elected from the oppositionist PAN (National Action Party).

37. March 15, 1967 - About 4,000 persons mainly student members of CNED participated in an anti-Vietnam rally in Mexico City.
38. April 10, 1967 - Students at the University of Juarez in Villahermoso, Tabasco, rioted during a demonstration demanding an increase in state funds for the school and dismissal of the state police chief. After a strike of about two weeks the police chief was fired and the state funds increased. There was no evidence of communist involvement but groups in Mexico City were quick to take up the cause.
39. April 1967 - Preparatory students in Monterrey seized 33 buses and held them until several dismissed drivers were reinstated and pay raises were granted.
40. April 28, 1967 - Police attempts to maintain order during a celebration in Puebla provoked a riot by 300 of the students causing extensive property damage.
41. May 8, 1967 - A strike was begun by students of the Superior Agriculture School at Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, who demanded that the government take over the private institution. With the active participation of CNED and other leftist student organizations the strike spread to 10 other agriculture schools throughout the country. By July other schools were ready to join the strike including the IPN (National Polytechnic Institute). A compromise was reached on July 15, which included the establishment of a state agriculture school at the University of Chihuahua for the dissidents and the end of the state subsidy to the private school.
42. October 23, 1967 - Students at University of Tamaulipas went on strike demanding the resignation of the Rector. The stoppage continued for over two months until several violent incidents brought the intervention of state authorities. The Rector was fired.
43. February 3, 1968 - The "Student March on the Road of Freedom" began with several hundred participants. CNED was the principal organizing force behind the march, the stated purpose of which was to gain the release

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of political prisoners, including a CNED leader Rafael Aguilar Talamantes. The government released Talamantes in advance. The march was stopped by federal troops, ostensibly to prevent violence between the demonstrators and hostile townspeople along the route.

44. February 29, 1968 - Students of Preparatory #4 of UNAM clashed with their counterparts in Prevocational #4 of IPN in a dispute over buses serving the area. This and other similar fights resulted in several injuries during the week.
45. March 13, 1968 - Students at the University of Nuevo Leon supported a strike by university workers and classes were suspended.
46. March 13, 1968 - A strike at the University of Chihuahua was settled by an agreement by the Secretary of Agriculture to subsidize the new school of agronomy at the university.
47. April 1, 1968 - A strike of students in the School of Odontology at UNAM was resolved by a compromise in which the director of the school was given a temporary leave of absence, rather than dismissal as demanded by the students.
48. April 1968 - Students of Preparatory #9 seized 31 buses and held them until the company paid indemnity to the family of a student killed in a bus accident.
49. May 1968 - Students again demonstrated in Villahermosa, Tabasco, this time demanding the ouster of the governor. One march through the town attracted over 30,000 participants indicating that the students had support from other elements of the population. This support quickly waned, however, and within two weeks the state authorities again had the situation under control.
50. April 25, 1968 - In Mexico City approximately 4,000 persons, mostly students, demonstrated against the war in Vietnam.
51. May 1968 - A teachers' strike in Yucatan demanding regular payment of salaries lasted several weeks before an agreement was reached.
52. July 10, 1968 - A clash between two student groups for control of the DEP (Puebla Student Directory) at the University of Puebla left 1 dead and 8 wounded. Police stood by for 8 hours while the students engaged in a pitched battle before moving in to quell the disturbance. The next day the students demanded that the governor be ousted for allegedly having supported one of the factions. There was no evidence to support the charge however, and the governor remained in power.

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53. July 1, 1968 - The Coalition of Workers of the University of Veracruz went on strike in demand of higher wages. When 7 of the striking professors were fired the 48,000 students joined the stoppage. A compromise settlement was reached on July 12.

FREEMAN

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