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Jacobo Arbenz



Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, the son of a Swiss immigrant, was born in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, on 14th September, 1913. His father committed suicide when Arbenz was still very young and was raised by his Guatemalan mother.

Arbenz joined the army and in 1935 graduated as sub-lieutenant. He joined the Guatemalan Military Academy in 1937 and became a teacher of science and history.

In 1939 Arbenz met and fell in love with Maria Cristina Vilanova. They were married soon afterwards. Maria was a socialist and soon converted her husband to this political philosophy. During this period Maria developed a strong friendship with the Chilean Communist leader Virginia Bravo and the Salvadorian Communist exile Matilde Elena Lopez. These three women organized regular political discussions at the Arbenz family home.

Arbenz became a secret opponent of Guatemalan dictator, Jorge Ubico. In the 1930s Sam Zemurray aligned United Fruit Company closely with the government of President Jorge Ubico. The company received import duty and real estate tax exemptions from Ubico. He also gave them hundreds of square miles of land. United Fruit controlled more land than any other individual or group. It also owned the railway, the electric utilities, telegraph, and the country's only port at Puerto Barrios on the Atlantic coast.

In June, 1944, teachers in Guatemala went on strike for higher pay. Other professions joined the teachers in street demonstrations. Ubico sent in the army and over 200 protesters were killed. This included Maria Chinchilla, the leader of the teachers' union movement.

A few days later, a group of over 300 teachers, lawyers, doctors, and businessmen handed a petition to Ubico in which demanded that the demonstrators' actions were legitimate. At this stage, the United States withdrew its support of Ubico. General Francisco Ponce became Guatemala's new dictator. In an attempt to gain public support, Ponce announced democratic elections. He chose himself as presidential candidate, while the opposition picked the former teacher, Juan Jose Arevalo, who was living in exile in Argentina. Afraid that he would lose the election, Ponce ordered Arevalo's arrest as soon as he arrived back in Guatemala.

Appalled by the actions of Ponce, Arbenz and a fellow junior officer, Major Francisco Arana, organized a military rebellion. They were quickly joined by other officers and attacked the pro-Ponce military and police forces. Ponce and Ubico were forced to abandon the country and Arbenz and Arana created a provisional junta with businessman, Jorge Toriello, and promised free and democratic elections.

Arbenz and Arana introduced a new constitution. Censorship was brought to an end, men and women were declared equal before the law, racial discrimination was declared a crime, higher education was free of governmental control, private monopolies were banned, workers were assured a forty-hour week, payment in coupons was forbidden, and labour unions were legalized.

Juan Jose Arevalo won the first elections and attempted to begin an age of reforms in Guatemala. Arevalo described himself as a "spiritual socialist". He implemented sweeping reforms by passing new laws that gave workers the right to form unions. This included the 40,000 Guatemalans who worked for the United Fruit Company.

Sam Zemurray feared that Arevalo would also nationalize the land owned by United Fruit in Guatemala. He asked the political lobbyist Tommy Corcoran to express his fears to senior political figures in Washington. Corcoran began talks with key people in the government agencies and departments that shaped U.S. policy in Central America. He argued that the U.S. should use United Fruit as an American beachhead against communism in the region.

In July, 1949, with the backing of the CIA and the United Fruit Company, Francisco Arana presented Juan Jose Arevalo "with an ultimatum demanding that he surrender power to the Army and fill out the remainder of his term as a civilian figure-head for a military regime."

Arevalo realized that Guatemala's experiment with democracy was in grave danger. He therefore appealed to Arbenz, who was still committed to the democratic system, to defend his elected government. Arbenz supplied Arevalo with the names of young officers who he knew to be loyal to the idea of democracy. Arevalo then ordered these officers to arrest Arana. Caught crossing a bridge, Arana resisted arrest, and during the resulting gunfight, Arana and several others were killed.

Juan Jose Arevalo then made the mistake of not telling the country about the attempted coup. Instead he claimed that Arana had been killed by unknown assassins. The CIA immediately spread the rumour that Arevalo and Arbenz had used communists to kill Arana. This resulted in another coup attempt by army officers loyal to Arana and the United Fruit Company. However, some members of the armed forces remained loyal to Arevalo. So did the trade unions that had originally overthrown the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico. Arana's supporters were defeated and Arevalo remained in power.

Once again Arbenz had become a national hero and his election to the presidency was ensured. The following year Arbenz defeated Manuel Ygidoras to become Guatemala's new president. Arbenz, who obtained 65% of the votes cast, took power on 15th March, 1951. Tommy Corcoran then recruited Robert La Follette to work for United Fruit.

In the spring of 1950, Corcoran went to see Thomas C. Mann, the director of the State Department's Office of Inter-American Affairs. Corcoran asked Mann if he had any plans to prevent Arbenz from being elected. Mann replied: "That is for the people of that country to decide." Unhappy with this reply, Corcoran paid a call on the Allen Dulles, the deputy director of the CIA. Dulles, who represented United Fruit in the 1930s, was far more interested in Corcoran's ideas. "During their meeting Dulles explained to Corcoran that while the CIA was sympathetic to United Fruit, he could not authorize any assistance without the support of the State Department. Dulles assured Corcoran, however, that whoever was elected as the next president of Guatemala would not be allowed to nationalize the operations of United Fruit."

Arbenz's first action was to order the construction of a government run port to compete with United Fruit's Puerto Barrios. He also attempted to break the International Railways of Central America's (IRCA) transportation monopoly by building a new highway to the Atlantic. Another measure was to build a national hydroelectric plant to offer a cheaper energy alternative different from the American controlled electricity monopoly. Arbenz also proposed a new system of progressive income tax.

Tommy Corcoran then recruited Robert La Follette to work for United Fruit. Corcoran arranged for La Follette to lobby liberal members of Congress. The message was that Arbenz was not a liberal but a dangerous left-wing radical. This strategy was successful and Congress was duly alarmed when on 17th June, 1952, Arbenz announced a new Agrarian Reform program. He said that the country needed "an agrarian reform which puts an end to the latifundios and the semi-feudal practices, giving the land to thousands of peasants, raising their purchasing power and creating a great internal market favorable to the development of domestic industry."

This included expropriating idle land on government and private estates and redistributed to peasants in lots of 8 to 33 acres. The Agrarian Reform program managed to give 1.5 million acres to around 100,000 families for which the government paid \$8,345,545 in bonds. Among the expropriated landowners was Arbenz himself, who had become into a landowner with the dowry of his wealthy wife. Around 46 farms were given to groups of peasants who organized themselves in cooperatives.

Arbenz's agrarian reform was approved in 1952. This empowered the government to expropriate uncultivated portions of large plantations. Farms smaller than 223 acres were not subject to this law. The expropriated lands would be distributed only to landless peasants in plots not bigger of 42.5 acres each, and the new owners were not allowed to sell them or gain profits through speculation. The new owners would pay to the government a rental fee of 5% the value of the food produced.

The Agrarian Reform managed to give 1.5 million acres to around 100,000 families for which the government paid \$8,345,545 in bonds. Among the expropriated landowners was Arbenz himself, who had become into a landowner with the dowry of his wealthy wife. Around 46 farms were given to groups of peasants who organized themselves in cooperatives. The main opponent to Arbenz's reforms were the United Fruit Company. The company owned 550,000 acres on the Atlantic coast, 85% of which was not cultivated.

In March 1953, 209,842 acres of United Fruit Company's uncultivated land was taken by the government which offered compensation of \$525,000. The company wanted \$16 million for the land. While the Guatemalan government valued \$2.99 per acre, the American government valued it at \$75 per acre. As David McKean has pointed out: This figure was "in line with the company's own valuation of the property, at least for tax purposes". However, the company wanted \$16 million for the land. While the Guatemalan government valued it at \$2.99 per acre, the company now valued it at \$75 per acre.

United Fruit main shareholder, Sam Zemurray, United Fruit Company's largest shareholder, organized an anti-Arbenz campaign in the American media. This included the claim that Guatemala was the beginning of "Soviet expansion in the Americas".

Tommy Corcoran contacted President Anastasio Somoza and warned him that the Guatemalan revolution might spread to Nicaragua. Somoza now made representations to Harry S. Truman about what was happening in Guatemala. After discussions with Walter Bedell Smith, director of the CIA, a secret plan to overthrow Arbenz (Operation Fortune) was developed. Part of this plan involved Tommy Corcoran arranging for small arms and ammunition to be loaded on a United Fruit freighter and shipped to Guatemala, where the weapons would be distributed to dissidents. When the Secretary of State Dean Acheson discovered details of Operation Fortune, he had a meeting with Truman where he vigorously protested about the involvement of United Fruit and the CIA in the attempted overthrow of the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz. As a result of Acheson's protests, Truman ordered the postponement of Operation Fortune.

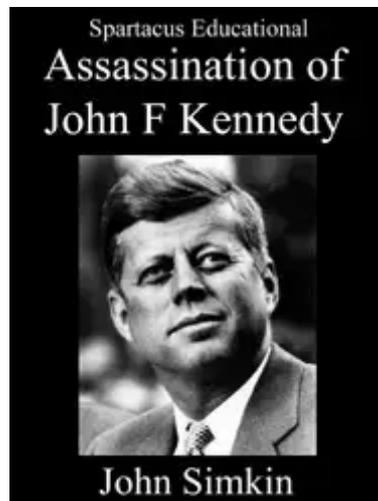
Tommy Corcoran's work was made easier by the election of Dwight Eisenhower in November, 1952. Eisenhower's personal secretary was Anne Whitman, the wife of Edmund Whitman, United Fruit's public relations director. Eisenhower appointed John Peurifoy as ambassador to Guatemala. He soon made it clear that he believed that the Arbenz government posed a threat to the America's campaign against communism.

Corcoran also arranged for Whiting Willauer, his friend and partner in Civil Air Transport, to become U. S. ambassador to Honduras. As Willauer pointed out in a letter to Claire Lee Chennault, he worked day and night to arrange training sites and instructors plus air crews for the rebel air force, and to keep the Honduran government "in line so they would allow the revolutionary activity to continue."

Eisenhower also replaced Dean Acheson with John Foster Dulles. His brother, Allen Dulles became director of the CIA. The Dulles brothers "had sat on the board of United Fruit's partner in the banana monopoly, the Schroder Banking Corporation" whereas "U.N. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was a stockholder and had been a strong defender of United Fruit while a U.S. senator."

Walter Bedell Smith was moved to the State Department. Smith told Corcoran he would do all he could to help in the overthrow of Arbenz. He added that he would like to work for United Fruit once he retired from government office. This request was granted and Bedell Smith was later to become a director of United Fruit. According to John Prados (*Presidents' Secret War*), Corcoran's meeting with "Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith that summer and that conversation is recalled by CIA officers as the clear starting point of that plan." Evan Thomas (*The Very Best Men*) has added that: "With his usual energy and skill, Corcoran beseeched the U. S. government to overthrow Arbenz".

The new CIA plan to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz was called Operation Success. Allen Dulles became the executive agent and arranged for Tracey Barnes and Richard Bissell to plan and execute the operation. Bissell later claimed that he had been aware of the problem since reading a document published by the State Department that claimed: "The communists already exercise in Guatemala a political influence far out of proportion to their small numerical strength. This influence will probably continue to grow during 1952. The political situation in Guatemala adversely effects U. S. interests and constitutes a potential threat to U.S. security." Bissell does not point out that the source of this information was Tommy Corcoran and the United Fruit Company.



[Assassination of John F. Kennedy Encyclopedia](#)

John Prados argues that it was Barnes and Bissell who "coordinated the Washington end of the planning and logistics for the Guatemala operation." As Deputy Director for Plans, it was Frank Wisner's responsibility to select the field commander for Operation Success. Kim Roosevelt was first choice but he turned it down and instead the job went to Albert Hanley, the CIA station Chief in Korea.

Tracey Barnes brought in David Atlee Phillips to run a "black" propaganda radio station. According to Phillips, he was reluctant to take part in the overthrow of a democratically elected president. Barnes replied: "It's not a question of Arbenz. Nor of Guatemala. We have solid intelligence that the Soviets intended to throw substantial support to Arbenz... Guatemala is bordered by Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador and Mexico. It's unacceptable to have a Commie running Guatemala." Barnes also appointed E. Howard Hunt as chief of political action.

Albert Hanley brought in Rip Robertson to take charge of the paramilitary side of the operation. Robertson had been Hanley's deputy in Korea and had "enjoyed going along on the behind-the-lines missions with the CIA guerrillas, in violation of standing orders from Washington." One of those who worked with Robertson in Operation Success was David Morales. Also in the team was Henry Hecksher, who operated under cover in Guatemala to supply front-line reports.

John Foster Dulles decided that he "needed a civilian adviser to the State Department team to help expediate Operation Success. Dulles chose a friend of Corcoran's, William Pawley, a Miami-based

millionaire". David McKean goes on to point out that Pawley had worked with Corcoran, Chennault and Willauer in helping to set up the Flying Tigers and in transforming Civil Air Transport into a CIA airline. McKean adds that his most important qualification for the job was his "long association with right-wing Latin America dictators."

The rebel "liberation army" was formed and trained in Nicaragua. This was not a problem as President Anastasio Somoza and been warning the United States government since 1952 that that the Guatemalan revolution might spread to Nicaragua. The rebel army of 150 men were trained by Rip Robertson. Their commander was a disaffected Guatemalan army officer, Carlos Castillo Armas.

It was clear that a 150 man army was unlikely to be able to overthrow the Guatemalan government. Tracey Barnes believed that if the rebels could gain control of the skies and bomb Guatemala City, they could create panic and Arbenz might be fooled into accepting defeat.

According to Richard Bissell, Somoza was willing to provide cover for this covert operation. However, this was on the understanding that these aircraft would be provided by the United States. Dwight Eisenhower agreed to supply Somoza with a "small pirate air force to bomb Arbenz into submission". To fly these planes, the CIA recruited American mercenaries like Jerry DeLarm.

Before the bombing of Guatemala City, the rebel army was moved to Honduras where Tommy Corcoran's business partner, Whiting Willauer, was ambassador. The plan was for them to pretend to be the "vanguard of a much larger army seeking to liberate their homeland from the Marxists".

Arbenz became aware of this CIA plot to overthrow him. Guatemalan police made several arrests. In his memoirs, Eisenhower described these arrests as a "reign of terror" and falsely claimed that "agents of international Communism in Guatemala continued their efforts to penetrate and subvert their neighboring Central American states, using consular agents for their political purposes and fomenting political assassinations and strikes."

Sydney Gruson of the New York Times began to investigate this story. Journalists working for Time Magazine also tried to write about these attempts to destabilize Arbenz's government. Frank Wisner, head of Operation Mockingbird, asked Allen Dulles to make sure that the American public never discovered the plot to overthrow Arbenz. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of the New York Times, agreed to stop Gruson from writing the story. Henry Luce was also willing to arrange for the Time Magazine reports to be rewritten at the editorial offices in New York.

The CIA propaganda campaign included the distribution of 100,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled *Chronology of Communism in Guatemala* . They also produced three films on Guatemala for showing free in cinemas. Faked photographs were distributed that claimed to show the mutilated bodies of opponents of Arbenz.

David Atlee Phillips and E. Howard Hunt were responsible for running the CIA's *Voice of Liberation* radio station. Broadcasts began on 1 st May, 1954. They also arranged for the distribution of posters and pamphlets. Over 200 articles based on information provided by the CIA were placed in newspapers and magazines by the United States Information Agency.

The *Voice of Liberation* reported massive defections from Arbenz's army. According to Phillips the radio station "broadcast that two columns of rebel soldiers were converging on Guatemala City. In fact, Castillo Armas and his makeshift army were still encamped six miles inside the border, far from the capital." As Phillips later admitted, the "highways were crowded, but with frightened citizens fleeing Guatemala City and not with soldiers approaching it."

One CIA memo has Raymond Leddy saying: "It may be necessary to take more deadly plans might need development... The best way to bring about the fall of the Arbenz government would be to eliminate 15-20 of its leaders with Trujillo's trained pistoleros."

As E. Howard Hunt pointed out, "our powerful transmitter overrode the Guatemalan national radio, broadcasting messages to confuse and divide the population from its military overlords." There was no popular uprising. On 20th June, the CIA reported to Dwight Eisenhower that Castillo Armas had not been able to take his assigned objective, Zacapa. His seaborne force had also failed to capture Puerto Barrios.

According to John Prados, it all now depended on "Whiting Willauer's rebel air force". However, that was not going to plan and on 27th June, Winston Churchill, the British prime minister berated Eisenhower when a CIA plane sank a British merchant vessel heading for Guatemala. The bombing had been ordered by Rip Robertson without first gaining permission from the CIA or Eisenhower. Robertson had been convinced that the Springfjord was a "Czech arms carrying freighter". In reality it had been carrying only coffee and cotton. Frank Wisner had to make a personal apology for the incident and the CIA later quietly reimbursed Lloyd's of London, insurers of the *Springfjord*, the \$1.5 million they had paid out on the ship.

The Guatemalan Foreign Minister, Guillermo Toriello, asked the United Nations for help against the covert activities of the United States. Toriello accused the United States government of categorizing "as communism every manifestation of nationalism or economic independence, any desire for social progress, any intellectual curiosity, and any interest in progressive liberal reforms."

President Dwight Eisenhower responded by claiming that Guatemala had a "communist dictatorship.. had established... an outpost on this continent to the detriment of all the American nations". Secretary of State John Foster Dulles added that the Guatemala people were living under a "communist type of terrorism".

Arbenz had been convinced by the *Voice of Liberation* reports that his army was deserting. Richard Bissell believes that this is when Arbenz made his main mistake. Arbenz decided to distribute weapons to the "people's organizations and the political parties". As Bissell later explained: "The conservative men who constituted the leadership of Guatemala's army viewed this action as the final unacceptable leftward lurch, and they told Arbenz they would no longer support him."

The CIA was also busy bribing Arbenz's military commanders. It was later discovered that one commander accepted \$60,000 to surrender his troops. Ernesto Guevara attempted to organize some civil militias but senior army officers blocked the distribution of weapons. Arbenz now believed he stood little chance of preventing Castillo gaining power. Accepting that further resistance would only bring more deaths he announced his resignation over the radio.

Castillo's new government was immediately recognised by President Dwight Eisenhower. Castillo now reversed the Arbenz reforms. In July 19, 1954, he created the National Committee of Defense Against Communism and decreed the Preventive Penal Law Against Communism to fight against those who supported Arbenz when he was in power. Over the next few weeks thousands were arrested on suspicion of communist activity. A large number of these prisoners were tortured or killed.

The new government disenfranchised three-quarters of Guatemala's voters by barring illiterates from the electoral rolls. Castillo also outlawed all political parties, trade unions and peasant organizations. Opposition newspapers were closed down and "subversive" books were banned and existing copies were burnt in the streets.

Arbenz and his family found it difficult to find a country willing to grant him sanctuary. He lived for short periods in Mexico, Switzerland, France, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Uruguay. In 1960 Fidel Castro invited him to live in Cuba. Ten years later, Arbenz and his wife moved to Mexico.

Jacobo Arbenz drowned in his bathtub in Mexico City on 27th January, 1971.

By John Simkin (john@spartacus-educational.com) © September 1997 (updated January 2020).

Primary and Secondary Sources

(1) Jacobo Arbenz, radio broadcast (15th March, 1951)

Foreign capital will always be welcome as long as it adjusts to local conditions, remains always subordinate to Guatemalan laws, cooperates with the economic development of the country, and strictly abstains from intervening in the nation's social and political life.

(2) William Blum, *The CIA: A Forgotten History* (1986)

Both administrations were pressured by executives of United Fruit Company, much of whose vast and uncultivated land in Guatemala had been expropriated by the Arbenz government as part of the land reform programme. The company wanted nearly \$16 million for the land, the government was offering \$525,000, United Fruit's own declared valuation for tax purposes.

United Fruit functioned in Guatemala as a state within a state. It owned the country's telephone and telegraph facilities, administered its only important Atlantic harbour and monopolized its banana exports. A subsidiary of the company owned nearly every mile of railroad track in the country. The fruit company's influence amongst Washington's power elite was equally impressive. On a business and/or personal level, it had close ties to the Dulles brothers, various State Department officials and congressmen, the American Ambassador to the United Nations, and others. Anne Whitman, the wife of the company's public relations director, was President Eisenhower's personal secretary. Under-secretary of State (and formerly Director of the CIA) Walter Bedell Smith was seeking an executive position with United Fruit at the same time he was helping to plan the coup. He was later named to the company's board of directors.

(3) Jacobo Arbenz, radio broadcast in July, 1954.

They have used the pretext of anti-communism. The truth is very different. The truth is to be found in the financial interests of the fruit company and the other US monopolies which have invested great amounts of money in Latin America and fear that the example of Guatemala would be followed by other Latin countries... I was elected by a majority of the people of Guatemala, but I have had to fight under difficult conditions. The truth is that the sovereignty of a people cannot be maintained without the material elements to defend it.... I took over the presidency with great faith in the democratic system, in liberty and the possibility of achieving economic independence for Guatemala. I continue to believe that this program is just. I have not violated my faith in democratic liberties, in the independence of Guatemala and in all the good which is the future of humanity.

(4) David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch; 25 Years of Peculiar Service* (1977)

"Tomorrow morning, gentlemen," Dulles said, "we will go to the White House to brief the President. Let's run over your presentations." It was a warm summer night. We drank iced tea as we sat around a garden table in Dulles' back yard. The lighted shaft of the Washington Monument could be seen through the trees. . . . Finally Brad (Colonel Albert Haney) rehearsed his speech. When he finished Alien Dulles said, "Brad, I've never heard such crap." It was the nearest thing to an expletive I ever heard Dulles use. The Director turned to me "They tell me you know how to write. Work out a new speech for Brad..."

We went to the White House in the morning. Gathered in the theater in the East Wing were more notables than I had ever seen: the President, his Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of State - Alien Dulles's brother, Foster - the Attorney General, and perhaps two dozen other members of the President's Cabinet and household staff....

The lights were turned off while Brad used slides during his report. A door opened near me. In the darkness I could see only a silhouette of the person entering the room; when the door closed it was dark again, and I could not make out the features of the man standing next to me. He whispered a number of questions: "Who is that? Who made that decision?"

I was vaguely uncomfortable. The questions from the unknown man next to me were very insistent, furtive. Brad finished and the lights went up. The man moved away. He was Richard Nixon, the Vice President.

Eisenhower's first question was to Hector (Rip Robertson): "How many men did Castillo Armas lose?" Hector (Rip Robertson) said only one, a courier... . Eisenhower shook his head, perhaps thinking of the thousands who had died in France. "Incredible..."

Nixon asked a number of questions, concise and to the point, and demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the Guatemalan political situation. He was impressive - not at all the disturbing man he was in the shadows.

Eisenhower turned to his Chief of the Joint Chiefs. "What about the Russians? Any reaction?"

General Ridgeway answered. "They don't seem to be up to anything. But the navy is watching a Soviet sub in the area; it could be there to evacuate some of Arbenz's friends, or to supply arms to any resisters."

Eisenhower shook hands all around. "Great," he said to Brad, "that was a good briefing." Hector and I smiled at each other as Brad flushed with pleasure. The President's final handshake was with Allen Dulles. "Thanks Allen, and thanks to all of you. You've averted a Soviet beachhead in our hemisphere." Eisenhower spoke to his Chief of Naval Operations "Watch that sub. Admiral. If it gets near the coast of Guatemala we'll sink the son-of-a-bitch." The President strode from the room.

(5) John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (1986)

The nature of Arbenz's government, however, meant that Operation Success launched both the CIA and the United States on a new path. Mussadegh in Iran was left-wing and had indulged in talks with Russian diplomats about possible alliances and treaties. Arbenz, on the other hand, had simply been trying to reform his country and had not sought foreign help in this. Thus by overthrowing him, America was in effect making a new decision in the cold war. No longer would the Monroe Doctrine, which was directed against foreign imperial ambitions in the Americas from across the Atlantic or the Pacific, suffice. Now internal subversion communism from within - was an additional cause for direct action. What was not said, but what was already clear after the events in East Germany the previous year, was that the exercise of American power, even clandestinely through the CIA, would not be undertaken where Soviet power was already established. In addition, regardless of the principles being professed, when direct action was taken (whether clandestine or not), the interests of American business would be a consideration: if the flag was to follow, it would quite definitely follow trade.

The whole arrangement of American power in the world from the nineteenth century was based on commercial concerns and methods of operation his had given America a material empire through the ownership of foreign transport systems, oil fields, estancias, stocks, and shares. It had also given America resources and experience (concentrated in private hands) with the world outside the Americas, used effectively by the OSS during World War II American government, however, had stayed in America, lending its influence to business but never trying to overthrow other governments for commercial purposes. After World War II, American governments were more willing to use their influence and strength all over the world for the first time and to see an ideological implication in the "persecution" of U.S. business interests.

(6) Stansfield Turner, *Secrecy and Democracy* (1985)

The Agency pulled off still another successful political action the following year. A prototype of the Castro revolution of 1956-1959 was developing in Guatemala under Jacobo Arbenz. The CIA was directed to prevent Arbenz from consolidating his communist-oriented regime. It did so by convincing the Guatemalans that a "popular rebellion" was sweeping the country in support of Carlos Castillo Armas, an

anticommunist army colonel then in exile. The CIA supplied Armas with enough arms for a ragtag army of fewer than two hundred men plus a few old bomber and fighter aircraft, most of them flown by mercenaries.

On D-Day, June 18, 1954, a CIA radio station, masquerading as the rebels' station, broadcast word that Colonel Armas had invaded from Honduras. It continued to give reports of the movement of a supposed five-thousand-man force toward the capital. A bomber dropped a single bomb on a parade field in the capital, without loss of life. A day and a half later, as the nearly imaginary invasion force was reported by its own radio broadcasts to be nearing Guatemala City, Arbenz resigned. Armas and his few men were flown to the outskirts of the city and marched in triumphantly. Again, this favorable political outcome required only a small effort, and, again, the government that was overthrown was so weak that only a little push was needed.

(7) David McKean, Peddling Influence (2004)

As planning for the U.S. plot progressed, Corcoran and other top officials at United Fruit became anxious about identifying a future leader who would establish favorable relations between the government and the company. Secretary of State Dulles moved to add a "civilian" adviser to the State Department team to help expedite Operation Success. Dulles chose a friend of Corcoran's, William Pawley, a Miami-based millionaire who, along with Corcoran, Chennault, and Willauer, had helped set up the Flying Tigers in the early 1940s and then helped several years later to transform it into the CIA's airline, Civil Air Transport. Besides his association with Corcoran, Pawley's most important qualification for the job was that he had a long history of association with right-wing Latin American dictators.

CIA director Dulles had grown disillusioned with J. C. King and asked Colonel Albert Haney, the CIA station chief in Korea, to be the U.S. field commander for the operation. Haney enthusiastically accepted, although he was apparently unaware of the role that the United Fruit Company had played in his selection. Haney had been a colleague of King's, and though King was no longer directing the operation, he remained a member of the agency planning team. He suggested that Haney meet with Tom Corcoran to see about arming the insurgency force with the weapons that had been mothballed in a New York warehouse after the failed Operation Fortune. When the supremely confident Haney said he didn't need any help from a Washington lawyer, King rebuked him, "If you think you can run this operation without United Fruit, you're crazy!"

The close working relationship between the CIA and United Fruit was perhaps best epitomized by Allen Dulles's encouragement to the company to help select an expedition commander for the planned invasion. After the CIA's first choice was vetoed by the State Department, United Fruit proposed Corcova Cerna, a Guatemalan lawyer and coffee grower. Cerna had long worked for the company as a paid legal adviser, and even though Corcoran referred to him as "a liberal," he believed that Cerna would not interfere with the company's land holdings and operations. After Cerna was hospitalized with throat cancer, a third candidate, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, emerged as the compromise choice.

According to United Fruit's Thomas McCann, when the Central Intelligence Agency finally launched Operation Success in late June 1954, "United Fruit was involved at every level." From neighboring Honduras, Ambassador Willauer, Corcoran's former business partner, directed bombing raids on Guatemala City. McCann was told that the CIA even shipped down the weapons used in the uprising "in United Fruit boats."

On June 27, 1954, Colonel Armas Ousted the Arbenz government and ordered the arrest of all communist leaders in Guatemala. While the coup was successful, a dark chapter was opened in American support for right wing military dictators in Central America.

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