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Passer of Che's Diary, Due to Return to Bolivia, Pledges Disclosures on C.I.A.

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

LIMA, Peru, Aug. 16—In a nearly bare room in a small hotel in this capital, a short, dark-haired man who has shaken one government and become a focal point of dissension in many parts of the world spoke of his own government.

"In my country," said Antonio Argüedas Mendietta, the former Bolivian Interior Minister who smuggled a copy of the late Ernesto Che Guevara's battle diary to Cuba, "the leftist newspapers declare I am an agent of the C.I.A."

"The rightist press calls me a traitor and a turncoat or a Communist. Actually, I seem to have no friends in La Paz, Washington, Moscow, Havana, Peking or anywhere else."

C.I.A. Disclosure Promised

Tomorrow, he pledged in an interview, he will end nearly a month of fast-moving exile by returning to Bolivia to stand trial, "even if the C.I.A. kills me along the way."

Mr. Argüedas, who was also Bolivia's chief of intelligence during Mr. Guevara's unsuccessful guerrilla campaign in

that country, also said that (on his arrival in La Paz) he would make a complete disclosure of the activities of the United States Central Intelligence Agency in Bolivia.

Mr. Guevara was captured by Bolivian soldiers last Oct. 8 near the town of Higuera. He was summarily executed the following day.

After several hours yesterday at the Bolivian Embassy, Mr. Argüedas said that he had received a guarantee from his Government that he would be safe until brought to trial, "but the C.I.A. has ample funds to kill me if it wishes, or to bring about a coup d'état right now in Bolivia."

Still dressed in the clothes in which he fled Bolivia in mid-July—a white shirt open at the collar, a sweater and a suede jacket—the youthful looking Mr. Argüedas, who is 40 years old, said:

"The C.I.A. is implacable and vicious. I am convinced that it is responsible for the assassination of Robert Kennedy in its campaign to impose fascism on the United States."

Apparently aware that the Bolivian Government had discovered that he smuggled the

diary out, Mr. Argüedas vanished from his office in La Paz on July 19 and turned up later in Chile, with his brother, Jaime.

He disclosed to the police that he had long been a Marxist, that he resented what he called the "humiliating subjugation" of Bolivia by the Central Intelligence Agency and that, as a gesture of his feeling, he had mailed a copy of the Guevara diary to Havana by way of Paris.

Since leaving Bolivia, Mr. Argüedas has visited London, where he was interrogated by the police before dropping out of sight, and New York, in addition to Chile. He arrived here Aug. 8 on a flight from New York.

Claims C.I.A. Tailed Him

"From the moment I left Chile," he said, "to the moment I left New York for Lima, there was a C.I.A. man, Nicholas Lendiris, with me constantly. I made arrangements for a complete statement from me to reach Ramparts and Punta Final if anything happened to me."

Cuba has given copies of the Guevara diary for publication to Ramparts magazine and to

*For excerpts from Argüedas' press conference, La Paz, 17 Aug, see CIA file 17 Nov 68.

Punta Final, a Chilean leftist periodical.

Despite his denunciations of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Argüedas said at one point that, if he had not gotten an assurance of a fair trial in Bolivia, he would have sought a visa to the United States.

Praises American People

"The United States and its people have many fine aspects," he said. "They have a revolutionary past themselves. But they also have negative aspects, especially when they infringe on the sovereignty of other nations."

Although most of his remarks were directed against the C.I.A., Mr. Argüedas refused to detail his grievances.

"You ask me if I was threatened or under pressure?" said the former Bolivian Air Force officer. "I will tell you everything in La Paz."

Although he was offered political asylum in Cuba and Chile, Mr. Argüedas said he preferred to return to Bolivia, where, he felt, he could disclose the full extent of the activities of the C.I.A. in Bolivia.

Whatever information the former minister plans to disclose, he has already thrown the Bolivian Government into its worst crisis in years.

After Mr. Argüedas smuggled the copy of the Guevara diary to Cuba, the Bolivian Government, fearing that it had been infiltrated by the C.I.A.,

or Cuban agents or both, was torn by dissension.

Opponents of President René Barrientos Ortuño seized the chance to create an uproar in Congress and rioting broke out in which a police officer was killed.

President Barrientos reacted by closing Congress temporarily and by declaring a state of siege. His entire civilian Cabinet resigned in protest, and he named a new one consisting of military officers, mostly close friends.

It is expected that if Mr. Argüedas returns to La Paz he will be charged with treason. The maximum constitutional penalty for any crime in Bolivia is 30 years' imprisonment.