



With the CIA in Bolivia: Antonio Arguedas

On June 29, 1968, the Cuban government announced that it had obtained a copy of the Bolivian diaries of Che Guevara, and that it was preparing this last testament of the guerrillaleader for publication. Three weeks later, it was discovered that Bolivia's minister of the Interior, Antonio Arguedas, had disappeared from La Paz. Suddenly the word was all over La Paz: it was Arguedas who had obtained a copy of the diaries from the Bolivian High Command and had sent it to Cuba. By Arguedas' own testimony, these rumors were true; but they were less than half the story.

Less than a week after his disappearance from La Paz, Arguedas surfaced in Iquique, Peru. After a very brief press conference, Arguedas was taken into custody by the Chilean police and held incommunicado for five days. Finally he was put on a plane to London, with a Chilean passport and a warning never to return to that country. Thus began Arguedas' strange odyssey around the world in search of asylum, tailed every step of the way by a man named Nicholas Lendaris whom Arguedas identifies as an agent for the CIA. Bit by bit, in press conferences at airports all over the world, Arguedas spun out his tale. Ever since 1964, he revealed, and during his entire term as minister of the Interior, he had been in the employ of the American CIA. In London (where he was interrogated once again), in New York, in Lima, the story of his involvement with the CIA and his dealings with the diaries was chaotic and fragmentary. But he promised that he would tell everything upon his return to La Paz. For

Arguedas was determined that if no other country would welcome him, he would go back to Bolivia to face any charges the government might bring against him.

The press conference he held on the 17th of August, the day of his return to La Paz, was everything Arguedas had claimed it would be. From the moment he began to speak, the Bolivian authorities knew they were in for trouble. So incriminating was Arguedas' testimony that the conference had been in progress for only half an hour when an official from the Ministry of the Interior cut it off and took Arguedas into custody. He was permitted to resume, in the offices of the Interior Ministry, only at the insistence of reporters. After the conference was over he was taken to jail and has not been permitted to talk to reporters.

But the damage was already done. In his three-hour press conference Arguedas had supplied ample ammunition for a sweeping indictment of the Bolivian regime and the American CIA. In every level of government, said Arguedas, the CIA had men, himself among them, willing to do its bidding. And Bolivia is not the only country in South America where the CIA is perhaps more of a force than the local citizenry. Arguedas has arranged for RAMPARTS to receive a document dealing with his work for the CIA. This document is to be made public should any unexpected "accident" happen to Arguedas during his stay in prison.

We reprint excerpts of Arguedas' La Paz press conference from the July 18 issue of Presencia.

I WILL ATTEMPT TO MAKE as short a summary as possible of my relations with the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. In 1964, after an uprising of the military—the people had overthrown the MNR [National Revolutionary Movement] regime—I was named undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior. Sixty days after my appointment, Colonel Edward Fox, of the U.S. Air Force, let me know that if I remained in the Ministry of the Interior, the U.S. would suspend economic assistance to Bolivia and would bring drastic sanctions and pressures to bear against the

government. To prevent this, I resigned my post. About 20 days later, I made contact once again with Colonel Fox, who told me that my case might yet work out and that I ought to talk things over with an American diplomat. He introduced me to Mr. Larry Sterfield, who at that time was with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in this country. Mr. Sterfield proposed that I undergo questioning outside of the country, to explain whether I had been a communist militant and whether the Communist Party had infiltrated me into the government.

Half out of opportunism and half out of curiosity, I accepted

Mr. Sterfield's offer. They gave me, I believe, \$90 or \$60 for a trip to Lima, Peru, and gave me an address on the Avenida Pierola. I presented myself there, escorted by the agent Nicholas Lendiris who at that time was a public safety advisor in Bolivia. When we arrived I was met by two American citizens. They received me cordially and the first phase of my interrogation began with interviews. They asked me who my friends had been, with whom I had links, what my ties were with the Bolivian Communist Party, what left-wing leaders I knew, and at what times I had talked with them.

On the second day, they questioned me on my personal history. They bombarded me with a mass of questions, my relations with all my friends and so on. . . .

On the third day I underwent electronic interrogation. They fastened electrodes to my hands, my chest and my head. Then I had to answer the questions so they could see if I was telling the truth. For example, they asked me: "Is it true that you were never a member of the Communist Party?" And I answered the truth: "I was a Marxist, and I admit that I have been acquainted with Sr. Monje, Sr. Kolle, Sr. Otero, etc., but I was never a member of the Bolivian Communist Party. I was, shall we say, a paper Marxist, very personal. I never went so far as to be a part of the group, although during my days at the university I helped the Party; this cannot be denied, I did aid the Communist Party."

On the last day of the interrogation, the fourth day, they offered me a Coca-Cola, and we began to talk about the streets in Lima, about the girls, and about a series of this kind of thing which friends talk about with one another. And then I began to feel very, very drowsy. When I woke up again it was about 7:30 at night, and the interrogation was over. I had no idea of anything I might have said. I think I must have been talking under the influence of some drug.

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When Sr. Lendiris told me that the CIA had verified that everything I said was true, I then said to him, "Okay, let's go, let's see what we have to do." I went into the Interior Ministry where I had been undersecretary. Then I was informed that I was to be made minister of the Interior. They said to me, all right brother, we're not going to keep an eye on you. Now you are a part of the Agency.

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The President of the Republic had no idea of my relations with the CIA. I have to be sincere and I have no reason to slander anyone. He didn't know. He believed that I had simply made friends with certain Americans at cocktail parties, at receptions and in the course of my work. He did not know that I had gotten myself, shall we say, into the position of being manipulated by a foreign intelligence service.

I then went to Washington, at the invitation of the American government. Before the trip I was sent \$6500. I was lodged in the Hotel Plaza, and I did not have to undergo any interrogation. I was treated with all courtesies. An interview was arranged for me with an American official who gave me a résumé, information about each of the Latin American governments. And then I had an interview with an expert on Cuban affairs. This man told me about all the difficulties and all the errors of the Cuban revolution, and about all the sordid international plots which were being hatched against this revolution.

I returned home and was named minister of the Interior.

Once I was minister, I talked to the Americans who had promised to cooperate with me in all matters. For example, they had made an agreement to help me construct a public jail which cost \$300,000. But there was no aid forthcoming.

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The friction with the Americans continued. But another basis of disagreement arose as well. The Bolivian Mining Corporation had filed a claim against the American firm, Lipez Mining. The CIA pressured me to exert influence on the Ministry of Justice to gain a settlement favorable to Lipez Mining. They told me that we had to guarantee private initiative, but I received instructions from the government telling me that in this case we had to be very scrupulous. And given the case I could do nothing else. I told the authorities that they had to be as scrupulous as possible because if there was any error in favor of Lipez Mining, I would go to the supreme court of the nation and accuse them of lying. As it turned out the case went according to the law. This exasperated the Americans; they thought that I was gradually escaping from their control.

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The 13th of June was my birthday, and the head of the CIA, Mr. Thomas, called me up and told me that I should come to his house to celebrate with him. I was indignant. After all, I was a government minister. Why should I go to the house of the head of the CIA? I was irritated with the way I was being treated and I didn't go. But on the 14th, Murray [Hugh Murray, connected with the AID office in La Paz] came up to me and told me that Thomas was upset that I hadn't come: "He said that you weren't there to celebrate with him and that he has a message for you which has come from the U.S. You have to go to see him."

Since I didn't want to make my relations with the Americans any worse than they were, I made the appointment with the head of the CIA at 7 Calle de Obrajes. He said to me, "How are you, Antonio? It is very nice to see you. I have a message here for you." He handed me a box which I looked at for a moment; then I took it and we chatted for a while. I drank a cup of coffee, and then went back to my office. When I arrived at the Ministry, I was curious and opened the package. It was a pistol with a gun belt and a clip without ammunition. I opened the other package and there was a photo of Commander Fidel Castro, a photo of Che Guevara, and a photo of Raul Castro receiving ammunition from another guerrilla. Immediately I thought that what they were trying to do was blackmail me. The CIA was telling me that if I didn't act unconditionally at its bidding, I would be denounced as a Castroite.

In one of the drawers of my desk I had the negatives of the diary of Che Guevara. To put it briefly, I lost my head. I grabbed a sheet of paper; I dashed off a note to Castro, put the negatives in an envelope and sent them to Havana. My luck had run out and there wasn't anything else for me to do at this point. I didn't tell Castro I was an agent or anything else. I told him that I was a friend of the Cuban revolution and I was sending the diary of Commander Guevara, and that he could publish it when he wanted to and that I didn't want any economic recompense. These were the facts of the matter.