

# **From Saboteurs to Communists: University Student Movement and Police Repression in Guatemala**

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## **Abstract**

### **From Saboteurs to Communists: University Student Movement and Police Repression in Guatemala**

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This thesis is about the Guatemalan university student movement and its interactions with the National Police from 1952 to 1956. In order to better understand this relationship, the thesis also analyses the transformations, fragmentation, contradictions and relations of solidarity among the university students. The dates encompass the last years of the revolutionary period (1944-1954) and first years of the counterrevolution (1954-1957). Relations between the student movement and the police in each political period are different and of key significance because the contrast set the course for the three decades of violence and armed conflict that would follow (1960-1996). Analysis of the actions of the student movement and the responses of the National Police during the revolution, provides a better understanding whether the police as a State institution abided by the democratic ideals professed by the revolutionary leaders. During the counterrevolution, the anticommunist ideology of the country's leaders transformed the structure and rhetoric of the National Police to make them compatible, which in turn guided police response to the opposition, epitomized by the student movement. These responses marked the beginning of the use of institutionalized violence of the State against its citizens.

The thesis is based on a vast array of primary sources including, newspaper articles of the time, personal interviews with some of the protagonists, and internal university documents and bulletins. But what allowed this thesis to provide original insight about the police, was the access

granted to the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional, accidentally discovered four years ago in Guatemala City, and at the time of my research, closed to the public. The archives are believed to be one of the most complete police archives in all of Latin America, since they encompass more than a century (1882-1996) and it is estimated they contain about 80 million pages of documents. There is currently very little work on the history of the Guatemalan National Police, and when it comes to its structure and operational methods the information is almost inexistent. This thesis is only the beginning of what hopefully can be a long-lasting relationship between researchers and the archive in order to publicize the history of the institution to the people of Guatemala.

## Acknowledgements

In my family and my K'iche' culture is common knowledge that every project accomplished is the result of a community of people providing support in many visible and invisible ways. There are more people than I can fit in this page who helped me along the process of completing this thesis, but a few deserve especial attention. I am grateful to Dr. Virginia Burnett, for her encouragement, support and ideas since the first day I walked into her office asking her to be my main adviser. I also thank Dr. Charles Hale for his constant support and meticulous critique, forcing me to sharpen my analysis, think more critically, and ask more questions. In Guatemala, Dr. Irma Velásquez was kind enough to read this manuscript in its entirety more than once; her constant encouragement and comments were extremely helpful.

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Finally, I want to thank my two families, the Guatemalan one and the Austinite one for always believing and supporting me in whatever way they could. The Smith-Hales, *con quienes estoy pegada con chicle*, welcomed me into their family with open arms; they not only gave me a home but also their love and trust. Charlie, Melissa, Amalia, Sofia and Sandy, thank you and I love you. My grandparents have also been a constant source of support, especially my grandmother who despite her hesitation, and disagreement of having her granddaughter living alone in another country, so far from the 'watchful eyes' of her own community, and studying *who knows what*, would always pull me aside before departing and give me her blessing. She also agreed to take care of all my cats that have been with me for half my life. Lastly I am especially grateful to my mother whom I adore and whose support has allowed me to be where I am today, she is my best critic but also my best friend. The journey we began as mother and daughter ten years ago has shaped my path and helped me become the person I am today. Her example and her love are the most valuable things I have in my life.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AEU	Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios
El Derecho	Asociación de Estudiantes de Derecho
CEUA	Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas
CEUAGE	Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas Guatemaltecos en el Exilio
MDN	Movimiento Democrático Nacional
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional
PGT	Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: The Importance of the Historical Period

*Cualquier forma de aplicación de la ley no sólo está determinada por el conocimiento que se tenga del derecho, sino por el grado de sensibilidad humana y social que priven en el ánimo del juzgador.*

-Carlos Guzmán Böckler<sup>1</sup>

“Everyone sees things from their own point of view,” an anticommunist student leader told me when he described the benefits of a militarized police in the counterrevolutionary and Jorge Ubico era.<sup>2</sup> There was order and there was peace, he stressed. While trying to piece this project together, I found this phrase to be very useful in describing the different political and public positioning university students took in regards to the National Police during two very different political regimes in Guatemala during the 1950’s. While for the conservative anticommunist student group the police during the revolutionary government was corrupt and repressive, for students belonging to other university associations, the police was a respectful institution. The coup of 1954 and subsequent counterrevolution would completely change this equation. With the new conservative and military government, the same anticommunist students portrayed the police as a well-organized and efficient force while students in associations more politically

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<sup>1</sup> “Any form of law enforcement only is not only determined by the knowledge of the law, but by the degree of social and human sensibility in the spirit of the one who judges.” Carlos Guzmán Böckler is a Guatemalan lawyer and sociologist.

<sup>2</sup> His exact phrasing was a popular Spanish saying: “Cada quien habla de la feria como le va en ella”. Jorge Ubico was president of Guatemala from 1931 to 1944. He was a liberal ruler one of a series of depression dictators that ruled through Latin America during the years coinciding with the Great Depression. He instituted vagrancy laws to force landless peasants mainly indigenous to work for landowners for free. The police played an important role during his rule by making sure his laws were enacted. Ubico’s Secret Police was also well known for brutally repressing all opposition.



involved saw a transformed institution, repressive in its legal nature and under the command of an anticommunist driven state focused on ridding all opposition from the country.

This thesis examines two specific events of student participation and protest and the responses to both by the Guatemalan National Police. These events help provide a better understanding of the internal and legal changes of the Police, and also of the student movement as well. The confrontations occurred in two different political regimes: the Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán's presidency from 1951 to 1954, encompassing the second half of the ten-year revolutionary government of Guatemala, and the presidency of Carlos Castillo Armas, the leader of the counterrevolution and president from 1954 to 1957.<sup>3</sup> The first event analyzed took place in June of 1952, when newspaper headlines alerted the population of sabotage tactics affecting electric plants in the outskirts of Guatemala City. The "*Atentados Dinamiteros*", as the bombings became known, were carried out by an anticommunist group of students who strongly opposed the Arbenz government and considered it a communist regime. The group attempted to use the bombing as a destabilizing tactic to spark a nation wide revolt to oust the government. While their plan was unsuccessful, some of their members were arrested and the students later made claims of undergoing torture while in police custody. The allegations of torture placed pressure on the security forces and on the democratic government itself. The sabotage acts, moreover, prompted solidarity between the university student associations who disapproved of any cruel and unlawful methods of punishment.<sup>4</sup> Many students associations publicly supported the anticommunist students even though most did not agree with their ideology.

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<sup>3</sup> The ten-year period from 1944 to 1954 is considered the Guatemalan Revolution. The first president of the revolutionary era was Juan José Arévalo, who was also the first democratically elected president of Guatemala. The second president was Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán who took power in 1951 and whose term planned to end in 1956 was cut short a Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, inspired 1954 coup.

These students associations criticized the government and the National Police for the alleged use of non-democratic tactics to deal with the opposition. However, in order to understand police actions, it is necessary to analyze its transformation during the revolution. In “democratic nations police forces are the state institutions that carry the prime responsibility for law enforcement and the use of force to re-establish social order.” For the most part, democratic regimes modify the “legal frameworks, selection criteria, [...] accountability mechanisms” of institutions like the police in order to address past violation from authoritarian regimes.<sup>5</sup> This was not the case in Guatemala, while selection criteria and emphasis on behavior of the new police force did take place, a change in the legal framework of the institution did not. The revolutionary governments never transformed the *Ley orgánica* of the National Police.<sup>6</sup> The government made various legislative structural changes in other State institutions but not in the police, a force that had gained a reputation in the past dictatorship of Jorge Ubico for its repressive conduct. The documents from the Police Archives analyzed, show that the emphasis of the government at the time was on reform of the police force ethos, not its institutional form and rules. The revolutionary authorities placed emphasis on the attitudes and behaviors police officers were expected to have, their duty was to serve and expand the revolution and make it a source of pride.

Excessive use of force attributed to both revolutionary presidents is important to study because “the repressive acts attributed to the October Revolution, especially to the Arbenz

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<sup>4</sup> The university had many student associations as the time since each faculty had its own and then the AEU was the umbrella organization that encompassed students from all faculties and was the official public voice of university students.

<sup>5</sup> Quirine A. M. Eijkman, *We Are Here to Serve You!: Police Security, Police Reform and Human Rights Implementation in Costa Rica* (Intersentia, 2007), 18.

<sup>6</sup> The Ley Orgánica is the Organic Law that governs and lists the statutes of the Guatemalan National Police. The one in effect when the revolution took power was the one instituted in 1940 by Jorge Ubico.

administration constitute one of the many black holes of our contemporary history.”<sup>7</sup> Thus learning and understanding these black holes is necessary to better comprehend the period of the revolution and see it in a more balanced way, without romanticizing or demonizing it by exaggerating the violent responses against opposition. It is also important to understand the climate from which the accusations of abuses surfaced. They were born out of an ideological and political conflict in part fed by the propaganda of the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, the ultraconservative beliefs of a Catholic Church with an anticommunist agenda, and the landed elites who felt their position in the country threatened by the various social reforms implemented. These powers managed to lure onto their side the middle classes, some conservative, and some simply misinformed of what the reforms meant for them.

Whereas the revolutionary government failed to enact structural legal changes for the National Police, the counterrevolutionary junta did not. The counterrevolutionary government was quick to make legal reforms to place the police at the executive’s disposition and organize it into a communist fighting machine, not only targeting members of the communist party, Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, PGT, but also using the term to encompass all opposition. The second incident analyzed in this thesis took place in this new political climate. In 1956, a student march took place to peacefully protest the violent and illegal actions incurred by security forces during the commemoration of the death of a martyr of the 1944 revolution. The government ordered the National Police to open fire against the students and cancelled all constitutional guarantees with the pretext that a communist insurrection was underway. The response chosen by the government clearly demonstrated that the Cold War’s principle of fighting communism would dictate the path of future responses that the Guatemalan State would take toward the opposition. The way in

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<sup>7</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *La esperanza rota: La revolución Guatemalteca y los Estados Unidos, 1944-1954* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 2005).

which the government directed and used the security forces as its new tool to fight the communist threat marked a beginning of institutionalized violence in the country.

After analyzing both periods and the events in each, I propose that despite a brief democratic period a true change of actions from the police forces was hard to achieve especially without the proper structural changes to its legislation. A change in the laws of the police was necessary because then “the law, rather than political power, provides the framework for policing, [...] by being accountable to the law rather than the government [...] the police supports democratic development within modern society.”<sup>8</sup> While the revolutionary government did its best to create and present a reformed and democratic institution, its attempt was only focused in reforming police ideology to make it compatible with the new democratic era. The attempt to reform the police was tarnished by accusations of torture and human right violations. The possible validity of the accusations was made stronger by the same fact that the government had not given the police a new law that would legitimize the institution in the public eye. Changing police conduct and instituting new democratic ideals is complex but the creation of new “institutional frameworks, encourages the actual social change.”<sup>9</sup> The counterrevolutionary government did understand the need to combine the structural and ideological change to achieve a complete transformation and to better control the Police. The government structured the Police Code in a way that law and ideology were compatible and worked together to fight the opposition by turning the police into a tool of the state.

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<sup>8</sup> Eijkman, *We Are Here to Serve You!* 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid,16.

## Historical Background

To understand the events presented in this thesis, it is necessary to know more about the political context in which they developed. The 1929 the stock market crash of the United States followed by the Great Depression meant a transformation for the governments in many Latin American countries, whose economies were dependant on U.S. investment and trade. In most countries the solution to their economic and political crisis meant an emergence of dictators with authoritarian policies aimed to assist the upper classes and foreign industries. In Guatemala such dictator was General Jorge Ubico, who was in power from 1931 to 1944, ruling with an iron fist. After a 14-year dictatorship, all sectors of society demanded Ubico's resignation. On October 20, 1944 students alongside teachers and workers joined a group of young military officers to oust all remnants of Ubico's regime. A junta of two young officers, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and Major Francisco Javier Arana, and one civilian, Jorge Toriello, took power but quickly held general elections. In March 1945, Juan José Arévalo became the first democratically elected president of Guatemala. During his presidency, Arévalo created a Social Security system and also passed the Labor Law of 1947, which set a minimum wage and legalized rural labor unions, and it also forbade wage discrimination on the basis of race and gender.<sup>10</sup>

Colonel Jacobo Arbenz became the second president of this democratic period by receiving 65 percent of the votes in the 1950 election. A major achievement of his term was the implementation of an agrarian reform in 1952, through Decree 900. The reform allowed for the expropriation of uncultivated lands to be given to landless peasants so to empower them and involve them in the capitalist system as owners and producers. In two years hundreds of

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<sup>10</sup> Cindy Forster, *The Time Of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala's October Revolution*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

thousands of peasants across Guatemala mobilized to claim land.<sup>11</sup> These reforms, created major instability in the country on the part of the middle class, the elite, the church, certain sectors of the military and American interests represented by the United Fruit Company, UFCO, all who saw their possessions and status threatened. The October revolution of 1944 survived ten years, the “ten years of spring” as they have become known. In 1954 Jacobo Arbenz was forced to resign by the CIA-funded opposition coalition of middle classes, army officers and elites.<sup>12</sup>

After Arbenz resigned, Colonel Castillo Armas took power. Castillo Armas was a military officer exiled in Honduras where he along with other opposition groups received support from the CIA to launch an invasion and overthrow the government. He retracted most of the reforms of the revolutionary period, returned confiscated lands to elites and the UFCO. He also began a period of repression against all of Arbenz’s supporters in both the countryside as well as in the urban areas of Guatemala City. Castillo and his successors would be the first of many other military leaders whom until 1985, through a series of fraudulent elections and coup d’états, would ascend to power and launch attacks against perceived communists.

Moreover, while the two events I focus on are very specific it is necessary to also understand the historical role of the two main actors of this thesis, the university students organized in different associations and the National Police. It is especially important to understand their transformations after the 1944 revolution, since it marked the end of a dictatorship and the beginning of a democratic regime. For the most part student movements have played very important roles in societies, especially in Latin America. Student movements tend to “constitute

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

something of a ‘conscience’ for their societies, as they often embody the concerns of broader segments of the population who are unable to voice their discontent.”<sup>13</sup>

During the time period I focused on, Guatemala had only one university, the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala established in 1676.<sup>14</sup> Within its walls, on May 22, 1920, a group of students from the different colleges of the university established the Association of University Students, AEU.<sup>15</sup> Its task was not only to be involved with university activities, but also to take a participatory role in the country’s politics. The founders of the AEU, aimed at forming university students that would maintain “a critical attitude towards government authorities.”<sup>16</sup> But under Ubico’s dictatorship due to his emphasis on order and obedience, the AEU was abolished. Yet, despite the prohibitions, in 1943, World War II’s rhetoric of freedom and justice as well as growing internal discontent triggered students to restore the past student associations like the AEU and El Derecho, the association of the law school.<sup>17</sup> The student leaders began to challenge the internal politics of the university by asking for new deans, the return of autonomy, technical schools for workers and the creation of a humanities program. As their demands increased,

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<sup>13</sup> Philip G. Altbach, “Student Politics in the Third World,” *Higher Education* 13, no. 6 (December 1984): 635-655:637.

<sup>14</sup> The University of San Carlos Guatemala, USAC, was established in 1676, one of the first universities of the new world. It mostly served as a theological college until the liberal period of the 1800’s, when it underwent several changes that included liberal ideals. The university was secularized and given relative autonomy from the state. As the university grew, so did the organizational structure of the student body, and each college developed their own academic student organizations.

<sup>15</sup> Horacio Cabezas, “AEU 1” (Unpublished Manuscript).

<sup>16</sup> Virgilio Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras: universidad y movimiento estudiantil en Guatemala* (Guatemala: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 2002), 162.

<sup>17</sup> Historically, the faculties and associations of Law and Medicine have been the most political in the University of San Carlos. This does not mean that other faculties did not participate or were not political, they were, but to a lesser scale. At the time all students enrolled in the university automatically became part of the AEU. However the Asociación el Derecho, the student association that represented the law faculty distinguished itself for its political role and because of it many considered it more important than the AEU, which tended to present a more moderate view since it encompassed all faculties. The influence of these university student associations was so important that newspapers at the time followed as important news the associations’ internal elections.

students began to shape a more democratic and open institution willing to stand up to the dictatorship turning their academic demands into political ones. As a response to the students' disregard for his laws, Ubico eliminated constitutional guarantees and citizen rights. However this only led to student strikes that were rapidly joined by other dissatisfied sectors of society who finally ousted him in 1944.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the university students' discontentment was due to academic stagnation in the university, a result from the policies of the dictatorship. Ubico imposed quotas on enrollment, and instituted tuition payment requirements, given that it was a public university, in prior years students did not have to pay tuition. These rules limited the number as well as social status of people who attended the university during those years. As a result, in 1944 the year the revolution overthrew Ubico's regime, only 705 students were registered and out of all only 30 were women.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, since the university reforms of Córdoba Argentina in 1918, a movement spread throughout Latin American universities demanding university autonomy.<sup>20</sup> Students deemed autonomy as necessary to achieve a truly open and challenging academic center. In Guatemala, until 1944, the executive chose all deans, directors and even faculty of the university. Career options after graduation were also very limited and that had created friction

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<sup>18</sup> Gleijeses, *Esperanza rota*; Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*; Augusto Cazali Ávila, "25 Años de autonomía universitaria," *Revista Alero*, February 1971; Manuel Galich, *Del pánico al ataque*, 2nd ed. (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Augusto Cazali Ávila, *Historia de la universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, época republicana (1821-1994)* (Guatemala, Centroamérica: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1997), 257, 260, 262. In 1932 the Secretary of Education in his report to the executive stated that the university was being led into a good direction, one of the causes being the establishment of quotas, which put an end to the "threatening professionalization of the proletariat." Starting in 1938, as part of the quota system, each faculty could only enroll 50 new students.

<sup>20</sup> A part of the basis for the long struggle for university autonomy were the Córdoba reforms originated in Argentina which provided the basis for the demand of university autonomy throughout Latin American Universities.



within the student body. It had become more difficult for young professionals to get jobs, which at the same time affected their possibilities for a stable income.<sup>21</sup>

The growing number of repressive and failed economic measures facilitated the coalescence of various social groups, who opposed the dictatorship. Some elites also joined in the growing movement, especially those who wanted a change in economic policy specifically a move towards industrialization, as other Latin American countries had done. This change in economic policy was something that Ubico with his *finquero* mentality would not allow because “Ubico and his associates aged while the world rejuvenated.”<sup>22</sup>

On June 24<sup>th</sup> 1944, a group of citizens including students drafted what has become known as the *Memorial de los 311*, a document sent to Ubico where the population requested the reestablishment of constitutional guarantees. Since the demands were not met, the students called for a general strike and led several marches demanding the resignation of Ubico. On June 25<sup>th</sup> protests continued, the security forces violently attempted to repress a women’s demonstration and killed teacher Maria Chinchilla, who would become an icon of the struggle for freedom.<sup>23</sup> As a result of the social pressures and without support from the American government, Ubico resigned on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1944. Guatemala City served as the stage for the events, and this was the first and last time that all social classes, who were discontented in one way or another, would unite and fight together.

After Ubico’s resignation, power was transferred to a military triumvirate in which Federico Ponce Vaides surfaced as the principal leader. However, a desire for change had

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<sup>21</sup> Carlos Guzmán Böckler, “Para recordar el 20 de octubre de 1944: una reflexión previa y necesaria” (Al Grano), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 8 Finquero refers to a landowner.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Chinchilla was a teacher who participated in women and teachers’ demonstration on the afternoon of the 25th. When the police was sent to disperse the march, they fired against the people congregated. Maria Chinchilla was killed with a gunshot to the face.

sparked within Guatemalan society, soon alliances formed between civilians and a section of the military with young people serving as a common denominator between both sectors. In October 20<sup>th</sup> 1944 a group of university students and junior military officers initiated a rebellion in the Guardia de Honor brigade and a tripartite junta made up of civilian Jorge Toriello, Major Francisco Javier Arana and Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán took power.<sup>24</sup> The National Police was disbanded and university students as well as Boy Scouts took charge of maintaining order in the city until a new police force could be recruited. General elections were called for and a multi-sector coalition, comprised of students and teachers, united under the banner of the *Frente Popular Libertador* party, supported the candidacy of Juan José Arévalo. Arévalo won the presidency with 86 percent of the votes and his term that began in 1945 marked the beginning of the ten-year democratic opening in the country. A new constitution was drafted that same year and for the first time the youth took control of the political power. Arévalo was 40 years old, his cabinet was comprised of young individuals, and the average age of the congressmen and representatives was 26.<sup>25</sup> Many were still university students, and even while they worked in the Guatemalan congress, they continued attending classes.<sup>26</sup> This group of young people took on the most important task of setting off and transforming into actions the ideals drafted in their new constitution. As one of the first reforms the University of San Carlos was granted autonomy and provided with economic independence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gleijeses, *Esperanza rota*.

<sup>25</sup> Carlos Guzmán Böckler, “Respuesta para la Revista Encontrarte,” March 21, 2006. Jacobo Arbenz was 37 years old when he took power as Arévalo’s successor.

<sup>26</sup> Carlos Guzmán Böckler, “Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler,” Oral Interview, August 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Alvarez A., *Conventos, Aulas Y Trincheras*. The revolutionary government allocated two percent of the national budget to the University.

This period is extremely important because it was one of the few, if not the only time, when social groups united around a common objective regardless of class or gender. However unity did not last long and its dissolution in the following years prompted the end of the ‘ten years of spring’, when the figure of a common enemy had vanished and political, ideological and personal interests once again took priority. The revolutionary government enacted reforms in the areas of education, health, labor and land tenure. These reforms gave rise to an oppositional force of the conservative sectors who felt threatened by the power that such reforms were giving the marginal sector of the population, mainly indigenous, to participate and gain a more powerful role in the country.<sup>28</sup> The Arévalo and Arbenz governments were not communist, but rather “ a serious effort to return people’s dignity by recognizing it.”<sup>29</sup> It was an attempt at democracy that scared the dominant elites and the United States. Elites were afraid of losing power and status in the political and economic spheres of the country, and the United States was afraid of communism.<sup>30</sup> These sectors could not handle a different viewpoint from their own and were quick to perform their role as opposition. The government allowed these groups to air their disagreements because to do otherwise would have been undemocratic. The university also became fragmented with the Committee of Anticommunist University Students, CEUA, at

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<sup>28</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Guzmán Böckler, “Para recordar el 20 de octubre de 1944: una reflexión previa y necesaria.”

<sup>30</sup> Stephen C Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, 2nd ed., David Rockefeller Center series on Latin American studies, Harvard University 4 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2005), 38-42. At the time the new democratic government took power, two percent of the landowners owned 75 percent of the land. 90 percent of the total population only owned 15 percent of productive land. The country also had a 75 percent illiteracy rate, and life expectancy was only 50 years for non indigenous and 40 years for the indigenous population. To combat such inequalities the government instituted a social security bill, labor code, emphasis on education and land reform.

certain points gaining the leadership of the official social and political bodies of the university, the AEU and the Huelga de Dolores, and used them to attack the government.<sup>31</sup>

After ten years of a democratically elected government, with the help of a U.S. intervention, the opposition in exile as well as the opposition in the country conformed by the Catholic Church, landowners, and a large section of the middle classes, were able to consolidate and overthrow president Arbenz.<sup>32</sup> The 1954 coup marked a watershed in the politics of the country and gave way to the period known as the counterrevolution. During this period many of the reforms of the revolutionary government were reversed. After taking power in a new Cold War climate, the counterrevolutionary government was not so lenient or perhaps so naïve with its opposition as the previous government had been. The government instituted a new Ley Orgánica for National Police and placed it under the jurisdiction of a newly created Committee of Security, whose official job was to combat communism but expanded its aim to all government opposition. This change was important because the revolutionary government had placed emphasis not on new legislation for the police but on its ethos. As part of the structural counterrevolutionary change, prominent figures from the Ubico dictatorship returned to their posts in the police. Bernabé Linares, the director of Ubico's secret police, returned to head the same section of the police under the new government.

The counterrevolutionary government prided itself in being a democratic movement that overthrew a "communist" regime, however, they began deeming all opposition as communists,

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<sup>31</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*; José Barnoya García, *La Huelga de Dolores* (Guatemala: Ediciones Calabaza, 1979). The Huelga de Dolores is a student tradition dating back to 1898 started by the law and medicine students as a way to air their discontent with government authorities. It consists of a series of events previous to Holy Week that parody various actors of society like the government and the Catholic Church. As part of the activities, the students read various bulletins making fun and complaining of the particular situation the country at the time. They also participate in an evening performance during which they present songs and sketches of social issues. Their event culminates with a parade, the *Desfile Bufo*, where the students march, singing, dancing and parodying the government, the church, and various other social actors.

<sup>32</sup> Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit*; Gleijeses, *Esperanza rota*.

which legally allowed them to repress it. The university associations and students, minus the anticommunist groups, would soon experience direct government ordered repression for the first time in ten years. The government began to stress in discourse that the enemy was internal and external and they would not stop until all communism was eliminated. This gave way to a discourse and practice of institutionalized violence, which would come to mark the basis for the following decades in which Guatemala succumbed to 36 years of civil war, a conflict so brutal that although it ended in 1996, its horrific consequences still affect the everyday lives of most Guatemalans.

### **The Sources Used**

The information related to the University of San Carlos of Guatemala was found in the archives located in the Benson Library under the Taracena Flores Collection, which contains an immense amount of information of both the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary periods. In Guatemala I visited the Centro de Investigación Regional de Mesoamerica, CIRMA, where the Taracena Arriola Collection is located. This collection is in part complementary to the one in the Benson Library and also holds information on the student movement during the 1950's. Located in the first floor of the main library of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, USAC, the archive of the Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios, AEU, was also extremely helpful. The documents about the association include correspondence, bulletins, *comunicados*, and transcripts of student sessions. While not complete and not in the best shape due to innumerable police searches that the university underwent during the war, the archive nonetheless contains valuable information.

Close to 90 percent of the media sources analyzed during the historical period are from the newspaper El Imparcial. Due to time constraints I decided to analyze the media response to these events only through this news source but it is also the most thorough and complete of all since it was established in 1922 and stopped circulating in 1985. Therefore I acknowledge that the viewpoint of the media I present only comes from this newspaper and does not take into consideration other newspapers that also circulated at the time like Prensa Libre, Nuestro Diario, and La Hora. Yet many of the citations used from the newspaper come directly from bulletins of various sectors, groups and the government published at times in their entirety. There lies the importance of this source, since at this point it would be extremely difficult to find original statements and manifestos of various groups of the time, it is easier to find them published in the paper.

And most importantly, the Guatemalan National Police Archives provided valuable information regarding the National Police. The Police as an institution was established in 1882 but interest in the force arose after 1996 when two Truth Commissions, one headed by the Catholic Church and the other by the United Nations, were established to document the human rights violations that took place during the armed conflict. The commissions asked the security forces, the army and the police, for any information they had regarding their institutions to incorporate it into their reports. Both institutions denied having archives and refused to cooperate. No one knew of the existence of records of the National Police until their accidental discovery in 2005, by a group of Human Rights officials looking for explosives in an old Police warehouse in Guatemala City. The Archive contains information on the police since its creation until 1996 when as part of the Peace Accords the institution was restructured. The Police has

been an extremely secretive institution, thus the discovery of these records mark the possibility of learning more about it and writing about its history.

The Police Archive is barely in the beginning stages of organization and digitalization, since it is estimated that it contains about 80 million documents, many in state of decay. At the time of my research, the archives were closed to researchers, but I was allowed access to the digitalized information corresponding to my dates of interest.<sup>33</sup> The information available allowed me insight into the interactions of the police, its agents and superiors as well as the relationship with the citizens of Guatemala. The Memoria de Labores, logbooks detailing the Police's yearly activities by day, were especially helpful in revealing the mentality of the police in the eras of the revolution and counterrevolution. The language and data presented in these logbooks signaled a clear change in the police in terms of its rhetoric during the period of the revolution, although I am still not sure to what extent the changes applied to its practice. Legislative changes during the counterrevolution also make themselves present in the pages of these logbooks. The Libros de Detenciones also provided information on the reason for citizen's arrests as well as the number of arrests made throughout the year. Also helpful were the Fichas de Identificación, which served as an index to the files of individuals, who were accused of criminal activities or were of interest to the police. The identification department was in charge of these documents and they help to demonstrate how the police closely monitored individuals and their lives.

Finally, I was fortunate to be given interviews by several of the participants and protagonists of my story. These men were not only university students but were also student

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<sup>33</sup> On March 2009, the Police Archives were open to the public (only information from 1975 to 1985) during an act that included the presentation of the first report regarding the archives. The day after the report was presented and the archives open, the wife of the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman was kidnapped and tortured. She was later released, but this shows how difficult it still is to make this kind of information public and how inquiring about institutions like the police, continues to be problematic and a source of danger in Guatemala.

leaders. They participated in one or several of the university associations discussed in my work, like the AEU, the Comité de Huelga de Dolores, the Asociación El Derecho, Frente Universitario Democrático, FUD, and the Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas, CEUA/CEUAGE. Roberto Diaz Castillo was a member of the FUD, and president of the AEU at the time of the coup against Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. Carlos Guzmán Böckler, through his college career served as president of El Derecho, was a member of the AEU and also of the Comité de Huelga de Dolores. José Barnoya descends from a long and strong tradition of *huelgueros* and was very much involved in the Comité de Huelga de Dolores during both the revolution and the first part of the counterrevolution. Leonel Sisniega Otero was one of the founders of the CEUA, which would later become Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas Guatemaltecos en el Exilio, CEUAGE, which stood as a block of student opposition against the revolutionary government internally and abroad. All four with their unique outlooks, ideologies and memories provided me with valuable information and not only allowed but prompted me look at the events in their historical context and not simply through the historical lens.



## Chapter 2

### Los “Atentados Dinamiteros” de 1952: Student Fragmentation, Solidarity and the Response of the Revolutionary Government

*Me parece una injusticia estar preso señor juez,  
Por tirarle una pedrada al presidente  
Se muy bien que en puntería nunca me he sacado un diez,  
Y el objetivo no era darle a ese teniente  
Me parece una injusticia estar preso señor juez,  
Y ni siquiera haberle dado a mi objetivo...*

- Ricardo Arjona, *Señor Juez*<sup>34</sup>

As the years passed after the events of 1944, the population no longer had the figure of a common enemy capable of uniting all the different sectors of society. As a result, the various groups dispersed, each in search of their own ideological, personal, political, social, or economic interests. Some of the right-wing groups turned to illegal actions to try to depose the government they perceived communist because of the social and economic reforms it was enacting. This was the case with a group of anticommunist students who in 1952 planned a series of sabotage attacks in an effort to destabilize the government and prompt an insurrection that would depose president Arbenz.

The group's actions were unsuccessful, and the National Police quickly acted and arrested some of its members. Some of the students detained, soon accused the police of torture. Therefore, this event provides a closer view of the interaction between the police as an institution of a democratic government, and the student movement, an important part of the society of the time. This chapter will also analyze the interactions and solidarity of university associations given the growing ideological differences among them. It will also focus on the role and

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<sup>34</sup> Ricardo Arjona, *Santo Pecado*, Audio CD (Sony International, 2002).

transformation of the National Police during the revolutionary government. The transformation of the police is important because, “how the police plays its changing role during democratization has an enormous influence on levels of social order, the rule of law, and corruption and helps determine the practical content of political rights.”<sup>35</sup> Thus structural changes along with an emphasis on behavior are vital in making the state bureaucratic apparatus “usable” to the new democratic government leaders and in allowing them “to exercise effectively [their] claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of force in the territory.”<sup>36</sup> However, by arguing that the revolutionary government placed greater emphasis on the rhetoric and attitudes of the newly formed police rather than on the legislation to reform it, I show that this lack of structural change allowed the opposition groups to manipulate the image of the police, associating it with the memory of repression of the Ubico dictatorship, something the revolution had sought to eliminate.

## **The Background**

The university and its associations exemplified the growing fragmentation in Guatemala. The newly acquired university autonomy of 1944 presented students with freedoms never before experienced. For the first time the student body was able to actively participate in the election of their student authorities and in the decision making process of their university. The definition of freedom for the students not only meant the possibility to rule their university for the first time, but also their ability to openly criticize the government without an innate fear of repression as had been the case during the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico. The spaces provided by the University

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<sup>35</sup> Murray Scot Tanner, “Review: Will the State Bring You Back In? Policing and Democratization,” *Comparative Politics* 33, no. 1 (October 2000): 101-124.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 102-103.

Student's Association, AEU, and the Huelga de Dolores, and the many other student organizations, allowed students to gather around a particular group or association while maintaining, protecting and developing their own political ideologies.

By the 1950's different factions were willing to pursue their own ideological interests for what they believed would be the best not only for the university but for the country as well. The emergence and influx of different ideals and opinions within the university was also largely influenced by the growth the student body during the revolutionary period. By 1954 the university had 3368 students compared to 1809 students in 1947 and the 611 in 1928.<sup>37</sup> The student growth can be attributed to various factors, one being Juan José Arévalo's emphasis on education, which led to the creation of new departments and university faculties as well as an increase in educational spending.<sup>38</sup> These educational reforms along with a recuperating economy, by 1947 coffee prices were the same as before the depression, allowed a larger section of the middle classes to send their children to college. Finally, the end of the restrictions and quotas that prevented access to education during the past dictatorship facilitated admission to the university.<sup>39</sup>

Gradually, university students began to fragment among conservative anticommunist students organized in the CEUA, and those who might not have fully supported the government but were more open minded toward the revolutionary regime, like the AEU, El Derecho and

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<sup>37</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*, 297.

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that while a lot of emphasis was placed on education, it still benefitted the urban areas rather than the rural ones. Illiteracy rates and lack of educational centers was such that the census of 1950 concluded that 89.2 percent of indigenous school age children did not attend school, and 90.3 percent of the indigenous population was illiterate. To counteract this situation in the 1945 constitution the government created the Comité Nacional de Alfabetización, by 1950 they had reached 82,278 people. At the same time the revolutionary period witnessed the greatest growth in educational spending in the history of the country. The budget for education in 1944 was Q.1, 330,000, by 1954 it had expanded to Q.10, 735,572.50

<sup>39</sup> Carlos González Orellana, *Historia de la educación en Guatemala*, Colección Historia nuestra v. no. 1 (Ciudad Universitaria, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1980).

other smaller student associations. While the death of Colonel Francisco Arana in 1949 was a blow to the conservative sector, destroying their hope of having him replace Arévalo in the next presidential election, it also served as a justification to direct greater anger at the revolutionary government, blaming it for his death and to exacerbate the division among the students.<sup>40</sup> The following year, the death of college student Edgar Lemcke on June 19, 1950, during a confrontation between anti and pro government supporters was also a source of conflict for students.<sup>41</sup> The anticommunists turned Lemcke's death into a symbol of their struggle against what they believed was an oppressive communist government that killed any opposition. While his death according to some was accidental and while accounts place Lemcke's ideology as center-left rather than right wing, to this day conservative sectors refer Lemcke as a martyr.<sup>42</sup>

In this power struggle of ideologies within the university, the Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas, CEUA, was by far the most conservative group and the most opposed to the government. Their statements, actions, and accusations against the government would not cease until 1954, when the government was overthrown. The group developed into a strong oppositional force while its members were in exile, by participating in the propaganda campaign against Arbenz and its government as well as by making contact with other

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<sup>40</sup> Francisco Javier Arana was one of the military officers who participated in the invasion of the Guardia de Honor on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1944. Arana served as the Chief of the Armed forces and was very sympathetic to the conservative sectors and to the United States. In 1949 president Arévalo learned that Arana was planning a coup against him and instructed officers to arrest him. However, during his arrest shots were fired and he was killed.

<sup>41</sup> Edgar Lemcke was a law student and was killed on July 20, 1950, during the first '*Minuto de Silencio*'. The *Minuto de Silencio*, or Minute of Silence was a practice started by Manuel Cobos Batres as a way to protest the government. Cobos Batres would stand in silence for one minute in downtown Guatemala with supporters, however that day, the anticommunists were met by a group of government supporters. Soon both groups began attacking each other, and among the commotion, Edgar Lemcke was stabbed. José Barnoya was present and recalled that before dying Lemcke yelled: "*viva Arévalo*", "long live Arévalo", prompting an anticommunist student to reply: "*Me alegra que te hayan rompido la trompa*," "I'm glad they fucked you up." Nonetheless, after his death the anticommunists paraded his coffin through downtown taking advantage of his death to attack the government.

<sup>42</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras.*, 255; "Entrevista José Barnoya," Interview by Maria Aguilar, Oral Interview, August 2008; "Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero," interview by Maria Aguilar, Oral Interview, December 2008.

disenchanted sectors including members of the military and eventually the CIA. However, the events that prompted the members of the CEUA to leave the country were the ‘*atentados dinamiteros*’ of 1952 and their aftermath. These events also provided the group with an opportunity not only to radicalize their view against the government but also to criticize it with the support from other sectors of society including other student associations, which might not have shared their conservative ideology but believed that violations against students or any individual called for the solidarity of the entire student body.

### **Los Atentados**

On Monday June 9<sup>th</sup> 1952, Guatemalan newspapers reported that on the night of Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup> and June 8<sup>th</sup>, two explosions occurred in an electric tower and transformer located in the outskirts of Guatemala City. The damage was minimal since many of the dynamite sticks did not explode, but within days the police had apprehended as suspects various members of the CEUA. Based on declarations from eyewitnesses, confessions of two of the alleged participants, and on explosives found in one of the suspect’s residence, the police pressed charges against the students for public disorder and for illegal possession of explosives.<sup>43</sup>

According to the confession of one of the detainees, the events were to be part of a network of attacks planned to destabilize and overthrow the government. After the incident, the Ministro de Gobernación, Minister of the Interior, Ricardo Chávez Nackmann presented the official police report containing the names of the suspects all of who belonged to the CEUA.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Atentados Dinamiteros al Alumbrado Eléctrico en la Ciudad: Uno el Sábado y Otro esta Mañana,” *El Imparcial*, June 9, 1952; “De Haber Culminado el Acto de Sabotaje,” *El Imparcial*, June 10, 1952; “Tres Estudiantes Anticomunistas Detenidos en Forma Ilegal,” *El Imparcial*, June 16, 1952; “Dinamita Incautada en un Chalet, Hoy,” *El Imparcial*, June 21, 1952.

<sup>44</sup> “Trama del Complot,” *El Imparcial*, July 2, 1952. The following are the names of the accused, however only the first five are actually arrested: Roberto Fernández Castellanos, Mario Quiñonez, Edgar Salvador Quiñonez,

Given that the accused were university students, the CEUA appealed to the AEU to help them pressure the government to release the students in custody. The CEUA accused the government of conducting unlawful arrests and house searches against its members. One week after the arrests, two of the detainees accused the police of torturing them to extract confessions. These accusations placed a stress on the government and security forces who were quickly pressured by the AEU and other students to not only release the students but at the same time to direct an investigation against the Ministro and the police forces for the accusation of torture.

### **The CEUA**

The Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas, CEUA, was a group formed by university students beginning in 1950 shortly after the death of Colonel Francisco Javier Arana. The group started to become disenchanted with some policies of the first revolutionary president, Juan José Arévalo, but their opposition to the government grew stronger when President Jacobo Arbenz began discussing the agrarian reform. This group of students perceived President Arbenz as a communist who wanted to turn Guatemala into a country dominated by Soviets.<sup>45</sup>

Leonel Sisniega Otero, the last remaining member of the CEUA, explained the formation of the committee.<sup>46</sup> Despite his initial support of Juan José Arévalo, he quickly felt that outsiders were “giving ‘meaning’ to the revolution, [and] their arguments clashed with our principles and

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Alejandro Castro, Luis Mendizábal, Mario López, Eduardo Taracena, Chato Lurze, Horacio Paredes, Lionel Sisniega Otero, Domingo Gloicolea.

<sup>45</sup> Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas (Guatemala), *El calvario de Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1955). Also, their opinions were stated in all of their public statements in which they accused the government of supporting and being infiltrated with communists.

<sup>46</sup> “Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero.”

values.”<sup>47</sup> After that, according to Sisniega Otero, he and others with similar ideals approached “the true author of the revolution,” Javier Arana, and asked him to be their leader. Sisniega Otero described how he felt excluded from the law student association, El Derecho, which he viewed as extreme leftists. Instead, in 1947 he joined with others to form the Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas to counteract the weight of the leftist university associations. Nonetheless, the group appeared to be unsure of what represented the left or what represented communism, they used “the left” and “communism” as umbrella terms to group all mindsets opposite to their own. The CEUA “was a right formed by a multitude of different attitudes, there was no program, no goal, no philosophy, simply everyone who was against the left was deemed right, so that is why we were of the right.”<sup>48</sup> What the CEUA wanted was to move all sectors of the population “up”, a very vague goal. According to them, the government “wanted equality for all, we wanted the harmony of all, they wanted to bring everybody down, we wanted to lift up those who were down.”<sup>49</sup> Clearly there was no specific goal nor did they provide alternatives when criticizing government reforms.

The committee’s first main public statement was published on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1952, in *El Imparcial*. In it, the CEUA delivered “an authentic declaration of war against the government.”<sup>50</sup> They protested the communist infiltration in the country, and listed several articles of the Constitution that they believed were being violated by having members of the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, the Guatemalan communist party, in government posts. They also

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Sisniega Otero made clear in his interview that he opposed the labor code and land reform, which he believed were communist programs aimed to attack the upper classes without bringing change to the lower classes.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Jesús García Añoberos, “El “caso Guatemala” (junio 1954): La universidad y el campesinado,” *Alero*, February 1978, 160.

argued that the government was not adhering to the Constitution, and therefore failing to do its job.<sup>51</sup> At the same time they called on the population to assemble and march on June 1<sup>st</sup> to repudiate the communist control in the government. Three days before the march, on May 29<sup>th</sup>, the CEUA issued another statement accusing the government of “distributing weapons to the working masses,” therefore due to a “lack of security for the Guatemalan people,” they were cancelling the march.<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning the committee’s members were university students, and slowly they began branching out to other non-students groups and reached other areas of society. The first step was the connection the group made with the women shopkeepers of the *Mercado Central*, the main market in Guatemala City, many of whom were originally from the surrounding towns of the capital. Their ties to rural areas allowed the group to connect with other people and begin branching out beyond the university.<sup>53</sup> While the group itself claimed to have a large following, others disagree and claim that within the university they were not very well received by the other student associations and groups. José Barnoya referred to them as the “*Choleros de Estados Unidos de America, CEUA*.”<sup>54</sup> He also said, “they were very few, one could count them with the fingers, they were all monkeys.”<sup>55</sup> Guzmán Böckler had stronger words to describe them,

If I say they were 20 I’m overestimating, [...] I’m even exceeding if I compare them to those here [Guatemala] who support the antichrist, no one paid any attention to them, they were the laughingstock of everybody, even in the Huelga we made fun of them because they would protest in the Sexta Avenida. Give me a Break! At six o’clock and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. They especially refer to article 32, which prohibited foreigners from participating in political parties.

<sup>52</sup> Directiva del Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas, “Pueblo de Guatemala,” May 29, 1952, Colección Taracena Arriola, CIRMA.

<sup>53</sup> “Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero.” *Choleros de Estados Unidos de America* would translate as Servants of the United States. *Cholero* is Spanish slang that refers to servant.

<sup>54</sup> “Entrevista Dr. José Barnoya.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



they wore a red ribbon, they were full of shit, we even composed them a song: with a red ribbon on their arm they go to the Sexta *monton de culecos*.<sup>56</sup>

At the time of the attempted bombing on June 1952, the CEUA denied the charges against them. Instead they accused the government of carrying out a repressive campaign to destroy the opposition. They also declared that they would resist arrest and that any violence resulting from their captures should be blamed on the security forces.<sup>57</sup> In 2008, Sisniega Otero discussed the Atentados Dinamiteros and accepted that they were part of a plan to destabilize the government, something that in 1952 he denied. He explained that cutting the electric power to the city would serve as a signal to military officers in Fort Matamoros to rebel and provide arms for the opposition to overthrow the government. He claimed not to have been present and that it was not until his return to the capital that he learned of the failed attempt.<sup>58</sup>

### **The University's Official Response**

The AEU as the official voice of the university decided to support the CEUA and issued statements asking for the fair and just treatment of the students arrested. At the same time in an official set of sessions, culminating in a general student assembly, the AEU along with the student body discussed strategies. They decided to intervene with the government not necessarily on the behalf of the CEUA, but on behalf of the detainees, who were university students. The official transcripts of the sessions illustrate the internal debate among the students regarding how to proceed with the detainees and with the government. An issue of concern among the members

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<sup>56</sup> "Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler." During the days surrounding the bombings, El Imparcial reported that the anticommunist students gathered in the Sexta Avenida to protest. Present were also the shopkeepers of the market as well as other various peoples who joined in, a march was organized but the people present decided to wait until the AEU released an official statement. However the CEUA convened to gather the rest of the days at six in the afternoon as a sign of protest.

<sup>57</sup> "Tres Estudiantes Anticomunistas Detenidos en Forma Ilegal."

<sup>58</sup> "Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero."

of the AEU was the fact that one of the detainees was not a university student. Some students began questioning whether it was their responsibility to also provide support to this person. However, the AEU concluded that abuses and illegalities committed against any individual whether or not he was a student damaged the constitutionality and democracy of the country, this reasoning also applied to the support the AEU provided the CEUA despite their ideological differences. Another resolution from the meetings was the economic support that the AEU decided to provide to the families of the detainees to help with food and jail bond expenses. At the same time the members of the AEU created an internal commission in charge of investigating the torture accusations.<sup>59</sup>

In the student assembly, were also present members of the CEUA, Leonel Sisniega Otero spoke in representation of the Committee, and accused the government of planning the bombings as a pretext to arrest members of the opposition. Jorge E. Rosal president of the AEU, quickly and clearly stressed that the AEU's participation related exclusively to the students and the university, and that they would not serve the sectarian, political or class interests of the CEUA.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the term "apolitical" is repeated throughout all the press statements release by student associations who presented their solidarity to the students arrested. This has to do in part with a type of protection that the university associations used against possible attacks or claims that their actions were biased or served political interests. However in this occasion, the term apolitical was mostly stressed because the rest of university association did not agree with the ideology or practices of the CEUA. At the end of the assembly, the AEU drafted a resolution

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<sup>59</sup> "Sesión Directiva de AEU," June 17, 1952, Correspondencia 52,55,57,60,62 Non.1 Tercera Transferencia, Archivo AEU. I was not able to find documents in the university archive regarding these commissions. The newspapers did not mention anything about their outcome. However, El Derecho also created its own commission and according to Guzmán Böckler they were not able to confirm the tortures.

<sup>60</sup> "4 Puntos Deciden Tras Largo Debatir," *El Imparcial*, June 19, 1952.

protesting illegal detentions, torture, and the violation of constitutional rights. At the same time they asked for the liberation of the detainees and called on the authorities to investigate the torture and hold someone accountable for such violations. As part of their resolution, the AEU decided to organize a peaceful march at the end of which, they would deliver a petition asking for the resignation of the Ministro de Gobernación Chávez Nackmann.<sup>61</sup>

### **Police and Government Response**

If successful, the sabotage acts of June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, would have represented substantial economic damage to the country. According to the electric company the destruction of the tower and transformer would have left Guatemala City and surrounding areas without electricity for at least 18 months.<sup>62</sup> Yet these actions also represented a blatant disregard for democratic institutions since their aim was to depose a government that had been democratically and freely elected. Nonetheless, the administration simply urged the population to remain calm. The only urgent security measure was added vigilance to other important electric towers of the country.<sup>63</sup> The government did not go on a media campaign against the opposition, nor did it question the constitutional guarantees of the population.

During this time, the administration made attempts to advance on the sabotage case while at the same time investigating the alleged police abuses, but the president distanced himself from the events. The Ministro de Gobernación Chávez Nackmann was placed in charge of the investigation against the students and of inquiring about the torture allegations. Nevertheless, much criticism was directed at the president, placing him responsible for the alleged actions of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> “De haber culminado el acto de sabotaje.”

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

the police. In protest organized by the AEU, several students held signs that read “to torture is not democracy, Jacobo your officials are screwing up.”<sup>64</sup> Due to the severity of the accusations against the authorities, Chávez Nackmann decided to meet with two leaders of the CEUA, Mario Sandoval Alarcón and Leonel Sisniega Otero. According to El Imparcial, which reported on the exchange, the students made the same accusations and the Minister responded by listing several protests organized by their committee for which they had no authorization and where the police was not sent to arrest them, despite the fact that they were breaking the law.

Nackmann also reminded Sandoval Alarcón and Sisniega Otero that several of their marches ended up outside his window with members of their group screaming accusations at him; therefore if the government or himself were on a rampage to get rid of the opposition they would have had enough motives and opportunities within the law to have done so. He also mentioned that it was well known to the authorities that members of the CEUA were traveling to various areas of the countryside criticizing the government and the agrarian reform law, which was about to be passed by congress. To this, Leonel Sisniega responded that the “populace had the liberty to gather freely and express their opinions and to say to their authorities whatever they wished.”<sup>65</sup> Sisniega Otero claimed he said much more to the Ministro that day, “I told him, tell me where are we putting these bombs? Because if I am going to place a bomb I would put it under your chair not on the street.”<sup>66</sup> These retorts exemplify one of the group’s contradictions. While the CEUA claimed the government was communist and constantly complained about its attempt to silence them, it was able to make defiant and disrespectful comments such as these.

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<sup>64</sup> “AEU Desfila en orden de protesta,” *El Imparcial*, June 19, 1952.

<sup>65</sup> “Delegados del CEUA enfrentan a Chávez,” *El Imparcial*, June 11, 1952.

<sup>66</sup> “Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero.”

The fact that they were able to express like that in public, in front of government officials, without repercussion, is an example of the freedoms provided by the democratic government.

### **The Laws in Effect, a Reformed Police Force?**

In October 1944, after the tripartite junta took power, the police force was disbanded and replaced by a temporary Civic Guard, made up of university students and Boy Scouts, many still underage.<sup>67</sup> The Civic Guard was highly regarded by people from all over the country, who quickly sent economic and food donations to the students. The volunteers served until the police was once again reinstated with members who it was believed did not participate in the past violations and by those who answered a public calling for new agents.<sup>68</sup> In his first report to the executive, the new director of the police wrote:

I proceeded with strength and energy to organize, as the circumstances demanded it, the various services of the new Civil Guard. Especial attention was placed on selecting, among the aspiring officers, individuals that due to their good physical condition, moral record and behavior, deserved to be considered as part of this institution. Of the individuals who served in the old National Police, very few were allowed to be part of the Civil Guard after making sure they had a clean record.<sup>69</sup>

However, an interesting and perhaps overlooked fact is that the government did not reform the Ley Orgánica of the Police except for the change of name.<sup>70</sup> The name of the two

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<sup>67</sup> Gustavo Berganza, ed., *Compendio de historia de Guatemala 1944-2000* (Guatemala: ASIES, KONRAD, PNUD, SOROS), 5.

<sup>68</sup> “Reclutamiento de Individuos para la Guardia Civil.” (Guatemala, October 28, 1944), 10 transferencia, correspondencia, 44,50’s, 64-66, No.14, Archivo AEU.

<sup>69</sup> “Memoria de la Guardia Civil de Guatemala Año de 1944” (Guatemala, 1944), GT-PN30-1439 Doc. 79783, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala. The director also stated that in the task described above, the law and medicine students played an important role. The medicine students helped provide physical exams to all recruits. Law students were in charge of doing a criminal check of those who solicited entry into the force.

<sup>70</sup> Cazali Avila, *Historia de la universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, época republicana (1821-1994)*, 306, 308. In Decree 17 of November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the revolutionary junta proclaimed ten fundamental principles of the October revolution. Among them were decentralization of power from the executive, autonomy for the judicial branch,

police branches, Policía Judicial and Policía Nacional were changed to the Guardia Judicial and Guardia Civil. Under the Arbenz government, the director of the Guardia Civil was Colonel Rogelio Cruz Wer, who took on the post of director on May 1952 and served until June 28, 1954.<sup>71</sup> His defense of the Guatemalan communist party made him an enemy for the CEUA as well as other anticommunist groups.<sup>72</sup>

During the Ubico regime, the Guardia Judicial was better known as the secret police and was headed by Bernabé Linares, who would return to this post during the counterrevolution. Nonetheless, this section of law enforcement was in charge of investigating criminal activity, but its procedural codes were and are to this date not clear. This section of the police was first mentioned in decrees of 1924 as a section that would aid the national police in its investigations. The judicial police were also mentioned in a Decree No. 8 of the Revolutionary Junta of 1944 as a body that will aid the *Jueces de Paz* in criminal diligences.<sup>73</sup> The junta also stated that the *judiciales* were under the command of the Office of Identification of the National Police.<sup>74</sup>

The fact that the government, democratic, the first of its kind, decided not to reform the police procedural code is interesting and raises many questions. Was their decision based on the fact that they believed Ubico's code was suitable for the new regime? Shouldn't a democratic government trying to adhere to a rule of law, moving away from the known brutalities of the past committed by the police, want to reform and democratize the force by providing it with a new

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autonomy for the university, a new constitution and a new organization of the army, but there is no mention of a change for the National Police.

<sup>71</sup> "Nómina de los Directores Generales de la Policía Nacional de la República de Guatemala," *Revista de la Policía Nacional*, September 12, 1963.

<sup>72</sup> Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*. Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, "Historia del glorioso Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," <http://www.wepa.com.gt/mln/h.html>, (Accessed September 24, 2008). In the history of the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, MLN, Cruz Wer is listed as a member of the Guatemalan Communist Party.

<sup>73</sup> "Memoria de la Guardia Civil de Guatemala Año de 1944."

<sup>74</sup> "Cuerpo de Detectives," in *Historia de Guatemala*.

code? The Memoria de Labores of the police, which listed their everyday events, point to the fact that the government was more concerned with reforming the individuals inside the police than the laws themselves.<sup>75</sup> The Memorias display how the directors and heads of stations focused more on how well the existing laws were respected and implemented and on the behaviors and attitudes of their agents. It appears that for the government, the change of name would also represent a change of behavior and a shift of how the police approached its duties. This was expressed in the Memorias of 1944, which noted: “the Civil Guard was established, substituting the former National Police, thus satisfying one of the just aspirations of the people who expect that in the new guards of public order, prevails a true sense of justice and respect to citizen rights.”<sup>76</sup>

The Memoria de Labores of the National Police portray a deep sense of pride from the officers to serve under a democratic regime. The language used towards the officers also demonstrated an emphasis on exhorting officers to excel in their jobs. At the beginning of 1951 the report delivered by the Guardia Judicial, began by congratulating all the officers for their work, which “satisfies the aspirations of the people and of the genuine democratic government of this nation.”<sup>77</sup> Officers were ordered to always be on time, attentive, disciplined, orderly, respectful, and efficient, since police misbehavior would only “violate the revolution and harm its prestige.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The Memoria de Labores were logbooks that recorded the daily activities of the police. The books are for the most part divided by years. I analyzed the ones corresponding or related to the years encompassed in my research, mainly from 1943 to late 1950’s. Given the situation of the archive not all years were available.

<sup>76</sup> “Memoria de la Guardia Civil de Guatemala Año de 1944.”

<sup>77</sup> “Ordenes Generales de la Guardia Civil 1951” (Guatemala, 1951), GT-PN30-1518, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

At the same time the *Memorias* provide useful information about the interactions between the officers. How the police behaved within its sections and its internal rules can help determine what their attitude towards the public was. The *Memorias* from the time of Arbenz reveal a police force very focused on presenting to the public a reformed and respectful institution that should lead by example. According to the director of the police, agents should be “true exponents of civism and culture, so that in the future they constitute a positive guarantee for all citizens.”<sup>79</sup> The logbooks of the police are filled with memos from the police chiefs directing their subordinates to take note of certain behavior rules as to provide a good example for the population. These orders were not an official part of the police code but more like unofficial rules enacted as superiors deemed necessary. They were also not presented as orders but as reminders or suggestions, such as: the personnel are reminded that..., the personnel are warned that..., or I have observed certain attitudes and in order to avoid them.... Officers were forbidden and would be reprimanded and punished for matters such as smoking, spitting, flirting, and being disrespectful to civilians or their superiors, failure to look presentable, among many other non-appropriate police behavior. According to the police director such actions “display a lack of culture and education, which should exist in a good servant of the institution.”<sup>80</sup>

At the same time the reasons that officers received *bajas* or punishments are important because they show the police was not perfect or very professional. The biggest cause of officer’s misbehavior was drunkenness. There are countless cases documented of officers failing to attend work or abandoning their posts due to their inebriated state. Another indicator of the lack of professionalization of the police and some of its internal problems was the fact that on certain

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<sup>79</sup> “Memoria de la Guardia Civil de Guatemala Año de 1944.” The police director explained that police officers would begin receiving training and workshops related to discipline, knowledge of the law, and on the proper way to behave with the public.

<sup>80</sup> “Ordenes Generales de la Guardia Civil 1951.”



occasions officers were fired when it was discovered they were illiterate. That shows that the police as an institution was in need of better recruitment, training and salaries. For the most part the Memoria de Labores does not present a violent police but instead an institution with problems, but also in a position to serve as an example for the population in the new democratic era.

This is not say that the government did not take any type of action against the opposition. One police logbook dating from 1952 to 1954 contained several descriptions of arrests, and while it did not mention the *Atentados Dinamiteros*, it did list captures for actions against the government. The book included details of arrests of individuals for attacks against police officers and disrespect for the government. Other repetitive causes for arrest were: proposal of rebellion, crime of rebellion, sedition, and supplying subversive propaganda. It also made mention of arrests due to explosives found in a journalist's home, and mentioned the expulsion of disliked foreigners.<sup>81</sup> In 1951 when social unrest led President Arbenz to cancel constitutional guarantees and implement martial law, the police was instructed to monitor meetings carried out without permits.<sup>82</sup> They were also ordered to prevent public protests and to question individuals suspected of carrying weapons but without committing any type of abuses. Officers were prompted to continue showing "signs of fidelity towards the Institution to which they have the honor of belonging; exhorting them at the same time to continue providing service in a noble manner as honest citizens at the service of the fatherland."<sup>83</sup> Throughout the *Memorias*, there

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<sup>81</sup> "Libro 1894" (Guatemala, March 31, 1952), GT-PN30-1894, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>82</sup> This refers to the conflict over the Centro Educativo Asistencial, the Guatemalan National Hospice, which was run by nuns. The government sought to make changes to its administration and have social workers take over the nuns. The anti-communist groups, the conservative archbishop, along with the shopkeepers del Mercado Central protested against the government, once again accusing it of communist. In this occasion the Arbenz government canceled constitutional guarantees.

was no mention of officers being reprimanded for abusing or torturing criminals or members of the opposition. However, it is understandable that if violations did occur it is most likely that they would not be recorded to avoid culpability.

A final discovery of the inner workings of the police is the fact that there was a level of enmity between the police and the army. There is no mention of both forces working together. Moreover, memos warned the police to avoid interaction with the army and avoid going to their quarters. All this to try and maintain a “certain level of harmony between both groups.” Several months later, referring to the previous statement another warning was issued to the police asking to avoid interference with the armed forces and to limit communication. Such changes “will avoid continuing and dangerous frictions with elements of that Armed Institution, with whom one should be understanding, approachable, and mutually helpful.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Police Procedures: Arrests, Warrants, the Investigation and Torture Claims**

The government issued a total of ten arrests warrants against members of the CEUA for their participation in the sabotage acts. Out of the ten only five people were arrested but two were quickly freed after the authorities failed to gather enough evidence against them, but mainly because both individuals were able to provide credible alibis. Therefore the accusations were mainly directed against three individuals, Mario Quiñonez, his brother Edgar Salvador Quiñonez and Roberto Fernandez Castellanos. While both the Quiñonez brothers accused the police of torture, Mario is the one who described his torture in full detail. He narrated how he was

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<sup>83</sup> “Ordenes Generales de la Guardia Civil 1951.”

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Order issued on February 15, 1951 said that repeated frictions and incidents between police officers and elements of the national army were evident. In order to prevent and avoid them there should be no interaction between them limiting it to alerting the army of important news. The next order was issued in October of the same year asking officers to limit the communication between both entities to passing on information about crimes.

drenched in cold water, shocked with electricity, hit on the soles of his feet, and penetrated in the anus with a metal object.<sup>85</sup> His brother's accusation was not specific about the torture undergone and during a medical inspection only Mario presented some bruises, which could have constituted possible signs of torture.<sup>86</sup>

Parts of the evidence for the case against the students were the declarations provided by Roberto Fernandez and Edgar Quiñonez accepting their culpability. However, Quiñonez quickly retracted his declaration and claimed it was given because he was tortured. Aside from these declarations the police had two eyewitnesses who were in the area, a fisherman and the guardian of the electric towers who described the cars and the individuals who attacked the tower.<sup>87</sup> Finally the police confiscated dynamite from a residence that Mario Quiñonez and Mario López, another anticommunist member, rented in Colonia Mariscal, a neighborhood in Guatemala City. The charges against the students began as public disorder but once the dynamite was found and tied to the accused, the charges escalated to illegal possession of explosives, an offense punishable by the death penalty.

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, the press was invited to the office of the Director of the Police Colonel Rogelio Cruz Wer to interview some of the detainees, among them the Quiñonez brothers. According to the Ministro de Gobernación, the government was not targeting students or anticommunists, but simply trying to find the responsible for the sabotage attacks that could have had disastrous consequences for the city. Present during the interview were the police director, the Ministro and a judge. The engineering student Roberto Fernandez Castellanos was the first interviewed. He sustained his past declaration that he had not been tortured, and that he had

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<sup>85</sup> "Exhibición de los estudiantes torturados," *El Imparcial*, June 17, 1952.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> "Trama del complot."

participated in the sabotage act of the electric towers. He claimed his role in the events was that of a driver for the rest of the individuals who would carry out the acts. Fernandez Castellanos argued he had denied his involvement at first, but when Edgar Quiñonez confessed and began giving names of other participants he decided to confess as well.

In his declaration, Edgar Quiñonez, who was not a student but a merchant, denied any participation or membership in political groups or associations. Edgar argued his previous confession where he had accepted participation in the events was given by mistake since at the time he felt intimidated. His brother Mario Quiñonez, a law student, said his declaration was not forced. His answers coincided with his previous declaration, where he denied any participation in sabotage tactics.<sup>88</sup> That same day, Luis Mendizábal another student member of the CEUA was released after five days of imprisonment for lack of evidence against him. After his release the student claimed he had been “severely tortured”. He stated his torture resembled the one underwent by the Quiñonez brothers but in addition he had suffered cold baths in the *pila* of the prison and twisting of his feet and that while tortured, he always denied his participation in any disorderly acts.<sup>89</sup>

On June 20<sup>th</sup> the paper reported that Roberto Fernandez, Edgar and Mario Quiñonez would be freed that afternoon after the courts set their bail at Q400 each. At the same time that same day the courts began a process to investigate the accusations of torture.<sup>90</sup> The same day the newspaper reported that two students who their families said were arrested by the Guardia Judicial were not presented to their families. The police argued that the students could not be found in any of the detention centers, while the families claimed the two students were being

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<sup>88</sup> “Periodistas interrogan a sindicatos,” *El Imparcial*, June 19, 1952.

<sup>89</sup> “Dos estudiantes no fueron exhibidos en la Guardia Civil; se ignora paradero,” *El Imparcial*, June 19, 1952.

<sup>90</sup> “Tres estudiantes por salir libres Hoy; Investigación sobre las torturas, abren,” *El Imparcial*, June 20, 1952.

tortured. The following day the Police Director provided a statement in the form of a letter to El Imparcial where he explained the whereabouts of the two students and gave other declarations on behalf of the Civil Guard. In his letter Cruz Wer stated that according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the two students sought asylum in the Honduran embassy but he did not know why, given that there were no warrants or investigations against them. He also added the reason other students and individuals were been apprehended was the result of an investigation that pointed to them as the responsible for the attacks to the electric towers. The Police Director also stated that all accusations of torture on the part of the CEUA were false and merely a tactic to discredit him and his security force. He claimed that under his leadership the Guardia Civil “had maintained the respect the citizenship deserves without incurring in any type of abuses.”<sup>91</sup>

The Quiñonez brothers were not freed immediately, due to a lack of resources on the part of their family, who could not afford both bails. It took their family five days to gather the money according to newspaper reports. Yet within those days the police discovered new evidence that would incriminate all of the accused in the events and would turn the charges against them from public disorder to illegal possession of explosives, a crime punishable by death according to decree 1581 passed during the past dictatorship of Jorge Ubico.<sup>92</sup> According to the authorities, 50 pounds of dynamite were found in a chalet in Colonia Mariscal, the same neighborhood where Fernandez Castellanos declared he and the other participants gathered the night of the sabotage acts.<sup>93</sup> On June 24, just as Mario and Edgar Quiñonez were about to be released, the owner of the chalet testified that she had leased the property to Mario Quiñonez on

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<sup>91</sup> “Declaraciones de la Guardia Civil,” *El Imparcial*, June 20, 1952.

<sup>92</sup> “Dueña del Chalet y Quienes Alquilan,” *El Imparcial*, June 24, 1952. Jorge Ubico passed Decree 1581, which applied the death penalty to the crime of illegal possession of explosives. The legislative decree 299 would have modified it but Juan José Arevalo vetoed it during his administration.

<sup>93</sup> “Dinamita incautada en un Chalet, hoy.”

the first days of the month. Due to the new evidence, a judge ordered the charges against all of the accused be modified to illegal possession of explosives, a more serious crime than public disorder. The judge also ordered the recapture of the students who had previously made bail and were already free, which included Fernandez Castellanos. Nevertheless, by July all three individuals held in custody posted bail. Once free, Roberto Fernandez Castellanos changed his story, he denied all of his previous declarations and claimed the only reason he made them was due to the abuses his friends were undergoing. Despite this the charges against them were upheld due to the remaining evidence in the hands of the police.

The archives of the university and the newspapers were unable to provide more information about the special commission created by the AEU to investigate the abuses. The police documents showed no evidence that the police tortured the students, although the archives contain millions of documents yet to be reviewed. In the *Fichas de Identificación*, I was able to find the ones corresponding to several members of the CEUA. Individuals like Sisniega Otero, Eduardo Taracena de la Cerna, Eduardo Quiñonez, Luis Mendizabal, and Gabriel Martinez del Rosal who belonged to the CEUA. In their fichas, they were not described as anticommunists, and only a couple had annotations associating them to the Atentados Dinamiteros. Ironically, it was not until the counterrevolutionary government took power that several of these individuals mentioned began to be closely monitored by the State.<sup>94</sup>

Mario Sandoval Alarcón was an example of individuals whose extensive monitoring began after the revolution. Sandoval Alarcón was one of the leaders of the CEUA and was arrested in 1953 on charges of rebellion. After the coup against Arbenz he was released, and served as personal secretary to the president Carlos Castillo Armas. Sandoval's ficha began in

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<sup>94</sup> "Ficha Domingo Goicolea Villacorta," Fondo 50 Caja 58A94.7(35) Legajo 2 Doc 202515, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.; "Ficha Gabriel Martinez del Rosal," Fondo 50 Caja 58A97.5 Legajo 5 Doc 290451, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

1946 when it recorded that he was the victim of a robbery. In 1953 his arrest was mentioned but that was the only notation due to political reasons during the revolutionary period. In 1957 his ficha listed that he accused people of being communists and in 1958 that he was planning the assassination of Miguel Idígoras Fuentes and participated in an oppositional movement against the government.<sup>95</sup> From that year on up until 1986 when the last annotation was made, it is clear that all the governments in place closely monitored him.<sup>96</sup>

As part of my research I was able to interview individuals who belonged to university student organizations during the period of my study. Several of the questions revolved around the role of the National Police and whether they believed the accusations of torture were genuine. Leonel Sisniega, the last living members of the CEUA continues to stand by the accusations of torture and abuses of the police.<sup>97</sup> The other three individuals were members of various university associations, El Derecho, Comité de Huelga and the AEU.<sup>98</sup> All three denied ever believing that the police tortured, they claimed to have had an amicable relationship with the police at the time. Roberto Diaz Castillo, the president of the AEU at the time of the coup against Arbenz said: “they were not tortured, if they had been they would have been dead; instead they came back to hold positions of power in the next government.”<sup>99</sup> José Barnoya belonged to the Comité de Huelga de Dolores, which every year of the revolutionary government mocked the

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<sup>95</sup> Idígoras Fuentes was president after Castillo Armas was murdered in 1957.

<sup>96</sup> “Ficha Mario Sandoval Alarcón,” Fondo 50 Caja 500398 Legajo 1 Ficha No.5 Doc 1528927; Ficha No.6 Doc 1528929; Ficha No.7 Doc 1528933; Ficha No.8 Doc 1528931, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>97</sup> Sisniega Otero claimed the police carried out horrible tortures. According to him, the police cut people’s fingers and carried out mass executions. However, for him the police in the time of Ubico were very respectful, he stressed that Ubico’s secret police did what it was expected from them, maintain order.

<sup>98</sup> El Derecho was the law student’s association; the Comité de Huelga was in charge of the events of the Huelga de Dolores.

<sup>99</sup> “Entrevista Roberto Díaz Castillo,” Interview by Maria Aguilar, Oral Interview, July 2008.

president and its administration. Barnoya agreed that it was possible that the police might have been violent if provoked, he said “the police was about giving blows but never about torture against those of us who did open and not conspiratorial opposition”, torture to him seemed unlikely.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, Carlos Guzmán Böckler a member of El Derecho, when asked about the accusations of torture laughed and replied “the Quiñonez brothers who claimed they were tortured, everyone said they had brought that electric thing, the electric pipe they called it here, and that the little brothers had liked it.”<sup>101</sup> This statement was part of the jokes the students made about the CEUA and their torture allegations. However on a more serious note he added “we saw many things because we were in close contact with the police, and the type of violence that they claimed, I would put it in quotation marks, in parenthesis, because one realizes many things and after so many years I wouldn’t have a reason to cover for anyone.”<sup>102</sup> Torture seemed very unlikely to Guzmán Böckler because as he added “I think that persecutions, torture as they said, was not true, not true, and if there was any type of violence, which cannot be dismissed, it was certainly not directed or organized, there has to be violent guys in all periods, one could have been violent I don’t disagree. But something decisive from the government, a policy in that sense, no, no, no, because I was close to all of that and I remember.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Entrevista José Barnoya.”

<sup>101</sup> “Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler.” The electric pipe refers to the metal object the student claimed was used by the police to penetrate him. These were some of the jokes made about the Quiñonez brothers.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Carlos Guzmán Böckler began his work in the Guatemalan tribunals in 1949 when he was an intern whose work consisted of studying various cases before passing them to the judge for trial. This task required close contact with the people related to the cases and the sentencing, like the accusers, the prosecutor, witnesses, experts, family members, etc. During the latter years of his college career he served as Juez de Paz del Ramo Penal.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



Carlos Guzmán Böckler also noted that the attitude of the police of the revolution was very different from that of the dictatorship. He remembered one ex-officer nicknamed *veneno*, poison, and of his conversations with him, “the guy would tell me that the respect on the part of the people towards the police had been lost, he [poison] remembered that when he was an active officer during the time of the General [Ubico], people said: here comes the police let’s get the fuck out. Now they say here come the Civil Guard, let’s kick their ass.”<sup>104</sup> This statement showed that even the perception that the old police had of the revolutionary police changed and ex-officers saw it as weak.

Nonetheless, solely based on police or student records it is not possible arrive to a conclusion about the tortures. Both Barnoya and Guzmán Böckler remembered that after the sabotage acts, in the Huelga de Dolores, and in the university, the apprehended students were mocked and called liars for their cries of torture. If the accusations of torture were true it seems unlikely that the students ridicule the incident since in years later when torture and human right violations were clearly happening the Huelga never dared to ridicule that suffering.

### **Long term Consequences, the radicalization of the CEUA and its transformation into the CEUAGE**

The arrest warrants directed at various members of the CEUA sparked the flight of other members of the group who were not accused of any crime but who belonged to the group. Several of these individuals fled to the Central American embassies in the country and sought asylum alleging government persecution. The CEUA was not disbanded, however, once abroad they remained organized in the Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas Guatemaltecos en el Exilio, CEUAGE, Committee of Guatemalan Anticommunists University

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Students in Exile. From exile these student launched an extensive propaganda campaign against the government through their official bulletins, with the help of the Catholic Church and the U.S. They produced *El Boletín del CEUAGE* and a radio program called *Radio Liberación*.<sup>105</sup> The *Boletín del CEUAGE* published its first issue on June 1953 in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Each of their bulletins showed the motto of the Liberation Movement: God, Fatherland and Freedom. In their publication they paid homage to individuals they considered heroes like Javier Arana. They also presented their own account of the abuses conducted by the police against the opposition along with their own illustrations. Each bulletin came with a section name *La Página Roja*, The Red Page, which they encouraged their readers to detach and distribute as it contained the “truth” about the government. The *Páginas Rojas* contained shocking and sensationalist accusations against the government. *Radio Liberación*, began to air on May 1954. It served as a propaganda campaign and was directed by Leonel Sisniega Otero, Mario López Villatoro and José Torón Barrios. The radio reached Guatemalan households advertising the impending victory of the liberation army over the Guatemalan communist government.<sup>106</sup>

In exile, the students contacted Coronel Carlos Castillo Armas who had escaped with five others from a Guatemalan prison on June 1951 with the help of the CEUA. According to Sisniega Otero, members of the CEUA helped dig a tunnel and waited for Castillo Armas outside the jail. Two cars were ready to wait for him, one driven by Mario Sandoval Alarcón and the other one used as a decoy in which Sisniega Otero rode. The CEUA took Castillo Armas to the Colombian embassy, from which he later left for to Honduras<sup>107</sup>. Castillo Armas would proclaim

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<sup>105</sup> *Boletín del CEUAGE*, the complete collection is located at CIRMA.

<sup>106</sup> *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional*, “Historia del glorioso Movimiento de Liberación Nacional”, 10. Mario Lopez and José Torón were later killed by guerrilla forces.

<sup>107</sup> Sisniega Otero, “Entrevista Leonel Sisniega Otero.”

himself the leader of the *liberación* which provided a unifying movement for the elites, disenchanted military, the ultra conservative catholic church, and the sections of the middle classes who despite having nothing to lose from the revolutionary reforms opposed the regime, and of course for the U.S., to gather in their quest to overthrow Arbenz.

After a long anticommunist propaganda campaign funded by the U.S. government through the CIA, they managed to instill not only fear in the populations, but also in the military forces who turned their back on Arbenz. Castillo Armas occupied Chiquimula on June 24, 1954 and proclaimed the triumph of the Liberación while U.S. planes bombed Guatemala City and dropped leaflets creating a state of panic in the population of a large-scale invasion.<sup>108</sup> President Arbenz decided to resign on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1954 stating in his last speech, “we fought to where our conditions would allow it, until a point in which to go further would mean losing everything we have gained since 1944.”<sup>109</sup> Castillo Armas became president through a popular referendum and not through elections. For 18 months he ruled by presidential decrees and it was not until February 1956 that he established a new Constitution. Despite the accusations of the United States against the government of Arbenz and the opposition that stormed in the country holding the banner of anticommunism to defend a country they portrayed as on the brink of falling to Soviet control, “no serious evidence ever turned up after the coup establishing a secret tie to the Soviets.”<sup>110</sup> After the coup the leadership of the AEU was forced into exile, and the military government appointed a conservative emergency group to head the AEU.<sup>111</sup> However after a

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<sup>108</sup> Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit*.

<sup>109</sup> *Discurso del Cnel. Jacobo Arbenz el 27 de junio de 1954*, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E55FdP9KiM>, (Accessed April 20, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit*, 107.

couple of months, elections were once again held in the university and groups opposed to the government gained control of the AEU.

At the time of the coup, the governing body of the AEU, which had taken office on September 1953, was the first group during the revolution to run on a more explicit leftist platform. They were nominated and supported by the Frente Universitario Democrático, FUD, a more radical leftist group with some ties to the PGT.<sup>112</sup> Regardless of their connection with the PGT, through their new leaders, the AEU took a more firm public position in defense of Arbenz and his democratic government. They also decided to steer the university in a new direction where politics and the arts could coexist. The group's short period in office left behind the first and only magazine published by the AEU at the time. Cuadernos Universitarios, as it was called, not only included literary pieces from Guatemalan authors but it also included a section on politics, clearly leaving behind the discourse that the AEU was apolitical. One of the highlights of the first and only issue of Cuadernos was the speech delivered by Jorge Toriello defending Guatemala's sovereignty against the United States in a meeting of the Organization of American States held in Venezuela. In the meeting, Secretary of State of the U.S. John Foster Dulles wanted to pass a resolution against communism, although not stated explicitly, the resolution was directed at Guatemala. Despite the praises Toriello Received for his speech willing to defy the United States, the resolution passed, only Guatemala voted against it.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Adolfo Montenegro, "Roberto Díaz Castillo," *Revista D*, May 14, 2006, <http://www.prensalibre.com/pl/domingo/archivo/revistad/2006/mayo06/140506/dfrente.shtml>, (Accessed September 24, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> "Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler." After the counterrevolution took power, in November 10, 1954 through decree No.48 the government dissolved various organizations it believed were communist, included the FUD, and communism was made illegal through the ley preventiva contra el comunismo.

<sup>113</sup> Gleijeses, *Esperanza rota*.

On the eve of the fall of the Arbenz Government, the AEU, through its president Roberto Díaz Castillo, called on the population to defend the national sovereignty against foreign infiltration.<sup>114</sup> At the same time members and leadership of the FUD, as well as other politically conscious and organized groups asked the army for weapons to arm the students against the invasion, but the army had already turned their backs on Arbenz.<sup>115</sup> The Police also underwent a very rapid transformation; once again the institution was disbanded and replaced by the Servicio de Seguridad, a temporary security force, under direct control of the President, mainly in charge of arresting alleged communists.

After the coup, the members of the CEUAGE returned to the country and were appointed to various posts in the new military government. As strong defenders of the new regime, they created lists with names of students they portrayed as communist or revolutionary.<sup>116</sup> Mario Sandoval Alarcón was freed from the prison in Salamá where he was held on charges of participating in an unsuccessful insurrection by a general against the government. Sandoval Alarcón was quickly appointed private secretary to the president. Sisniega Otero was given a job as a director of a radio station and Goicolea was appointed Minister of Foreign Relations. The anticommunist groups also coalesced in a new political party, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, MLN, a product from the combination of the CEUAGE and the Partido Unificación Anticomunista, PUA, the Party of Anticommunist Unification.

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<sup>114</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*.

<sup>115</sup> The FUD organized a brigade with the name Tecún Umán, a Guatemalan indigenous K'iche' leader who with his troops fought the Spanish conquistadors for three months but was ultimately killed in battle.

<sup>116</sup> Cazali Ávila, *Historia de la universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, época republicana (1821-1994)*, 359. It is also important to note that as Cazali Ávila mentions and the interviews with Böckler and Barnoya corroborate, that the members of the CEUA never received their professional degrees, at least not from the University of San Carlos, nor did they contribute to the academic prestige of the institution. Böckler mentioned that something all had in common was that they were bad students, not smart and those who had professional titles bought them abroad.

## Conclusion

If the CEUA began as a “grupusclo de culecos” during the revolutionary regime, it would not remain one for long. In exile this group managed to remain organized and united with disaffected military and with the support of the U.S. government. Their position in the country would flourish during the counterrevolution with terrible consequences. The group’s importance, regardless of its numbers, was their ability to show that “the mobilization of the students was not only about leftist protests.”<sup>117</sup> Despite the fact that conservative sectors would no longer in the future gain control of the important university associations or the AEU, their ability to mobilize and gather support from other groups with different ideological beliefs during this time showed that “in the social sectors the direction of each needs to be constructed daily,”<sup>118</sup> and that is exactly what the CEUA accomplished. A construction of a conservative opposition within the university with deeply rooted conservatism and that until this day, those alive and until their death those who already died defended their ideologies and remained unapologetic for their actions or beliefs.

At the same time, the temporary alliance of other university associations, most importantly the AEU, with the CEUA despite clear ideological differences is key. The alliance showed that the support of members of the AEU was to the democratic processes not to the leaders or figures in power. The AEU helped the CEUA because they disapproved of any type of human right abused regardless of the inflictor. The AEU could have dismissed the opposition, instead they decided to work with the CEUA and respect their opinions. Guzmán Blöcker said that during the democratic regime “we learned in the [student] sessions to discuss, vote, and to respect the winner, to respect the voice of the majority, [...] we learned to be tolerant, they later denied that

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<sup>117</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

to us.”<sup>119</sup> Learning to respect all opinions allowed them to support others regardless of ideology when they believed violations had occurred, but as Guzmán Böckler said, this group would not be so tolerant in the future.

In terms of the governmental response, in the aftermath of the Atentados, the administration did not go on a national crusade to arrest all opposition and label them as threat. Voiding constitutional guarantees was never suggested by any government official. All of the students accused were eventually freed and the process against them was simply as suspects of these sabotage tactics, they were never publicly labeled as a threat for the country. It is perhaps also important to add that the atentados coincided with the approval of Decree 900, the land reform. The law by itself was already creating opposition and conflict and the president was on a media campaign to calm the opposers of such law. Thus the government was doing its best to avoid conflict.

So was the police a truly reformed institution compatible with the new democratic State? The fact was that the police carried out very few arrests and the list they provided of individuals implicated was short. It was clear that the government worked hard to create a new image of the institution in the minds of the population but attempting to do so without structural reforms was an error. While a reform of the ethos consistent with democratic ideals was clearly important, so was the need for structural changes within the police's legal framework. Structural changes in police law could have created different hierarchies within the force with more accountability to the government and the civilian population. These reforms would have helped assure possibility of abuses were diminished if not eliminated and also made it less likely for groups to claim the police continued to be oppressive as it had been in the past authoritarian government. While the revolutionary government failed to see changes in the Police's Ley Orgánica as necessary, the

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<sup>119</sup> “Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler.”

counterrevolutionary government did not. The police after the fall of the revolution underwent extensive practical but also structural legislative change turning it into a truly repressive force as the following chapter will explore.



## Chapter 3

### **Efemérides Estudiantil Universitaria: The Student Killings of June 1956**

*“Cara de Hacha” iba ordenando, Santo Lima asesinando, Monseñor felicitando, de León Cardona Acusando. Esta “cuarteta maestra” logro en un junio execrado, ganar la “vuelta siniestra” de Guatemala al pasado!*

*-Tarjeta 1957 Historia de la Huelga de Dolores.*

After 1944, June 25<sup>th</sup> was remembered as the beginning of the large-scale social mobilizations that ousted Jorge Ubico from power, but it also served as a date of remembrance for the death of teacher Maria Chinchilla, who was mortally wounded by government forces during a protest that day. The university and various other social sectors continued to commemorate the date as a civic celebration in the name of liberty and freedom from the tyranny of the past dictatorship. Sadly, on June of 1956, the date would serve as remembrance of another event, the killing of university students by police forces under the command of notorious figures from the past. Therefore, the murder of the students can be considered as a return to the institutionalized violence that the revolutionary era had attempted to change but that Castillo Armas and his supporters seemed eager to return to. Opposition and unrest would be trampled and police forces began serving as tools for the state to carry out its Cold War policies of fighting communism.

This chapter will explore how the counterrevolutionary government manipulated the events of June to portray them as a communist insurrection that threatened the “democracy” of the country. Along with the past anticommunist student group, turned political party, the government supported and deemed necessary a policy of institutionalized repression against all opposition. To carry out their plan, the police underwent a restructuring of its law compatible

with the government's new aim of eliminating communism. To further achieve this goal, the police was placed under control of infamous figures of Ubico's dictatorship whose past significance would perfectly represent the government's desire to revert any change accomplished by the revolutionary era and accomplish a return to the idolized past of Ubico's rule.

### **The March of June 25<sup>th</sup> 1956**

On the first days of June 1956, various social groups began the requesting permits from the government to carry out their various commemorative events to celebrate June 25<sup>th</sup>. By Friday June 22, according to *El Imparcial*, four groups "of anticommunist tendency" were authorized to carry out their events on June 24<sup>th</sup> and June 25<sup>th</sup>. The events included a peregrination to the cemetery as well as a gathering and speeches in the central plaza of Guatemala City. The celebrations began on Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup> because that year the remains of Maria Chinchilla would be transferred to the official teacher's mausoleum. The paper also presented the government's feeble excuse to prevent the student association *El Derecho* and the AEU to participate in the festivities, arguing that other groups were already given permission to carry out events and therefore times for their activities would overlap.<sup>120</sup>

As a response, the students decided to carry out the bulk of their activities on Sunday because they were aware that the groups who were having activities on Monday were groups allied with the government and were planted simply to participate as members of a "*contramanifestación*." The AEU replied to the Castillista administration's obstacles and hesitation to allow the students to participate in the celebratory activities by issuing a public

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<sup>120</sup> "Tres grupos cívicos autorizados para manifestar y efectuar un mitin público el próximo lunes 25," *El Imparcial*, June 21, 1956; "Cuatro grupos manifestaran y harán mitin el domingo entrante," *El Imparcial*, June 22, 1956.

declaration on Saturday June 23, stating that the celebrations of June 25<sup>th</sup> served as remembrance of the civic struggle for freedom and belonged to all the citizens of Guatemala. The AEU also declared the university “free of political influence,” a quote most likely used to appease the president and Ministro de Gobernación who feared that participation of student groups could turn into a protest against their administration.<sup>121</sup>

There was also another reason that made the date special for the students and the university. The AEU’s declaration also stated that from 1956 on, the 25<sup>th</sup> of June would be declared a day of student celebration with the name of “*efemérides estudiantil universitaria*”. To celebrate the day in which “the flag of dignity and university autonomy was hoisted [...] and it is precise that this date is recorded of imperishable form in the memory of the university students, as an example and encouragement for the defense of freedom.”<sup>122</sup> The students planned to gather at eight in the morning outside the building of the law school and then march to Maria Chinchilla’s tomb. Saturday’s paper declared that the Asociación El Derecho organized the march and that the students finally had the permission of the government for their activities.<sup>123</sup> However the governor of the capital warned, “the demonstrations can be carried out as long as they respect the public order and article 62, and article 59 of the Preventive Law Against Communism.”<sup>124</sup>

On Monday morning June 25<sup>th</sup>, the public woke up to the news that the government had placed into affect *Estado de Alarma*. The press also reported that various arrests were carried out against ‘communists’ from one of the groups that participated in the events of the previous day.

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<sup>121</sup> “Lucha cívica de junio es del pueblo proclama la AEU,” *El Imparcial*, June 23, 1956.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> “Cuatro grupos manifestaran y harán mitin el domingo entrante.”

Still, the most significant events were yet to occur, Sunday's peregrination would set off a series of coordinated and synchronized police actions aimed at suppressing any celebratory activities. Prior to reaching Maria Chinchilla's tomb, the students learned that patrol cars, policemen and soldiers had surrounded the cemetery. Thus, the students dispersed and returned to the law school where at ten in the morning police forces encircled the building and threatened to kill any of the 500 there gathered if anyone attempted to leave.<sup>125</sup> After two hours of being held hostage, the students were allowed to exit, but the building remained surrounded by policemen until the next day. At the same time, under orders of Colonel Santos Miguel Lima Bonilla, the police, with the pretext that they were investigating a murder, broke into the building of the school of medicine.<sup>126</sup>

Other social groups and students congregated in the Barrios Plaza after being prevented from entering the cemetery. At the plaza among the participants news spread that the previous night throughout the city various prominent student leaders and lawyers were arrested after attending a human rights meeting at the University.<sup>127</sup> When the police began to disperse group, the people gathered began shouting, "shoot us, kill us, we don't want dictatorship!" They also

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<sup>125</sup> Cazali Ávila, *Historia de la universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, época republicana (1821-1994)*.

<sup>126</sup> Junta Directiva Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios AEU, "Por la verdad de un hecho histórico," March 29, 1957, Correspondencia 1940-59 No. 58 Cuarta Transferencia, Archivo AEU. Colonel Santos Miguel Lima Bonilla was at the time third chief of the Guatemalan National Police. He also had a career in publishing. A book published by the Army in 1966 accredited Lima Bonilla with at least 22 publications. The topics of his works varied greatly from women's fertility calendar to poetry and world history. The events described in the chapter illustrate his brutality and fervent anticommunism; the guerrilla killed him in the 1960's. One of his sons and grandson also fervent anticommunists had a military career and are currently serving jail sentences for the murder of Monseñor Juan Gerardi. Monseñor Gerardi was murdered days after he presented the Guatemalan Catholic Church's truth report, *Guatemala Nunca Mas*, which unveiled the brutalities committed by the army during the 36 years of the armed conflict.

<sup>127</sup> Rodolfo Azmitia Jiménez, *La represión Del 25 de junio de 1956*, 4th ed., Publicaciones CIEPROD (Guatemala: Centro de Investigación, Estudio y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, 1992). The individuals detained were José Luis Barcalcel, president of El Derecho, the lawyers José Bocaletti, Héctor Zachrisson and Mario Monteforte Toledo, the owner of the newspaper *Hoy*. Also were the students Alberto and Mario Vinicio Castañeda, Jorge Mario García and various editors of the newspaper *El Estudiante*, which since its creation in 1955 was very vocal in its opposition against the government. It is also important to mention that some of these individuals arrested had participated in a round table that day regarding human rights.

began saying: “unite! unite!” to try to prevent the police from evacuating them. The group managed to move to the statue of Justo Rufino Barrios where they tried to place a national flag and began singing the national anthem. Soon the plaza was saturated with policemen and the people, traffic, and even journalists were evacuated from the area. A small group attempted to gather on nearby streets but when Santos Lima realized this he ordered “clean that street one way or another, if they want bullets, give them bullets, if they want a beating, give them a beating”, after hearing these orders, the people finally dispersed.<sup>128</sup>

The next day, Monday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, the AEU called for an emergency session to discuss the events of the previous day. They decided to draft a memo asking the president for the release of the detainees as well as for the return of constitutional rule and to protest “the disrespect of the police to enter [...] the university and surround the law school.”<sup>129</sup> The last petition was extremely important because given its autonomy the university was considered sovereign territory by the student body.

During the emergency session the students also discussed how to present the memo, and whether to simply deliver it to the president’s office or to march to the central plaza and read it publicly. The overwhelming majority of students decided on the latter, and around 8:30 p.m. about 300 students began a peaceful march led by the directive of the AEU while everyone sang the national anthem.<sup>130</sup> After advancing a couple of blocks and reaching 11 street and sixth avenue, a very busy intersection and right outside one of the major movie theaters, the students encountered rows of police officers and soldiers, “prepared as if to combat another army”

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<sup>128</sup> “Manifestación del Comité Cívico Nacional disuelta por la Policía ayer temprano,” *Prensa Libre*, June 25, 1956.”

<sup>129</sup> “Saldo de tres muertos y varios heridos al ser disuelta la manifestación estudiantil de anoche,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

commanded by Santos Lima and Bernabé Linares.<sup>131</sup> With no warning the officers began shooting at the students who attempted to take cover on the sidewalks and doors yet continued singing the anthem. The police began rounding up students and arresting them. After the violent tumult was over, three students were dead, around 30 were taken to the emergency room, many in critical condition, where two more died and more than 200 were arrested.<sup>132</sup> The executive with the support of congress immediately imposed martial law placing the Ministerio de la Defensa in control of the courts, the police and the media and cancelled all constitutional guarantees arguing an imminent threat by communists planning to destabilize and overthrow the government.<sup>133</sup>

### **The AEU's Response**

The public response of the AEU to the actions of the security forces was not very strong due to the martial law instituted by Castillo Armas. The university association asked students to abstain from public manifestations in order to avoid the “murderous bullets of the police” and it instituted a general student strike.<sup>134</sup> The A.E.U. quickly organized and assigned a group of

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<sup>131</sup> Azmitia Jiménez, *La represión del 25 de junio de 1956*.

<sup>132</sup> “Saldo de tres muertos y varios heridos al ser disuelta la manifestación estudiantil de anoche.” The students killed were Álvaro Castillo Urrutia, President of the Consejo Superior Estudiantil and of the Asociación de Estudiantes de Ciencias Económicas; Julio Juárez, member of Juventud Médica; Julio Arturo Acevedo, economics’ student; Ricardo Castillo Luna; Salvador Orozco, secretary of the Asociación de Estudiantes el Derecho. There are contradicting figures on the number of wounded students, the first declaration issued by the A.E.U. claimed 15 students, this article listed 18 were wounded but later works (Azmitia Jimenez) take the number to 30.

<sup>133</sup> “Estado de Sitio en toda la nación,” *El Imparcial*, June 25, 1956; “Ordenzas correspondientes a la aplicación del Estado de Sitio en toda la república,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956; “Momentos de prueba, se denuncia movimientos de subversión,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956. The Estado de Sitio according to Guatemalan law would last 30 days if not lifted by orders of the president.

<sup>134</sup> Comité Universitario de Emergencia, “Instrucciones del Comité Universitario de Emergencia” (Guatemala, June 26, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1974, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

lawyers to make arrangements to free the detainees and fight the charges against them.<sup>135</sup> The next day the AEU issued a statement informing the public they had petitioned the president for the release of the apprehended students, and for the immediate destitution of the police authorities responsible for the killings.<sup>136</sup> Two days later they issued a bulleting containing their own version of the events since the government had declared press censorship. The students stated their march had been peaceful, they were not armed, and that the police fired against them.<sup>137</sup> As a way to deal with the censorship, they also asked students to make typewriter copies of the subsequent bulletins issued by the association and to distribute them.

Perhaps not surprisingly, what had occurred in June of 1952 when various groups offered their support and solidarity to the anticommunist students arrested despite strong ideological differences, did not happen in 1956. Conservative groups, the former CEUA, by then a political party, and the Catholic Church sided and defended the government and the police actions.<sup>138</sup> The dislike of pro-government groups and the administration itself against the AEU had increasingly grown after a series of actions of the AEU to protest what they considered an unconstitutional government. A section of university students had opposed the plebiscite that allowed Castillo Armas to take power without proper democratic elections.<sup>139</sup> The students also repudiated the

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<sup>135</sup> “Gestión pro libertad de los estudiantes que están detenidos,” *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956.

<sup>136</sup> Junta Directiva y Ejecutiva de la A.E.U., “Boletín de Información” (Guatemala, June 29, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1972, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>137</sup> A.E.U., “La Junta Directiva de la Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios A.E.U.” (Guatemala, June 27, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1973, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>138</sup> “PUA Solidaria con las medidas de defensa nacional de el gobierno,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956; Arzobispo de Guatemala se entrevistó con el Presidente hoy por la mañana,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956; “Arzobispo se mostró de lado de la legalidad en últimos sucesos,” *El Imparcial*, June 27, 1956; “Gestión pro libertad de los estudiantes que están detenidos.” Only three government functionaries spoke in favor of the release of the students, as an act of solidarity to their Alma Mater.

presence of the dean of Columbia University, who declared Castillo Armas Doctor Honoris Causa. He was set to deliver a series of speeches in the University of San Carlos, which the students promptly tried to prevent. The university students and AEU had also publicly criticized the government especially the police for the torture of prisoner, Rogelio Rivera Sánchez.<sup>140</sup> They had voiced their support for a report delivered by the Secretary General of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld, which condoned the policy of the Castillo Armas' government against the labor movement. Finally, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> a day before the tragic events, the university and the AEU organized a series of roundtable discussions regarding human rights. Several of the participants of the roundtable were arrested that same night.

After the student massacre, since public protests were not a possibility, the students sought other means to express their outrage and their support for the students arrested. The AEU asked all university students from abstaining to show up to their jobs and everyday activities. The order was mainly directed at medicine and law students, who played important roles in Guatemalan society.<sup>141</sup> Since doctors and student residents from the University of San Carlos ran the general hospital of the city, they decided to refuse to treat anyone except for the wounded students and the emergency room.<sup>142</sup> The students working in the hospital also helped escape some of the wounded students who the police kept attempting to arrest despite their critical conditions. The actions of the med students were the first step towards a general student strike.

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<sup>139</sup> Cazali Ávila, *Historia de la universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, época republicana (1821-1994)*, 351. José Barnoya remembers participating in the plebiscite where all the students gathered voted against Castillo Armas.

<sup>140</sup> "Responsables de torturas consignados," *El Imparcial*, June 23, 1956. Rogelio Rivera Sánchez was accused of killing the Chief of Detectives of the National Police while under the influence of alcohol. Once arrested Rivera Sanchez was tortured by police officers, prompting university students and lawyers to protest such unconstitutional practices.

<sup>141</sup> Comité Universitario de Emergencia, "Instrucciones del Comité Universitario de Emergencia."

<sup>142</sup> "Estudiantes de medicina en pláticas con el Presidente sobre la libertad de sus compañeros," *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956.



Law students working as interns in all the legislative offices and courts were supposed to be the second group to strike but they failed to organize and the attempted general strike died out.<sup>143</sup>

The university student association also asked for the resignation of the Ministro de Gobernación Eduardo Rodríguez Genis, since the national police was under his and Castillo Armas' direct orders at the time of the attack. The students also wanted the chiefs of police Bernabé Linares, Santos Lima Bonilla and Aparicio Cahueque discharged from their posts. The AEU also supported the family of the victims who began a criminal processes against the police chiefs who gave the orders to shoot the students, Lima and Linares. A recent law graduate, Carlos Guzmán Böckler, served as the legal representative for the mothers and wives of the five students killed. The courts nonetheless quickly dismissed the case; the attitude of the court and security forces in regards to the students was uncooperative. Since the beginning when the AEU began to organize the release of the individuals arrested, they issued *Recursos de Exhibición* to see the detainees but the police continued denying having certain people under arrest.<sup>144</sup>

### **The Government's response**

The government declared that the confrontations of June 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> were a long-planned act of communist aggression against the democratic regime. However, even before the incidents the government had used the term "communist" to refer to the students and had hinted

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<sup>143</sup> Azmitia Jiménez, *La represión del 25 de junio de 1956*; "Memorial envían al Presidente estudiantes de pasantía," *El Imparcial*, June 28, 1956; "Normal es la actividad en el instituto nacional de varones," *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956.; "Secundaria de Rafael Aqueche reanuda clases," *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956. Law students with internships in the legislative did not go into a general strike by failing to show up to work. They did however organize and drafted a petition directed at the president requesting the liberty of the students arrested. While drafting the petition in an office of a Guatemalan court, the national police stormed in and arrested everyone, but they were quickly released due to the intervention of government functionaries. High School students attempted to join in the strike as a sign of solidarity with university students. However school authorities expelled students attempting to organize in order to maintain control of the schools.

<sup>144</sup> "Ampliación a Recurso de Exhibición para comprobar detenciones," *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956.

that communists might attempt to act on that date. In a press statement the governor of Guatemala City declared, “within the proverbial scope of the democratic regime, licenses have been distributed to various groups to carry out demonstrations”; however if any “communist group” attempted to control any of the manifestations for their own benefit all the extent of the law would be used against them.<sup>145</sup>

Castillo Armas’ opinions regarding the university students were contradictory. On the one hand, he believed that under the disguise of ‘student associations’ “true schools of communism” were being formed. But at the same time he was grateful to the “university youth, nerve and life of the Liberation Movement,” referring to the members of the CEUA, who first developed within the university setting and who helped him escape from prison and continued supporting him while in exile.<sup>146</sup> He was careful to expand the idea that foreign communist infiltrators were affecting the sections of the university and certain associations, but especially the law school. The government also upheld autonomy as a way to gain the support of the university since as the previous chapter showed, the associations could at times be under influence or control of conservative groups, which he hoped would happen again during his government.

In terms of legality, the government argued its actions on Sunday were completely legal under Decree No. 587 that instituted state of alarm in the country on Sunday the 24th. However the students argued that the decree was issued on the same day of their morning peregrination and they were not informed of it.<sup>147</sup> On Tuesday June 26, newspaper headlines read that *Estado*

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<sup>145</sup> “Dirigentes responsabilizaran por cualquier disturbio en celebraciones,” *El Imparcial*, June 23, 1956.

<sup>146</sup> Álvarez A., *Conventos, aulas y trincheras*. P. 290,291

<sup>147</sup> Azmitia Jiménez, *La represion del 25 de junio De 1956*.

*de Sitio*, martial law, had been imposed throughout the country.<sup>148</sup> The Ministerio de la Defensa published an official statement of the events of the 25th. The Ministro de Defensa claimed the students were violating the state of emergency imposed that Sunday, which prohibited public congregation. The Ministro, along with the president, affirmed that students were the first to act violently firing shots at the police who had no other option but to defend themselves and protect the public order.<sup>149</sup> The accusations against the students also included an explanation of how student disobedience was part of a large-scale conspiracy against the government.<sup>150</sup> Another declaration claimed the police had confiscated weapons from the students and the newspaper ran the pictures of six revolvers, several machetes and hand grenades.<sup>151</sup> The alleged use of machetes—a rural tool— as a weapon employed by urban middle class university students appeared more as a way to relate the students to the labor or peasant movements. The claim that the students had weapons was used as a pretext that allowed the government to search and arrest any individual that seemed suspicious as well as the right to search residences of “known communists.”

The Ministro de Gobernación as the official spokesperson from the government also blamed the students for allowing themselves to be influenced by communist individuals. He claimed that Vicente Lombardo Toledano, an important Mexican labor leader, had arrived to Guatemala to give the students instructions for an insurrection.<sup>152</sup> The Director of National Security, Ismael Ortiz Orellana, backed up the declarations of the Ministro de la Defensa and the

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<sup>148</sup> “Estado de Sitio en toda la nación.”

<sup>149</sup> “Ministerio de la Defensa informa sobre los sucesos de anoche, coordinado plan revelan de subversión,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956.

<sup>150</sup> “Ministerio de la Defensa informa sobre los sucesos de anoche, coordinado plan revelan de subversión.”; “Medidas de emergencia además de prevenir disturbios estudiantiles se debe también a existencia de movimiento proveniente del exterior,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956.

<sup>151</sup> “Armas incautadas a los manifestantes el lunes,” *Prensa Libre*, June 28, 1956.

<sup>152</sup> “Deseo de evitar disturbios movió al gobierno a declarar Estado de Alarma,” *Prensa Libre*, June 25, 1956.

Ministro de Gobernación about foreign communist intervention in student organizations and reported that the government had exiled 35 individuals from the country for their participation in the events.<sup>153</sup> Ortiz Orellana said it was sad to observe how “the student body [...] was being used by communism.” As proof he presented to the members of the press a manifesto issued by the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, PGT, in which they exalted the contributions of the revolutionary government, shunned the return of figures from Ubico’s dictatorship and exalted people to participate in the events of June 25<sup>th</sup>. He also claimed to have proof of the connection between foreign communists and the “instigators” of the protests. For Ortiz Orellana it was too much of a coincidence the similarities of discourse between communist publications and certain student owned newspapers.<sup>154</sup> The army, through the Ministerio de la Defensa, also issued a statement blaming the university students for creating within a university association a “pro-communist nucleus.”

According to Ministro de Defensa, “a university student, as any other citizen, is free to profess any political ideas they consider better [...] although of course he could not be a member of communist groups.”<sup>155</sup> This statement also said that the university as a whole should not be categorized as communist simply by the actions of a small group of “communist fanatics.” To end his statement the Ministro also emphasized that it was the responsibility of the university students to act in such a manner that would not jeopardize the university autonomy.

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<sup>153</sup> “Razones para extrañar del país a algunos periodistas,” *El Imparcial*, June 28, 1956. Among the individuals exiled were some of the people arrested after attending the discussion on human rights. The official reason for forcing Mario Monteforte Toledo and other journalists who owned and or were editors of newspapers critical to the government was because of their “pro-communist” actions.

<sup>154</sup> “Medidas de emergencia además de prevenir disturbios estudiantiles de debe también a existencia de movimiento proveniente del exterior.”

<sup>155</sup> “La Universidad de San Carlos y la baja política,” *El Imparcial*, June 26, 1956.

The Ministro de Gobernación declared that while the government had all the proof necessary to act with “the most effective control and repression, to avoid that the true cultural aim of our University is distorted”, they would not do so in order to respect its autonomy. Instead the Ministro added: the government “limits its power of authority, in relation to the student body, from university doors out, where all the citizens must be measured with the same standard of equality required before the law.”<sup>156</sup> The government did not apologize for the deaths of the students but instead blamed them on the ‘irresponsible’ student leaders who allowed the march.

In relation to the weapons attributed to the students in their first public statement the government claimed one officer had died and many had been injured. Other reports claimed only one police officer had been hit in the head<sup>157</sup>. Two days later the Ministro de Gobernación published the picture of an officer injured in the attacks against the students. Officer Raúl Sánchez Rodríguez of the national police, according to the government was hospitalized as a result of the violent acts of the students.<sup>158</sup> A list was later issued to *El Imparcial* with the names and types of wound sustained by the police officers. Officer Sánchez’s wound was the most grave, consisting of a bullet strafing the side of his face. The described wounds of the rest of the officers were: wounds to their arms, feet, and fingers, closely differentiating between thumbs and pinkies. Despite what appeared to be not serious injuries, the officers were being cared for in a hospital.

The students arrested on the 24th and 25th were accused of sedition. The Procurador General de la Nación, Manuel de León Cardona tried to lobby so that they could be judged in a

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<sup>156</sup> “Declaraciones del Ministro de Gobernación por la radio 4 causas preludieron sucesos del 25,” *El Imparcial*, June 28, 1956.

<sup>157</sup> “Ministerio de la Defensa informa sobre los sucesos de anoche, coordinado plan revelan de subversión.”

<sup>158</sup> “Declaraciones del Ministro de Gobernación por la radio 4 causas preludieron sucesos del 25.”

military tribunal and given the death penalty. His petition was consistent with the fact that the courts under the martial law were placed under the control of the armed forces, however the courts requested to maintain their autonomy and not be subject to military control. But in the criminal cases, the students were still charged with the crime of sedition. The following days, the press reported that the arrests against possible suspects continued. Based on the liberties provided by the martial law, the police could arrest and use violence against anyone on the street after nine at night. The police also warned, “every person caught in suspicious activities will be persecuted and punished.”<sup>159</sup> The police then began arresting students, teachers and lawyers who, as part of the university’s actions, were presenting Recursos de Exhibición and aiding with the legal proceedings for those arrested on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>160</sup> Castillo Armas warned that the arrests would continue, “until the country was completely cleaned of communists and agitators.”<sup>161</sup> As part of the martial law, the government declared that it would censor all media. The students were not allowed to refute the stories accusing them of being communists. The few newspapers that were critical of the government had their owners and editors arrested the Saturday before the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> and their newspapers were associated with communist publications.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> “Vigencia plena de la Ley de Orden Público y Estado de Sitio,” *El Imparcial*, June 28, 1956.

<sup>160</sup> “Detención del Br. Rosales comprobando,” *El Imparcial*, June 27, 1956. “Memorial envían al Presidente estudiantes de pasantía.”

<sup>161</sup> “Firme la estabilidad de su gobierno, declaro Castillo Armas: Comunismo y acción comunista, lo que se barre,” *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956.

<sup>162</sup> “Medidas de emergencia además de prevenir disturbios estudiantiles de debe también a existencia de movimiento proveniente del exterior.”

## **Police Transformation: The New Police Code**

In 1955 Castillo Armas passed a new Ley Orgánica de la Policía Nacional through Decree 332 and reverted the name of Guardia Civil back to its “more historic” Policía Nacional. This change was the first governmental change to the Ley orgánica of the police since 1940 when Jorge Ubico had instituted his own. But Castillo Armas’ more immediate change soon after taking power was the creation of the *Servicio de Seguridad* in September 1954.<sup>163</sup> The Servicio de Seguridad was under the direct control of the president and it was in charge of carrying out the duties of the Guardia Judicial. In February 1956 Castillo Armas issued more definite instructions regarding the Servicio de Seguridad by substituting it with the *Dirección General de Seguridad Nacional*, under the authority of the Ministerio de Gobernación but for the first time with jurisdiction over the National Police. As part of the structural changes, there was also an emphasis on militarizing the police and U.S. advisors arrived to the country to help restructure the new force.<sup>164</sup>

The Dirección de Seguridad Nacional was divided in three departments: *Seguridad, Judicial, and Jurídico Administrativo*. The Departamento de Seguridad became the more important in the following years because it included the Committee of Defense Against Communism, whose job it was to prevent and combat any communist action or individuals in the country, and became “the contemporary version of the inquisition.”<sup>165</sup> The official functions of the Department of Security were to “investigate, prevent, uncover, persecute and monitor against

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<sup>163</sup> “Cuerpo de Detectives.”

<sup>164</sup> “Militarización de los servicios de la Policía Nacional será solicitada,” *El Imparcial*, September 4, 1956.; “En servicios de Policía se asesoran,” *El Imparcial*, March 5, 1956.

<sup>165</sup> Carlos Guzmán Böckler, “La Huelga de Dolores que viví con mi generación, 1947-1977,” *Viernes de Dolores* 1998, 15.

political crimes.” It was divided in two sections, *Sección de Servicio Secreto* and the *Sección de Defensa Contra el Comunismo u Otros Sistemas Totalitarios*.<sup>166</sup>

The Secret Service section was in charge of investigating confidential cases for the state. Their duties were to “investigate, denounce and prevent criminal acts against the security of the state and the public order.” The duties of the Defense Against Communism section were to “investigate, control, monitor, denounce, and persecute communist activities.” Communist activities were defined by the *Ley Preventiva Penal Contra el Comunismo* but also included other “totalitarian systems that by their methods or procedures represent a danger to society and its democratic institutions.”<sup>167</sup> This section was also in charge of capturing people accused of communist activities and turning them over to the justice system. Their officers and offices were given complete access to the records of any other state agency in order to facilitate the effectiveness of their duties. The agents who worked for the entire Departamento de Seguridad were not required to identify themselves as such unless they were carrying out an arrest, search warrant or when required by another higher authority. Due to their incognito position, some of these agents began to go undercover in the university to alert of any communist or subversive activity in campus or student sessions.

The duties historically carried out by the Policía Judicial transferred to the Departamento Judicial, the second of the three branches. Their duties remained the same as the Policía Judicial, to arrest and investigate common crimes against people and property. Regarding the Policía Nacional, Castillo Armas instituted the new Ley orgánica in an attempt to ‘modernize’ it and

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<sup>166</sup> “Cuerpo de Detectives.”, 241. Sección de Servicio Secreto refers to Secret Service Section. Sección de Defensa Contra el Comunismo, Section against communism and other totalitarian regimes.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



facilitate its duties.<sup>168</sup> The new law reaffirmed one of the few changes of the 1944 constitution regarding the police, which transformed it into a civil institution. The new law stressed that the police would receive training and specialization to attain a “professional character.” Article 7 of the new law also stated that the police was “a disciplined, apolitical and obedient institution.”<sup>169</sup>

Two Memoria de Labores related to the counterrevolutionary period led by Castillo Armas, the Memoria de Labores of 1955 and the Memoria de Labores de Quetzaltenango of the same year. In his annual report, the director of the National Police of Guatemala assured the president that the entity was reorganized to fit its new law. In the director’s summary of events it is clear that the rhetoric once again changed to fit the new regime and also the new enemy: communists. The Memorias note an increased number of arrests on the crime of communism. Despite the fact that the new Police was supposed to be “apolitical,” on June 2, according to their records, commemorative plaques were unveiled in the headquarters of the police with legends thanking the Ejército Nacional Libertador for their actions of June 29<sup>th</sup> 1954, referring to the coup against the Arbenz government.<sup>170</sup> The Memoria de Labores of Quetzaltenango, the second largest and important city of Guatemala, also supported the new regime. The past government described by the chief was “an anarchy whose regime kept the Guatemalan family in division and if it had continued the consequences would have been disastrous.” The Memoria ended with the words God, Fatherland and Freedom, the signature slogan of the Liberation movement.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Guatemala, *Ley Orgánica De La Policía Nacional; Decreto Presidencial número 332*, Publicaciones del Ministerio de Gobernación (Guatemala: Tip. Nacional, 1965).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 4,5.

<sup>170</sup> “Memoria de los trabajos llevados a cabo en la Republica, por la Policía Nacional en 1955” (Guatemala, 1955), Libro 1500, GT-PN 30-1500, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala, 11.

<sup>171</sup> “Memoria de las labores desarrolladas durante el año de 1955 en la estación de la Policía Nacional en el departamento de Quetzaltenango, Rep., Guatemala.-” (Quetzaltenango, 1955); Libro 1871, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

The Memorias also show a stronger emphasis placed on the section in charge of identification. A fragment read, “the increase in the identification task [...] was a superior achievement, it managed to obtain ten thousand three hundred twenty five index files during the year.” The accomplishment was important since according to the police, “the effectiveness of a Cabinet of Identification is based precisely on the amount of files available in its archives.”<sup>172</sup> These files, of course, would serve as an index to note not only criminal acts but also for the monitoring of Guatemalan citizens. However the fichas also show that it was no longer simply the police in charge of investigating, monitoring, and keeping tabs on the opposition. One ficha mentioned a secret group named Relampago, which as noted in the document, was spying on El Derecho and also alerted the government that the students would march on June 1956.<sup>173</sup>

I was able to find some fichas corresponding to a number of the deceased and participants in the march of June 25th. Salvador Orozco, one of the students killed, had a ficha that began on 1955 noting that he was elected secretary of the association El Derecho in June 1955. A later annotation mentioned that he was expressing his discontent about the government, and that he participated and was wounded in the march of June 25, 1956. His ficha ended the year after his death in 1957, when it reported that a peregrination visited his tomb.<sup>174</sup> Julio Juárez Pérez, another student killed, had a ficha that began in 1953 when he was accused of robbery. The next annotation to his file was in 1956 when his death was reported and that a group of students met

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<sup>172</sup> “Memoria de los trabajos llevados a cabo en la Republica, por la Policía Nacional en 1955”, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Confidencial, “Relámpago,” Fondo 50 Caja 500329 Legajo 3 Doc 1196409, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>174</sup> “Archivo Guardia Judicial-Ficha Salvador Orozco,” Fondo 50 Caja 5000337 Legajo 6 Doc 1181894, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

to protest his death. The last notation to his ficha dated from 1957, when the National Police passed photographs of him to the General Directory of National Security.<sup>175</sup>

Another individual whose ficha was noteworthy was that of Jorge E. Rosal, the only person who held the presidency of the AEU in two occasions. His first term was during the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz, he was the president of the AEU during the *Atentados Dinamiteros* of June 1952. However, his ficha began until 1955 when he was labeled a communist but also noted that he worked in the hospital of the National Police.<sup>176</sup> Rosal's work in the hospital began after the fall of the revolution as a way to aid those apprehended by the liberation movement for political reasons.<sup>177</sup> His ficha explained that he participated, was wounded and arrested during the march of June 25, 1956. Information about him continued until the 1970's, with several notations for both political reason and for crimes reported against him. Other fichas described individuals who were deemed communists and instigators of the events of June 1956.<sup>178</sup> These fichas illustrate how some students were being monitored and catalogued as communists even before the June events.

These police documents aid in understanding how the language and idea of anticommunism quickly permeated the police and dictated its actions. Despite the accusations against Santos Lima, the case did not advance. Since Santos Lima was a member of the army; he

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<sup>175</sup> "Ficha Julio Juárez Pérez Estudiante de Medicina," Fondo 50 Caja 58A93.4 Legajo 6 Doc 158823, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>176</sup> Archivo Guardia Judicial, "Ficha Jorge Edilberto Rosal Meléndez," Fondo 50 Caja 500234 Legajo 6 Doc 1017791, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.

<sup>177</sup> Jorge Edilberto Rosal Meléndez, "Discurso del Doctor Jorge Edilberto Rosal Meléndez al recibir la medalla de honor al mérito profesional" (presented at the Asamblea de Presidentes de los Colegios Profesionales de Guatemala, Guatemala, Agosto 5, 2006); Rubén Barreda Avila, *Guaridas infernales; Mi drama vivido durante 1096 días en las mazmorras penitenciarias, en el período en el que Carlos Castillo Armas detentó poder y ultrajó la dignidad nacional* (Guatemala: s.n., 1960).

<sup>178</sup> "Ficha Salvador Orozco," Fondo 50 Caja 5000337 Legajo 6 Doc 1181894, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.; "Ficha José Quiñonez," Fondo 50, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional de Guatemala.; Confidencial, "Relampago."

could not be tried in regular courts but instead any accusations against him had to be decided by a military tribunal.<sup>179</sup> In July Castillo Armas substituted Santos Lima Bonilla from his post as Inspector General of the National Police.<sup>180</sup> By the end of July newspapers reported that the process against Santos Lima and two other police officers had begun. However, the article also reported that Santos Lima was soon departing on a scholarship to Panamá where he was to specialize in the formation and organization of militarized police.<sup>181</sup> Lima's scholarship was in fact one to attend the School of the Americas, since as their records show he attended the course on militarized police from July to September 1956.<sup>182</sup> Santos Lima training in militarization of the police was part of the government's aim to militarize the police to adapt it to the changing needs of the country.<sup>183</sup> Militarization, said the new Inspector General, Rubén Gonzáles Rivera, was necessary not as a way to intimidate the population, but to instill better discipline in the personnel and extend control in rural areas.<sup>184</sup> After Santos Lima departed from the country, the military tribunal decided to place the process on hold until his return, in fact simply dismissing all the charges against him. Carlos Guzmán Böckler, the families' lawyer even asked for the death penalty against Lima; however, the tribunal did not accept the evidence he presented and dropped the charges. As a last defiant act Guzmán Böckler asked the judges "if they were a court of law, or servants of a dictatorship. Of course they did not answer."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> "Responderán a Tribunal Militar Santos Lima, Cahueque y Chiquín," *El Imparcial*, July 13, 1956.

<sup>180</sup> "Santos Lima Removido de su cargo de tercer jefe; reciben sucesores," *El Imparcial*.

<sup>181</sup> "Santos Lima partirá a Panamá: Indagatoria está pendiente en la auditoría de Guerra," *El Imparcial*, July 23, 1956.

<sup>182</sup> "SOA Graduate Database," <http://soaw.org/grads/index.php>.

<sup>183</sup> "Militarización de los servicios de la Policía Nacional será solicitada."

<sup>184</sup> "Disciplina y no para atemorizar la militarización," *El Imparcial*, September 6, 1956.

<sup>185</sup> "Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler."

In the days and weeks following June 25th, the courts ordered the release of a number of students arrested, citing lack of evidence to continue a case against them. Others were released on bail and continued fighting the charges against them and the police continued investigations to link them to communist organizations. Releases were not immediate, since the police denied having some individuals under their control. Many were exiled to other Central American countries like Honduras and Costa Rica. The government maintained martial law for two months, since according to the Ministro de Gobernación “the communists are still very insolent” and investigations needed to continue.<sup>186</sup>

### **La Crisis se Da por Terminada, la Democracia No Ha Sido Lesionada: Long Term Consequences and Institutionalized Violence**

On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Mario Sandoval Alarcón, who served as the private secretary for president Castillo Armas, delivered a speech where he called for the use of institutionalized violence if necessary to stop the communist threat. He stated, “the time for mercy has ended” and “the era of organized violence” had begun. His speech marked the celebration of the first year of his recently formed political party. The Movimiento Democrático Nacionalista, MDN, stressed that in order to defend democracy, “it is legal and necessary to reach the extremes of force and power, aggressiveness, and passion if necessary.”<sup>187</sup> Sandoval and his followers would continue to develop this belief in future years and turn their violent points of view into brutal and horrific organizations such as death squads one of the most infamous being Mano Blanca.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> “Se declara el Estado de Sitio en todo el país durante otros treinta años a partir del día 26,” *El Imparcial*, July 23, 1956.

<sup>187</sup> Azmitia Jiménez, *La Represion Del 25 De Junio De 1956*.

<sup>188</sup> Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*; Deborah. Levenson-Estrada, “The Life That Makes Us Die/The Death That Makes Us Live: Facing Terrorism in Guatemala City,” *Radical History Review* 85 (2003): 94-104:87. Sisniega

After the June events, the government publicly agreed with the official statement of the MDN by stating that the recent events justified their declarations.<sup>189</sup> The MDN was not the first to ask the government for the use of violence against opposition. In March of that same year on the eve of the Huelga de Dolores, Monseñor Rossell y Arellano, an archconservative supporter of the counterrevolution, called for the intervention of the police against the Huelga and the students involved in it claiming that behind “that buffoonery of bad taste and lack of culture, hides the communist brutality against the people of Guatemala.”<sup>190</sup> Rossell’s statement forced the AEU to issue statement declaring its absolute support for the Huelga. The association also expressed that any violence of security forces against university students would be blamed on Rossell’s call for violence against a group of students who were simply carrying on a longstanding university tradition that had only been repressed during the era of Ubico.<sup>191</sup>

A group of Guatemalan women had also started issuing public statements declaring: “communists are using to the student body and to other national sectors, to divide the Guatemalan family.” They believed “government measures will prevent new acts of blood. The communists, we must never forget, are masters of provocation and are only interested in

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Otero in his interview justified the actions of Raúl Lorenzana, the man credited for the creation of Mano Blanca and a member of the MDN. Otero said that Lorenzana’s father had been violently tortured by the police during the revolutionary period. That was the reason why the son decided to start Mano Blanca in 1966. Lorenzana father was in fact killed but he was part of the invasion forces during the coup of 1944.

<sup>189</sup> “Declaraciones del Ministro de Gobernación por la radio 4 causas preludieron sucesos del 25.”

<sup>190</sup> Un grupo de estudiantes universitarios, “A la opinion publica” (Guatemala, March 22, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1951, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin. That year, the Huelga de Dolores paraded a float named the Causes of Indoamerica’s Sickness, consisting of a military helmet, a bishop’s miter, and Uncle Sam’s hat. The students also read a satirized version of the Our Father prayer infuriating Rossell y Arellano who excommunicated several students, including José Barnoya and Guzmán Böckler. José Barnoya recalled that the government did attempt to repress the parade but the workers of the Licorera Nacional warned the students that the police would attack. The workers offered to march with them for support and protection.

<sup>191</sup> Consejo Superior Estudiantil, “Apoyo total a la Huelga de Dolores” (Guatemala, March 22, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1956, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

divisions, grief and anguish.”<sup>192</sup> These statements serve to show that throughout the country a consensus was arising on the part of the Guatemalan conservative groups that institutionalized violence was the answer against the “communist” threat. However these groups themselves shaped their enemy to fit their flexible communist mold in which any opposition could be deemed communist and therefore it was the duty of the government to repress such groups.

Therefore the political climate in which these students decided to celebrate a civic occasion of remembrance for the freedoms obtained in 1944 was filled with the idea that any force necessary would be used to quiet the dissident voices. Those in power established a political system that no longer allowed freedom of expression and quickly suppressed any attempt to challenge the system. Protests by the students would no longer be tolerated and it was clear the government would use the police and army against them without hesitation. By associating the entirety of the events with foreign communist infiltration, the government managed to validate the repression. The government did its best to dislocate the student movement by restricting constitutional guarantees, and creating a state of fear and panic in the population about a possible communist take over. After the events of June, the government warned that it was time university authorities took charge and prevented illegal activities in student associations. At the same time through the Ministro de Gobernación the government warned “to the university one goes to study and not to turn our highest center of culture into a political trench from where a few communist students can conspire [...] the government is set to end with the subversion and will not tolerate another outbreak.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> “Manifiesto de la mujer Guatemalteca al pueblo de Guatemala” (Guatemala, 1956), Box 1956 Item 1966, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>193</sup> “Declaraciones del Ministro de Gobernación por la radio 4 causas preludiaron sucesos del 25.”

The regime's actions also had several similarities with the era of Ubico given its repressive tactics. Nothing could exemplify this better than the return of Bernabé Linares to his post as director of the Judicial Police, or the rise of equally brutal figures like Santo Lima Bonilla. During the dictatorship of Ubico the infamous *Ley Fuga* was used as a tactic for the police to legally shoot all enemies by claiming that the person in custody attempted to escape. Castillo Armas instituted his own version of the law, where the opposition to his government, would be labeled as communist thus providing the police with the legal means to repress it. Thus, as the quote at the beginning of the chapter states, these events “*marcaron la vuelta siniestra de Guatemala al pasado.*”<sup>194</sup> Once again, it was acceptable for the head of state to use repression to deal with the opposition. However, most importantly, it marked a point in which the discourse began to emerge that the army and the police would be responsible to keep the country safe against external and internal enemies.<sup>195</sup> This mention on internal enemies gave leverage to the army as well as the police to unite and fight the citizens they had sworn to protect.

During a press statement, Castillo Armas declared: “the crisis has ended, democracy has not been harmed”, his words illustrated how the definition of democracy could be stretched to define his government which was clearly not democratic.<sup>196</sup> Through the structural reforms of the police and the new ethos of anticommunism, opponents of the government were suppressed and deemed communist and terrorist. Democracy was not hurt because it did not exist in the first place. The Guatemalan Police underwent great structural changes affecting its functions and

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<sup>194</sup> Signaled the sinister return to the past.

<sup>195</sup> “Institución militar está dispuesta a que se cumpla al pie de la letra con el precepto legal que cataloga al comunismo internacional como una actividad ilícita en el país,” *El Imparcial*, June 29, 1956.

<sup>196</sup> Mario Ribas Montes, “La mayoría del pueblo anticomunista está a su lado, declaró Castillo Armas a la prensa unida,” *El Imparcial*, June 30, 1956.



creating new hierarchies. The Policía Judicial transformed into the Dirección de Seguridad, which contained the sections of Secret Service and Defense Against Communism, and was given more power than the regular National Police. The Committee of Defense Against Communism, combined with the loose and over generalized meaning of the term communist, facilitated the repression of any opposition. The structural transformations encouraged the police to monitor citizens by placing greater emphasis on Section of Identification.

Despite the repression, student leaders and young professional graduates declared that the opposition had to continue fighting. Jorge Mario García, editor of the newspaper *El Estudiante* declared “podemos permitirnos el lujo de perder no una si no muchas batallas. Esta fue una pérdida y la otras tendrán que venir.” The student movement did continue to suffer many more losses in years to come. The events described in this chapter were only the beginning of a long history of repression, torture, disappearances, and murders against university students by various military governments that ruled the country until 1985.

## Conclusion

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 1959, the AEU unveiled a plaque on the 6ta Avenida and 11 calle of Guatemala City, as homage to the five students killed in that street on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1956. Similarly, the campus of the Universidad de San Carlos is filled with murals, plaques and plazas paying tribute to the hundreds of students killed and disappeared by the State's security forces during country's 36-year civil war. The university students along with the National Police gained great significance during the war because of their respective roles in the conflict. The student movement after 1956 remained critical of all governments in power and as a result suffered an immense amount of state repression through raids, disappearances and murder of students. The police became a tool of the State working alongside the army to carry out the repression against Guatemalan citizens. However, in order to fully understand the path that each group took during this period, it is also necessary to trace how their ideologies developed. My thesis achieves this by providing background and analysis of the students and the police during the 1950's, an era that shaped the ideologies and future radicalization of both entities. The police transitioned from being part of a democratic government to being one of the most repressive forces in the country's history. Similarly, the CEUA, which had at first supported Arévalo, aligned itself to the extreme right, defenders of institutionalized violence. And the rest of the student movement, which started as 'apolitical', supported the insurgency forces during the war and many students joined the guerrilla lines.

With the emergence of democracy in 1944, university students, their participation, demands and active involvement in the revolutionary government "contributed to the process of

nation building.”<sup>197</sup> Just as important was their fragmentation into different associations within the university as a reaction to the social reforms enacted by the revolutionary regime. For the students who belonged to the AEU, their democratic ideals based on the promises of the 1944 revolution were so strong that in 1952 they opted to align themselves with counterrevolutionary students to protest the possible use of torture by the police. During the counterrevolution, university students discovered that opposition to the government would no longer be tolerated, but instead violently repressed by ghosts of the past that had once again materialized. Also, while government forces directed the police to quiet and target the protestors, the anticommunist students, by then in positions of power, would not return the favor: instead of showing the same solidarity that the AEU once gave them, they supported and excused the police procedures.

The police as an institution presented a challenge for the revolutionary government: how should a State institution, infamous for its oppressive tactics during the previous authoritarian regime, be transformed and made compatible with the democratic ideals of respect for the rule of law professed by the revolution? While the ethos of the police was transformed to meet these democratic ideals, the government failed to make structural changes in the police laws to reinforce the ideological changes. If the revolutionary government had placed the same emphasis on structural changes as they did on ideological change of the police, perhaps the police could have served as a true example of an institution compatible with a democratic regime. Police reform was necessary because it “is the institutional linchpin in [...] establishing the rule of law in post authoritarian society,”<sup>198</sup> since it will dictate how the country’s security forces, given their monopoly on the use of force, will exercise that power. Moreover, in emerging democracies attempting to leave behind their authoritarian past, structural and ideological

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<sup>197</sup> Altbach, “Student Politics in the Third World”: 636.

<sup>198</sup> Tanner, “Review”:103.

changes need to be addressed together since “the potential for police violence and the rhetoric that would justify it are endemic. The control of violence then, is not automatic; it is a matter of policy affected through many institutions, including the management of the police itself as well as separate institutions of accountability.”<sup>199</sup> If the democratic government had made structural reforms of the Ley Orgánica of the police, they would have given it greater legitimacy in society’s eyes and perhaps, if the accusations of torture were false, it would have been less likely that sectors of the populations like the university students would have believed them.

When the counterrevolution took power, the institution was transformed by authorities that longed to return to a period structured around brutality and order with no considerations for the integrity or lives of the country’s citizens. Therefore, Guatemala’s position after 1954 can be considered a new version of the pre-1944 past, when new enemies were created and new forms of institutionalized repression were instituted. Communism became an umbrella term that could be shaped to fit any time of dissenting voice willing to criticize the government and the authorities. The Police was transformed in its structure and its ethos to make it compatible with this new enemy. The reforms enacted excused the use of excessive force during isolated incidents of public disorder as the case of the student march in 1956, but also during everyday policing. This was accomplished by making communism illegal and persecuting anyone believed to be communist. The police had the liberty to stop and question anyone who looked suspicious and anyone whose ideas were considered dangerous to democracy. The creation of new hierarchical structures in the police, like the Departamento de Seguridad, with its Comité de Defensa contra el Comunismo are examples of how the structural changes were compatible with the new anticommunist ideology of the State. The Police as an institution has the ability to use

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<sup>199</sup> Paul Chevigny, *Edge of the Knife: Police Violence in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995), 26.

force to “control people and impose order [but] controlling the level of violence is the essential problem of human rights in ordinary police work.”<sup>200</sup> The police under the counterrevolutionary government was not able to control the use of force exerted over political opponents, and thus torture and human right abuses on the hands of the police became the norm.

The other important issue analyzed in this thesis was the solidarity among university students during the revolutionary period. By criticizing Arbenz and his functionaries and aligning themselves with right-wing groups who fought under the banner of anticommunism, did the student associations like the AEU “betray” the revolution? No, the students in the AEU were more concerned to make sure the revolutionary ideals of democracy were upheld than to support or remain faithful to specific figures of the revolutionary government. However, by allying with the CEUA and accusing the government of violations, the AEU had the political effect of calling into question the extent of real change of the democratic government. Still, as a way to avoid criticism, or be blamed of favoritism for either government, in public the AEU maintained a position of being apolitical, even though clearly, the AEU was a political instrument for the students. In the same way, in 1956, despite claiming to be apolitical the students through their actions showed they had ideological and political positions that opposed the government.

It is impossible to conclude from the information gathered whether the members of the CEUA were actually tortured. The Police archives do not contain, to my knowledge, evidence of torture during the revolution. The same was the case with the documents of the University Archives: while there was mention of a commission in charge of investigating the allegations, there were no documents listing their conclusions. Similarly, the newspapers did not report on the investigations of torture. It is clear that the CEUA took advantage of the situation by

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, II.

publicizing and at times exaggerating their ordeal through their bulletins, describing horrific acts allegedly carried out by the police.

Publicizing the alleged abuses provided the CEUA with a collection of stories that would aid their goal of destabilizing the government from abroad by making terror stories part of the propaganda against Arbenz. But if the police did commit abuses, would that mean the emphasis on transforming the police ethos was in vain? The answer to this question requires further research on the police during this period, to understand whether cases of abuse were frequent or isolated incidents. Then perhaps one could reach a conclusion as to whether the police as a whole was never reformed but simply continued using the same repressive practices they had developed under the Ubico dictatorship. Without proper oversight of the police, there is always possibility for the police to retain their old style of use of repressive force even in a new democratic regime. But if the incidents were isolated then it could be argued that their use of force corresponds to one of the two types of violence described by Chevigny in his book about police abuses in the U.S. and Latin America. The author makes a distinction between two types of police violence. The first is official violence, “calculated and directed at political enemies”; the second is “more routine police violence in dealing with crowds and crimes.” The second type can be considered ‘police brutality’ meaning that certain members of the police are ‘out of control’, but the first type is deemed ‘political repression’ “a calculated act by a centralized authority.”<sup>201</sup> Thus if the allegations of torture against the students were product of ‘police brutality’, structural reforms to the police’s laws, creating more accountability, along with the democratic ideals would have made it more difficult for the police to abuse their power and for society to believe they were still an oppressive force.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

However, during the counterrevolution, the combination of structural reforms with the new anticommunist ideal made it clear that police violence was a centralized act. The transformation of state institutions like the National Police, with their new rules and emphasis on destroying the enemy was the start of a doctrine of national security, which continued to develop with disastrous effects for Guatemala, given that all citizens who did not abide to the rules created by the new regimes were considered enemies. The Movimiento de Liberación began closing all the doors for a civic opposition; opponents in turn began to realize that change through political means would be almost impossible, and other means were needed. Beginning with the counterrevolution and throughout the war, “anyone who wanted to create a student movement was a sure candidate for the cemetery, that is if they buried him, if he didn’t just disappear without leaving trace, so the ones who had ideals, either they went to war, or they swallowed them [the ideals].”<sup>202</sup>

The experiences of both right and left-winged university students, in terms of student organizing, playing a role of opposition and the interaction with the security forces, had an important impact on these students. Both the CEUA and the AEU developed very different ideas of what both administrations represented and some of their members continued having active organizational and political participation role in the country. Jorge Rosal, the twice president of the AEU eventually joined the Guatemalan guerrilla branch Organización del Pueblo en Armas, ORPA, he lived in exile for some time and in 1996 he was one of the signers of the Peace Accords.<sup>203</sup> Roberto Díaz Castillo, the president of the AEU at the time of the 1954 coup was exiled to Chile, he eventually returned and continued working in the university. In 1980 his son

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<sup>202</sup> “Entrevista Carlos Guzmán Böckler.”

<sup>203</sup> Rosal Meléndez, “Discurso del Doctor Jorge Edilberto Rosal Meléndez al recibir la Medalla de Honor al Mérito Profesional.”

was killed by the army, prompting him to once again leave to exile, he returned in 1994 and to this date continues working in the University of San Carlos.<sup>204</sup> Ricardo Ramirez de León, a member of the FUD during the revolution, became better known as Rolando Morán, a *comandante* of the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, EGP, another Guatemalan guerrilla branch.<sup>205</sup> Rolando Moran, also participated in the signing of the Peace Accords between the guerrilla and the army in 1996. Jose Barnoya continues to participate in the events of the Huelga de Dolores and is considered one of the most knowledgeable individuals about its history. Leonel Sisniega Otero and Mario Sandoval Alarcón continued with their political party MDN, which was later renamed Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, MLN, the party of organized violence. Beginning in the 1960's Sandoval Alarcón organized and directed paramilitary groups, later in his life he lost his voice, which he claimed was caused by the tortures he underwent while in prison during 1953. Both Sisniega Otero and Sandoval Alarcón also held political posts during the following military governments.

Finally, both periods provide insight into a complex set of relations among university students and between these student associations and the National Police. Through the events of 1952, students learned that democracy also entailed respecting the opposition and at times looking beyond ideologies and working alongside the anticommunists to demand that authorities behave according to the democratic rules. The interactions among these students were complex because while the CEUA wanted help protesting the government against alleged abuses, they were not willing to do the same when the roles were reversed in 1956. The political climate in which the events of June 1956 unfolded made it acceptable for conservative groups like the CEUA to praise and promote the use of institutionalized violence against other students. The

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<sup>204</sup> Montenegro, "Roberto Díaz Castillo."

<sup>205</sup> "Entrevista Roberto Díaz Castillo."



Police, as a protagonist in the events of 1952 and 1956, served as a mirror of the transformations as well as the mistakes of the political regimes in power. What the institution's actual role was in 1952 and in 1956, is still very much unknown, and these unknowns continued until 1996 when after the signing of the Peace Accords the institution was restructured. Therefore, it is necessary to continue uncovering the past about a force that played a key role in the country's politics and in its recent history. The Police Archives will be able to provide valuable information that will lead to a better understanding of the issues that influenced the institutions not only during the 1950's but during the war as well. Guatemala is a country still suffering from the brutalities of its recent past, including the genocide against the indigenous population. For those who were directly affected by state violence the Archives provide the possibility to learn the truth about their loved ones, and about how the Police committed acts of violence against its own citizens. The truth belongs to us all, studying and knowing it will hopefully help us to prevent the same acts from being committed in the future.

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