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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Nov 3 11 53 AM 1968
File Student Unrest &
ANALYSIS BRANCH
DATE: November 3, 1968

RS/AN Hall 12

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FROM : AmEmbassy MEXICO

SUBJECT : Student Unrest: Comments on Enclosures to CA-10592

REF : CA-10592 of September 3, 1968
A-1292 of August 23, 1968
A-1442 of October 20, 1968

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FOR STUDENT UNREST GROUP

Generalizations on Student Unrest (Enclosure 1)

1. We concur on basic points with the analysis of student unrest contained in Enclosure 1 to CA-10592. We find no generalization that is clearly inapplicable in the Mexican context, although the peculiarities of the Mexican social and political systems, the intermediate development stage in which Mexico finds itself, and the historical tradition of student protest which Mexico shares with other Latin American nations have combined to give Mexican student unrest a somewhat different cast, and reception, than has been the case in the U.S. and other more advanced countries.
2. Mexico has a long history of student activism. More often than not this protest has been directed against or in support of the university structure (removal of a rector, protest against dismissal of professors, the issue of autonomy), toward local issues (an increase in bus fares, theaters refusing to give student discounts) or onto the international plane (Cuba, Viet Nam, the Dominican Republic).

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Drafted by: POL:RESservice:sd (10'28'68)

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Only infrequently, since the Revolution, have students directed their protest against the Government or, even less, against the system by which Mexico is governed. Yet, in the recent student disturbances in Mexico City many see evidence of more generalized and profound dissatisfaction with the established order.

3. Modern Mexican politics derive from a social revolution which captured and retains the support of the vast majority of Mexicans. The inheritor of the revolutionary tradition, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), has been able to capitalize on the accomplishments and mystique of that tradition to maintain itself in complete political control for almost forty years. That there has been significant economic and social progress is beyond dispute. But it is equally apparent that there have been wide discrepancies between the rhetoric of democracy and the facts of one party control, between the professed dedication of PRI leaders and numerous acts of venal self-interest, and between the Government's promises and its accomplishments. In short, there are many reasons why students might doubt both the sincerity of national leaders and the appropriateness of their policies. And their doubts find sympathetic, if usually passive, hearing in a sizeable portion of the population. Mexican students share idealism and distrust of their elders with students elsewhere in the world. Less apparent in the Mexican context is that "students today reject position in society as a conscious value" or that they are the products of affluence and permissiveness who, as a consequence, no longer respect the goals and values of their parents.

4. The relative importance of politics as a career ladder, comparing Mexico with more economically advanced countries, and the one-party-dominant political system create unusual conditions for student unrest. One suspects that much of the student unrest in the U.S. and Europe is anti or apolitical in nature. Protesters have no intention or desire to enter politics themselves, even were the system completely reformed. Anarchistic and apolitical elements are also present in Mexico but we believe they encompass a much smaller percentage of active participants. Student leadership has traditionally

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been a path to professional politics which, to a continuing high degree, can be equated with PRI politics. There is no alternative party that is congenial to student views and that promises significant access to power. The overpowering position of the PRI discourages hopes for a new party, formed by any other means than a split in PRI ranks. This may be what many hope for (Carlos Madrazo, ex-President of the PRI, is periodically reported to be considering such a move) but this in itself would imply a degree of system acceptance. Mexican student leaders are aware that their political futures, at least for the next 5 - 10 years, will most probably depend on their relationships with the official party. That realization may not noticeably dampen their ardor for change as long as they are functioning as student leaders in a protest situation, but it does make them more susceptible to official blandishments once they leave the student ranks.

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5. Not only does the typical Mexican student leader have more vital political ambitions than his U.S. counterpart, but there is also a tradition of professional politician interest in student affairs, with student movements often the creature of behind-the-scene politicians. Twenty years ago student politics were rigidly controlled as an appendage to the official party. The PRI still has its youth movement, but student control in recent years has been less direct and considerably less reliable. However, many student leaders have lines of communication with individual politicians and, conversely, the temptation is strong for professional politicians to cultivate the student sector -- a temptation that will be even stronger when the 18 year old vote proposal becomes law. The protégé system is an important feature of Mexican political life and many of the organizational and leg-work type jobs, that in the U.S. would be performed by citizen volunteers out of a sense of public duty, are, in Mexico, performed by the young, aspiring politicians. It is not uncommon for them to hold important party and elected positions.

6. The Mexican tradition of close working relationships between professional politicians and student leaders, the long-term political interest of many of those leaders, and the fact that students, even without the vote, have long been a significant pressure group in Mexican society make present student unrest seem less novel and, perhaps, less a cause for alarm. Unrest is not a "fad" so far as the Mexican students are concerned. And Mexican society in general has had ample experience in the various techniques (concessions, repression, cooptation, etc.) for handling student ferment.

Indeed!
7. While student activism is nothing new in Mexico there are some indications that the events of recent months in Mexico City mark a departure from previous patterns. From 1963 to mid-1968 there were in Mexico forty instances of significant student unrest. Twenty-three of these protest movements were directed toward various aspects of university administration, eight dealt with problems peculiar to the locality of the university involved, six were in support of Cuba or against U.S. policies in Viet Nam and elsewhere, and only three had as primary demands issues related to the political control system. In Sonora in 1967 students protested against the PRI's choice for governor and the manner of his selection. In Tabasco in 1968 students mounted a sizeable

movement to oust the governor of the state. In the Federal District, also earlier this year, communist-led students demanded the release of political prisoners. The six demands formulated by the National Strike Council (CNH) in connection with the most recent student protest movement in Mexico City ignore entirely university or foreign policy issues. It might be argued that the demand for dismissal of police officials and the disbandment of the riot police are local issues related to specific instances of over-zealous use of force. But viewed in context with other demands -- the release of political prisoners, the elimination of the article in the penal code dealing with the crime of "social dissolution" -- it is quite reasonable to argue that the thrust of student activism has moved onto a new plane and that students are now more interested in basic reforms than in resolving specific grievances. In this we believe that Mexican student unrest is drawing closer to the pattern exhibited recently in the U.S. and Western European countries. We do not yet see the same degree of student alienation as is present in the advanced countries, or in those with basically unpopular governments, but the trend for the time being is in that direction.

8. It is perhaps noteworthy that in none of the cases of student unrest mentioned above have the announced aims of the students included issues of direct interest to the labor or campesino sector. This may reflect the fact that there is little sympathy between students and campesino or labor youth who tend to look upon students as a privileged and pampered group.

9. The characterization of attitudes toward the U.S. and the Soviet Union are fairly valid for the Mexican student. A 1964 USIS sponsored study of the opinions of university students in Mexico (prepared by International Research Associates S.A. de C.V.) makes it clear that they are most valid for those students who rate themselves as "very interested in politics." But, whether because anti-Americanism has been around so long that it has become passé, or because the Government takes pains to control possibly embarrassing incidents, anti-U.S. demonstrations of recent years have drawn minimal support. It might be argued that the fact that many Mexicans have visited or worked in the U.S. has permitted them to learn of the good points of American society. We judge that the present standing of the Soviet Union in Mexican student eyes is quite low. It still may be preferred to the U.S. on ideological grounds by many of the more active students, but a substantial proportion of these have now shifted their primary allegiance to the Cuban or Chinese models of communist development. In their eyes the differences between the U.S. and the Soviet Union are diminishing.

General Action Recommendations on Student Unrest (Enclosure 2)

10. We concur fully with the tenor of Enclosure 2, and most particularly with the statement "that there is little that the U.S. Government can or should do about student unrest." The closeness of the U.S., the traditional Mexican fear of U.S. domination, rule out direct U.S. initiatives and make even indirect actions (encouragement to foundations and private groups) of doubtful usefulness. The Department is doubtless aware of the charges and rumors that the CIA and FBI were involved in the recent student disturbances even, according to some reports, playing the role of instigators. While we may smile at the twisted logic that could lead to such a conclusion, it is a fact that some

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Mexicans involved with student affairs have been reluctant to maintain their Embassy contacts.

11. What little influence the U.S. may have on the course of student unrest will depend in large part on the willingness of Mexicans, and particularly the students, to seek our advice and assistance. And it is hard to escape the conclusion that such interest in our ideas and mechanisms will depend on how well we succeed in solving our own student problems. As in the spread of student unrest the force of example may be a more potent means for amelioration than external or calculated design.

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