

The Curious Case of Sydney Gruson and the Obsessions of Guatemala and the United States

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By 1954, the United States was gripped by the fear of the ever-expanding Communist tide. The expansion of Soviet Russia into Eastern Europe, the fall of China to the reds, and the war over the Korean peninsula had all shaken America's nerves. As the only non-Communist super-power, the United States felt that it was its duty to first halt the spread of Communism and then push it back and replace it with democracies. Any government that had even the slightest hint of Communism must be removed for the safety of the United States and democracy. The United States State Department and CIA became obsessed with rooting out Communism and Communists, and Guatemala became caught in the CIA's crosshairs. This obsession led to a lack of perspective and inability to see the other side's point of view that caused the CIA, the United States State Department, and the Eisenhower administration to cause the downfall of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and end the October Revolution of 1944. Both sides were guilty of tunnel vision. All the CIA could see was red Communists quickly taking over the government of Guatemala and creating a beachhead for Moscow and the USSR to infiltrate the North American continent and the United States' sphere of influence. While the people of the United States and their government may or may not have had justification for this fear, the real tragedy was their inability to see and understand why and what the reality was on the ground in Guatemala. Arbenz and his foreign minister were just as guilty in bringing about their demise. Arbenz and Toriello's inability to understand the United States' fear of Communism, and their own obsession with United Fruit Company contributed in a significant way to the end of their administration.

There was one reporter in Latin American that had the ability to see things from both perspectives, and due to both sides obsessions,

Sydney Gruson was expelled from Guatemala twice, once by the Guatemalan government and once by the CIA. Gruson, through his contacts at the State Department in Guatemala and his Guatemalan contacts, was one of the only reporters able to see the whole picture unfolding in Guatemala. By researching his reporting for the *New York Times*, we can uncover the obsessions of both sides and their inability to understand the opposition's concerns. Gruson and his reporting are the perfect prism with which to view this debacle of tunnel vision.

This tunnel vision is covered very differently by four books that discuss the CIA coup in Guatemala, and each has their own somewhat narrow point of view. In Schlesinger and Kinzer's book *Bitter Fruit*, they are too concerned with the influence and power of the United Fruit Company just like Guatemalan President Arbenz and his administration. They make great pains to link the administration of Eisenhower and the hierarchy of United Fruit Company via financial investments, previous employment and possible future employment. While these connections absolutely existed, the United Fruit Company had assets of almost \$580,000,000 in 1954¹. More people in the U.S. had connections to United Fruit than they realized. In fact, the United States citizens and its government were being influenced by one of if not the first truly 20th century public relations campaigns. Thomas Corcoran was a lobbyist for United Fruit, and he was a Roosevelt "brain truster" who had connections with the CIA through his good friend Walter Bedell Smith, who was the director of the CIA in the early 1950s (and later Undersecretary of State)². Edward Bernays, the P.R. mastermind, had connections with the owner of the *The New York Times*, the publisher of Scripps-Howard newspapers, as well as the editors of *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New Leader*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*³. Thomas Cabot was brought in as President of the United Fruit Company in 1948, and Cabot's brother was the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs up

¹Sydney Gruson, "United Fruit Company is a Vast Enterprise," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1954, E4

² Stephen Schlesinger and Steven Kinder, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Harvard University: Harvard University Press, 1982), 91

³ *ibid*, 80

until the 1954 coup in Guatemala⁴. United Fruit was also able to enlist the help of Henry Cabot Lodge, John McCormack and Alexander Wiley, who were all senator and representatives.⁵

While all these people were able to use their significant influence in the early 1950s to coerce private and public opinion about the dangers of the Guatemalan government, by the time the Eisenhower administration took power, the focus of the majority of the United States' power and time was on the Communist dilemma in Guatemala and not on United Fruit Company. Schlesinger and Kinzer use their extensive experience in journalism to write a wonderfully cinematic book with peaks and valleys, rights and wrongs, and good and evil. The bully of their book is United Fruit Company, and while looking out for its own interest in overthrowing the Arbenz administration, the United Fruit Company's influence is overblown in this book so that a slick narrative could keep its readers glued to *Bitter Fruit*. In reality, the influence of UFCo wasn't as strong as the authors would have you believe. Communism and its presence in Guatemala was the overwhelming factor in the CIA's decision to overthrow the Guatemalan government.

Schlesinger and Kinzer also paint a wonderful painting of the expulsion of Sydney Gruson in June of 1954. Allen Dulles, the director of the CIA, and Julius Adler, the business manager of *The New York Times*, were described as having a clandestine dinner meeting to scheme together to get Gruson, and his "pro-communist" reporting, expelled from Guatemala before the overthrow of Arbenz. While this dinner may have happened, Kinzer and Schlesinger make the meeting out to be the evil head of a dastardly organization influencing the gullible and malleable press⁶. *Bitter Fruit*'s narrative is a cinematic wonder, and it would make a fantastic movie; however, at times the authors seem to go a little beyond the facts, to convince their audience that the evil United Fruit Company was pulling the strings of the government.

Richard Immerman's account of the Guatemalan coup, on the other hand, will never be

turned into a movie, and if it did, it would fail miserably. Not to say that Immerman did not have his facts and narrative straight, but that Immerman's *The CIA in Guatemala* reads like a textbook at times, and the movie would probably be just him reading the book at his desk, with occasional sips of scotch between chapters. Along with the difference in writing styles, is the difference in interpretations of the reasons the CIA sponsored the coup. Just a look at the titles says it all: *Bitter Fruit* vs. *The CIA in Guatemala*. While Immerman acknowledges the influence of the United Fruit Company, he surmises that the overthrow of Guatemala was due to the perceived presence and influence of Communists in the Guatemalan government. It was, according to Immerman, the hysteria and obsession of Americans and their government with the spread of Communism that caused them to cry wolf. "Practically all United States citizens were 'professional patriots and Russian haters,' and so they remained into the 1950's,⁷". Immerman believed that it was Americans' fear of Communist Russia and its expansionist policies that led to the CIA backing Armas and his insurrectionists.

Surprisingly enough, even though Sydney Gruson wrote numerous pieces on the infiltration of Communists in the Guatemalan government, and Gruson was eventually expelled because he was getting very close to discovering the connection between the CIA and Castillo Armas, their chosen liberator of Guatemala, and thus Gruson would have discovered the connection between the CIA's obsession with halting the Communists in Guatemala, Immerman devotes very little to the Gruson story. In fact, he doesn't even mention the fact that Gruson was later kept out of Guatemala by the CIA. Immerman could have strengthened his case about the United States' obsession with Communism in Guatemala by discussing Gruson's second expulsion, and the CIA's belief that Gruson's "conscious fifty-fifty treatment⁸" of the Guatemalan situation in late May of 1954 was an example of the CIA's narrow view of Guatemala and their inability to see that the Communists in

⁷ Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 101

⁸ Anonymous, "REPORTING ON GUATEMALA BY NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT SYDNEY GRUSON," CIA Memo, May 27, 1954

⁴ *ibid*, 82

⁵ *ibid*, 90

⁶ *ibid*, 154

Guatemala were not as powerful as the CIA believed.

Nick Cullather, author of *Secret History*, made better use of the second expulsion of Gruson, helping to prove his case that the CIA's obsession with Communism in Guatemala was the reason that Arbenz and Guatemala was targeted. Cullather, who only made statements backed by evidence supplied by the CIA, stated that the CIA was worried about reporting back in the United States. The CIA and "[]" speculated that either Arbenz had extracted a quid pro quo in exchange for lifting the expulsion, or that Gruson was unwilling to risk offending Guatemalan officials a second time⁹.

Cullather surmised that since Gruson was not parroting the CIA line, and was instead reporting Foreign Minister Toriello's statements, the CIA was not willing to take the risk of having their obsession with the minuscule Communist presence exposed and possibly ruin their chance to overthrow the Arbenz administration. Cullather asserted that the fear of Communism was overblown and the cold war ethos in the Eisenhower administration and the CIA was the reason behind this. Because Cullather's book was written for the CIA, it reads like a recently released CIA document. Succinct and to the point, Cullather wasted no ink in his book, and he certainly saved plenty with all the redactions, which often left as many questions as answers. *Secret History* is clearly a government document, with little emotion, that got stretched out on a rack used during the inquisition.

Glejises' *Shattered Hope* on the other hand is written solely with the experience of the people involved in the coup in mind. Glejises' reliance on interviews of key figures and their close associates reveals a perspective of the coup that the other three books cannot offer. His interviews with Guatemalan priests and opposition figures reveal the fear of the spread of Communism in Guatemala that the other books are unable to convey. "The... agrarian reform law... [was] a ruthless political tool that accomplished a bloodless revolution... Communism and Christianity are irreconcilable,¹⁰"

⁹ Nick Cullather *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 94

¹⁰ Piero Glejises *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States 1944-1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 212

said an interviewed American priest. This hatred and fear was not something that the previous three books were able to convey. Quotes like "tyrannical Communist minority," "reign of terror," and "Communist wolves" in "sheep's clothing" from American officials were able to demonstrate their hatred and fear of the Guatemalan Communists. "Speaking 'with a voice full of emotion,'" Arbenz stated "I say goodbye to you, my friends, with bitterness and pain,¹¹" is a line that would not appear in *Secret History*, *CIA in Guatemala*, or even in *Bitter Fruit*. Glejises was able to convey the fear, terror, joy and sadness that accompanied both sides of this unfortunate historical event.

It is because of this ability to show both the Guatemalan and United States' emotions that Glejises was able to explain the Gruson the best of all the authors. Glejises was able to show that Gruson's "sober style" and that fact that he "rarely resorted to sensationalism," actually caused Gruson to offend both the CIA and the Guatemalan government¹². Neither side was willing to let realistic and unbiased facts get in the way of their ultimate goals, and it is because of this that the story of Sydney Gruson in Guatemala is so unique and historically important to understanding what was actually happening in Guatemala and going through the collective minds of the CIA and the Guatemalan government.

It is a travesty that Sydney Gruson got no more than two paragraphs in any of these books regarding the CIA sponsored coups that overthrew the democratically elected government on Guatemala. Gruson's experience with his expulsion by initially the Arbenz administration and then the CIA could aid each author's thesis immensely and dramatically. He managed to anger both the United States and Guatemalan government enough through his reporting of the facts, that he was expelled by both. His reporting on United Fruit Company and the Communist influence in the Guatemalan government, which there was, as well as his reporting of the realities of the situation on the ground in late May and early June of 1954 would have been able to confirm the theories and reasons for the coup that every one of these books put forth. Gruson's experience, in being expelled by both sides of the conflict, is extremely uncommon and

¹¹ *ibid* 347

¹² *ibid* 260

certainly did not happen to any other reporters during the conflict between Guatemala and the United States. His reporting showed that the Guatemalan government was fixated on the problems caused by United Fruit Company in Guatemala, and his reporting showed that the CIA, and the American people, were obsessed with the Communist scourge spreading throughout the world, and their fear that its tentacles could reach the North American continent and the United States' sphere of influence. Sydney Gruson deserves our attention and at the very least his own wikipedia page.

Born in Dublin, Sydney Gruson began working for *The New York Times* during World War II. He was transferred to Mexico City to become the *Times*' Latin America correspondent in late 1951, and he immediately came under the scrutiny of the CIA. In one of his first articles after being transferred to Mexico City, Gruson apparently "immediately published" a story involving a mutual assistance pact between the United States and Mexico. This agreement focused around the Mutual Security Assistance Program was unannounced, and Gruson's source in the State Department was apparently off the record. The United States State Department was furious and the CIA became aware when the "Mexican Communist press" picked up his story and began reporting it throughout Mexico and the rest of the hemisphere. Due to the resulting "anti-American atmosphere," the CIA began to investigate Gruson and his wife, and it was not long before they found out that the FBI already had a file on him¹³. The CIA believed that Gruson's article had affected the Mexican presidential elections that were ongoing at the time of this article's publishing, and Gruson even stated in the article that "There is considerable opposition here to do anything that might limit Mexico's right to trade wherever she can," in reference to the fact that due to agreement between the two countries, Mexico would not be able to buy "any item of 'primary significance' in the production of munitions or making war." Little did anyone know that one of Gruson's first articles foreshadowed the uproar that would result from the Alfhem incident, when the Guatemalan government bought arms from communist controlled Czechoslovakia, but this was more of a turning

¹³ LINCOLN, "Guatemalan Matters: Sydney Gruson," CIA memo, June 2, 1954

point for Gruson and the CIA and their relationship, unbeknownst to Gruson. He was no longer just a regular reporter, but a dangerous one that would not play by the rules and was not regurgitating the State Department's views and beliefs¹⁴.

The Arbenz administration also came to the conclusion that Gruson was a dangerous reporter spreading dissension and hatred via his reporting, but it wasn't until February 2, 1954 that he was expelled from Guatemala. The Foreign Ministry of Guatemala issued the following statement on February 2:

In view of the fact that Sydney Gruson, correspondent for *The New York Times* who is in this country, has systematically defamed and slandered this republic and its Government, through the press, and being one of the most active agents of the campaign of defamation which is being developed in a malicious and increasing manner by certain information organs in the United States against Guatemala with the purpose of prejudicing the good relations between the two countries, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs resolves in the name of national decorum and based upon Legislative Decree 337, [that he] is expelled from this country as an undesirable.¹⁵

The Foreign Ministry went on to say that Gruson was guilty of "general unfriend[li]ness" and was being expelled because of a sentence Gruson used in an article printed on November 6, 1953. At the end of that article Gruson concluded that "President Arbenz G[u]zman has become a prisoner of the embrace he so long ago gave the Communists."¹⁶ The Foreign Ministry went on "we can understand the differences in opinion because this is a democracy. But when a foreigner casts scorn on the dignity of the President that is intolerable."¹⁷ Even if we disregard the statement about the inability to

¹⁴ Sydney Gruson, "Mexico Awaiting U.S. Arms Mission," *The New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1952, 5

¹⁵ Special to the New York Times, "Guatemala Ousts Two News Men," *The New York Times*, Feb. 3, 1954, 07

¹⁶ Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Reds Increase Powers," *The New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1953, 3

¹⁷ Special to the New York Times, "Guatemala Ousts Two News Men," *The New York Times*, Feb. 3, 1954, 07

question a president's policies in a democracy, we still should be vexed at why it took three months to expel Gruson from Guatemala when the Guatemalan government could just revoke his travel visa whenever it chose. What was he writing in this period, and could this actually be an insight to why he was really expelled by the Guatemalan government?

The answer is unequivocally yes. It was actually Arbenz's obsession with the United Fruit Company and Gruson's reporting on the company how it was being affected by the land reform that caused Gruson to be expelled from Guatemala. In fact, during this time period Gruson's reporting on the Communist influence in Guatemala decreased, while his 'favorable' reporting on United Fruit Company increased. The day after Gruson published his article speaking of President Arbenz's 'embrace,' Gruson published an article discussing how the land reform in Guatemala was affecting The United Fruit Company. Gruson said that 174,000 acres of 263,000 acres at United Fruit Company's Bananera plantation will be expropriated, and that 85% of the land that United Fruit Company will keep is "hilly woodland unsuited for plantations." Gruson goes on to quote a State Department aide, who was speaking on behalf of United Fruit: "Such a high disproportion raises a very serious question of discrimination despite assertions to the contrary." Gruson also goes on to reference United Fruit officials who claim that the plantation will become a "losing proposition," and that the company might just close the plantation. Only once does the article even mention Communists, just saying that they have influence over the Guatemala government that wants American companies, including United Fruit, out of their country.¹⁸ From a Guatemalan perspective, this article could seem very biased towards United Fruit, but upon closer inspection, the most damning lines are quotes from either United Fruit or the State Department. Gruson does not go out of his way to slander the Guatemalan government or Arbenz.

Gruson continued his reporting about the United Fruit Company in Guatemala and UFCo's relations with the Guatemalan government. In the November 11 issue of *The New York Times*, Gruson

¹⁸ Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Stalls Seizing Fruit Land," *The New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1953, 5

wrote an article mostly about the renegotiations of a contract between United Fruit and Costa Rica, but the article featured a quote that can be quite telling about why the Guatemalan government became very irked by Gruson's reporting: "in Guatemala, where Communists-inspired propaganda has led to continual Government harassment..."¹⁹ The important phrase is not "Communist-inspired propaganda," but actually "Government harassment." Many other American reporters were covering the Communists' influence exclusively, but Gruson actually showed the negative interaction between United Fruit and Arbenz. In typical Gruson fashion, not only did this article anger the Guatemalan government, but it also elicited a response from the President of The United Fruit Company which stated the inaccuracy of Gruson's article and his assertions.²⁰

Throughout this three-month period from November 6, 1953 to Gruson's expulsion on February 2, 1954, Gruson wrote only nine articles on Guatemala, as he was covering all of Central America. Five of his articles concern United Fruit Company, and he continually uses the phrase "harassment by the Guatemalan Government." In fact, only one of his nine articles is about Communism in Guatemala, and the article is actually about the Communist presence throughout Latin America. In this article, he states: "Guatemala, actually, has proved no better a breeding ground for communism than the other Central American republics," and that communism in Guatemala had "won no popular support." Gruson went on to say that the communists do head several committees in the government, but "The Communists have made no significant gains in enlisting important Army officers on their side," and "there is no sign that the Army's rulers are overly concerned about the [Communist] situation."²¹ These statements were probably something that the Arbenz administration would agree with. Arbenz never hid the fact that there were Communists in government and often stated that they were not as powerful as the United States made them out to be, which is what Gruson reported

¹⁹ Sydney Gruson, "United Fruit Talks Pose U.S. Problem," *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1953, 3

²⁰ Kenneth H. Redmond, "Letters to the Times," *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1953, 30

²¹ Sydney Gruson, "Central America Feels Communist Pressure," *The New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1954, E4

in this article. This style of reporting is not “generally unfriendly” or in any way a defamation of the Guatemalan republic or of Arbenz, who is not even mentioned. Arbenz in fact is not mentioned by name in any of the articles during this three month period; however, in most of Gruson’s articles during this period some iteration of the phrase “official Guatemalan harassment of United States business concerns” appeared, and it appeared multiple times if the article is about United Fruit Company.²² It seems likely that the Guatemalan government wanted Gruson out because of his writings on United Fruit Company and its interaction with the Guatemalan government. There was no reason to wait three months to revoke Gruson’s visa to Guatemala if Arbenz and the Guatemalan government believed in fact that he was defaming the government, but because of Gruson’s reporting on United Fruit Company and its relationship with the Guatemalan government throughout this three-month period we are able to conclude that it was Guatemala’s obsession with United Fruit and not the defamation of Arbenz that was the reason for Gruson’s expulsion by Guatemala.

Guatemala did oust another reporter along with Sydney Gruson on February 2, 1954, and in his writings actual defamation of the government can be seen, and it shows the contrast of the two reporters’ views of the Communist influence. Marshall F. Bannell, a reporter for Reuters and *Vision* magazine, was also expelled for ‘antagonistic’ views of the Guatemalan government, but his views on the Communist influence in the Guatemalan government were far more extreme than Gruson’s. Bannell described life in Guatemala as “just like being behind the Iron Curtain,” and he elaborated by saying that the “black hats,” the secret police, were “increased greatly,” that “all mail and cables, incoming and outgoing, are opened and scrutinized,” and every car leaving Guatemala City was being searched. Bannell also claimed that most Guatemalan government and labor leaders made frequent trips behind the Iron Curtain, and that the Guatemalan Congress sent a congratulatory message to North Korea for “repulsing the

imperialist aggression.²³” Bannell summed up his observations by claiming that “[Guatemala] is dominated by Communists and is being used as ‘international headquarters for further infiltration into Central America.’²⁴” Bannell’s reporting demonstrated an actual ‘campaign of defamation’ against the Guatemalan government; however, Bannell was never accused of a ‘campaign of defamation.’ That quote and the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry’s statement was only about Sydney Gruson. The Foreign Ministry never issued a statement about Bannell despite his “general unfriendl[iness]” and “disrespect” for President Guzman. Bannell’s extremity and Guatemala’s lack of statement about Bannell only reinforces the fact that Gruson was expelled not for his views of the Communist influence over the Guatemalan government, but in fact because Gruson was writing about the ‘harassment’ of the United Fruit Company by the Guatemalan government.

Despite the fact that Gruson had “systematically defamed and slandered [the Guatemalan] republic and its government,” he was allowed to return to Guatemala on May 20, 1954. There were varying beliefs as to why he was allowed back in including: United States pressure for freedom of the press, “vigorous protests from Ambassador Peurifoy,²⁵” and that Gruson had made a deal with Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello for more favorable reporting. This last theory, put forth by the CIA, is actually accompanied by another theory that Gruson’s initial expulsion was actually a Communist attempt to make Gruson and his writing appear less Communist even though he clearly was a Communist.²⁶ The CIA was already disturbed by Gruson’s “fifty-fifty” reporting and his “liberal point of view,” and no matter how Gruson

²³ Anonymous, “Guatemala ‘Iron Curtain’ Devices Cited,” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 11, 1954, 6

²⁴ Anonymous, “Guatemala is Assailed,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1954, 14

²⁵ Stephen Schlesinger and Steven Kinder, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Harvard University: Harvard University Press, 1982),

²⁶ Frank G. Wisner, “Sydney Gruson, NEW YORK TIMES correspondent in Guatemala City,” CIA memo, August 9, 1954

²² Sydney Gruson, “Latin Americans are Vexed at U.S. For Scoring Reds but Not Dictators,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 23, 1953, 8

was able to re-enter Guatemala, the CIA would immediately be angered by his reporting.²⁷

Gruson's first article written after his re-admittance set off alarm bells throughout the CIA, State Department and eventually Gruson was discussed at a National Security Council meeting attended by all the department heads of the United States government and President Eisenhower. On May 20, 1954 Gruson wrote that the Guatemalan people were "unequivocally" united in support for the Arbenz administration and its right to buy arms for self-defense. Even opposition newspapers were printing articles defending the government and its arms purchase. Guatemalans believed that their country should be able to participate in free trade throughout the world with whomever they wanted. In his next three articles, Gruson continued with the theme that the Guatemalans were united behind a rising tide of nationalism and believed that the United States had chosen the wrong issue to attack the Arbenz administration. Throughout these articles, Gruson is giving Guatemalan Foreign Minister Toriello more ink than articles throughout the three-month period from November 1953 to February 1954, but during that period Toriello was actually Guatemalan ambassador to the United States until being expelled in late January. Toriello seems to like hearing himself talk a lot more than previous ministers and this is reflected in Gruson's reporting, but Gruson still mentioned any statements by the State Department and still reported that "Communists have significant influence" on the Guatemalan President. It may seem like Gruson's reporting began to skew towards a more favorable view of the Arbenz administration, but Gruson was in fact just continuing his reporting that he was known for and just reporting the quotes he was given. Unfortunately for Gruson, the CIA felt that his style of "fifty-fifty" reporting had no place in Guatemala.²⁸

²⁷ Anonymous, "REPORTING ON GUATEMALA BY NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT SYDNEY GRUSON," CIA Memo, May 27, 1954

²⁸ Sydney Gruson, "U.S. Stand on Arms Unites Guatemala," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1954, 1
Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Says U.S. Tried to Make Her Defenseless," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1954, 1
Sydney Gruson, "Guatemala Hints U.N. Case on Arms," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1954, 1

While writing his series on the fervent nationalism sweeping across Guatemala due to the *Alfhem* incident and the United States' reaction, Gruson's name began appearing in more and more in CIA memos. Right after Gruson's publication of the "unequivocal" article, the Deputy Director of Plans for the CIA, Frank Wisner, wrote a memo questioning the articles reliability and sources. Wisner goes on to question Gruson's motivation, suggesting that perhaps he is under the influence of the Communists and that this should be brought to the attention of the top executives of *The New York Times*.²⁹ This memo implied a level of manipulation of the media that was confirmed in a later memo on June 14, 1954 when Wisner wrote about "the piece that we have worked up and given to *Time Magazine*, entitled 'The Friends of Guatemala.'³⁰" Because Gruson was not regurgitating the views of the CIA and the United States State Department, the CIA felt he needed to be removed from the country, but that would take time and a delicate hand.

In the meantime, Gruson would keep on reporting about the situation on the ground in Guatemala. In his May 25 article, Gruson reported about the misconceptions of both the Guatemalans and the United States.

Most [Guatemalan] officials seem unable to realize that [The United States'] concern is rooted in the Communist problem. Those who do realize it consider it to be unjustified. Most officials... convinced themselves that if the trouble over the United Fruit Company could be straightened out, everything else would fall neatly into place.

Gruson goes on to say

Even if a working agreement between the fruit company and the Government we're to be reached tomorrow, nothing would be changed unless the agreement was accompanied by steps to halt the

²⁹ Frank G. Wisner, CIA Memo to Sr. Rep. Guatemala City, May 21, 1954

³⁰ Frank G. Wisner, "Guatemalan Friendship Societies — Gruson piece of 14 June 1954, New York TIMES," CIA memo, June 14, 1954

Communists' tightening grip on the land-reform administration, worker-peasant union and the Government's propaganda machinery.³¹

Gruson was the only person to realize that the Guatemalan's tunnel vision was negatively affecting their relationship with the United States. Their obsession with United Fruit meant nothing to the CIA and the Eisenhower administration who were obsessed with the fact that there were Communists in the Guatemalan government. In a personal letter to James Reston, a *New York Times* editor, Gruson wrote that he was saddened by the trouble he is causing the Ambassador Peurifoy who "made his annoyance very evident," and the only way to make Peurifoy happy would be to follow the State Department line exactly, but this would not be what Gruson or Reston would want or believe was the truth. Later in the letter Gruson stated that he believed the United States had made two basic mistakes: emphasizing the *Alfhem* incident and the State Department's close relations with the fruit company. Gruson goes on to say that "the State Department should push often and hard to get across the thought that we are not against their reforms but only against the allowing of Communists to take over their reforms for their own purposes." Gruson understands that the two sides are stuck on their own views of the cause of the deteriorating situation and neither are willing to budge, and because of that, everything will only get worse.³²

The same day that Gruson wrote the letter to Reston, the CIA had clearly had enough of his "fifty-fifty" reporting and were doing everything they could to defame him, claiming that he "had systematically distorted the true facts about Guatemala and had injured the national dignity," and that Gruson "unwittingly and inadvertently" had written "for publication in US newspapers what the Communists have wanted him to write."³³ In another memo on the same day the CIA who had a

"wide consensus of opinion" that Gruson was a danger and that he was possibly a puppet of the Arbenz regime.³⁴

While the CIA was working on possible ways to silence Gruson, Secretary of State Dulles had grown so concerned with Gruson's "Communist line" in his reporting that Dulles actually voice his concern in a National Security Council meeting involving President Eisenhower who went on to say that "*The New York Times* was the most untrustworthy newspaper in the United States." The President then went on to allow Authur Sulzberger, editor of the *Times*, to be approached with Dulles' concerns.³⁵ The concern of Gruson's "fifty-fifty" reporting had reached the top of the food chain and the chain of events that lead to Gruson's second expulsion had begun, if Gruson could not spew the CIA and State Department's Communists line, then he must not be allowed in Guatemala.

Gruson, unaware of his imminent removal, kept on his fair and balanced reporting. "Washington stand for something more than merely anticommunism... to improve the living standards, the social welfare and educational level of the people of Central America," "The nature of the political friction between the United States and Guatemala has served the United States poorly," "Is there any means of changing the situation here [Guatemala], short of changing the Government? Apparently not," are all quotes from Gruson's article written on May 29. Gruson had stumbled onto something that the CIA was not willing to let out, that there must be a regime change in Guatemala. Gruson had now become dangerous to the success of PBSUCCESS, and he must be silenced.

In a memo to the headquarters to PBSUCCESS Alan N. Reelfoot, CIA operative, noted that Gruson had been "harmful to PBSUCCESS" via his reporting the "official Guatemalan line." Since Gruson was unwilling to report the CIA line, he clearly must be a

³¹ Sydney Gruson, "Guatemalans Fail to Grasp Concern of U.S. Over Reds," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1954, 13

³² Sydney Gruson to James Reston, Personal Letter, March [May] 26, 1954

³³ Anonymous, "REPORTING ON GUATEMALA BY NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT SYDNEY GRUSON," CIA Memo, May 27, 1954

³⁴ Frank G. Wisner, CIA memo to Senior Rep, Guatemala City, May 27, 1954

³⁵ "Foreign Relations, 1952-1954, Volume IV, American Republics (Guatemala Compilation)," National Security Council minutes, May 27, 1954

Communist, in league with Arbenz and his Communist fiends. Reelfoot also mentioned that Gruson is close friends with all the leftist correspondents, and that Gruson would often have rowdy parties in Mexico City that often ended with violence and that “democratic thinking people” no longer would accept invitations to his parties.³⁶ The CIA probably planned to defame Gruson if Sulzberger didn't remove him, but due to the fact that the CIA “DENIED IN FULL” the final two pages of that memo, uncertainty survives. One thing is certain however, the CIA considered Gruson and dangerous leftist who could have spoiled their plans and uncovered their plot to overthrow Arbenz.

CIA Chief Allen Dulles was able to neutralize Gruson by convincing Arthur Hays Sulzberger to remove Gruson from Guatemala for the duration of the coup. Gruson may have been the only American reporter who would have given the situation on the ground a fair view, and this was something that the CIA could not tolerate. The CIA's obsession with the Communists in Guatemala, and throughout the world, had blinded the agency to the reality of the situation in Guatemala and the fact the Gruson was the only reporter who was actually reporting the reality of the state of affairs on the ground in Guatemala. Even after the overthrow of Arbenz, Wisner still believed that Gruson remained a “man to be watched.”³⁷

The result of the Gruson situation in Guatemala was that not only that Sulzberger's reputation was sullied, though not until after he passed away, but also that *The New York Times'* reputation was also tarnished.³⁸ In an article at salon.com Patrick L. Smith claims that “the *Times* will bear a variant of the responsibility it bears for its corruptions in 1954 and thereafter.” Smith claimed that because of the *Times'* capitulation to the pressure of the CIA, it can no longer be trusted during any of its war reporting, specifically on the

Ukrainian war.³⁹ The CIA claims it has since backed away from media manipulation, though it would not be surprising to see another Sydney Gruson appear from somewhere in the middle east. After hearing about the Sydney Gruson experience, people hopefully would begin to question everything they read and hear in the media.

The curious case Sydney Gruson is an example of the United States' and Guatemala's tunnel vision during the early part of 1954. His “fifty-fifty” reporting showed that both sides were obsessed with only their point of view, and anyone who viewed their situation differently had to be silenced. Guatemala's fixation with United Fruit Company and the CIA's fixation on the Communist influence led to third years of chaos and carnage in Guatemala. Guatemalans and the Arbenz administration viewed their worsening relations with United Fruit Company as a direct cause of the their deteriorating relationship with the United States. Gruson reported this in his *New York Times* articles, but because he did, he was labelled “disrespect[ful]” and expelled from Guatemala. The CIA on the other hand, were no longer willing to let any reporter in Guatemala or in the United States print anything that wasn't the exact CIA line of reporting. Both the Guatemalans and the CIA had their blinders on and were unwilling to recognize the other's gripes and concerns. Perhaps if both the CIA and the Guatemalan government had read Sydney Gruson's reporting with an open mind instead of immediately condemning it, the coup would not have been necessary.

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³⁶ Frank G. Wisner, “Sydney Gruson,” CIA memo, June 2, 1954

³⁷ Frank G. Wisner, “Sydney Gruson, NEW YORK TIMES correspondent in Guatemala City,” CIA memo, August 9, 1954

³⁸ Tim Seiner, “Role of the C.I.A. In Guatemala Told in Files Of Publisher,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1997, 25

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