

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Union Busting as Development: Transnationalism, Empire and Kennedy's Secret Labour Programme for Bolivia

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(First published online 10 September 2019)

Abstract

Drawing on archives from the US labour movement, personal papers of transnational labour organisers, Bolivian oral histories and press reports, and government records from four countries, this article explores a web of Cold War relationships forged between Bolivian workers and US government and labour officials. Uncovering a panoply of parallel and sometimes conflicting state-supported trade union development programmes, the article reveals governments' inability to fully control the exuberance of ideologically-motivated labour activists. Rather than succeed in shoring up a civilian government as intended, US President John F. Kennedy's union-busting programme aggravated fissures in Bolivia's non-Communist Left, ultimately frustrating its attempt to steer a non-aligned posture in Latin America's Cold War. Employing transnational methods to bridge gaps between labour, development and diplomatic history, this article points toward a new imperial studies approach to the multi-sited conflicts that shaped the post-war trajectory of labour movements in Bolivia and throughout the Third World.

Keywords: Bolivia; labour; transnationalism; empire; Third World; Kennedy; development

On the evening of Friday 6 December 1963, a handful of armed trade unionists stormed into management headquarters at Bolivia's largest mine complex, Siglo XX – Catavi, taking dozens of hostages. The captives included four US development officials who had gone to the mines to establish ties with labour leaders from the country's non-Communist Left. For nine tense days, the world's attention briefly shifted to highland Bolivia, where military forces laid siege to the mining camp, eventually forcing the rebellious workers to capitulate in the face of thinly-veiled White House threats of US military intervention and release the hostages unharmed. Now largely forgotten to history, Bolivia's 1963 hostage crisis brought the country to the brink of civil war and contributed to a popular insurrection that brought down its civilian government less than a year later.¹

¹Regarding the crisis, see Thomas C. Field Jr, *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 109–30.

The proximate cause of the crisis was a decision by Bolivian police to arrest two popular trade union leaders hours earlier. But the mine workers' fury had been stoked by a union-busting operation the Bolivian government launched weeks before, with the aim of destroying the mighty Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers' Central, COB) and replacing it with a more malleable Bolivian trade union federation subservient to the governing nationalist party. Unbeknownst to the rebel workers, President John F. Kennedy's administration had provided secret funding and coordination for the Bolivian government's labour programme, resulting in a multi-pronged covert action that brought together the Bolivian secret police, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Funnelling USAID money to the anti-Communist overseas organising of the AFL-CIO, the Kennedy White House aimed to create 'a more disciplined' labour movement in Bolivia.² This was followed by 'sizeable bribes' from the CIA channelled through Bolivia's secret police to local workers willing 'to wrest control of labor organizations' from the COB and create 'a new ... Confederation of Bolivian Workers'.³

Drawing on the archives of the US labour movement and the personal papers of overseas labour organisers, complemented by US Labor and State Department records, Bolivian oral histories and press reports, and a handful of government records from Bolivia, Cuba and the Soviet bloc, this article untangles a transnational web of relationships between Bolivian and US labour actors during the height of the Cold War. Uncovering a panoply of parallel and sometimes conflicting government-supported trade union operations, it reveals states' inability to fully control the exuberance of ideologically-motivated non-state actors. With Bolivian workers and their AFL-CIO allies refusing to stick to their government-drafted scripts, the outcome of anti-Communist labour organising bore little resemblance to the plans hatched in La Paz and Washington. Specifically, Kennedy-era union busting aggravated fissures within Bolivia's non-Communist Left, ultimately frustrating the country's attempt to steer a non-aligned posture in Latin America's Cold War. More than just a history of imperial intervention in the Third World, this article employs transnational methods to bridge gaps between labour, development and diplomatic history, pointing toward a new imperial studies approach to the multi-sited conflicts that shaped the post-war trajectory of labour movements in Bolivia, the United States and beyond.

Transnationalism, Empire and the Third World

This cross-sectional study of Kennedy-era union busting in Bolivia operates on three overlapping planes. First, it weighs in on decades-long debates in labour

²'Internal Defense Plan for Bolivia', 10 May 1963, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA (hereafter JFKL), Schlesinger Papers (hereafter SP), box WH-25.

³[Ambassador Ben] Stephansky to [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, 24 Aug. 1963, JFKL, National Security Files – Countries (hereafter NSF-CO), box 11, folder 'Bolivia, 8/63–1/64'; and 5412/2 Special Group [on covert action] Minutes, 8 Aug. 1963, cited in 10 March 1964 memorandum, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), 1964–1968, vol. 31: *South and Central America; Mexico* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), document 148.

historiography from early New Left critiques of the AFL-CIO being controlled by the CIA, to more recent transnational approaches emphasising the autonomy of non-state labour organisers, notwithstanding their relationships with US government agencies. Second, the article injects a transnational perspective into recent historiography on the Kennedy administration by concentrating on the catalysing role played by AFL-CIO anti-Communism in radicalising foreign development programmes on the ground. Finally, the article calls for greater attention to Latin America's fraught relationship with Third World non-alignment, through a multi-sited approach that reveals Bolivia's frustrated attempt to steer between its preference for non-Communist leftism and unyielding anti-Communist pressure from transnational labour activists.

International history's shift to the Global South over the past decade has opened space for transnational methods, leading to a rise in research regarding what Andrew Zimmerman calls 'multiple, connected sites in the world system'. These studies explore non-state and local agency without ignoring that, often times, 'connections are characterized by unequal power relations'.⁴ The fields of intelligence and labour studies have themselves undergone a transnational renaissance. Examining the multivalent foundations of CIA cultural programmes in Latin America, Patrick Iber challenges popular mythologies of local writers and artists being 'controlled' by the Congress's financiers in the CIA. Hugh Wilford similarly questions traditional power hierarchies in regard to CIA youth and labour fronts globally, where 'the CIA might have tried to call the tune ... but the piper did not always play it'.⁵ A movement of scholars representing the new international history of labour has gone even further in exposing the inability of the imperial state to firmly control the activism of overseas trade union organisers.⁶

While it has been helpful for labour history to move past the polemics that marked earlier narratives of the AFL-CIO's relationship with the CIA, current literature remains fragmented by the divisions of area studies: diplomatic historians often bypass ground-level dynamics in favour of elite US labour diplomacy while

⁴Andrew Zimmerman, 'Africa in Imperial and Transnational History: Multi-Sited Historiography and the Necessity of Theory', *The Journal of African History*, 54: 3 (2013), p. 336. See for example Kornel Chang, 'Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880–1910', *The Journal of American History*, 96: 3 (2009), pp. 678–701; Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Margaret Power, 'Who but a Woman? The Transnational Diffusion of Anti-Communism among Conservative Women in Brazil, Chile and the United States during the Cold War', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 47: 1 (2015), pp. 93–119; and Lauren Francis Tourek, 'To Support a "Brother in Christ": Evangelical Groups and US–Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime', *Diplomatic History*, 39: 4 (2015), pp. 689–719.

⁵Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 10, 56–61. Emphasising CIA control is Francis Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁶See Robert Anthony Waters Jr and Geert van Goethem, 'Introduction', in Waters and van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors: The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–6; and Magaly Rodríguez García, *Liberal Workers of the World, Unite? The ICFTU and the Defence of Labour Liberalism in Europe and Latin America (1949–1969)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

Latin Americanists give scant attention to the Washington-based labour debates that shaped events on the ground.⁷ Furthermore, as Paul Kramer points out, transnational literature frequently overemphasises the borderless ‘flows’ of non-state actors and gives short shrift to the overwhelming power of imperial states.⁸ Regarding the latter, decades of suggestive research has been done on US government involvement in AFL-CIO programmes in post-war Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, British Guiana, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.⁹ This is to say nothing of spinoff labour projects in Africa and Asia, about which less has been published.¹⁰

Historical disagreement over the precise nature of the state’s relationship with global labour organisers in part reflects the US government’s own confusion over who was calling the shots. In a 1963 planning document for Bolivia, the US Labor Department wrote assuredly that the ‘basic rationale’ for USAID’s partnership with the AFL-CIO was ‘the *furtherance of US foreign policy*’.¹¹ On the ground, things were rarely so neat. Near the outset of USAID-funded trade union organising in Latin America, the White House privately groused that it was ‘clearly desirable’ to subject AFL-CIO contractors to ‘greater monitoring’. Wishing to ‘avoid

⁷For diplomatic histories that address the AFL-CIO in Latin America, see Thomas C. Field Jr, ‘Transnationalism Meets Empire: The AFL-CIO, Development, and the Private Origins of Kennedy’s Latin American Labor Program’, *Diplomatic History*, 42: 2 (2018), pp. 305–34; Patrick Iber, “Who Will Impose Democracy?” Sacha Volman and the Contradictions of CIA Support for the Anticommunist Left in Latin America’, *Diplomatic History*, 37: 5 (2013), pp. 995–1028; Stephen G. Rabe, *US Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Dustin Walcher, ‘Reforming Latin American Labor’, in Waters and van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor’s Global Ambassadors*, pp. 123–35. For Latin American labour histories that address US foreign policy, see Larissa Rosa Corrêa, “Democracy and Freedom” in Brazilian Trade Unionism during the Civil-Military Dictatorship: The Activities of the American Institute for Free Labor Development’, in Waters and van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor’s Global Ambassadors*, pp. 177–99; Renato P. Colistete, ‘Trade Unions and the ICFTU in the Age of Developmentalism in Brazil, 1953–1962’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 92: 4 (2012), pp. 669–701; Cliff Welch, ‘Labor Internationalism: US Involvement in Brazilian Unions: 1945–1965’, *Latin American Research Review*, 30: 2 (1996), pp. 61–89; and Jon V. Kofas, *The Struggle for Legitimacy: Latin American Labor and the United States, 1930–1960* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Press, 1992).

⁸Paul A. Kramer, ‘Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States and the World’, *American Historical Review*, 116: 5 (2011), p. 1380.

⁹See Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 393–414, 424–34; and Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975). See also Fred Hirsch, *An Analysis of our AFL-CIO Role in Latin America, or, Under the Covers with the CIA* (San Jose, CA: n.p., 1974); Robert Armstrong *et al.*, *Working against Us: The American Institute for Free Labor Development and the International Policy of the AFL-CIO* (New York: NACLA, 1987); Carlos Diaz, ‘Argentina: AIFLD Losing its Grip’, *NACLA’s Latin America and Empire Report*, 8: 9 (1974), pp. 1–23; Robert Waters and Gordon Daniels, ‘The World’s Longest General Strike: The AFL-CIO, the CIA, and British Guiana’, *Diplomatic History*, 29: 2 (2005), pp. 279–307; and Rabe, *US Intervention in British Guiana*.

¹⁰Regarding Africa and Asia, see Yvette Richards, *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), pp. 222–84; and Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 142–52.

¹¹US Department of Labor, ‘Bolivia: Guide to Program Officers’, 25 Sept. 1963, George Meany Memorial AFL-CIO Archives, University of Maryland (hereafter GMMA), RG18-001 (International Affairs Department. Country Files, 1945–1971), folder 015-10, ‘Bolivia, 1963’ (emphasis in the original).

overt official monitoring which would detract from [AFL-CIO's] vital appearance of autonomy', however, the White House finally surrendered to 'the far-flung and semi-autonomous character of [its] various activities in the field ... [which] make close monitoring difficult if not impossible'.¹² A critical US Senate report put it more bluntly in 1968, charging the State Department with having 'contracted out' its foreign policy to the AFL-CIO, entrusting non-state labour organisers with an 'unusual amount of flexibility' to carry out 'subversive activities and divisionist training' under the cover of economic development.¹³

Recent scholarship on Kennedy has tended to highlight his administration's reliance on top-down concepts such as modernisation theory and development as integral aspects of US foreign policy. This has prompted fresh debates regarding the sincerity of his administration's commitment to Third World non-alignment, the extent to which his White House balanced its commitment to development with a stated preference for political democracy and the non-Communist Left, and the tendency of Kennedy-era modernisation theories to encourage authoritarian responses to political unrest.¹⁴ Despite the richness of these state-centred accounts, little is known of the role played by the AFL-CIO in planning and implementing Kennedy's development strategies on the ground.¹⁵ Since the Kennedy administration and its successors foreswore keeping close tabs on their non-state labour allies, it is possible to write a full history of Cold War labour politics, as this article will show, only through a combination of multi-national sources and the private records of the AFL-CIO.

The Origins of US Labour Organising in Bolivia

A 1942 police massacre of striking workers in highland Bolivia sparked US labour's concern for the country, with allies of the global-minded International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) taking special notice. One the largest US trade unions and the site of fierce internecine leftist battles in the interwar period, the New York-based ILGWU was midwife to an anti-Communist ideology that became known as 'Free Trade Unionism' in the years leading up to the 1950s merger of the left-leaning CIO with the more conservative AFL. Over the course of the tumultuous 1940s, ILGWU shifted its affiliation from the former to the latter, fighting fascism and then Communism with equal zeal through a network of overseas

¹²Memorandum to the Special Group (CI [Counterinsurgency]), 'Progress Report', tab c, n.d. [1964], US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA), RG59, State Department Lot Files (hereafter SDFL), box 5, folder 'Records of the Special Group (CI)'.

¹³Robert H. Dockery, US General Accounting Office and US Congress, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Survey of the Alliance for Progress; Labor Policies and Programs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 21, 36.

¹⁴See Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and US Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*; Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁵Exceptions include Iber, 'Who Will Impose Democracy?'; and Field, 'Transnationalism Meets Empire'.

organisers reporting to apostate former US Communist Party General Secretary (and eventual CIA collaborator) Jay Lovestone. Heading Latin American operations for the Russian-born Lovestone was the Italian-born socialist, Serafino Romualdi, whose first overseas task for the ILGWU included assignment to wartime psychological labour operations at the State Department.¹⁶ In 1943, Romualdi authorised one of his State Department colleagues, Irish-born CIO organiser Martin Kyne, to join a high-level US government commission to investigate Bolivia's massacre at the Siglo XX – Catavi mine complex. Kyne was a long-time Lovestone and Romualdi collaborator, whose scathing report resulted in a requirement that worker protections be written into future US tin contracts.¹⁷

After a year running US labour intelligence in Italy as World War II came to a close, in 1945 Romualdi found himself back at the head of Latin American labour organising for the Lovestone apparatus, which now represented the entire AFL but was still housed at ILGWU headquarters in New York. It was from this base that Romualdi began badgering US embassies to take a greater interest in his efforts to coax Latin American workers into a nascent global network of CIA-funded Free Trade Union organisations that reflected the anti-Communist bent of ILGWU and the broader AFL. Mirroring the immediate post-war western European activities of his boss Lovestone, Romualdi scoured the western hemisphere for trade union leaders willing to drop their affiliations with the left-leaning Confederación de los Trabajadores de América Latina (Latin American Confederation of Labour, CTAL) and join the CIA-backed Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, ORIT).¹⁸

In La Paz, Romualdi's efforts culminated in the 1948 creation of the Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores (Bolivian Confederation of Workers, CBT), which promptly affiliated with the global Free Trade Union movement. Unfortunately for Romualdi and Lovestone, the CBT effort was spurned not only by Bolivia's small Communist Party, but also by the country's more numerous revolutionary nationalists and anti-Soviet Trotskyists, who disparaged the CBT as a 'yellow' union set up by US labour imperialists to stabilise Bolivia's oligarchic *sexenio*

¹⁶For more on ILGWU internationalism, see Robert D. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue: David Dubinsky and the American Labor Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999); and Serafino Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador in Latin America* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967).

¹⁷See Laurence Whitehead, 'Bolivia', in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds.), *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 132; Kiran Klaus Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 276–7; and Beal to State, 4 Feb. 1943, published in *FRUS, 1943*, vol. 5: *The American Republics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), document 552.

¹⁸Field, 'Transnationalism Meets Empire'; and Magaly Rodríguez García, 'The AFL-CIO and ORIT in Latin America's Andean Region, from the 1950s to the 1960s', in Waters and van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors*, pp. 137–63. Regarding the CIA's role with ORIT, see Joseph Burkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (New York: Putnam, 1976); and Agee, *Inside the Company*, p. 611. For Lovestone's collaboration in Europe with those he called the 'Fizz Kids' of the CIA, see Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 51–69; and Anthony Carew, 'The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA', *Labor History*, 39: 1 (1998), pp. 25–42.

governments (1946–52). Rather than fall in line behind the AFL's anti-Communist ideology of Free Trade Unionism, nationalist and Trotskyist workers allied in an armed struggle that succeeded in authoring one of Latin America's first social revolutions in April 1952.¹⁹

From the perspective of Romualdi and the AFL, Bolivia's 1952 National Revolution offered a combination of risks and opportunities. The revolt inaugurated 12 years of civilian government under Víctor Paz Estenssoro's cross-class *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR), which promptly declared universal suffrage, thorough-going land reform and nationalisation of the country's enormous tin mines. The MNR also boasted strong support from organised labour, as former Trotskyists like mine union leader Juan Lechín Oquendo brought a dose of Marxism into the nationalist MNR, leading to the abolition of the anti-Communist CBT and the creation of the non-aligned COB.²⁰

Recognising the centrality of labour to Bolivia's revolutionary coalition, Romualdi dispatched Rutgers University labour scholar (and frequent AFL collaborator) Robert Alexander to La Paz in August 1952. An anti-Communist socialist and long-time Lovestone confidant, Alexander reported back hopefully that Bolivia's anti-Soviet Left 'may well be won over to democratic trade unionism and our side in the Cold War'. Noting that even former Trotskyists like COB leader Lechín 'were quite friendly to me', Alexander wrote that Bolivia's 'exceedingly interesting' revolution represented a 'marvelous opportunity' for the AFL, 'full of possibilities of both success and failure'. Estimating that the non-aligned COB 'might very well be receptive to some bid' from the Free Trade Union movement, Alexander concluded that it would be wise for the AFL to provide 'counter attraction' against a small group of orthodox Communists vying for control of COB member unions. Recommending that the US labour movement 'go on the record as soon as possible ... in support of the social objectives of the Bolivian Revolution, more specifically the nationalization of the tin mines', Alexander also believed it would be an 'exceedingly good idea' for the AFL to 'bring pressure on the State Department to send a Labor Attaché to Bolivia'. He closed his superlative-laden memorandum by reiterating the necessity of moving quickly: 'Above all, I would like to urge the urgency [*sic*] of the situation.'²¹

Following the Alexander mission, a reciprocal courtship ensued between the AFL and Bolivia's COB, with Romualdi gauging the extent to which Lechín and his Left sector of the MNR were truly 'fighting the Communists'. If they were not, Romualdi declared privately: 'We should then be compelled to fight them

¹⁹Magaly Rodríguez García, 'De Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores in Bolivia in de jaren '60', *Brood en Rozen: Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis van Sociale Bewegingen*, 7: 3 (2002), pp. 7–33; Guillermo Lora, *Historia del movimiento obrero boliviano* (La Paz: Masas, 1979), pp. 179–86.

²⁰Herbert S. Klein, *A Concise History of Bolivia*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 200–8; and James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–1982* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 1–37.

²¹N.a. [Alexander to George Meany], 'Report on Bolivia', 17 Aug. 1952, GMMA, RG1-027 (Office of the President. President's Files, George Meany, 1947–1960), folder 55/14. Despite being unsigned, author and recipient are clear from the remainder of the folder contents.

[Lechín's followers] to the finish.²² Testing Bolivia's turbulent waters in late 1952, the AFL indeed declared itself in support of the country's right to carry out nationalisation of its mining sector, a gesture to which Lechín responded with an official statement of appreciation for the 'solidarity of the American workers'.²³ In December, Lechín dispatched COB observers to ORIT's congress in Rio de Janeiro, where Bolivia's mine nationalisations were once again endorsed. The AFL's hasty invitation to have Lechín address its 1953 convention was rescinded at the last minute, with the AFL citing an overbooking of speakers, a slight that was mitigated when the AFL sent an official delegation to the COB's first national congress in 1954. The awkward period of AFL outreach to Bolivia's non-aligned COB was somewhat transcended with the former's historic 1955 merger with the left-leaning CIO in New York, an event personally witnessed by COB leader Lechín. Early the following year, Romualdi boasted to AFL-CIO President George Meany that '[o]ur relationships with the COB are ... extremely cordial' and that 'we look forward to the early affiliation of that group with the ORIT'.²⁴

Rapprochement between US trade unionists and Bolivia's COB also played out at an official level. Serving as lynchpin in diplomatic negotiations was Bolivia's MNR ambassador to Washington, Víctor Andrade (1952–62). A close friend of Romualdi, Andrade also enjoyed the occasional round of golf with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and he leveraged his wide-ranging relationships to convince US observers that Bolivia's governing coalition was a benign hodgepodge of revolutionary nationalists and anti-Soviet Marxists, united as much by their distaste for Moscow as their antipathy toward Bolivia's oligarchy.²⁵ Eisenhower, hoping to shore up the MNR as a nationalist bulwark against outright Communism in the heart of south America, showered revolutionary Bolivia with over US\$120 million in economic aid between 1954 and 1958, a generous gesture during a period otherwise marked by austerity toward Latin America and CIA-sponsored aggression toward similar developments in Guatemala.²⁶ It bears noting that US labour's contemporaneous hostility toward Guatemala's Communist-led workers provided justification and operational support for the CIA's 1954 coup. In both the Bolivian and Guatemalan cases, Romualdi's office helped to frame the US government's understanding of leftist labour's widely diverging positions on orthodox Communism.²⁷

²²Romualdi to Lovestone, 25 March 1953; and Romualdi to José Figueres, 6 Nov. 1952, Kheel Center Archives, Cornell University, Serafino Romualdi Papers (hereafter KCA, SRP), collection 5459, box 9, folder 2.

²³Lechín, 'El ministro destaca el apoyo de la AFL', 25 Sept. 1952, GMMA, RG1-027, folder 55/14.

²⁴Romualdi to Andrade, 25 Aug. 1953, Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia, Sucre (hereafter ABNB), Walter Guevara Arze Papers, correspondencia 12; Romualdi to Meany, 3 Aug. 1954, GMMA, RG1-027, folder 55/14; and Romualdi to Meany, 4 May 1956, KCA, SRP, collection 5459, box 9, folder 2.

²⁵Romualdi to Andrade, 8 Jan. 1953; and Andrade to Romualdi, 13 Jan. 1953, both in KCA, SRP, collection 5459, box 2, folder 2. See also James F. Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1952 to the Present* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), pp. 55–72.

²⁶Cumulative US aid to Latin America in 1954–8 was US\$770 million, with half going to three countries: development-oriented Brazil (US\$178 million), revolutionary Bolivia (US\$120 million) and post-coup Guatemala (US\$80 million). See USAID, 'US Overseas Loans and Grants' (the 'Greenbook'), available at <https://eads.usaid.gov/gbk/>. On Guatemala, see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁷Gary K. Busch, *The Political Role of International Trade Unions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), p. 34.

By the late 1950s, Lechín's non-aligned COB had failed to come fully around to the AFL-CIO position. Doggedly refusing to affiliate with either the Soviet-backed CTAL or the Free Trade Union ORIT, Bolivia's labour movement articulated a persisting Latin American interest in Third World neutralism. In addition to frustrating the designs of the AFL-CIO, Lechín's non-aligned pretences fuelled tensions between the COB and the Bolivian government, whose MNR leadership was deepening its financial reliance on the United States as it struggled to cope with post-revolutionary inflation. In 1956, President Paz Estenssoro (1952–6) invited the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to draw up a currency stabilisation plan, the bulk of whose austerity measures fell on organised labour. Lechín's COB viewed the IMF plan as a counterrevolutionary retreat toward Washington, and Bolivian workers launched a series of strikes that roiled the country throughout the presidency of MNR second-in-command Hernán Siles Suazo (1956–60).²⁸ Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's post-Stalin leadership had begun to court Third World nationalists, even political movements they had previously disparaged as representing the petty bourgeoisie. This culminated in late 1960 with Moscow's offer of US\$150 million in economic aid, announced during a Soviet parliamentary visit to the COB union branch at the Siglo XX – Catavi mine complex.²⁹

Frustrated by the continued non-alignment of Lechín's COB and its blossoming interest in the Soviet bloc, the AFL-CIO increasingly came to demonise the COB as an existential threat to the stability of the US-backed MNR government. Early in 1958, Romualdi dispatched his deputy, Andrew McLellan, who reported back that local trade unionists were 'sharply divided' over the COB's opposition to the IMF plan and that 'it would be wise' to lend support to a group of MNR loyalists coalescing around railway workers' boss Juan Sanjinés Obando. Never mind that Sanjinés's antipathy toward Lechín dated in part to the former's erstwhile affiliation with the Communist Party, which frequently disparaged Lechín as a closet Trotskyist opportunist and provocateur. For McLellan, Sanjinés's new-found willingness to affiliate with the anti-Communist Free Trade Union movement outweighed 'any possibility that he [might] still have ties with the Bolivian CP'.³⁰ The CIA pointedly expressed 'some concern ... [with] Sanjinés's checkered background', but AFL-CIO organisers harboured no such qualms.³¹ Before leaving La Paz, McLellan signed up a large group of pro-government workers to ORIT and invited one of Sanjinés's railway colleagues to attend the inaugural class of an anti-Communist labour school near Washington. According to McLellan, these two accomplishments represented the first concrete successes of Free Trade Unionism in Bolivia since the 1952 revolution.³²

²⁸Kevin Young, 'Purging the Forces of Darkness: The United States, Monetary Stabilization, and the Containment of the Bolivian Revolution', *Diplomatic History*, 37: 3 (2013), pp. 509–37.

²⁹See Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, pp. 12, 50.

³⁰McLellan to Bury, 1 June 1958, KCA, SRP, collection 5459, box 10A, folder 8.

³¹CIA, 'The Outlook for Bolivia', 7 Jan. 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, vol. 5, Microfiche Supplement (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1991), document 1.

³²McLellan to Bury, 1 June 1958; and Communication Workers of America (CWA), 'A Confidential Report to the Sponsors', June 1959, Tamiment Library, New York University, CWA Records (hereafter TL, CWA), box 328, folder 'Latin American Affairs'.

By abandoning its previous courtship of Lechín and opting to aggravate tensions within Bolivia's non-Communist Left, the AFL-CIO acted prematurely. In early 1960, MNR chief Paz Estenssoro surprised observers by announcing that he would lean on Lechín to become his running mate later that year. Out of office since 1956, Paz Estenssoro had distanced himself from the IMF plan and begun to explore relations with socialist countries through visits to Prague and Belgrade during his late 1950s ambassadorship in the United Kingdom. According to Lechín, Paz Estenssoro's apparent willingness to offset US financial support with Soviet bloc assistance, coupled with his new-found interest in Third World non-alignment, led COB leftists to believe that 'a revolution within the revolution was possible'. With endorsements from the COB and Bolivia's small but growing Communist Party, Paz Estenssoro won 76 per cent of the vote in June 1960.³³

Facing an uncertain Bolivian labour situation not unlike the early days of the 1952 revolution, the AFL-CIO was therefore heartened when Lechín extended an olive branch by sending COB observers to ORIT's Caracas conference in late 1960. On 15 December, Romualdi wrote optimistically to AFL-CIO President Meany: 'Now that he is Vice President of the Republic, [Lechín] has apparently taken a rather moderate attitude ... [and] veered toward the ORIT.' Noting astutely that the former Trotskyist had 'never engaged in anti-US propaganda', even at the height of his opposition to the IMF austerity plan, Romualdi cautiously recommended that 'Lechín be received at AFL-CIO headquarters' during his early 1961 stopover en route to the Soviet Union and, in characteristically schizophrenic fashion, Taiwan.³⁴

As the inauguration of President Kennedy approached, Bolivia's trade union scene remained in a state of non-aligned flux. The AFL-CIO had demonstrably failed to convince the COB to affiliate with the anti-Communist Free Trade Union movement, but Vice President Lechín nonetheless seemed committed to providing labour stability for the new Bolivian government, whose budget was still reliant on tens of millions of dollars in US aid per year.³⁵ Yet President Paz Estenssoro was himself an enigmatic figure who was in the process of building bridges to the Third World and the Soviet bloc. Digging in for a bitter fight over Bolivian nationalism and its non-Communist Left, the AFL-CIO harboured hope that Washington's incoming Democratic president could be convinced to make good on his stated commitment to engage more deeply in Third World affairs.

Kennedy-Era Free Trade Unionism and Bolivia's Non-Communist Left

For US labour leaders seeking to obtain stronger government backing for Free Trade Union activities in Latin America, the inauguration of President Kennedy had an enormous impact. Shortly after entering the White House, Kennedy appointed AFL-CIO attorney Arthur Goldberg to be his labour secretary.

³³See Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, p. 6.

³⁴Romualdi to Meany, 15 Dec. 1960, GMMA, RG1-027, folder 55/14; and Juan Lechín Oquendo, *El pueblo al poder*, 2nd edn (La Paz: La Razón, 2005), pp. 123–7.

³⁵In 1961, the Kennedy administration increased annual aid from US\$17 million to US\$30.7 million. See USAID, 'Greenbook'.

Formerly chief spymaster for Washington's labour intelligence operations in World War II Europe, Goldberg wasted little time in convincing Kennedy to issue a secret cabinet directive on 3 May 1961, aimed at mobilising the AFL-CIO in a joint effort 'toward making a Western Hemisphere united labor front' against Communism. Following this up with another secret memorandum in September, Kennedy envisioned an 'imaginative, energetic, and progressive labor program for Latin America', one that would channel millions of USAID dollars, now available in the Alliance for Progress development programme, 'through appropriate private groups' such as the AFL-CIO.³⁶

After months of negotiations between the Labor Department, USAID and the CIA, in early 1962 Secretary Goldberg announced to Romualdi and AFL-CIO President Meany that President Kennedy had personally authorised US\$350,000 in 'emergency funds' for Free Trade Union programmes in Latin America. Goldberg categorised Kennedy's generosity as seed money to jump-start the AFL-CIO's nascent organising arm in the southern hemisphere, recently coined 'the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD)'.³⁷ Over the next three decades, AIFLD would successfully employ the high-minded rhetoric of Third World modernisation to obtain millions in USAID funding for trade union education programmes in 13 Latin American countries. By 1965, 40,000 local labour leaders had passed AIFLD courses, led by local institutes in Colombia (5,930) and Bolivia (2,168).³⁸

From its modest beginnings in 1962, AIFLD's Bolivian programme aimed to provide ground-level support for USAID's stridently anti-Communist Triangular Plan, a mine rehabilitation agreement signed a year earlier but since stalled by local worker resistance. Well funded under the developmentalist umbrella of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, the Plan was strictly conditioned on the firing of 20 per cent of the mine workforce, the abolition of worker representation in company management, and the physical removal of pro-Communist trade union leaders from the mining camps.³⁹

Charged with pushing through USAID's Triangular Plan was Kennedy's hand-picked ambassador and labour economist, Ben Stephansky. A Russian émigré and former US labour attaché in Mexico City, Stephansky was coming off a three-year stint as chief labour advisor for the State Department. In Bolivia, Ambassador Stephansky argued for hours with leftist Vice President Lechín, trying to convince him that 'there was nothing incompatible between modernization and efficiency', as

³⁶Kennedy Memorandum, 3 May 1961, NARA, RG174, Goldberg Records, box 46, folder 'Latin American Labor'; Kennedy Memorandum, 14 Sept. 1961, NARA, RG174, Werts Records, box 1, folder 'Appropriations ILAB'.

³⁷US government to [Joseph] Beirne, n.d. [1962], TL, CWA, box 319, folder 'AIFLD - Financial'; AIFLD, 'Statement of Income', 31 Dec. 1962, TL, CWA, box 319, folder 'AIFLD - Financial Statement'; and Beirne to Hamilton, 26 April 1962, NARA, RG174, Goldberg Records, box 163, folder 'Labor Advisory Committee'. See also Welch, 'Labor Internationalism', pp. 82-3.

³⁸Regarding modernisation rhetoric and overall numbers, see Field, 'Transnationalism Meets Empire', pp. 326-7. For country-by-country numbers, see 'The AIFLD Report', June 1965, KCA, SRP, collection 5459, box 10, folder 1; and AIFLD, 'Statement of Revenue and Expenses', attached to Jefferson to Scrivner, 12 May 1964, and Creel to Rockefeller, 14 July 1965, Rockefeller Archives Center, NY, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Records, series 3, box 80, folder 540 (hereafter RBF).

³⁹Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, pp. 10-38.

called for in the Alliance for Progress, 'and your version of socialism, whatever it may be'. Failing to influence Lechín's politics, the ambassador took to characterising the persisting non-alignment of Lechín's COB as Bolivia's key 'obstacle to development' under USAID's Triangular Plan.⁴⁰ Resurrecting the AFL-CIO's late 1950s demonisation of the COB, Stephansky drafted a laundry list of covert action proposals to 'recruit rural and labor leaders for political action ... [to] break the Marxist monopoly on theoretical trade union instruction ... [and] curb labor anarchy'.⁴¹ The Department of State responded with a ringing endorsement of the Embassy's ideas to divide Bolivia's non-Communist Left and foster 'an intellectual class with a healthy skepticism of outdated socio-political theories such as theoretical Marxism'.⁴²

Unaware of the covert proposals bouncing between the US Embassy and the State Department, US labour organisers were already moving forward with their own pilot project to break anti-Communist trade unions away from Vice President Lechín's COB. Now benefitting from a mushrooming USAID budget, AIFLD's social projects division began plotting with a group of Dominican priests to 'better equip them in their fight against communism' in the Bolivian mining camps.⁴³ The US Embassy assured Romualdi, now AIFLD's executive director, that the Dominican programme was staffed by 'anti-communist college professors and attorneys' and that it thus represented 'activity in the right direction'.⁴⁴ AFL-CIO officials conceded that such a sensitive project would have to proceed 'in a highly discreet manner', but they believed that 'urgent attention must be given to the matter because of the present political situation in Bolivia', a country that was 'now delicately balanced on the brink between Democracy and Communism'.⁴⁵

At this point, US labour organisers resumed their late-1950s collaboration with the pro-government railway workers, headed by long-time Lechín nemesis Juan Sanjinés Obando. In June 1962, AIFLD paid to fly Sanjinés and his deputy to Washington, where the latter was enrolled in the first Spanish-language seminar put on by the institute's flagship programme. As would become standard practice, those who completed AIFLD seminars then returned to their home countries on nine-month USAID stipends to engage in full-time labour organising. When Sanjinés's colleague arrived back in early September, the railway workers presented a bold plan to the US Embassy, in which they would form the nucleus for a schismatic national labour confederation, free from the influence of Lechín's

⁴⁰US State Department, 'Guidelines for Policy and Operations', March 1963, JFKL, NSF-Dungan, box 389A, folder 'Bolivia, 2/63-6/63'; and Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, pp. 33-4.

⁴¹Embassy to State, 'Annual Politico-Economic Assessment', 8 March 1962, NARA, RG59, State Department Central Files (hereafter SDCF), box 2387, folder 824.00/1-2362; Stephansky to State, 17 March 1962, SDCF, box 1524, folder 724.5411/3-161; State Department, 'Operational Program for Bolivia', n.d. [mid-1962], SDLF, box 7, folder 'Bolivia, 1961'. See also Battle to Smith, 20 March 1962; and Embassy to State, 8 May 1962, JFKL, NSF-CO, folder 'Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62'.

⁴²Belcher to Martin and Goodwin, 26 April 1962, SDLF, lot 64D518, box 2, folder 'Memoranda, 1962'.

⁴³AFL-CIO (Chicago), 6 Feb. 1962; and AIFLD Report, attached to Doherty to Beirne, 13 June 1962, TL, CWA, box 319, folder 'AIFLD - Grants; Applications; Contributors (\$) - Financial - 1962'.

⁴⁴Boggs to Romualdi, 6 April 1962, in *ibid.*

⁴⁵Doherty to AIFLD Board, 9 May 1962; and Doherty to Beirne, 13 June 1962, in *ibid.*

non-aligned COB. Impressed by their militancy, the Embassy wrote glowingly to the AFL-CIO that it was 'confident that the people you assign here will be able to make a very worthy contribution too ... enabling the government to free itself of the threat of a communist takeover'.⁴⁶ For US government and labour officials, the COB's unwillingness to affiliate with anti-Communist Free Trade Unionism had become akin to Communism itself.

As the broad outlines of what would become Kennedy's secret labour programme began to take shape in La Paz, the Bolivian government's continued diplomatic flirtation with Third World non-alignment provoked renewed urgency in Washington. US officials had long complained that nationalist Bolivia was 'taking clear guidance from Cuba' at the Organization of American States (OAS), where anti-Communist resolutions faced a 'remarkable show of solidarity on the part of all except Cuba and Bolivia'.⁴⁷ In 1962, President Paz Estenssoro continued to abstain from the anti-Cuba crusade, and his government meanwhile persisted in bridge-building efforts to Soviet bloc countries such as Czechoslovakia, which privately boasted in July that its economic relations with the MNR government were 'not bad at all' considering 'Bolivian dependence on the USA'.⁴⁸ Matters came to a head in September, when unrelated tin dumping by the US Treasury Department prompted President Paz Estenssoro to suspend USAID's anti-Communist Triangular Plan, publicly decline an invitation to the White House and temporarily boycott the OAS. Ambassador Stephansky warned that the situation had 'gravely deteriorated', with Paz Estenssoro apparently having 'given up' his tenuous policy of containing Vice President Lechín's leftist labour movement. According to Stephansky, 'evidence [is] piling up that we may well be in the process [of a] complete [MNR] left sector take-over with large-scale Soviet aid'.⁴⁹

The Kennedy White House responded by assigning Bolivia to its Special Group on Counterinsurgency (CI), responsible for 11 Third World countries deemed 'sufficiently threatened by Communist-inspired insurgency', and elevating Ambassador Stephansky's covert action programme to priority status.⁵⁰ Now coupling rank-and-file labour operations with high-level diplomatic efforts to 'precipitate a conflict between Lechín and Paz', the US Embassy aimed to reduce Paz Estenssoro's flirtation with non-alignment while using as much USAID money as possible to obtain from him 'commitments on a harder line', ranging from the anti-Communist labour reforms to Bolivia's international relations and everything in between. By quietly encouraging a split in the country's nationalist party, Stephansky hoped to 'work out the basis for [Paz Estenssoro's] candidacy

⁴⁶Boggs to McLellan, 31 July 1962; McLellan to Boggs, 6 Aug. 1962, GMMA, RG18-001, file 015/09.

⁴⁷Dillon to Kennedy, 16 Aug. 1961, published in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 12: *American Republics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1996), document 30.

⁴⁸Czechoslovak Embassy (La Paz) to Prague, 24 July 1962, Czech National Archives, Prague, Office of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Antonín Novotný, box 74, inventory 92 (hereafter Novotny Records).

⁴⁹Stephansky to Rusk, 22 and 29 Sept. 1962, JFKL, NSF-CO, box 10, folder 'Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62'.

⁵⁰Kennedy, National Security Action Memorandum 184, 4 Sept. 1962, JFKL, NSF Meetings and Memoranda, folder 'National Security Action Memoranda'.

in 1964' and thus block Vice President Lechín's presumed path to the presidency.⁵¹

Finally enjoying a clear White House *imprimatur* for using covert means to cleave the labour Left away from Bolivia's governing MNR, the Embassy sought to deepen coordination with its friends in the AFL-CIO. In late 1962, US Labor Attaché Emmanuel Boggs, previously an organiser for the Left-leaning CIO, implored his former colleagues to marshal their new-found USAID largesse behind the trade union schism alluded to a few months earlier by the Bolivian railway workers. As Boggs put it, USAID was 'in complete accord with Ben [Stephansky] and I in regard to labor activities, which means funds can and will be made available'. Romualdi's deputy McLellan, who hailed from the more conservative AFL wing of the US labour movement, responded noncommittally that he had 'discussed the Bolivian situation' with a number of smaller organisations, who had 'pledged their cooperation with any joint ... program drafted for Bolivia'.⁵²

After two months of inaction, however, it became clear to the US Embassy that McLellan was tacking too closely to an inflexible brand of anti-Communist Free Trade Unionism. Desperate for US labour organisers willing to collaborate with the non-aligned governing nationalists, Boggs turned to an old CIO union firmly ensconced on the non-Communist Left, the United Auto Workers (UAW). Complaining to UAW leadership in early February 1963 that the AFL-CIO had failed to move in support of the pro-government workers, Boggs warned that Lechín's COB aimed for nothing less than to 'make Bolivia a second Cuba in Latin America'. According to Boggs, 'it is not our belief in the Embassy that a split in the COB is inevitable', unless the US labour movement took rapid action. The UAW promptly requested field comments from a roving Latin America representative of an allied trade union, who reported back to Detroit that the AFL-CIO had indeed failed to 'follow through on a commitment to Boggs ... to begin the work of organizing the anti-Communist groups'.⁵³

A few hours after the unofficial UAW representative left La Paz on 18 February, Boggs tried one last time to mobilise the conservative hierarchy of the AFL-CIO. Angered that 'there has not been a single representative of a free [trade union] international organization in Bolivia this year', Boggs warned that the AFL-CIO was passing up 'a golden opportunity to organize the democratic unions to take control of the Bolivian labor movement'. Citing 'well-known leaders, such as Juan Sanjinés ... who are members of the Paz sector, pro-US, and outspokenly anti-communist, who are the logical leaders around whom to organize the democratic unions', Boggs expressed full Embassy support for Sanjinés's plan 'to establish a

⁵¹Goodwin to Martin, 2 Nov. 1962; SDLF, lots 62D418 and 64D15, box 4, folder 'Bolivia, 1962'; Belcher to Martin, 29 Nov. 1962, in the same folder; Stephansky to Rusk, 8 April 1963, JFKL, NSF-CO, box 10A, folder 'Bolivia, General, 1/63-4/63'.

⁵²Boggs to McLellan, 28 Dec. 1962; and McLellan to Boggs, 11 Jan. 1963, GMMA, RG18-001, file 015/09.

⁵³UAW relied on reporting by Ben Segal, Latin America representative for the International Union of Electrical Workers. Boggs to Victor Reuther, 'Crisis in the Bolivian Labor Movement', 14 Feb. 1963; Segal to Reuther, 18 Feb. 1963; and Boggs/Stephansky to Reuther, 18 Feb. 1963, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit, UAW Records, International Department Files, box 48, folder 12. (Labour historian Michael Murphy assisted in interpreting these documents, which were provided by diplomatic historian Robert Waters.)

new, democratic labor central organization' loyal to Paz Estenssoro's sector of the governing nationalists.⁵⁴

The AFL-CIO's late February response was once again drafted by McLellan. Betraying orthodox Free Trade Unionism, intolerant of any version of Cold War non-alignment, he complained that Sanjinés 'had in mind the creation of a labor movement which would be under the control of the Paz Estenssoro [*sic*] party and controlled by the government much like the well-known situation in Mexico'. According to McLellan, partisan support for the non-aligned MNR 'would tend to dampen enthusiasm' among the more principled veterans of the Free Trade Union movement. The US Embassy replied by upbraiding the AFL-CIO for being too dogmatic. 'The practical fact is', Boggs wrote, 'that the only road to an independent labor movement here is to first defeat the communists', thus building upon US officials' previous mischaracterisation of Lechín's followers in the COB. Reiterating the Embassy plan, Boggs outlined in stark language that 'both Ben [Stephansky] and I would like to see an anti-communist, pro-Paz sector labor movement come into being either as a result of a split in the COB or of the more responsible elements gaining control of the COB'. Boggs closed his emotional appeal by lamenting that '[a]s a union veteran, I find it extremely frustrating not to be able to do what needs to be done'. McLellan finally relented, under the combined pressure of the left-leaning UAW and the strongly pro-Paz Estenssoro US Embassy. On 15 March, he apologised directly to Ambassador Stephansky for having initially resisted the Embassy's plan, conceding that 'the situation in Bolivia is urgent', and vowing that the AFL-CIO 'will get people to Bolivia as soon as we can'.⁵⁵

With AFL-CIO organisers finally reconciled behind US government policy, the White House Special Group (CI) met on 16 May to consider a revised draft of the Embassy's covert labour proposal. Now seen as the key to forcing through USAID's labour conditions, the paper included specifics on the MNR government's secret plan to 'eliminate the basis of power of [Lechín's] Left sector' and create 'a more disciplined and responsible free labor movement'. As Chair of the Special Group, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy was especially eager to proceed in 'our efforts to work with labor organizations in Bolivia', and the Department of State agreed that the union-busting project should receive 'highest priority' now that 'the American labor movement has begun to move into Bolivia after a long period of neglect'. While the State Department initially warned that 'we have to move slowly in our program due to Bolivian sensitivity to outside influence', Washington's hand was soon forced by events on the ground.⁵⁶ Through the remainder of 1963, Kennedy's labour programme hurtled full speed ahead, accompanied by a handful of parallel covert operations aimed at dismantling leftist influence in the country.

⁵⁴Boggs to Romualdi, 18 Feb. 1963, GMMA, RG18-001, file 015/10, folder 'Bolivia, 1963'.

⁵⁵McLellan to Boggs, 28 Feb. 1963; Boggs to McLellan, 6 March 1963; and McLellan to Stephansky, 15 March 1963, GMMA, RG18-001, file 015/01, folder 'Bolivia, 1963'. Stephansky's 5 March letter is missing, but it is referenced in McLellan's 15 March response.

⁵⁶Cottrell to Special Group (CI), 10 May 1963, JFKL, SP, box WH-25, folder 'Bolivia, 3/61-10/63'; Minutes of Special Group (CI) meeting, 16 May 1963, NARA, United States Information Agency (RG306), entry P296, container 8, folder 'CI-Special Group Minutes'; and Martin to White House Special Group (CI), 5 June 1963, SDLE, box 1, folder 'Special Group (CI), 3/2/63-6/13/63'.

President Kennedy did not shy away from the non-aligned politics of the Third World. Days before his assassination, Kennedy hosted his last head of state: Bolivian President Paz Estenssoro. Agreeing with Kennedy that resolving the trade union situation was a 'prerequisite to Bolivian development', Paz Estenssoro assured the US president that his government would soon carry out the USAID labour conditions and 'impose its authority' on the left-leaning COB.⁵⁷ A few weeks earlier, a top AFL-CIO official had remarked that the US labour movement was now committing substantial resources to support Paz Estenssoro's new-found resolve against Vice President Lechín, 'whether it came to a shooting war or not'.⁵⁸ As subsequent events would demonstrate, violence between Bolivia's divided MNR workers would indeed result from this potent blend of anti-Communist union busting, deep-pocketed developmentalism and impending covert action.

The Limits of Third World Anti-Communism

White House approval of the US Embassy's covert proposals in mid-1963 opened the USAID and CIA dollar taps in support of President Paz Estenssoro's tenuous grip on power. This included millions of dollars to finance a parallel operation to arm pro-government peasant workers who would 'attack' the pro-Lechín miners, provoke them to launch a 'general mine strike', and 'cut off food shipments' until 'the miners begin to suffer'. According to the Bolivian government, this would create the pretext for the army to 'move into the mine areas ... [and] eliminate communist and leftist mine leadership'. Recognising that 'civil war would be [a] real possibility', Paz Estenssoro assured the US Embassy that with US\$4 million in secret USAID 'contingency funds' to arm the peasant militia and recover lost revenue during a prolonged strike, he could continue his nascent policy of 'standing firm' against Lechín's left-leaning COB.⁵⁹ On 29 July 1963, a bloody battle left several dead on the outskirts of Bolivia's largest mining camp, Siglo XX – Catavi, including four pro-government peasants and one mine union leader.⁶⁰

The shedding of Bolivian blood in late July crystallised Washington's commitment to its anti-Communist labour programme. A week later, the White House 5412/2 Special Group on covert action put the finishing touches on a joint CIA/USAID project to 'wrest control of labor organizations' from Lechín's COB once and for all, providing the railway workers with enough secret money to '[m]eet the necessary expenses in connection with the establishment of a new anti-left Confederation of Bolivian Workers'.⁶¹ US labour organisers were poised to play a leading role. Since having reluctantly agreed to support the US Embassy's labour

⁵⁷Memorandum of Conversation, 22 Oct. 1963, JFKL, NSF-CO, box 11, folder 'Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, 10/63, MEMCONS', Part III, pp. 2 and 3.

⁵⁸Beirne, 'Address to the 36th Annual Conference of the Catholic Association for International Peace', 26 Sept. 1963, TL, CWA, box 71, folder 'JAB (Speeches)'.
⁵⁹State Department, 'Contingency Plan for Meeting Possible COMIBOL Crisis', 5 July 1963, JFKL, NSF-Dungan, box 389A, folder 'Bolivia, 7/63-5/64', p. 7; and Stephansky to Rusk, 17 and 20 July 1963, JFKL, NSF-CO, box 10A, folder 'Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63'.

⁶⁰Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, pp. 93-5.

⁶¹5412/2 Special Group Minutes, 8 Aug. 1963.

policy two months earlier, the AFL-CIO had placed Bolivia on its list of 'priority countries' and transferred one of its best organisers from Quito to La Paz.⁶²

AIFLD's local institute soon became a clearinghouse for anti-Communist trade unionists opposed to Vice President Lechín's dissident COB. As a local AIFLD official put it, participating unions were 'carefully scrutinized to make certain that they are truly democratic groups, free from any subversive or left-wing political inclination'.⁶³ When the first courses began in July, workers from the railway and peasant sectors packed into AIFLD's seminar hall to hear technocratic lectures on collective bargaining and the benefits of labour discipline for economic and social modernisation. Five Bolivian instructors joined the institute in August, having just graduated with nine-month USAID stipends from AIFLD's flagship programme in Washington.⁶⁴ As AIFLD's local director reported from La Paz on the 12th, 'the process of beating back the communists seems to be progressing quite well'.⁶⁵

When a second cohort of Bolivian workers graduated from AIFLD's six-week programme in October, local US organisers reported to their AFL-CIO superiors that the time had finally arrived to split Bolivia's national labour confederation. As they wrote on 28 October:

the democratic elements within the Bolivian labor movement are on the offensive ... [prepared to] eliminate the communist scourge from their positions of leadership within the unions ... [A] strong movement exists for the formation of a new Confederation of Bolivian Workers to replace the existing communist-dominated COB ... These developments are extremely encouraging and tend to create a strong feeling of optimism for the future. It is our feeling that this is a most opportune time to give aid to these groups so that the offensive they have successfully initiated may be carried on toward a speedy and conclusive victory.⁶⁶

Two weeks later, on 15 November, a large group of pro-government workers founded the Central Obrera Boliviana de Unidad Revolucionaria (Bolivian Workers' Central of Revolutionary Unity, COBUR). Consisting almost entirely of AIFLD alumni and their member unions, and covertly financed by the CIA through the 'active support' of Paz Estenssoro's secret police, COBUR 'got off to an auspicious start', in the words of the US Embassy.⁶⁷ The MNR government newspaper praised the new organisation as reflecting 'the honest voice of the railway workers in the midst of extremist confusion', and COBUR's founding

⁶²AIFLD Executive Committee Minutes, 25 April 1963; Romualdi to Schnitzler, 31 May 1963; and 'Notes for Mr. Schnitzler', 23 July 1963, GMMMA, RG1-038 (Office of the President. George Meany Files, 1940-1980), folder 57/6.

⁶³Angelo Verdu, 'Bolivian Report', 11 July 1963; Doherty to Beirne, 17 July 1963, GMMMA, RG18-001, file 015/10, folder 'Bolivia, 1963'.

⁶⁴AIFLD Executive Committee Minutes, 8 Aug. 1963; AIFLD, Graduation Luncheon Report, 8 Aug. 1963; GMMMA, RG1-038, folder 57/6; and Romualdi to Creel, 8 Nov. 1963, RBF.

⁶⁵Wasson to McLellan, 12 Aug. 1963, GMMMA, RG18-001, file 015/10, folder 'Bolivia, 1963'.

⁶⁶Verdu/Bermúdez to Doherty, 28 Oct. 1963, GMMMA, RG18-001, file 015/10, folder 'Bolivia, 1963'.

⁶⁷Consulate (Cochabamba) to Embassy, 27 Nov. 1963, SDCF, box 3828, folder 'POL 12 BOL'; and report attached to Embassy to State, A-94, 28 Aug. 1964, box 1281, folder 'LAB 3-2 BOL 1/1/64'.

declarations (apparently drafted by a US labour officer) denounced revanchist COB workers as ‘paid agents of Russia’ who represented ‘foreign interests’, namely the ‘positions of Castro and Khrushchev’.⁶⁸

Not all Bolivian workers were pleased to see their national confederation torn asunder. Shortly after COBUR was founded, a group of pro-Lechín factory workers carried out a late-night, drive-by dynamite attack on the house of Paz Estenssoro’s labour minister, Anibal Aguilar, who ‘rushed to the door, carrying a machine gun’, just as the assailants sped away. Unfazed, Aguilar announced the following morning that the Bolivian government was giving full recognition to COBUR, and he ordered Lechín’s COB to ‘turn its office over to the new leadership’.⁶⁹ Later that day, pro-Lechín commercial workers issued a formal complaint to local AFL-CIO officials, charging AIFLD’s education seminars with having ‘sustained, directly or indirectly ... overtones of divisionism’ in the Bolivian trade union movement. Obviously unaware that the AIFLD programme had been approved at the highest levels of US labour and government, the commercial workers in vain threatened to appeal to Washington for the removal of AIFLD’s local director.⁷⁰

Apart from the factory and commercial workers in La Paz, the most intransigent resistance to COBUR would come from the left-wing miners, who held their 12th national congress in early December at the Colquiri mining camp. Furious at the growing ‘terror used by the government’ against the Bolivian Left, the disparate mine worker factions closed ranks behind a ‘unanimous’ resolution, introduced by Vice President Lechín, declaring a ‘head-on struggle’ and calling on all Bolivian workers ‘to rise up in arms against Paz’s “police state”’.⁷¹ Having taken to misrepresenting Lechín as a Communist, AFL-CIO officials suddenly began to appear prophetic. By the opening of the Colquiri congress, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had initiated a US\$10,000 annual subsidy to the COB, and Bolivian Communists were reporting to the Czechoslovak Embassy that Lechín had matured beyond his earlier ‘political volatility’ and was finally ‘cooperating with the Central Committee of the Bolivian Communist Party’.⁷² Even the

⁶⁸‘La voz honesta de los ferroviarios en medio de la confusión extremista’, *La Nación*, 26 Nov. 1963; ‘Principales fuerzas sindicales de Cochabamba explican creación de nueva central departamental’, *La Nación*, 30 Nov. 1963; and ‘La nueva COB se pronuncia por la democratización sindical’, *La Nación*, 5 Dec. 1963. These declarations contain several eccentricities of syntax that suggest a non-Bolivian author: (1) many accent marks are missing; (2) a Bolivian would not include ‘la’ in ‘Países de la América Latina ...’; (3) a native speaker would not write: ‘Luchar permanentemente porque [sic – para que] los trabajadores del estado sean ...’ (4) ‘Congreso’ is mis-spelled ‘Conggreso [sic]’; and (5) ‘Khrushchev’ is spelled as is typical in English rather than the Hispanicised ‘Kruschev’, ‘Kruschov’, or ‘Jrushchov’.

⁶⁹Henderson to Rusk, Embtel [Embassy telegram] 848, 12 Dec. 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX (hereafter LBJL), NSF-CO, box 8, folder ‘Bolivia, US Hostages’.

⁷⁰Confederación de Trabajadores de Comercio to AIFLD/Bolivia, 12 Dec. 1963, GMMA, RG18-001, file 015/10, folder ‘Bolivia, 1963’.

⁷¹Cited in Lechín, *El pueblo al poder*, pp. 141–2; Arturo Crespo Enríquez, *El rostro minero de Bolivia: Los mineros ... mártires y héroes* (La Paz: Sygnus, 2009), p. 342; Embassy to Rusk, 6 Dec. 1963, SDGF, box 3540, folder ‘INCO BOL’; and ‘Dramático rompimiento de Lechín con el Presidente Paz Estenssoro’, *El Diario*, 6 Dec. 1963.

⁷²Lora Soroka (ed.), *Fond 89: Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Trial: Archives of the Communist Party and Soviet State* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), p. 371; and Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, Memorandum of Conversation, 7 March 1963, Novotny Records.

Cuban Foreign Ministry privately expressed awe when Lechín declared warmly at Colquiri that he would now 'follow [the] Castro example', with Havana's diplomats shrugging that 'we lack concrete information as to the reasons that prompted Lechín to assume this attitude'.⁷³

As (bad) luck would have it, four US government employees were in attendance at Colquiri, comprising two USAID labour development officers, a US Information Agency labour officer and a Peace Corps volunteer. Still wistful for MNR unity and privately bothered by what they called the AFL-CIO's programme of 'destroying the legitimate unions' and 'setting up stooge unions', members of this independent-minded development mission also chafed at the anti-Communist Triangular Plan being pushed by State Department diplomats, who 'have no conception of what it is like to work in a 15,000 foot altitude, digging coal [*sic*: tin]'. These four left-leaning US functionaries were at Colquiri only due to their insistence, 'after a long argument' with US Embassy leadership, that they be allowed to deploy a small quantity of USAID funds, US\$10,000 to be exact, in a last-ditch effort to court workers loyal to Lechín, a non-aligned leftist whom they believed '[to be] not as black as he is usually pictured'.⁷⁴

Working at cross-purposes to its own Embassy's labour office, on 6 December this US development team accepted a spontaneous invitation from pro-Lechín workers to visit Bolivia's most radical mining complex, Siglo XX – Catavi. Soon after they arrived at the mess hall for dinner, Bolivian radios began to report that the Siglo XX union branch leaders, Federico Escóbar and Irineo Pimentel, had been arrested on their way back from the Colquiri congress in a bloody shoot-out with Paz Estenssoro's secret police. Within minutes, armed workers burst in and took all four US officials hostage.⁷⁵

Back in Washington, newly-inaugurated President Lyndon B. Johnson pledged 'full assistance to President Paz Estenssoro' to secure the hostages' release, and the Pentagon began dispatching C-47s to La Paz loaded with 'impact shipments' of military hardware aimed at shoring up the resolve of the Bolivian government.⁷⁶ After nine tense days, Escóbar and Pimentel wrote a letter from prison, convincing their union branch to 'teach the barbarians a lesson' (in magnanimity, one supposes) by releasing the US hostages. Praising the 'revolutionary firmness of the Siglo XX and Catavi working class', Escóbar and Pimentel lambasted the 'cancer of divisionism' fomented by the labour policies of the Paz Estenssoro government.⁷⁷

⁷³State to Henderson, 20 Dec. 1963, NARA, RG59, SDCF, box 3831, folder 'POL BOL-CHILE'; and Cuban Foreign Ministry report, 12 Dec. 1963, Archivo General del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba, Havana, folder 'Bolivia, 1963, ORD'.

⁷⁴Transcript of interview with Bernard Rifkin, USAID labour development officer and hostage, 23 March 1965, Chicago Historical Society, Sidney Lens Papers, box 128, file 128-6, folder 6; document courtesy of Robert Waters. Other quotes from Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, p. 129.

⁷⁵See Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, p. 110.

⁷⁶White House Press Release, 8 Dec. 1963, JFKL, NSF-Bundy, box 1, folder 'Chronological File, December 1963'; and Joint Chiefs to Southcom [Southern Command], 13 Dec. 1963, JFKL, NSF-CO, box 8, folder 'Bolivia, US Hostages'.

⁷⁷Escóbar/Pimentel to Siglo XX branch, 14 Dec. 1963, published in María L. Lagos (ed.), *Nos hemos forjado así: Al rojo vivo y a puro golpe: Historias del Comité de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX* (La Paz: Plural, 2006), pp. 95–6; and 'Pimentel y Escóbar piden que se libere a rehenes', *El Diario*, 14 Dec. 1963.

Taking stock of the Bolivian trade union scene in the wake of the hostage crisis, AFL-CIO officials betrayed little sympathy for the views of their freelancing compatriots in the mines. Giving no sense of the role played by AIFLD in stoking the fire, McLellan responded with an implicit condemnation of Bolivia's underdevelopment, blaming the fracas on a 'medieval and bitter power struggle' between Paz Estenssoro and Lechín, a brute-force brawl that 'will only end when one of the two major antagonists is eliminated'.⁷⁸ For its part, the US Embassy remained cautiously optimistic that its labour programme was working, despite the chaos. Reporting on the 'amazing progress' of the covertly-financed COBUR, the Embassy boasted that the new confederation continued to lend its 'full cooperation' to the AFL-CIO and that it was even warming to open alignment with the regional Free Trade Union organisation, ORIT. At the same time, the Embassy conceded that COBUR had 'a tremendous job ahead of it before it can stand on its own feet as a responsible, competent organization that can give the workers the direction they need to develop the country economically and defeat the communist threat'.⁷⁹

With the support of the schismatic COBUR labour faction, President Paz Estenssoro won re-election in May 1964 with 98 per cent of the vote, in a poll whose legitimacy was marred by his being the only candidate and an abstention campaign organised by Lechín's COB and all other parties, both Left and Right. Throughout mid-1964, the miners condemned the government's divisive labour policies, declaring their camps 'free territories' from government security forces and vowing to 'arm their militias to liberate the Bolivian people'. Meanwhile, right-wing Falangist youth launched a guerrilla struggle in the jungles of Santa Cruz, and Paz's new running mate, General René Barrientos, began to entertain the possibility of a palace coup d'état.⁸⁰

Central to US policy in Bolivia was a faith that polarising events since mid-1963 had convinced Paz Estenssoro's MNR to break with Lechín's labour Left and carry out a 'historic change toward moderation in the Bolivian revolution'. Indeed, from the very beginning of the union-busting operation, the Embassy counted on the close collaboration of Paz Estenssoro's secret police, which served as conduit for CIA subsidies to COBUR.⁸¹ The Bolivian president even appeared to be abandoning his previous flirtation with Third World non-alignment, declaring during the election campaign that the world was 'divided into two great camps', and that Bolivia's allegiance was 'determined by geography, tradition, and the democratic convictions that inspire us'. To put the icing on the cake, his secret police gave Lechín a thorough beating on the morning of the inauguration.⁸²

Despite signs that Bolivia was shifting toward anti-Communist alignment, it became clear after the election that elements of the MNR government retained a

⁷⁸'Power Struggle in the Bolivian Andes Likely to Have Great Effect on Labor', *Free Trade Union News*, Jan. 1964, in KCA, SRP, collection 5459, box 2, folder 4.

⁷⁹Osborn to State, A-637, 9 March 1964, SDCE, box 1281, folder 'LAB 3-2 BOL 1/1/64'.

⁸⁰Embassy to State, A-626, 5 March 1964; and Embassy to State, A-94, 28 Aug. 1964; and Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, pp. 140–58.

⁸¹See San Román to COBUR, 27 Aug. 1964, ABNB, Collection Presidencia de la República (hereafter PR), PR1676.

⁸²Embassy to State, 16 Aug. 1963, SDCE, box 3829, folder 'POL BOL 1963'; and Henderson to Rusk, 10 Aug. 1964, SDCE, box 1190, folder 'INCO BOL'.

vestigial streak of Third World independence. Aside from rejecting entreaties from the new COBUR and its US patrons that Bolivia break diplomatic relations with Cuba, members of the nationalist government began to grow weary of the labour imperialism of the AFL-CIO and its local paymasters at the US Embassy. Central to the rising drama was Paz Estenssoro's labour minister, Aguilar, a devout adherent of the Cold War 'third way' and a leading personality in securing a late 1963 visit to Bolivia by Yugoslav President Josep Broz Tito.⁸³ According to the US Embassy, Labour Minister Aguilar had initially been 'the most dynamic figure' in support of the COBUR operation. He had begun to complain in May 1964, however, that COBUR was ultimately being 'run by [US Embassy Labor Attaché Emmanuel] Boggs'. In private conversations with COBUR leadership, Aguilar warned that Boggs was 'a clever, dangerous person, thoroughly trained in the labor movement, whose motive was to make the [Bolivian] labor movement subservient to the US Embassy'.⁸⁴

In the presence of US Embassy officials at an AIFLD ceremony on 18 May, Aguilar redoubled his advocacy of MNR non-alignment, imploring the nascent COBUR not only to 'avoid being taken in by orthodox Marxism', but also to consider that 'overly close ties to ORIT or dependency on any US agency would be prejudicial' to genuine trade union independence.⁸⁵ Two weeks later, he further sought to curb COBUR's shift toward anti-Communist Free Trade Unionism by calling for an immediate workers' congress to elect leadership that Aguilar hoped would reflect the governing party's official policy of Cold War neutralism. COBUR, taking a page out of the playbook of its fiercely anti-Communist allies in the AFL-CIO, rejected Aguilar's suggestion as representing 'paternalism' on the part of the nationalist MNR.⁸⁶

Running out of patience in mid-June, Labour Minister Aguilar openly denounced COBUR's secret ties to Washington. In a dramatic press conference on the 18th, the labour minister revealed that COBUR was essentially the 'instrument of a foreign power', founded with secret money bags from the US Embassy. 'Congresses of workers should not be called by government nor by any foreign labor attaché', Aguilar proclaimed, vowing: 'I will not tolerate paternalism, much less foreign paternalism, toward the working class.' Arguing that the Bolivian trade union movement 'needs unity and not "godfathers"', Aguilar proceeded to deploy 50 armed labour ministry officials to occupy COBUR's headquarters until they agreed to call trade union elections that would 'determine the national line of the workers'.⁸⁷

⁸³ Author interviews with Paz Estenssoro's private secretary, Carlos Serrate, and Aguilar's son, Anibal Aguilar Jr, 5 and 7 Oct. 2016. For COBUR on Cuba, see 'COBUR respalda la política internacional del gobierno', *La Nación*, 30 Aug. 1964.

⁸⁴ Osborn to State, A-637, 9 March 1964; Henderson to State, 20 June 1964, LBJL, NSF-CO, box 7, folder 'Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64'; and Burgoon to State, A-63, 6 Aug. 1964, SDCF, box 1281, folder 'LAB 3-2 BOL 1/1/64'.

⁸⁵ 'Universitarios y obreros asisten al 1er Seminario de Altos Estudios Sindicales', *Última Hora*, 19 May 1964.

⁸⁶ 'La COBUR exigirá al Ministro de Trabajo aclare una declaración', *Presencia*, 13 June 1964.

⁸⁷ 'Ministro de Trabajo denunció intromisión de funcionario americano en asuntos sindicales', *Presencia*, 18 June 1964; Henderson to State, 20 June 1964, and Burgoon to State, A-63, 6 Aug. 1964.

The US Embassy was incredulous at this turn of events, which clearly represented a 'loss of prestige ... [and] a serious blow to COBUR'. Insensitive to the extent to which the AFL-CIO's unwavering anti-Communism had exacerbated tensions between its COBUR protégé and the US-backed MNR government, Embassy diplomats assured the State Department that Labor Attaché Boggs had 'maintained cordial relations' with the labour minister, even having 'consulted Aguilar on every step of his program'. COBUR leadership responded similarly to Bolivian press queries, noting meekly that the US Embassy payments had been nothing more than a 'USAID fund for workers' education' and expressing befuddlement as to why Labour Minister Aguilar had 'signed documents allocating funds' right up to his startling revelations.⁸⁸

In private conversations with US officials, President Paz Estenssoro claimed he had not approved of Aguilar's spectacular denunciations, but this was of little comfort as he retained the labour minister throughout the remainder of his presidency. Moreover, Aguilar's family and confidants later insisted that Aguilar was extremely close to Paz Estenssoro, and that he 'would never have taken any action' without his boss's approval.⁸⁹ A dedicated Third World neutralist, Aguilar apparently blew the whistle on Washington's secret subsidies to COBUR in order to brandish the MNR government's waning nationalist credentials and reassert its own networks of patronage over the organisation. Declassified Bolivian documents reveal that Paz Estenssoro's secret police continued modest subsidies to COBUR for weeks as Aguilar tried in vain to patch up relations with the organisation's leadership.⁹⁰ Now bereft of the deep pockets of USAID and the CIA, however, COBUR's debts rapidly accumulated. In late September, its executive secretary flew off to West Germany, leaving the organisation 'with a pile of bills and no money to pay them'. By 23 October, it became clear to the US Embassy that 'COBUR will collapse ... the office is still open, but the telephone has been disconnected.'⁹¹

After sensationally betraying Washington's role in COBUR, Labour Minister Aguilar privately fretted that the MNR was still 'losing its ... revolutionary mysticism'. For many Bolivians, the final nail in the coffin of the country's erstwhile non-alignment was Paz Estenssoro's reluctant decision to fold in the face of Washington's 'abusive' pressure and break diplomatic ties with Cuba in early September 1964.⁹² This was 'disastrous for Paz's domestic game', according to his private secretary, as Lechín's labour Left was now driven even further from the MNR government, into the awkward embrace of Paz Estenssoro's eternal conservative nemeses on the oligarchic Right.⁹³ Throughout September and October, pro-Lechín workers led armed demonstrations with Communist students and their right-wing Falangist classmates, many carrying placards that read, 'Down

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; and Embassy to State, A-94, 28 Aug. 1964.

⁸⁹ Author interviews with Serrate and Aguilar Jr, 5 and 7 Oct. 2016.

⁹⁰ San Román to COBUR, 27 Aug. 1964; 'Aguilar acatará decisión de su sector si le pide que renuncie', *Presencia*, 2 July 1964.

⁹¹ Memorandum of conversation, 23 Sept. 1964; and Embassy to State, A-168, 23 Oct. 1964, SDCF, box 1281, folder 'LAB 3-2 BOL 1/1/64'.

⁹² Cabinet Minutes, 13 Aug. 1964, ABNB, PR1800, pp. 3-5; and cabinet member Guillermo Bedregal Gutiérrez, *De búhos, políticas, y exilios: Mis memorias* (La Paz: Instituto Carlos Montenegro, 2009), p. 366.

⁹³ Author interview with Serrate, 19 July 2012.

with Yankee Imperialism!' When several workers and students were gunned down in late October, the US Embassy reported that the growing revolt could be put down only with 'substantial cost of life'. On 3 November, the Embassy urgently requested another million rounds of ammunition to arm pro-government peasant militias facing down angry workers, rebellious students and a growing number of mutinous military units. The following day, the Bolivian armed forces deposed Paz Estenssoro to restore order, but not before workers had stormed the national penitentiary and liberated scores of COB leftists and Communist party members.⁹⁴

With the fall of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, a particularly tumultuous chapter in Bolivian labour's struggle for non-alignment came to a close. COBUR's abortive shift toward Free Trade Unionism, and its precipitous collapse, revealed the inability of AFL-CIO organisers to build a viable anti-Communist Left to replace Bolivia's revolutionary labour movement. Draped in the language of social and economic modernisation, USAID-funded labour activists succeeded in hollowing out the labour-led soul of Bolivia's MNR, widening a split in the country's non-aligned Left, and paving the way for the military to take over. As a top USAID official later put it, 'nothing is more political than labor union training. But we treat it as developmental.'⁹⁵

Conclusion

Old habits die hard. A few days before President Paz Estenssoro was overthrown on 4 November, Washington's Embassy in La Paz was preparing to launch yet another 'major effort ... [to] be undertaken as soon as possible ... [to] break the Bolivian labor movement completely away from communist and demagogic control'. Warning the State Department that 'our socks are down on this one', the Embassy reported that the local CIA head 'was also perturbed by the comparative weakness of our effort and has asked for help'. Boggs had been reassigned to Chile, but the Embassy was confident that 'with a [new] Labor Attaché aboard and a combined overt and covert effort, we have a good chance of making real progress'. Once again, the AFL-CIO would be asked to participate, through its 'in-country labor education programs', which were now set to receive a doubling of their USAID subsidy.⁹⁶ Unlike the ill-fated COBUR effort, the US Embassy now planned to carry out its anti-Communist labour operations independently of the frustratingly non-aligned politics of the MNR. With Paz Estenssoro falling from power five days later, his demise caused in part by leftist workers opposed to his labour policies, a series of military dictatorships would serve as a fresh milieu within which USAID and the CIA settled in with their AFL-CIO allies for a decades-long battle to coax Bolivia's non-aligned labour movement toward the Free Trade Union camp.

By rescuing the voices of transnational labour organisers and their enablers in the Bolivian and US governments, this article explores the evolution of Bolivia's non-aligned labour movement as it temporarily buckled under the weight of

⁹⁴Henderson to Rusk, 3 Nov. 1964, LBJL, NSF-CO, box 7, folder 'Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64'. See also Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, pp. 152, 176 and 182-9.

⁹⁵William Greider, 'Unions Turn to [US]AID after CIA Pullout', *Washington Post*, 21 April 1969.

⁹⁶Hurwitch to Dentzer, 28 Oct. 1964; Hurwitch to Mann, 29 Oct. 1964; and Hurwitch to Firfer, 30 Oct. 1964, SDLE, ARA-Bolivia, box 3, folder 'LAB 1 1965'.

US-funded union busting. Illuminating the inability of states to get workers to stick close to their scripts, the case study reveals how powerful organisations such as USAID and the CIA were ultimately unable to mould the Bolivian labour movement precisely to their liking. As a constellation of government-funded trade union activists moved between Washington and La Paz, Kennedy's labour programme for Bolivia succeeded in dividing the country's workers and inadvertently weakening the non-aligned government it was meant to support.

For a fuller picture of the post-war role played by the AFL-CIO in Latin America and throughout the world, more ground-level research will be necessary in individual countries. Above all, future scholarship on transnational labour politics will require sensitivity to the agency of local and non-state actors. In the words of Kennedy's Assistant Labor Secretary George Weaver, the private nature of overseas labour organisers 'gives the government an instrument for action which minimizes the "intervention" aspect'.⁹⁷ Fortunately, their papers are available to historians willing to consider the power of non-state actors and the multi-sited conflicts that mark the contemporary global history of labour movements in Latin America and the broader Third World.

Acknowledgements. Suggestions on previous drafts were provided by the late Michael Nash, the late Marilyn Young, Joaquín Chávez, Leon Fink, Molly Giedel, Robert Karl, Robert Waters, Julia Sarreal, Jack Reid, Judy Wu, Michael Murphy and four anonymous reviewers. Earlier versions were presented at New York University's Tamiment Library, the Conference on Latin American History, a 'Labor and Empire' workshop at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Financial support included a Tamiment Library Postdoctoral Fellowship and sabbatical support from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Spanish abstract

A partir de archivos del movimiento de trabajadores estadounidense, documentos personales de organizadores sindicales internacionales, historias orales bolivianas e informes de prensa, y registros gubernamentales de cuatro países, este artículo explora la red de relaciones de la Guerra Fría forjada entre trabajadores bolivianos y el gobierno y funcionarios sindicales estadounidenses. Destapando una paralela y a veces conflictiva serie de programas de desarrollo sindical apoyados por el estado, el artículo revela la incapacidad gubernamental para controlar la exuberancia de los activistas sindicales motivados ideológicamente. En vez de tener éxito en apuntalar un gobierno civil como se intentó, el programa para la degradación sindical del presidente estadounidense John F. Kennedy agravó las fisuras en la izquierda no comunista boliviana, frustrando como resultado sus intentos de conducir una postura no alineada en la Guerra Fría en América Latina. Empleando métodos transnacionales para conectar vacíos en la literatura sobre el sindicalismo, el desarrollo y la historia diplomática, este artículo propone un nuevo enfoque apoyado en los estudios imperiales para estudiar los conflictos multisituados que dieron forma a la trayectoria de los movimientos sindicales en Bolivia y a lo largo del Tercer Mundo en la postguerra.

Spanish keywords: Bolivia; sindicalismo; transnacionalismo; imperio; Tercer Mundo; Kennedy; desarrollo

⁹⁷Weaver to Goldberg, 28 Aug. 1962, NARA, RG174, Goldberg Records, box 118, folder 'A American - H American - R, 1962'.

Portuguese abstract

A partir de arquivos do movimento trabalhista estadunidense, documentos pessoais de organizadores de movimentos trabalhistas transnacionais, histórias orais e reportagens da imprensa boliviana e registros governamentais de quatro países, este artigo explora a teia de relações forjadas durante a Guerra Fria entre trabalhadores bolivianos e o governo e funcionários trabalhistas dos Estados Unidos. O artigo revela, ao descortinar uma panóplia de programas de desenvolvimento sindical apoiados pelo estado, que agia de forma paralela e por vezes conflitante, a incapacidade dos governos de controlar a emergência de ativistas trabalhistas ideologicamente motivados. Em vez de dar apoio a um governo civil, como previsto, o programa de supressão dos sindicatos engendrado pelo presidente estadunidense John F. Kennedy acabou por agravar as fissuras presentes na esquerda boliviana não-comunista, frustrando a tentativa de reverter uma postura não-alinhada da América Latina durante a Guerra Fria. Empregando métodos transnacionais para colmatar lacunas entre trabalho, desenvolvimento e história diplomática, o artigo aponta uma nova abordagem enfocada nos estudos imperiais para estudar os conflitos multi-localizados que marcaram a trajetória pós-guerra dos movimentos trabalhistas na Bolívia e no Terceiro Mundo.

Portuguese keywords: Bolívia; trabalho; transnacionalismo; império; Terceiro Mundo; Kennedy; desenvolvimento

Cite this article: Field Jr TC (2020). Union Busting as Development: Transnationalism, Empire and Kennedy's Secret Labour Programme for Bolivia. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 52, 27–51. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X19000646>