

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communist Disinformation Campaigns and the Latin American Cold War of the 1960s: The Case of the Uruguayan Newspaper *Época*

Michal Zourek 

Department of Politics, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové
Email: zourek@centrum.cz

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Abstract

Based on declassified documents from the archives of the Czechoslovak intelligence agency (StB) and the contemporary press, this article delves into the working mechanisms of the Communist secret services in Latin America in the 1960s. Specifically, focusing on the case of the newspaper *Época*, it deals with the production of articles aimed at discrediting the capitalist states and their publication in the press through local collaborators. The link between the StB and the Uruguayan newspaper, which claimed to be politically and economically independent, was pragmatic and, for a time, helped both parties to achieve their political ends. While the StB managed to obtain a space where it could carry out its operations, *Época*'s motivations were not only ideological but also economic and related to the urgent desire of the non-Communist Left to get funding for its political activities.

Keywords: Uruguay; Cold War; secret services; Cuban Revolution; Soviet bloc; disinformation

Introduction

Very little is known to this day about the activities undertaken by the secret services of both capitalist and Communist countries in the so-called Third World during the Cold War due to the unavailability of archives. In 2004, a law was passed in the Czech Republic facilitating access to the archival documents of the Státní Bezpečnost (State Security, StB), the intelligence service of Communist Czechoslovakia. When this new legislation was enacted, virtually no consideration was given to protecting personal data and almost all the archival material has been made accessible to the public without any filters, including documents containing sensitive information about people still active in public life. As a result of such liberal legislation, studies have been published recently that bring to light surprising interactions between the StB and local politicians, intellectuals and journalists.¹

¹See Natalia Telepneva, “Code Name SEKRETÁŘ”: Amílcar Cabral, Czechoslovakia and the Role of Human Intelligence during the Cold War’, *The International History Review*, 42: 6 (2020), pp. 1257–73;

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The case that has resonated most strongly in Latin America is that of Vivian Trías, a member of the Partido Socialista de Uruguay (Socialist Party of Uruguay, PSU), who was an agent of the StB between 1964 and 1977. The cooperation between Czechoslovak intelligence and this prominent politician and intellectual, who defined himself as a Latin Americanist and Third-Worldist and who explicitly distanced himself from the Communist world, has given rise to much debate and several studies.² This example has shown that, while the opening of the Czechoslovak intelligence archives has been an invaluable asset for historians, it has also led to these documents being used to discredit specific individuals. Therefore, it is necessary to approach their content from a very critical perspective: the documents produced by StB officials often do not make it possible to see what the real motivation of the local contacts was for forging the links and carrying out the collaboration.³

While offering us a new vision of the personal histories of some well-known figures, the StB archives represent, above all, a unique source that reveals the objectives and mechanisms of the Communist secret services in many countries around the world. In the case of Latin America, they allow us to understand the dynamics of the Cold War in this region after the Cuban Revolution from a hitherto little-known perspective. At the same time, they shed light on a subject that, up to now, has not been given due attention: the role played by minor countries and minor actors in this conflict.

In the first place, Czechoslovakia played a particular role, due to its special position in the diplomatic field. It had maintained close ties with Latin America since the interwar period, establishing a wide network of legations. In the early 1960s, this network was wider than that of the USSR or of any other Communist country. In addition, Czechoslovakia was perceived in the region as an industrial and culturally advanced country, which had a tradition of democracy and was closer to Western Europe.⁴ Thus, after the Cuban Revolution, which considerably increased the USSR's interest in Latin America, Czechoslovakia became the main intermediary through which Soviet influence was exerted in the region.

Czechoslovakia played a key role in Castro's government in the earliest years after the Revolution. As the supplier of heavy industry, weapons and expert services in various areas, Czechoslovakia had undoubtedly played a key role in helping Castro's government to power.⁵ This pro-Cuban policy, imposed by the USSR,

Jan Koura, 'A Prominent Spy: Mehdi Ben Barka, Czechoslovak Intelligence, and Eastern Bloc Espionage in the Third World during the Cold War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 36: 3 (2021), pp. 318–39.

²See Aldo Marchesi and Michal Zourek, 'The New Latin American Left in a Polarised Cold War: The Story of Vivian Trías', *Cold War History*, 22: 1 (2022), pp. 19–40; Fernando López d'Alessandro, *El hombre que fue Ríos: la inteligencia checoslovaca y la izquierda nacional (1956–1977)* (Montevideo: Debate, 2019); Vladimír Petrilák and Mauro 'Abranches' Kraenski, *La STB: el brazo de la KGB en Uruguay. Los archivos secretos del espionaje comunista desde los años 60* (Montevideo: Planeta, 2018).

³Michal Zourek, 'Uruguay en el archivo de las fuerzas de seguridad (Archiv bezpečnostních složek) en Praga', *Contemporánea*, 9: 9 (2018), pp. 228–31.

⁴Josef Opatrný et al., *Las relaciones entre Checoslovaquia y América Latina, 1945–1989, en los archivos de la República Checa* (Prague: Karolinum, 2015).

⁵Hana Bortlová, *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959–1962* (Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2011).

represented a major drawback for Czechoslovakia because it threatened its diplomatic and commercial interests in the region.⁶

In the early 1960s, Czechoslovak spies were operating in nine Latin American countries. Although the StB was formally independent of the Soviet Union's intelligence apparatus, its operations were supervised and occasionally even directed by the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security, KGB). In Latin America the StB relied on a network of local collaborators to fulfil its objectives – mostly driven by the demands of the USSR, which was keen to maintain its influence on the island of Cuba. The Czechoslovak secret services were forbidden from cooperating with members of Communist parties or with organisations under their direct influence: such relations were managed by the KGB. The StB therefore focused on finding 'progressive nationalists' with an anti-United States stance.⁷

In Uruguay, the StB maintained contact with all political parties except the Communist Party. Over time, its most effective cooperation was established with the PSU, which, although it had rather limited political power, had intellectual capital that the StB could use for its operations. This cooperation was based on the ideological proximity resulting from the rapprochement between Cuba and the Soviets, which had in turn led to considerable tension and a shift within the non-Communist Left. The Soviet Union had previously been unanimously seen as an imperialist threat but, from 1961 – when Castro proclaimed that the Revolution was Marxist-Leninist and expressed his alliance with the Soviet Bloc – the voices that began to consider the USSR as a power capable of defending the peoples of the Third World against US aggression gained momentum.⁸

Trías was one of those who reassessed their position towards the Soviet Bloc. This politician and intellectual was of extraordinary value to the Czechoslovaks not only because of his publications and political analyses, but also because of Uruguay's significance for the work of the Communist secret services in the 1960s.⁹ While the KGB's *rezidentura* (intelligence station) had been operating in Uruguay – the country with the highest urbanisation and literacy rates in Latin America – since the 1950s, the StB's was established only at the end of 1960. Uruguay was chosen for the StB's *rezidentura* in Latin America because of its liberal

⁶Michal Zourek, 'Czechoslovakia and Latin America's Guerrilla Insurgencies: Secret Services, Training Networks, Mobility, and Transportation', in Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez (eds.), *Toward a Global History of Latin America's Revolutionary Left* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2021), pp. 27–66.

⁷Zápis z jednání mezi KGB při Radě ministrů SSSR a ministerstva vnitra ČSSR, 26–30. 6. 1961, Archiv bezpečnostních složek, Praha (hereafter ABS), I. správa SNB.

⁸On the motivations of some sectors of the PSU for maintaining contact with Czechoslovak intelligence, see Michal Zourek, 'La alianza cubano-soviética y sus desafíos para el tercerismo uruguayo en la primera mitad de los años sesenta: una mirada desde los archivos de la inteligencia checoslovaca', *Historia Crítica*, 85 (2022), pp. 75–98.

⁹On the activity of the secret services in Uruguay see Roberto García Ferreira, "'El asunto Mesutti': anti-comunismo y espionaje soviético en Uruguay', *Revista de Historia Iberoamericana*, 4: 2 (2011), pp. 84–111; Roberto García Ferreira, 'Espionaje y política: la guerra fría y la inteligencia policial uruguaya, 1947–64', *Revista de Historia (Costa Rica)*, 63–4 (2011), pp. 13–33. Very little is known about US intelligence activities in Uruguay in the 1960s; nevertheless, an important source is the work of the former CIA officer, Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary* (New York: Random House, 1975).

political environment, its socio-cultural proximity to Europe, and the large number of its intellectuals and periodicals with an anti-imperialist slant.¹⁰ These favourable conditions for conspiracy activities contrasted with developments in neighbouring Argentina and Brazil, where authoritarian regimes came to power in the following years and the possibilities for the StB to act were very limited. The *coup d'état* in March–April 1964 in Brazil, which until then had been the epicentre of Czechoslovak espionage activities in the region, proved to be a particular setback.¹¹ From mid-1964 onwards, Uruguay took over this role. Its importance was reinforced by the fact that the most important leaders of the Brazilian opposition, former President João Goulart and the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Leonel Brizola, were granted political asylum there.¹²

In the early years, the dominant line of work of the *rezidentura* in Montevideo was aimed at obtaining information on government policy, especially regarding international affairs. For this reason, the StB was mainly interested in people linked to the ruling parties, the National (Blanco) and Colorado parties.¹³ In September 1964, following the recommendation of the Organization of American States (OAS), Montevideo broke diplomatic ties with Havana, so Uruguayan policy towards Cuba became less significant. However, the StB's activities were redirected towards active measures, i.e. undercover operations aimed at influencing public opinion in an effort to weaken the 'main enemy', the United States.

The literature on the active measures of the Soviet Bloc countries is very limited.¹⁴ Ladislav Bittman worked in the StB department in charge of the application of such measures during the 1960s. After emigrating to the United States in 1968, he was the first to introduce the subject of active measures to the Western public.¹⁵ Although there are some more recent studies on the active measures of the StB, based on archive research, these are more general and make no mention of their implementation in any specific region.¹⁶

Despite the opening of the archives, only a few fragments of the documents dedicated to active measures have survived. Because many of these papers contained sensitive information about the system's details and *modus operandi*, they were

¹⁰Aldo Marchesi, *Hacer la revolución. Guerrillas latinoamericanas, de los años sesenta a la caída del Muro* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2019), pp. 51–2.

¹¹Mauro 'Abranches' Kraenski and Vladimír Petrilák, 1964: *O elo perdido. O Brasil nos arquivos do serviço secreto comunista* (Campinas: Vide, 2017).

¹²Maria Claudia Moraes Leite, 'A trajetória política de Leonel de Moura Brizola no exílio uruguaio (1964–1977)', PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2015.

¹³Michal Zourek, 'Los servicios secretos del Bloque Soviético y sus aliados en América Latina: el Partido Colorado y el Partido Nacional en los planes de la inteligencia checoslovaca en Uruguay', *Izquierdas*, 49 (2020), pp. 4120–39.

¹⁴Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020); Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

¹⁵See Ladislav Bittman, *The Deception Game: Czechoslovak Intelligence in Soviet Political Warfare* (Syracuse, NY: University Research Corporation, 1972).

¹⁶Martin Slávik, 'Spolupráce rozvědky StB a KGB v oblasti aktivních opatření', in Kateřina Volná (ed.), *Aktivita NKVD/KGB a její spolupráce s tajnými službami střední a východní Evropy, 1945–1989*, vol. 2 (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2009), pp. 175–9; Petr Cajthaml, 'Profesionální lháři – aktivní opatření čs. rozvědky do srpna 1968', *Sborník archivu ministerstva vnitra*, 4 (2006), pp. 9–41.

almost completely destroyed immediately after the political changes that took place in November and December 1989.¹⁷ However, a partial reconstruction is possible thanks to the surviving folders containing mail about the operations of the První Správa Sboru Národní Bezpečnosti (First Intelligence Directorate of the National Security Corps, I. Správa SNB) responsible for foreign espionage, which contain documents related to the internal administration of the Oddělení Aktivních Opatření (Department of Active Measures), assessments of its work plans and details on cooperation with intelligence services of the other Soviet Bloc countries.

Based on the analysis of the StB archives and the Uruguayan press of the time, this study has two main objectives. The first is to expose the nature and aims of the active measures, as well as their specific implementation in this South American country. In the mid-sixties, Uruguay was the centre of the Soviet Bloc's disinformation campaigns in the region, which were carried out through several journalists and local newspapers, the most important collaboration being that with the newspaper *Época*. The second objective is to show, through this link between the StB and a newspaper that proclaimed itself to be politically and economically independent, the several challenges faced by the Uruguayan non-Communist Left in the 1960s. In particular, it focuses on the issue of the economic support received by the newspaper from abroad, which was essential for the opposition's activity but which could lead to questions about its self-declared independence.

Active Measures

The term 'active measures' was adopted from the KGB's lexicon (Russian: '*aktivnye meropriyatiye*') and used by the intelligence services of other Soviet Bloc countries. These top-secret operations were an important tool in Soviet offensive policy. They typically consisted of the dissemination of political, military and economic disinformation aimed at discrediting the capitalist states on a global scale. Most of these measures were carried out through the mass media. According to the StB's 'Directive on Agency Operative Work Abroad', active measures were to be based not entirely on lies but on at least partially true information that could be verified and, thus, generate credibility.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the CIA had already begun to work intensively in this field since the 1950s, buying advertising in the press and radio in different areas across Latin America. Historian Roberto García, for example, described how the Uruguayan newspapers *El País*, *La Mañana* and *El Plata* were part of intense secret actions aimed at the local public, where it was stated that the government of Guatemala's Jacobo Árbenz posed a threat of Sovietisation in the region.¹⁹ In turn, the Soviet Bloc began to be more actively involved in this field from the 1960s onwards, which was when these active measures reached their peak.

Active measures were designed, managed and coordinated by Department 'D', established in 1959 within the First Directorate of the KGB (responsible for KGB operations abroad); the more important measures were discussed by the Central

¹⁷Skartační protokol svazku 81206, 21. 11. 1989, ABS, f. I. správa SNB, 81206/-, č. I. 33.

¹⁸Směrnice o agenturně operativní práci v zahraničí, ABS, f. I. správa SNB, č. j. A/1-00211/010-64, č. 77.

¹⁹Roberto García Ferreira, *La CIA y el caso Arbenz* (Guatemala City: CEUR-USAC, 2009), pp. 67–103.

Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁰ Following the example of Department 'D', which was made up of between 50 and 70 people, sections specialising exclusively in active measures were created within the secret services of the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria between 1962 and 1964. The KGB played the role of central coordinator, but also established direct operational contacts between the various Communist intelligence services. This massive and coordinated apparatus of the Soviet Bloc countries (excluding Romania) implemented the mass production of 'active measures'.

In February 1964, Department 8 of I. Správa SNB, the Czechoslovak body engaged in active measures, was established, comprising 18 staff members. The implementation of 'influencing activities' thus became a field of work independent of the StB, one that was based on thorough documentation. The following period, until the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact (WP) troops in August 1968, was characterised by an increase in the quantity and, above all, in the quality of these actions. In 1965, the services of all Soviet Bloc countries carried out more than 400 active measures, and the StB participated in more than 100 of them, demonstrating the key importance of Czechoslovak intelligence. The StB had a long reach and its technical equipment was of a very high standard, evidenced by the fact that, between 1964 and 1966, no Czechoslovak counterfeits were detected.²¹

The main battleground in the psychological warfare against the West was in Third World countries. National liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America were increasing in strength, and the emergence of new independent states with strong anti-Western sentiments and prejudices provided fertile ground for the disinformation campaigns of the Soviet Bloc.²² Active measures were adapted to local operational and cultural conditions. In more developed Latin American countries with a deeply rooted tradition of literacy, active measures based on the press were more often used, while in African countries with a high rate of illiteracy letters were sent to specific addresses, or the radio service was used.²³

As for printed active measures – which made up the majority – the mechanism usually consisted of printing material in a newspaper or magazine through local contributors. The aim was to create a chain reaction that would be reproduced by other media. News from provincial newspapers in Third World countries was picked up by the Soviet news agency and, through it, reached other countries around the world. Therefore, in the early 1960s, the Communist secret services began to invest capital secretly in various newspapers, magazines and small news agencies to continuously use them as disinformation channels.

The active measures carried out by the StB reached their peak between 1964 and 1967. Although they did not increase in quantity, their quality improved considerably.²⁴

²⁰Herbert Romerstein, 'Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 1 (2001), pp. 54–67.

²¹Cajthaml, 'Profesionální lháři', p. 18.

²²Dosavadní vývoj a výsledky 8. odboru – zaměření další činnosti, 10. 2. 1967, ABS, I. správa SNB, 81067/101, č. 1., pp. 153–73.

²³Cajthaml, 'Profesionální lháři', p. 13.

²⁴Předávací protokol agendy dokumentace aktivních opatření, 28. 2. 1970, ABS, I správa SNB, 81206/-, č. 1. 2–11. In 1964 the StB performed 78 operations; in 1965: 99; in 1966: 66; and in 1967: 62.

The huge scope of the StB's active measures is illustrated by the fact that, in the 1964–6 period alone, it had at its disposal 210 local confidential agents or contacts, as well as 35 press channels (newspapers, magazines, or others) for their implementation.²⁵

In 1968, the Czechoslovak intelligence service had *rezidenturas* in 39 of the 72 countries where it operated. Approximately half of these were in developing countries. Nevertheless, with changes in the political context, Department 8 was reducing its activity in 1968. Most of the members of the agency, until recently the showcase of Czechoslovak intelligence, became supporters of the reformist ideas that had emerged during the Prague Spring, and expressed criticism of the WP occupation in August. In addition to major personnel changes, Bittman's defection, mentioned above, also dealt a severe blow to the StB.²⁶ Activities were completely paralysed for several months and, in the following period, a major restructuring took place. Czechoslovakia and its intelligence services shifted from being the ally that faithfully fulfilled the tasks assigned to it by the Soviets to an object of surveillance.²⁷

At its peak, the section most valued for its active measures was the Americký Odbor (America Department), which included the entire western Hemisphere. Although it did not carry out a large number of operations, it was noted for its high quality. The most significant of its active measures were those with a continental scope. Those assessed to be the best, in terms of their results, were the *rezidenturas* in Brazil (until the 1964 coup), Mexico and Uruguay.²⁸ This was because they had highly effective contacts, although the Prague Directorate maintained that they were repeating a certain pattern of work, always dealing with the same people and using the same methods.²⁹

The StB was aware that local journalists would not participate in its active measures without imposing conditions. Therefore, Czechoslovaks focused on the anti-imperialist press, where it was easier to publish content. Besides having the same political stance as Czechoslovakia, these media outlets also appreciated small financial rewards. The fact that their readership was limited was not so important for StB. The success of the active measures consisted first and foremost in the subsequent dissemination of the information that was published.

From 1962 onwards, the StB began to implement active measures in Uruguay in *El Sol*, the PSU's weekly newspaper. In addition, through Ángel Rama, the StB managed to publish its articles in *Marcha*, spreading them beyond the borders of Uruguay. However, publication in this weekly was more difficult, because several attempts at publication were rejected by the founder and director Carlos Quijano. From 1964, when active measures came to represent most of the work of the StB, the *rezidentura* in Montevideo began to focus almost exclusively on the newspaper *Época*.

²⁵Dosavadní vývoj a výsledky 8. odboru – zaměření další činnosti, 10. 2. 1967.

²⁶Zpráva o zradě příslušníka čs. rozvědky L. Bittmana, 26. 11. 1968, ABS, f. A 13, inv. j. 91.

²⁷Petr Cajthaml, 'Politický úkol: Aktivní opatření v období krize komunistického režimu', *Securitas Imperii*, 17: 2 (2010), p. 83.

²⁸Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1965, 30. 6. 1965, ABS, I SF 041/25.

²⁹Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1964, 1. 7. 1964, ABS, I SF 041/18.

The StB and *Época*

Despite its relatively short existence between 1962 and 1967, the daily newspaper *Época* has an important place in the political and cultural history of Uruguay.³⁰ Besides being closely linked to names of great renown in the pantheon such as Quijano, Eduardo Galeano, Mario Benedetti and Carlos María Gutiérrez, the newspaper made a very important contribution to unifying the non-Communist Left. Its foundation was the result of an agreement between different groups linked to the PSU and other minor sectors. Its proclaimed political and economic independence was reflected in the intention to generate a plurality of opinions, that is, in its effort to give a space to all representatives of the political Left. This diversity could be seen in the newspaper's editorial board, which included Socialists, anarchists and individuals linked to guerrilla groups. *Época* played an important role in shaping the revolutionary Left. Some activists of El Coordinador – a popular defence movement which later gave rise to the Tupamaros urban guerrilla group – also helped to run the newspaper as printers and journalists, writing notes and articles.³¹

Through its 20 pages, the newspaper provided written and graphic information on foreign and national events. Extensive coverage was given to issues related to the process of renewal undergone by the Uruguayan Left in the previous years – Third Worldism, anti-imperialism and defence of liberation struggles. International news, mainly focused on criticising US imperialism, was given special attention. One of the most important topics was the Cuban Revolution – its diffusion and expressions of support and solidarity. Defending Castro's government was a major unifying element for the various heterogeneous groups that ran the newspaper.

Unlike *Marcha*, which was aimed at an intellectual public, and *El Sol*, directed at Socialist activists, *Época* targeted at broader sectors. It did not focus solely on strictly political issues, as could be seen in the culture and sports sections, which had the largest number of pages. With this strategy, the newspaper tried to penetrate the daily life of apolitical readers and bring them closer to national and international events.³² Its initial print run of 6,000 copies progressively increased to 25,000.³³

The bond that was forged between the newspaper and Czechoslovak intelligence was based not only on the convergent interests between the two parties, namely, the objective of weakening US influence in Uruguay and Latin America, but also on economics. *Época* came into being as the property of the Editorial Independencia SA corporation, made up of a large number of small shareholders, especially activists, workers and intellectuals.³⁴ The purpose of this format was to guarantee

³⁰See Daniel Álvarez Ferretjans, *Historia de la prensa en el Uruguay: desde La Estrella del Sur a Internet* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2008), pp. 524–7; Eduardo Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina: la izquierda revolucionaria uruguaya, 1955–1973* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2006), pp. 108–22.

³¹Marina Cardozo, “‘Ese momento no ha de tardar’: *Época*, la construcción de sentidos acerca de la revolución y los nexos con la izquierda armada uruguaya en formación (1962–1964)”, *Contemporánea*, 8: 1 (2017), pp. 141–57.

³²Fabián Kovacic, *Galeano: la biografía* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara, 2015), p. 160.

³³Návrh na pomoc pokrokovému listu v Uruguayi, 24. 7. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

³⁴*Época* invita a usted participar en su empresa, *Época*, 26 Oct. 1962. Back copies of the periodicals referenced in this article can be consulted at <https://anaforas.fic.edu.uy/jspui/> (URL accessed 3 Nov. 2024) or the Biblioteca Nacional de Uruguay.

political independence; however, the fact that the newspaper was not backed by any organisation or economically strong individual meant that it faced serious financial problems throughout its existence. The income from donations and share offers was not enough to consolidate and secure the project. Therefore, the newspaper's bosses saw in the Czechoslovaks a way of solving these continuous financial problems.

Trías, mentioned above, whose code name was *Ríos*,³⁵ was key at the outset of this relationship. Contact between him and a Czechoslovak intelligence officer was made in July 1961 and intensified after the very poor showing of the PSU (as part of the Unión Popular coalition) in the elections of November 1962. Trías lost his parliamentary seat, resigned as General Secretary of the PSU, and for a few years withdrew from political life. In June 1964, Trías accepted an offer to become an agent of the StB. This process must be seen in a broader context: the recruitment of this intellectual, whose enormous literary production was mostly dedicated to condemning US imperialism, took place only four months after the StB established Department 8 and a little more than two months after the coup in Brazil.

After Trías's recruitment as an agent, his work shifted in another direction – first and foremost, to political analysis and the writing of books. A few months later the main contact with *Época* became Guillermo Bernhard, code name *Rajka*, Chief Accountant of the Frigorífico Nacional company and advisor to the Ministry of Economy. In addition to being a renowned economist, Bernhard was also a journalist and author of several pamphlets dedicated to the meat industry and agrarian reform. Despite his anti-imperialist orientation and close ties with the PSU, Bernhard never joined the party. The first contact between him and the StB was made in January 1963. In November 1964, Bernhard was elected chairman of *Época*, which would further spark the Czechoslovaks' interest in him. Contact would reach its apogee in May of the following year, when Bernhard became an StB agent.

Active Measures Carried Out in *Época*

Because documents dedicated to active measures have been destroyed, it is difficult to identify which articles published in *Época* were part of these operations. In most cases, we do not have information on the exact date of any specific publication, nor of the title of the articles. Moreover, *Época* published many articles condemning US policy, whether or not under the heading of 'active measures'. However, based on the documents available now, we can reconstruct the situation to some extent. Through mentions of the author, the approximate date of publication and the subject of the active measure, it is sometimes possible to identify specific articles.

The first active measure implemented in *Época* was called *Plamen*; it was aimed at denouncing the events that took place in Panama in 1964.³⁶ On 9 January, during the so-called 'Flag Riots', thousands of demonstrators demanded that the Panamanian flag be flown in the Canal Zone territory. The protests were violently repressed by the US authorities. This reaction was strongly criticised throughout Latin America and the StB wanted to take advantage of this atmosphere to whip up this anti-imperialist spirit.

³⁵Code names for agents and special measures are given in *italics*.

³⁶Caymaris – schůzka dne 15. ledna 1964, 17. 2. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 11503.

Trías promised to try to publish an article on the subject in *Marcha* through his friend, Galeano. In parallel, Miloš Veselý, a *rezident* of the StB, officially Second Secretary of the Legation, followed Trías's recommendation to publish in *Época*, and gave material to the editor, Alberto Caymaris, so that he could write an article. Caymaris valued the information provided by Veselý, whom he believed to be a diplomat. They made an agreement that would result in the publication of an article describing US interventions in Panama's internal affairs since the establishment of the country. These were to be based both on reports approved by Veselý and on foreign news summaries favourable to Panama. The StB documents mention that articles were published in *Época* and *Marcha* within the framework of *Plamen*.³⁷ However, neither a date of publication nor any indication of the content is provided. Identifying these articles seems almost impossible, given that *Época* and *Marcha* devoted a great deal of space to Panamanian events independently of the StB.

According to the Czechoslovak documents, in addition to publications, the PSU, encouraged by Trías, organised events – namely student demonstrations and speeches on Radio Nacional – as part of this active measure.³⁸ It is open to debate whether the StB had a direct influence on these events, but implementation of *Plamen* was highly appreciated by the Directorate in Prague. Other *rezidenturas* in Latin America also took part in the operation. Letters of protest were sent and debates organised through local contacts. The StB thought it indisputable that its materials were useful to the Latin American press, and that they only needed to be adapted to the conditions in each country, e.g. in the wording and phrases used. The Montevideo *rezidentura* was rated as the best in Latin America by the Directorate in Prague. Specific mention was made of its use of radio, since this was the first incorporation of this medium into an StB operation in the region.³⁹

Yet another of the active measures carried out in Uruguay was related to the coup in Brazil. Immediately after the fall of Goulart's government, the Communist secret services took on the task of developing an information campaign to condemn the coup and emphasise the role of the United States in it. Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State and special advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson, was the focus of the Communist secret services' special attention. The active measure carried out by the StB in this case was code-named *Rachot*, with the Directorate in Prague deciding that the most suitable conditions for its implementation were to be found in Uruguay, because of the large number of Brazilian exiles there. The key figure in carrying out this operation was to be Trías. 'We order that, through *Ríos*, a revelation about the coup be secured (preferably in *Época*) in the most shocking way. We must get the front page or a special one-page edition of the newspaper. If necessary, we will pay whatever costs this may entail.'⁴⁰ Trías accepted the request but rejected the idea of a special edition because of its high monetary cost.

The copy for the article was to be written based on the thesis that the *rezident*, Veselý, had passed to Trías. According to the StB's report, Trías considered this

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸AO PLAMEN, 17. 2. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/000.

³⁹Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1964, 1. 7. 1964.

⁴⁰AO RACHOT, 7. 4. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/000.

article to be a very important contribution to the struggle against the United States. He asked the *resident* if he wanted to read the article prior to its publication, to which Veselý replied that he would leave all the responsibility to him, the important thing being to stick to the thesis presented.⁴¹ In addition, Veselý instructed Trías to say, should the Uruguayan police ask for the newspaper's sources, that the information came from a journal that had been sent to *Época's* editorial office and that it had been destroyed after use.⁴²

In this case, the StB documents mention the date of publication, page number and author, which makes it possible to accurately identify the article: this was finally published on 14 April and trailed on the front page. Its author was Carlos Machado, a close friend of Trías and editor of the international section of the newspaper. In his commentary, he related the coup in Brazil to other US interventions in the region. It began as follows:

Today we have enough data to unravel the threads of the plot and to know how the situation developed. Mr Gordon, the Yankee ambassador, organised the assault. Mr Mann, a sinister figure responsible for the assault against Guatemala in '54, directed 'Operation Brazil'. Magalhães, Lacerda, Meneghetti de Barros, Castelo Branco and General Kruel [Brazilian military officers involved in the coup] were but puppets in the operation.⁴³

Trías's other task in this operation was to send this news item to the offices of the newspaper *Última Hora* in Rio Grande do Sul and to the Peronist newspapers *Patria Libre* and *Compañero* in Buenos Aires. In addition, 100 copies were delivered in Brazil, via a Socialist youth activist friend of Trías who lived on the border, to contacts linked to Brazilian opposition leaders Luis Carlos Prestes, Francisco Julião and the previously mentioned Brizola. Trías himself sent Machado's article by post to 21 Brazilian nationalist intellectuals.⁴⁴

The *Rachot* active measure, in which the Czechoslovaks invested US\$3,000 through Trías, was deemed a success.⁴⁵ The StB's Brazilian contact, Leocádio de Almeida Antunes, whose code name was *Reflejo*, reported that former President Goulart himself had indicated that the articles published in *Época* were of great value and that the campaign was very useful to his resistance movement.⁴⁶ Thanks to the StB's collaborator in Mexico, journalist José Natividad Rosales (code name *Alonso*), the Czechoslovak materials were published in the influential magazine *Siempre*. However, the main objective of the active measure, i.e. to directly influence the situation in Brazil, could not be achieved. After the coup, all resistance was eliminated by the military government.⁴⁷

A few weeks later, another operation targeted at Uruguay took place: this was the active measure *Eko II*, which coincided with the first session of the United Nations

⁴¹Ríos – záznam ze schůzek dne 9. 4. a 14. 4. 1964, 11. 5. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/000.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Como se forjó el golpe. Brasil: historia de la infamia', *Época*, 14 April 1964, p. 24.

⁴⁴Výpis ze zprávy č. 100 z Montevidea ze dne 16. 4. 1964, 21. 4. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/000.

⁴⁵AO RACHOT, 7. 4. 1964.

⁴⁶Reflejo – záznam ze schůzky dne 15. dubna 1964, 11. 5. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 11495/304.

⁴⁷Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1964, 1. 7. 1964.

Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva; the suffix 'II' was a reference to the fact that this was a follow-up to a 1963 operation aimed at promoting Czechoslovak exports to Latin American countries. Its purpose was to promote the Czechoslovak stance that the economic policy of the capitalist countries on the world market was limiting the growth of developing countries. On 6 May 1964, *Época* published an article by Bernhard describing the Czechoslovak proposals at the conference. It focused mainly on the need for reorganising the world market. Experience had shown that economic exchange between capitalist countries and developing countries did not favour the latter, and it was, therefore, necessary for them to strengthen their ties with the Socialist countries.⁴⁸

In the evaluation of the active measure carried out by the StB, I found information stating that Bernhard was able to have the material he received for preparing the article delivered to a government meeting, which was of great help to the Uruguayan delegation's support for the Czechoslovak proposal at the Geneva Conference. The Directorate in Prague was satisfied with the implementation of the *Eko II* active measure, as it confirmed that it was possible to influence the political debate, even at the highest levels.⁴⁹

The *Moskyt* active measure was carried out during the last two weeks of May 1964. This operation followed *Toro*, initiated in Brazil in February. In order to implement *Toro*, employees of the newly established Department 8 in Prague prepared false documents masquerading as the official bulletin of the United States Information Service (USIS) in Rio de Janeiro. Their objective was to discredit the new US foreign policy line on Latin America formulated by Assistant Secretary of State Mann. Oswaldo Costa, StB collaborator, published an article deriving from this material on 27 February in the Brazilian magazine *O Semanário*, of which he was editor. In the article Costa headlined the return to the 'hard stick' policy and the fact that the United States would not grant aid to any country that maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba. According to Mann's alleged statement, the Alliance for Progress was to serve as a powerful instrument of US policy. He supposedly said that 'many countries had the United States to thank for their very existence and survival', and that, 'without North American aid, many politicians could not maintain their positions and privileges against the Communist tide'. In the document as reported in the *O Semanário* article, Mann would also highlight the need for realigning the OAS in order to effectively fight Communism.⁵⁰ The content of the bulletin was announced in the Brazilian Congress. On 3 March, the US embassy in Rio de Janeiro issued a statement denouncing the news as fake.⁵¹

After the coup in Brazil, this discrediting of Mann gained increasing importance, and the StB showed interest in boosting its dissemination, this time outside Brazil, within the framework of the *Moskyt* active measure. Through Trías, the information from the false USIS bulletin was published on 20 May in *Época* in a full-page

⁴⁸'Posición de Checoslovaquia ante la Conferencia de Comercio y Desarrollo', *Época*, 6 May 1964, p. 2.

⁴⁹Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1964, 1. 7. 1964.

⁵⁰'Mann fixa "linha dura" para EUA: - não somos camelôs para barganhar', *O Semanário*, 27 Feb. 1964, pp. 1, 6.

⁵¹Zpráva o činnosti po linii 8. odboru za I. pololetí 1964, 1. 7. 1964.

commentary by Machado. The article begins with the following words: 'A reader, whom for obvious reasons we cannot identify, has passed to us by hand a document the eloquence of which speaks for itself. Dated in Washington and written in Portuguese, the document emanates from the USIS. The letterhead serves as proof of authenticity.' The commentary then presents several controversial aspects of the alleged statement of the Assistant Secretary of State, going on to conclude, 'Mr Mann is appealing – out of self-interest – for a holy crusade where all the puppets play their part. *Delenda est Cuba!* says the new Cato. But Cubans are not Carthaginians and they will not be alone.'⁵²

The content also appeared in *Siempre* magazine, thanks to Natividad Rosales.⁵³ *Época* again referred to the Mexican publication in its 1 June edition. On the front page and in large print it announced Mann's plans in the region: 'Coups in Uruguay, Chile, Mexico and Cuba'.⁵⁴

The US Embassy in Montevideo strongly objected to the two *Época* articles. On 4 June, it refuted them in the newspaper *El País*, citing its previous complaint against the publications in Brazil (see note 50) and highlighting the interest of enemies in reviving these false claims in Uruguay.⁵⁵ A day later, on 5 June, the Communist newspaper *El Popular* mentioned *Época's* anti-Mann articles in an extensive analysis of US activities in Latin American countries.⁵⁶ At the same time, the General Secretary of the Partido Comunista del Uruguay (Communist Party of Uruguay, PCU), Rodney Arismendi, used this information in an address to Congress.⁵⁷

In October 1964, active measure *Galo* was carried out on the occasion of Charles de Gaulle's visit to Uruguay. Its implementation was entrusted to Trías. As part of the operation, two articles were published in *Época*, during the first and second days of the French president's visit, that is to say on 8 and 9 October.⁵⁸ It aimed to present France's intention to carry out an independent policy and, in this way, to foster division among the capitalist states. Although the StB archives do not contain a very detailed description of the articles, it is evident that they were published by Machado in the international commentary section. De Gaulle is depicted as a successful statesman who, unlike those in Great Britain and Germany, seeks a policy that is not subordinate to the United States and is not opposed to increasing trade with Eastern European countries, even with the USSR; Latin American countries could benefit from de Gaulle's policies. As with the other articles, we do not know which part was specifically written in agreement with the Czechoslovak instructions. However, it is worth noting that Machado's article explicitly states the objective of the active measure: '[Arising] out of all this, for us is the positive fact that de Gaulle divides the Western bloc and triggers concern among the Americans.'⁵⁹

⁵²'Mr Mann se confiesa', *Época*, 20 May 1964, p. 3.

⁵³Ríos – záznam ze schůzek dne 11. 5., 18. 5., 25. 5 a 1. 6., 22. 6. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁵⁴Siempre denuncia: el plan de Thomas Mann contra la América Latina', *Época*, 1 June 1964, p. 1.

⁵⁵'De la embajada de los EE.UU.', *El País*, 4 June 1964, p. 5.

⁵⁶'El imperialismo yanqui, enemigo de toda la nación', *El Popular*, 5 June 1964.

⁵⁷Ríos – záznam ze schůzek dne 11. 5., 18. 5., 25. 5. a 1. 6., 22. 6. 1964.

⁵⁸Ríos – záznam ze schůzek dne 28. 9. a 5. 10. a 13. 10. 1964, 29. 10. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁵⁹Carlos Machado, 'De Gaulle en América pobre', *Época*, 8 Oct. 1964, p. 4.

During 1965, *Družba II* was the StB's main active measure in Latin America on which all the continent's *rezidenturas* worked. The suffix 'II' was due to the fact that its objectives were similar to those of an operation of the same name carried out in Brazil during 1962 and 1963. This active measure was directed by the KGB and its main objective was to rekindle Latin American solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.⁶⁰ In addition to activities in the media, it was the organisation of conferences that was intended to be the real peak of its activities. StB documents indicate that, while the KGB had already discussed organising a conference in Uruguay with the PCU's General Secretary during his visit to Moscow, the StB had considered the matter mainly with Trías. With his help, a long list of people, newspapers, radio stations and organisations that could be useful to pro-Cuban propaganda was drawn up.⁶¹ Plans for the conference in Uruguay moved more slowly than expected. The date was initially scheduled for December 1964 or January 1965 but, finally, it was postponed until June.

Meanwhile, in January 1965, the *rezidentura* in Montevideo carried out active measure *Mora*, which consisted of the publication of an article in *Época* on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Panamanian 'Flag Riots'. The article was written by Machado through Trías, who had given him the Czechoslovak line.⁶² The publication process was monitored by Bernhard. According to the StB documents, the article was published on 10 January in the international commentary section. In his contribution, Machado recalls how events unfolded in Panama and presents Mann's opinion that many Latin American countries should be grateful to the United States for guaranteeing stability against Communism.⁶³

Carrying out active measure *Družba II* became complicated. The pro-Cuba conference was blocked by the Uruguayan government. In June, then, Trías was appointed by the StB to protest in the press. According to Veselý's report on his contact with Trías, *Época* published several articles as a result of this initiative denouncing the government's actions. At the same time, the *rezident* entrusted Trías with the organisation of a street protest, which took place on a national holiday, 18 June, and in which both the PSU and the PCU took part. After the plans for the pro-Cuba conference in Uruguay failed, the KGB turned its attention to organising one in Chile. Its *rezident* in Santiago had yet another task for the StB: disseminating the declaration of the Chilean Preparatory Committee of the Congress for the Defence of Cuba.⁶⁴ In Uruguay, this task was assigned to Trías. Through his offices the Congress's declaration, which was planned for March 1966, was published in *Época* on 24 July 1965.⁶⁵

Another part of *Družba II* was to be two articles in *Época* dedicated to the anniversary of the establishment of the 26th of July Movement, the leading organisation of the Cuban Revolution. The archives indicate that one of these was a note written by Galeano, while the second was written by an unspecified author and occupied a

⁶⁰AO DRUŽBA, říjen 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Rajka, 22. 2. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁶³Carlos Machado, 'Panamá: desde Morgan a Mann, dos piratas', *Época*, 10 April 1964, p. 3.

⁶⁴Ríos - záznam ze schůzek dne 4. 6., 11. 6., 21. 6., 30. 6., 1. 7., 12. 7. 1965, 17. 7. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁶⁵'El Congreso se hará en Chile', *Época*, 24 June 1965, p. 8.

full page.⁶⁶ The 26 July edition contains a large amount of copy dedicated to the Cuban issue, which makes it difficult to identify the specific articles produced within the *Družba II* framework.

The StB's final operation in the newspaper was active measure *Panar*. At the end of September 1965, the Czechoslovaks handed over to Bernhard some newspaper articles from Prague. Bernhard's task was to draft an article condemning US expansionism and generating distrust before the OAS Second Special Inter-American Conference, which would take place in Rio de Janeiro in November. It was essential for the StB to incorporate information in this article on a fictitious resolution by the US Senate to intervene anywhere in Latin America if necessary, thereby highlighting US support for the Brazilian coup.⁶⁷ The original intention was to publish the article in *Marcha*; however, its director Quijano rejected it because of the imposition of *Medidas Prontas de Seguridad* (Emergency Powers) by the government in the face of political and union unrest: he believed that the publication of such an article would have entailed a threat to his newspaper. So Bernhard was asked to publish the article in *Época*, which had no problem carrying out the task.⁶⁸ The StB documents make no mention of the date of publication but internal evidence suggests 23 October. It is not possible to accurately recreate the article.

Financial Support

The main controversy over the cooperation of the Uruguayan collaborators with the StB arises from the fact that they received payment in money or kind, despite their being, according to StB documents, very interested in the materials provided by the Czechoslovaks, whose publication in the newspaper was mainly ideologically driven. In exchange for carrying out active measures, contributors usually received rewards, such as cigarettes and whisky. Occasionally, they would receive small amounts of money destined for the newspaper. For example, for carrying out active measure *Eko II* Bernhard received \$U500. This situation changed when a 'contributor' became a regular 'agent': the higher the level of collaboration, the higher the compensation. While Trías – an agent – received a regular sum of US\$150/month, since his work was very important to the StB, Bernhard was rewarded for specific jobs. For example, for active measure *Panar* he received US\$200.⁶⁹

From the very beginning of his collaboration with the StB, even before he became an agent, Bernhard saw the Czechoslovaks as a way of obtaining support for *Época*, which constantly suffered from major financial problems. The StB, in turn, was at first also very interested in gaining some influence over the newspaper. After Bernhard was elected chairman of Editorial Independencia SA on 23 November 1964, the question of possible financial support for the newspaper became more pressing. According to a statement by the new Executive Committee, 'the company was in a very parlous condition: no cash, a winding-

⁶⁶Ríos – záznam ze schůzek dne 19. 7. a 28. 7., 28. 8. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁶⁷Záznam o schůzce se spolupracovníkem Rajkou dne 12. října 1965, 18. 10. 1965. ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

down mentality and an significant salary backlog'.⁷⁰ Just one day later, on 24 November, the new chairman visited the commercial department of the Czechoslovak Legation to meet Daniel Lhotský, an employee of the *rezidentura*, who managed the StB's commercial activities. He informed him that the newspaper was in a serious financial situation that had to be resolved within three days; otherwise, *Época* was in danger of going bankrupt. Bernhard asked for a sum of US \$1,300.⁷¹ Undoubtedly, he was aware that his new position as chairman of Editorial Independencia SA gave him more leverage, which he used to his advantage in an attempt to put pressure on the Czechoslovaks.

Lhotský acted immediately. In principle, it was not possible to grant such an amount without the prior approval of the Minister of the Interior (Lubomír Štrougal), so he sent him a request, mentioning that *Época* was a nationalist and anti-United States newspaper of considerable influence amongst the middle classes of Montevideo, and that it supported the political stance of the PSU. He also reported that, with the support of the newspaper, the *rezidentura* had carried out several active measures against the 'main enemy', listing *Toro*, *Moskyt* and *Rachot*. He furthermore pointed out that the newspaper would be used as a means to carry out *Družba II*, an active measure of great importance for the KGB.⁷²

The StB took great care in such cases and each proposed investment was rigorously assessed. On this occasion, the organisation found it appropriate to approve the request from the Montevideo *rezidentura*, since this would create the ideal conditions for recruiting Bernhard as an agent. However, the Directorate made it clear that the loan was intended not for *Época*, but for Bernhard.

Bernhard received the money and, according to the StB report, registered it as a personal loan to *Época* from himself. He explained that he had obtained it from friends and that it had been secured against his own assets. He gave Lhotský a signed receipt for a personal loan of US\$1,300, which also stated that the origin of the money was secret and that in return he was available for any cooperation with the StB. The StB intended to use this receipt to put pressure on Bernhard and facilitate his recruitment as an agent.⁷³

The relationship with the newspaper grew closer, and at the end of 1964 the Directorate in Prague requested more detailed information about *Época*.⁷⁴ According to the StB's January 1965 report of the interview with Bernhard, the newspaper's initial print run of 6,000 had increased to between 15,000 and 17,000. However, *Época* continued to have severe financial problems. At the beginning of 1965, the paper showed a deficit of US\$5,000.⁷⁵ Bernhard accused the founder and first director, Quijano, of responsibility for this crisis, implying that he had spent all the initial capital on preparing and promoting the newspaper.⁷⁶ As a result, the newspaper had to depend entirely on sponsors in order to continue its activities. Bernhard disclosed to the StB the names of the monthly contributors,

⁷⁰A los accionistas, contribuyentes y amigos de *Época*, *Época*, 22 June 1965.

⁷¹Výpis ze zprávy č. 294 z Montevidea ze dne 25. 11. 1964, 27. 11. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁷²Návrh na půjčku typu, ABS, I. SMV, 44176/000.

⁷³Výpis ze zprávy č. 23 do Montevidea ze dne 25. 11. 1964, 25. 11. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁷⁴Výpis ze zprávy č. 36 do Montevidea ze dne 18. 12. 1964, 18. 12. 1964, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁷⁵Výpis ze zprávy č. 327 z Montevidea ze dne 5. 1. 1965, 8. 1. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

who numbered about 50, among them Goulart, Brizola and Darcy Ribeiro. Of these, Goulart was the most generous donor: on one occasion, for example, he donated US\$4,000 to the newspaper.⁷⁷ The StB appreciated the importance of the Brazilian exiles for the newspaper; this, in turn, was clearly reflected in its content, since it attacked the Brazilian military regime frequently and fiercely.

Paid articles and advertisements played an important role in the financing of the newspaper. Some of them were officially paid for. Bernhard, for example, stated that the press secretary of the Romanian Embassy came to the editorial office from time to time seeking to publish articles about Romania and, in turn, paid for articles written by *Época's* editors for the Romanian press; this practice was legal and listed in the official accounts. There was concern about the influence of enemy forces in the StB, especially because of advertisements by the Nativa publishing house that reproduced news from the Chinese agency. In addition, once a week Trotskyist groups, enemies of the USSR, had a page of commercial advertisements in the paper.⁷⁸

According to Bernhard, by early 1965 the newspaper had about 80 employees, plus 12 reporters and seven administrators. The reporters were mostly young people who worked for practically nothing and often had a second job. The newspaper's editorial board consisted of 18 people, who were elected at the Annual General Meeting. According to information provided by Bernhard, the publication and placement of an article were decided by the editor-in-chief, who, at that time, was Galeano. However, thanks to his position, Bernhard could publish anything without explanation.⁷⁹

At the end of January, less than two months after the first loan, Bernhard submitted another request for financial assistance, a considerably larger sum this time, amounting to US\$6,000. The Directorate in Prague unanimously rejected it on the grounds that a loan of such a sum would not represent value for money and would therefore, in the future, only reward Bernhard for each assignment. According to the Directorate, such a large amount could only be approved if the number of StB publications in *Época* were to increase significantly, which was unrealistic:

If we were able and willing to finance the journal in this way, it would have to be compensated in some other way. That would mean providing the journal all the time with materials, so that at least half of the print run, that is, a large part of each issue, would contain our materials. We are not in a position to do this and we cannot ensure it.⁸⁰

The Prague headquarters also restated another important requirement, namely that the active measures should not deviate from *Época's* political line. 'The newspaper writes more or less along the same lines we would aim at when offering financial support. That is why we are going to remunerate *Rajka* directly for specific active measures.' Moreover, the StB was aware that another of its agents, Trias,

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰Rajka, 22. 2. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

could carry out similar actions more economically.⁸¹ On the other hand, for the StB the most important thing was that the newspaper continued to be published and that it was not banned. Therefore, the StB Directorate was much more concerned about *Época*'s attacks on the Uruguayan and Brazilian governments. Support for the newspaper could have a negative influence on relations with Brazil, Czechoslovakia's most important Latin American economic partner.⁸²

Although the loan application was rejected, the *rezidentura* went ahead with the attempt to recruit Bernhard as an agent. This would free Trías to concentrate on other matters. 'As far as active measures were concerned, we were greatly assisted by *Rajka* at the *Época* newspaper and thus left Ríos out of the implementation of measures at the newspaper.'⁸³ The documents also mention that, just like Trías, Bernhard was close to Galeano, editor-in-chief of the newspaper, and Machado, international commentator. Although the collaboration of the latter two was important for the implementation of active measures, neither of them knew that they were part of the operations of the Czechoslovak secret service.⁸⁴

On 10 April, a fire broke out in the newspaper's machine room. The losses from the accident were estimated at \$U500,000.⁸⁵ The insurance did not pay for the damage, with catastrophic consequences for the newspaper, which was already suffering huge economic problems. From then on, in practically every issue of *Época* there are requests for financial support. Immediately after the fire, the 'reconstruction operation' began, which consisted of collecting money from various small contributors. Many public figures contributed to the cause and several others sent telegrams of support, among them Salvador Allende.⁸⁶ Music festivals and sales of donation vouchers were also held.⁸⁷

Two weeks after the fire, on 23 April 1965, Bernhard was signed up as an agent of the StB. Following this event, the StB's headquarters instructed Montevideo that active measures in *Época* would no longer be carried out by Trías but by the new agent Bernhard.⁸⁸ If we take the context into account, there is no doubt that Bernhard's motivations for becoming an agent were primarily economic and driven by the desire to help the newspaper, which was in a serious financial position.

According to StB documents, a few days later Bernhard met with Lhotský to tell him that the newspaper urgently needed to raise \$U110,000 (US\$3,000) before 24 July, or else it was in danger of going bankrupt.⁸⁹ This information coincides with a report that appeared in the newspaper. The Executive Committee openly announced that, as of 25 June, *Época* would have to stop printing unless, before that date, the necessary resources were obtained to cover the payment of workers' wages. Specifically mentioned is the same sum that Bernhard requested from the StB. 'Either *Época* gets \$U110,000 before next Saturday and manages to cover

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ríos, 11. 1. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/020.

⁸⁴ Návrh na verbovku uruguayského státního příslušníka, 22. 3. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

⁸⁵ Operación reconstrucción', *Época*, 11 April 1965, p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Época*, 18 April 1965, p. 16.

⁸⁷ Operación reconstrucción', *Época*, 12 April 1965, p. 16.

⁸⁸ *Rajka*, 25. 5. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

⁸⁹ Blesk, 22. 7. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

the operating deficit of \$U70,000 per month for the next six months, or else it will have to temporarily cease operations in order to honour its obligations and come back on a sound financial footing', wrote Bernhard.⁹⁰

With this request, the *rezidentura* approached the Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior for an urgent resolution of the matter. The reaction of the Minister was swift, and on 24 July, the day Bernhard had indicated as the deadline, it approved the payment of US\$3,000. This favourable reaction can be explained mainly by the fact that Bernhard had already reached the rank of agent and had therefore gained more confidence among the Czechoslovaks. The StB's intention, consequently, was to take advantage of Bernhard's work for other, more important activities. When handing over the money, Lhotský reminded Bernhard that the Czechoslovaks would not act as a patron, but would pay only for each task done. The loan was accounted for by Bernhard as a purchase of *Época* shares in his name, out of money from an inheritance in Argentina.⁹¹

Decline in Interest in *Época*

Although Bernhard was recruited as an agent in April 1965, and was expected to use the newspaper *Época* more frequently for active measures, paradoxically a decline is observed. As mentioned above, the last StB article in the paper was published in October 1965. This was partly because Bernhard had been assigned to other work. One of his main tasks was to obtain information on activities by Brazilian exiles: he lived in the El Pinar resort, as did several of them. More decisive, however, was the growing radicalisation of the newspaper, with which the StB did not agree at all, considering it a risk for Czechoslovak politics.

During the period of increased strikes, as a result of the economic crisis, *Época* supported the strikers and the unions, harshly criticising the government, especially the Minister of the Interior, Adolfo Tejera. On 7 October 1965 the government declared Emergency Powers. Even though the decree banned support for strikes in the media, *Época* continued with its criticism, triggering the reaction of the Ministry of the Interior, which had long considered *Época* a threat. On the night of 14 October the police, by order of Tejera, occupied *Época*'s premises. The building was locked and guarded by police patrols.⁹²

In late October, Lhotský told Bernhard again that the Czechoslovaks had a strong interest in keeping the paper in print and that it was therefore necessary to stop attacking the government, particularly the interior minister. He also said that criticism should focus more on the United States. Bernhard agreed but stated that it would take some time to create a new image for the paper. He saw an obstacle in some members of the editorial board, particularly Galeano and Guillermo Chifflet, who held a strongly anti-government position.⁹³

⁹⁰A los accionistas, contribuyentes y amigos de *Época*, *Época*, 22 June 1965.

⁹¹Návrh na pomoc pokrokovému listu v Uruguayi, 24. 7. 1965.

⁹²Medidas de seguridad en casa. Por dos veces la policía impidió que *Época* llegará al pueblo', *Época*, 18 Oct. 1965.

⁹³Záznam o schůzce se spolupracovníkem Rajkou dne 26. října 1965, 29. 11. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

At the same time, Lhotský responded to a new request from Bernhard, asking the Prague Directorate whether it was possible to supply 150 tonnes of newsprint to cover the newspaper's needs. The request was rejected because, the Directorate argued, before making any new requests, the newspaper should stop criticising the government. Furthermore, due to the complicated political situation in the country, Prague recommended a temporary suspension of active measures carried out at the newspaper.⁹⁴

The key topic of the November meetings between Bernhard and Lhotský was the financing of *Época*. According to Bernhard, the newspaper had a monthly budget of \$500,000. Eighty percent of the budget was generally covered by contributions from shareholders and donations, while the monthly deficit amounted to \$100,000 (about US\$1,200). Bernhard explained that this situation was due to the rising prices of newsprint: the newspaper consumed 2 tonnes per day. In addition, part of the newsprint destined for *Época* was given to the socialist weekly *El Sol*. Amidst this serious situation, Bernhard presented Lhotský with a new proposition: the Czechoslovaks would buy the entire newspaper and keep it under their influence. Knowing in advance what Prague's response would be, the spy immediately rejected the idea, arguing that there were no resources for such an operation.⁹⁵

In explaining the financial situation of the newspaper, Bernhard presented Lhotský with the complete list of contributors. The document is available in the StB archive and includes dozens of names of various political orientations, even members of the traditional (Colorado and Nacional/Blanco) parties. Those who contributed the most money were the Brazilian politicians Goulart, Brizola and Ribeiro. Above all, it was Goulart who donated the largest sums of money to the newspaper. For example, on one occasion he donated US\$4,000 to the newspaper.⁹⁶

In January 1966, Bernhard asked Lhotský for US\$1,500 to fund salaries and newsprint, which he expected to pay back when the campaign for the upcoming November elections resulted in an improvement in the newspaper's financial position (through the printing of election propaganda). This request was rejected by headquarters in Prague, arguing that it had made a loan of US\$3,000 only a few months previously. Moreover, it reminded Lhotský that the aim was to support various active measures and not exclusively this newspaper. The StB was willing to reward Bernhard only if he implemented an active measure at the newspaper:

We cannot justify another loan. The newspaper is always in a weak position, and *Rajka* will continue to ask for new loans, which he will never return. We should not link *Rajka's* cooperation with the newspaper. *Rajka* is not the owner of *Época* and will have no influence if he loses his current position. It is *Rajka's* business what he does later with his payment. He can use it to help the newspaper if he wants to.⁹⁷

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵Situace v Époce, 10. 12. 1965, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷Výpis ze zprávy do Montevidea č. 12. z 9. 2. 1966, 9 2. 1966, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

The Prague headquarters also mentioned that, despite having access to the list of contributors, it was not clear which foreign powers had interests in the newspaper. Analysing the content, the Czechoslovaks suspected that Chinese influence was growing.⁹⁸ Bernhard argued that *Época* was an independent newspaper and, as such, its objective was to publish different opinions. The intention was not to side with China, the USSR, or Cuba, but to look at problems from another perspective. The StB also disagreed with the large number of articles promoting the Tricontinental Conference in Havana. According to the StB, this issue stirred opposition among official and government circles, as well as in the middle classes, and could serve as a pretext for closing the newspaper. Bernhard explained that these articles had been published by Galeano, who was in close contact with the editor of the Cuban Prensa Latina agency. According to Bernhard, the Cuban agency provided financial support to the newspaper.⁹⁹

Although the Czechoslovaks supported Cuba's interests, they had no information about the activities of its secret services. At the same time, there is no explanation in the StB documents as to how this mechanism worked with respect to the paid articles. It can be assumed that the dynamics were the same as in Czechoslovakia: countries that were interested in publishing favourable copy in the newspaper did so in exchange for financial support.

While the StB Directorate looked at Bernhard's constant requests with growing distrust, Lhotský showed some understanding. 'I can't blame him for all he asks of us, maybe he thinks that if he asks he might receive something.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the spy was looking for ways to support the newspaper, showing an active interest in its continued existence. One of the possibilities Lhotský thought of was the advertising of Czechoslovak industrial and business products. However, the StB Directorate rejected this proposal, arguing that the newspaper was not aimed at such milieus.¹⁰¹ This example shows that pragmatism and rationalism, typical features of Brezhnev's administration – hitherto absent from the StB's approach – were taking over the Czechoslovak state security apparatus.

In April 1966, the Directorate again expressed its disagreement with the direction the paper was taking and argued that any financial support on its part should be conditional on ideological change. 'We want it to be an anti-American, Latin American, and nationalist newspaper, which should be geared in this direction.'¹⁰² As this change was not carried out, a few months later the *rezidentura* was instructed to look for other newspapers and local collaborators to implement active measures. Given the political situation in the country, it was recommended that they should not be linked to leftist parties, which were facing increasing pressure from the government.¹⁰³

⁹⁸Rajka, 14. 2. 1966, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

⁹⁹Situace v Épocce, 10. 12. 1965.

¹⁰⁰Záznam ze schůzky se spolupracovníkem Rajkou dne 31. 1. 1966, 24. 2. 1966, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

¹⁰¹Záznam ze schůzky se spolupracovníkem Rajkou dne 5. a 8. 2. 1966, 24. 2. 1966, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

¹⁰²Rajka, 19. 4. 1966, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

¹⁰³Ríos, 30. 1. 1967, ABS, I. správa SNB, 43943/021.

Época's situation was getting more and more difficult. The new Colorado government ended state subsidies to the newspaper, so that on 16 February 1967 Época, economically exhausted and politically increasingly divided, was forced to close. The reasons for this closure were explained by Bernhard in a article published in *Marcha*, in which he emphasised the inability of the national Left to maintain a project, and criticised it for not being able to achieve unification, and for not achieving resonance among the workers.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, Bernhard explained the reasons for Época's closure in an analysis prepared for the StB, in which he highlighted the economic factor as crucial.¹⁰⁵

The newspaper reappeared on 7 December 1967. The so-called 'Acuerdo de Época' was published in its editorial; its main objective was to 'promote from a journalistic point of view more mature conditions for the revolution in Uruguay' within the context of revolution in Latin America as evidenced in the newspaper's adherence to the founding declaration of the recently established Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad (Latin American Solidarity Organisation, OLAS). According to Trías, bringing Época back to life was possible thanks to the financial support of Cuba, specifically mentioning a contribution of US\$5,000. This sum was supposed to reach the newspaper every month, thus guaranteeing its existence.¹⁰⁶ However, this expectation was not fulfilled. On 12 December, the new government of Jorge Pacheco Areco published the decree that closed down Época and *El Sol*, arrested the members of their editorial board, and outlawed the political groups that had signed the *Acuerdo*. In this way, practically all the non-Communist Left now became outlawed.¹⁰⁷

It is quite telling that the aforementioned reopening of Época is not mentioned in the StB documents. The Czechoslovaks had distanced themselves from the newspaper, which was linked to groups that were increasingly in favour of armed struggle, since its support for them could threaten the diplomatic and economic interests of the Soviet Bloc. At the same time, the *rezidentura* of the StB in Montevideo stopped focusing on press articles and began to give more support to books, which could have a more significant impact: *La crisis del dólar* (*The Dollar Crisis*) and *La crisis del imperio* (*Crisis of Empire*) by Trías, and *Los monopolios y la industria frigorífica* (*Monopolies and the Refrigeration Industry*) and *El problema de la carne* (*The Meat Problem*) by Bernhard.¹⁰⁸ Despite these publications, the StB reduced its contact with Bernhard after Época closed down. The economist was facing grave family and economic crises, and his work was not showing satisfactory results. He left Frigorífico Nacional in 1972 and started working as an accountant for a small agricultural cooperative. By then he was living alone, with serious alcohol problems. His contribution to StB became increasingly limited.

¹⁰⁴Guillermo Bernhard, 'La desaparición de Época', *Marcha*, 24 Feb. 1967, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵Rajka, 20. 3. 1967, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/200.

¹⁰⁶Informe o konferenci OLAS a jejich důsledcích pro levicové hnutí Latinské Ameriky, ABS, f. I. správa, 43943/021, 12. 1967.

¹⁰⁷Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸Vivian Trías, *La crisis del dólar y la política norteamericana: la guerra del oro y la diplomacia* ([Montevideo:] Ediciones El Sol, 1966); *La crisis del imperio* (Montevideo: EBO, 1970). Guillermo Bernhard, *Los monopolios y la industria frigorífica* ([Montevideo:] EBO, 1970); *El problema de la carne* ([Montevideo:] EBO, 1971).

The relationship ended definitively in July 1973. During a collaboration lasting ten years, 112 meetings had been held. His remuneration from the StB amounted to \$U410,000, plus six cases of whisky and packets of cigarettes. In addition, Bernhard had received US\$4,300 as aid for *Época*, plus US\$200 for the *Panar* active measure.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The Czechoslovak intelligence *rezidentura* in Montevideo showed remarkable development in its operation. From being a minor base, it soon became one of the most important *rezidenturas* in Latin America. In the article, I try to reconstruct how active measures – consisting of the publication of articles stirring up anti-United States sentiment – were carried out. In the mid-1960s, a key role in this activity, not only in Uruguay but in all of Latin America, was played by the newspaper *Época*. Its anti-imperialist orientation, the endemic economic crises that the newspaper experienced throughout its existence, as well as the need to seek funds, led some of its representatives to establish contact with the Czechoslovaks. At first, they considered them to be diplomats: they had no idea that these foreigners, who so valued their strongly anti-imperialist orientation, were also spies. In due course the most active collaborators, Trías and Bernhard, became StB agents, which would ensure more organised and more effective contact. At the same time, both began to receive money for their activities.

Probably the main motivation for *Época*'s chairman, Bernhard, to accept the proposal to become an StB agent was the fact that he saw in the Czechoslovaks some hope for saving the paper from economic collapse. However, despite his numerous funding requests, support was limited grants of only US\$1,300 and US\$3,000. The main argument of the StB Directorate in rejecting Bernhard's requests for loans was the growing radicalisation of the newspaper. When it was founded, *Época* was a publication of the nationalist Left, aligned with the Cuban process, which seemed also to align with the StB's interests. However, especially after the PSU's failure to gain any seats in the elections of November 1966, the newspaper's support for armed struggle and its critical stance towards the Uruguayan government became increasingly evident. This led to a distancing from the StB, due to the threat it posed to its political and economic position in the country. There was also concern that this approach would lead to the closure of the newspaper, which finally came to pass.

The newspaper *Época* belonged to a minority left-wing movement and therefore had a relatively limited circulation, which could have been the main cause of its financial problems; these intensified after the fire in the machine room and following the government's decision to end subsidies. StB documents suggest that the newspaper *Época* received money from various channels. In addition to suspicions about economic support from China, Bernhard explicitly mentioned financing from Cuba and Brazilian exiles, who, in turn, had great influence on the newspaper. This information makes one believe that the newspaper's self-proclaimed economic and political independence was an objective that, in the political context of 1960s

¹⁰⁹Celkové vyhodnocení spolupráce, 28. 3. 1975, ABS, I. správa SNB, 44176/000.

Uruguay, was difficult to achieve in practice. However, consider the example of the weekly *Marcha*, with a larger print run: it is believed that it was politically and economically independent and that it did not receive financing from abroad. This thesis is confirmed by the fact that its director, Quijano, refused to publish articles paid for by the Czechoslovaks.

The StB archives show the Czechoslovak secret services' growing interest in influencing public opinion after the Cuban Revolution. Although through these documents we can reconstruct some of the Communist secret services' ways of working, the real impact of particular active measures, which were often of a continental scope and part of broader Soviet intelligence operations, is unknown because – with a few exceptions – we do not have access to the KGB archives. On the other hand, the story of the link between the Czechoslovak secret services and a newspaper which stressed its independence and aimed to be the voice of the national Left not only makes it easier to understand the role of the Latin American press in the Cold War, but also demonstrates that the Czech archives can be of great use in elucidating the dilemmas that nationalist and anti-imperialist sectors faced during this conflict.

Las campañas comunistas de desinformación y la Guerra Fría latinoamericana de los años sesenta: el caso del diario uruguayo *Época*

Basándose en los documentos descalificados de los archivos de la inteligencia checoslovaca (StB) y la prensa de la época, el artículo analiza los mecanismos de trabajo de los servicios secretos comunistas en América Latina en los años sesenta. Concretamente, centrándose en el caso del diario *Época*, presenta la producción de los textos que buscaban desacreditar a los estados capitalistas y su implementación en la prensa a través de colaboradores locales. El vínculo entre la inteligencia comunista y el diario uruguayo, que se proclamaba política y económicamente independiente, era pragmático y, durante un tiempo, contribuyó a que ambas partes alcanzaran sus fines políticos. Mientras que la StB consiguió un espacio para implementar sus operaciones, las motivaciones de *Época* eran no solamente ideológicas, sino también económicas y estaban relacionadas con el deseo urgente de la Izquierda no comunista de conseguir financiamiento para sus actividades políticas.

Palabras claves: Uruguay; Guerra Fría; servicios secretos; revolución cubana; bloque soviético; desinformación

Campanhas de desinformação comunista e a Guerra Fria latino-americana da década de 1960: o caso do jornal uruguaio *Época*

Com base em documentos dos arquivos da agência de inteligência da Tchecoslováquia (StB) e da imprensa da época, este artigo investiga os mecanismos de trabalho dos serviços secretos comunistas na América Latina na década de 1960. Especificamente, com foco no caso do jornal *Época*, trata da produção de textos destinados a desacreditar os estados capitalistas e a publicação na imprensa por meio de colaboradores locais. O vínculo entre a inteligência comunista e o jornal uruguaio, que se dizia política e economicamente independente, era pragmático e, por algum tempo, ajudou ambas as partes a

atingir seus objetivos políticos. Enquanto o StB conseguiu um espaço para implementar suas operações, as motivações do jornal *Época* não eram apenas ideológicas, mas também econômicas e relacionadas ao desejo urgente da Esquerda não comunista de obter financiamento para suas atividades políticas.

Palavras-chave: Uruguai; Guerra Fria; serviços secretos; Revolução Cubana; bloco soviético; desinformação

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