

Red Scare, Ripe Bananas

Wash. Post, Oct. 15, 96

Stephen Schlesinger's Sept. 25 op-ed column "The CIA's Legacy in Guatemala," which pointed out the CIA's reluctance to comply with requirements to release documents on that country, must ring true with many historians. Several years ago, I needed the leverage of both House and Senate intelligence committee chairmen to obtain already declassified material that should have been available to the public long ago in the National Archives.

Nevertheless, I wonder how much

more we need to know about the CIA's part in the invasion of Guatemala in 1954. Historian Piero Gleijeses, among others, using available documents and interviews with participants on both sides, has established the connection beyond doubt and in detail. Perhaps, however, more documents will clarify once and for all the U.S. government's motivation.

Did the CIA organize the invasion principally because of the troubles of the United Fruit Co.? One can believe

that only if one thinks Washington saw the Arbenz government, as Mr. Schlesinger does, as simply reformist, not heavily communist influenced. But even Che Guevara found its communist inclinations hard to take. When he applied for a Guatemalan government job in 1953, he was told first to join the Communist Party. He said "stuff" the job, he did not mind joining the party, but he would not be forced to do so.

Unquestionably, United Fruit had enormous influence in Washington and helped focus officials on the Guatemalan issue, but in 1954—with the "red scare"—at its peak, Eisenhower's administration feared that Guatemala would become an outpost of Soviet power, just as Cuba eventually did. It likely would have toppled Mr. Arbenz even without the fruit company's pressure.

HENRY B. RYAN
Washington

The writer is a historian of foreign affairs.