

II. BINATIONAL CENTERS

While in Guatemala I had an opportunity to become acquainted with the operations of the Instituto Guatemalteco Americano, a binational center.

Binational centers are nonpolitical, nonprofit cultural institutions, founded largely on local initiative, incorporated under the laws of the host government, and governed by boards of directors chosen from U.S. citizens resident in the host country and citizens of that country. The purpose of the binational centers is to provide a meeting ground for people interested in learning more about the United States. There are presently 132 such centers in 29 countries, 112 of these in the Latin American Republics.

Binational centers sponsor various cultural activities, such as programs by visiting U.S. symphonies, choral and theater groups, and ballets. Probably their most popular function is the teaching of English.

Some of the binational centers receive some form of U.S. assistance, such as books for their libraries, English teaching specialists, teaching materials, and occasionally cash grants.

I have asked the Department of State to furnish additional background information on the operations of the binational centers. This is included in the appendix, page 31.

My contact with the binational center in Guatemala City convinced me that it is an effective means for developing and perpetuating better relations between our countries through cultural activities. The Instituto's administration is truly binational, with the board of directors composed equally of Guatemalans and resident Americans. Their goal—better relations between our two countries—is accomplished through maintenance of a good library, art exhibits and concerts, and especially, classes in English and commercial subjects.

The intense desire among Guatemalans to learn English is astonishing. Their interest is so ardent and persistent that the Instituto is hard pressed to provide the number of teachers required for the 3,000 registered students. The Instituto's roster of teachers includes only 8 full-time American teachers and 17 part-timers. There are also 18 non-Americans, fluent in English, who help out on a part-time basis.

Surely, there is no better way to build bridges of understanding between two nations than by broadening their means of communication. Yet the shortage of teachers is limiting the Instituto's ability to meet the enthusiastic demands of the Guatemalan people.

I was deeply troubled by the limitations imposed on the program by the shortage of qualified teachers. The United States could remedy the situation simply by funding for and recruiting the necessary teachers. But that type of U.S. Government sponsorship would extinguish the distinctive feature of binational centers—their local initiative.