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Subject COLOMBIA INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS MINERALS (PLATINUM)
(Name reported as) (Main title on per index guide) (Subtitles) (Make separate report for each title)

NOTE—(Here enter careful summary of report, containing substance exactly stated; include important facts, names, places, dates, etc.)

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DESCRIPTION OF PLATINUM PRODUCING AREA IN THE INTENDENCIA
OF CHOCO, COLOMBIA, INCLUDING INFORMATION CONCERNING TOPOG-
RAPHY OF THE SECTION, MINING PERSONNEL, LICENSED BUYERS,
AND METHODS AND ROUTES USED BY SMUGGLERS.

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The following is a report [redacted]
concerning the platinum producing
region in the Intendencia of Choco, Colombia:

"The Colombian area of platinum production, for all practical purposes, is included within a circle with a radius of 25 kilometers with Condoto as its center. Within this circle is produced practically all of the white metal found in Colombia, with the exception of some small deposits along the Pacific coast. The general nature of the topography of the area within the circle (see enclosure) is sharply broken and hilly. Heavy rainfall causes the streams to rise abruptly in a short time making river navigation difficult and land travel dangerous. For the most part the region is heavily timbered and only rarely does one find isolated clearings on stream flats.

Within the 25 kilometer circle described above there live approximately 39,000 people of whom most of the adults, men and women alike, and many of the children are engaged in mining gold and platinum. Mining is by three processes: panning by individual members, mostly females of families along the stream beds; washing, as practiced by the MINAS de NEQUA; and dredging is carried on in the Choco exclusively by the CHOCO PACIFIC MINING COMPANY. The latter company operates six dredges at various points in the platinum and gold producing area. Under a contract, all of the platinum produced by this company is sold to the United States government directly.

Several thousand individuals, "miners", work the stream beds of the Condoto area panning for gold and platinum. It is from these

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Platinum Smuggling in Colombia

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sources that smugglers obtain the bulk of the metal being exported illegally from Colombia. In addition to panning, local natives conduct the shaft and washing process of mining which like-wise produces much of the platinum available to smugglers.

Most of the gold and platinum obtained by the small organizations and the individual panners is sold to local licensed buyers of the metal, usually merchants who give credit on merchandise in exchange for the metal. Various reports have been received of buyers attempting to purchase platinum directly from the panners but it is believed that the bulk of the metal available to smugglers is diverted after it has been sold to licensed local buyers by the miners.

All licensed buyers keep records which pretend to show the amounts of metal they buy. It has been definitely established however, that many buyers have in the past recorded only a small percentage of their actual purchases for resale to the Bank of the Republic holding out the remainder for sale to the smugglers at black market prices approximately twice that paid by the bank. The miners within the platinum producing area, practically all negroes, are without education and are suspicious by nature of any intruder in this territory. White Colombians who live in this section have little in common with the native miners and are constantly at odds with the miners. Newcomers in the area share in an ingrown dislike for the COMPANIA MINERA CHOCO PACIFICO built up by the fact that the natives feel that the company's dredgings have encroached on their private domain and the company officials treat the natives without respect.

Buying of platinum and gold in this area is largely in the hands of foreigners, particularly Syrians, who, although they have intermarried into Colombian families retain their original citizenship.

Platinum smuggling may best be stopped at its source within the 25 kilometer circle surrounding Condoto. Once the metal gets beyond the local buyer it is extremely difficult to trace. There are various land routes in this area including the following: from Istmina to Cortegui is a one way-all-weather government route, 28 kilometers long and requiring considerable time to pass over its entire length by truck. Cortegui is on the Rio Quito which forms the upper branch of the Atrato River. From the village of Tadó there is a foot path along the San Juan River to the narrows opposite Rio Puerto. At this point the trail crosses to the north side of the San Juan River to Playa de Oro from where there is a pack trail to Pueblo Rico. The trip from Pueblo de Oro to Pueblo Rico requires about two days on horseback. From Pueblo Rico there is an auto road to Cartega and on into other interior points including Manizales and Medellin. A second route is from Istmina by truck to Cortegui thence down the Quito River in a "champa" (canoe) to Quito from where there is a provisional road for autos and trucks and as far as Bolombolo in Antioquia. There is train service between Bolombolo and Medellin. Completion of this road has been delayed by a lack of government appropriations by the

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Secretary of the Intendencia in Quibdo, Jorge Dias, who states that the government has given permission to accomplish this by February, 1944. Despite the poor conditions of the road it is the route for considerable travel between the Choco and Medellin.

It appears from an investigation that the most probable routes taken by carriers of contraband platinum is from Tadó down the San Juan River to the Brea River thence overland to Cordova and into Cali.

Water routes are used almost exclusively in the platinum producing area because of a lack of land routes or even easily passable trails. Condoto usually forms the hub of commercial activity in this region since it is connected by water with Tadó and Istminia. Since Condoto has a branch of the Bank of the Republic the legal flow of platinum in this area is directed into this town. Legal trickles of platinum in the upper Atrato branches reach the bank in Quibdo.

The very nature of the Chocó region lends itself to clandestine operations. There is not a single Colombian official who will trouble himself to penetrate the innermost region to check on activity. Police are all a low, ignorant type, worried only about the amount of time they must spend in this region and how soon they can be transferred.

The inspection of travellers, other than obvious foreigners, is nil. There is a fear which has inoculated even the most capable officials of this region so that they interest themselves only with the most habitable and populated places.

COMMENTS:

It appears that the platinum smuggling problem can best be solved by stopping the flow of the metal into illegal channels at its source -- within the 25 kilometer circle with Condoto as its center. A careful weeding out of licensed buyers and a strict control of those who remain, coupled with prompt action against anyone found with platinum in their possession outside the area, should do much to solve the problem."

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