

DOCUMENTO



LOS DOCUMENTOS QUE LOS DIPLOMÁTICOS FABRICAN

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Que los historiadores colombianos se preocupen por la información que sobre Colombia reposa en los archivos extranjeros no es una novedad si se trata de periodos anteriores a nuestros tiempos. Pero el que consulten la información del siglo XX en archivos de Estados Unidos o de los países latinoamericanos sí lo es. Cada vez más investigadores se sumergen en los archivos donde pueda haber huellas sobre nuestra historia política contemporánea. Contribuye a esto la precariedad de la información sobre el siglo XX en nuestros archivos y hemerotecas. Nada más complicado que la constitución de un archivo colombiano sobre la política en el siglo XX. Cantidades enormes de documentos de ese siglo han perecido por desidia o por órdenes de las autoridades, por incendios voluntarios o involuntarios, o simplemente mandados a incinerar para liberar espacio. La documentación oficial de la mayoría de los pueblos de Colombia está, si existe, en el suelo de húmedos recintos. Es una obligación moral de los historiadores, de las carreras de historia, contribuir a salvar la memoria de los pueblos que se pierde cuando perece un archivo.

Las embajadas, en los países donde hay tradición diplomática fuerte, contribuyen a esclarecer los entuertos históricos. Su meticulosidad para describir la cotidianidad de la vida política, cultural y económica de cada nación constituye una pieza pertinente para el historiador. En las embajadas se fabrica todo tipo de informes: político, económico, confidencial, etc. El diplomático tiene conocimiento de la cultura política del país que describe, conoce sus personajes, asiste a cocteles y a todo tipo de eventos sociales donde coincide con uno y otro protagonista de la vida nacional. Va transmitiendo su concepción de la gente; es inconfidente, opina sobre los nombramientos de los ministros, hace cábalas. El documento fabricado por el diplomático es tremendamente subjetivo, obedece a una política del Estado que representa, pero nos permite acercarnos a entender cómo nos veían, cómo nos consideraban. Así, los archivos de los Ministerios de Relaciones Exteriores de Brasil (Itamaratí) y de Argentina guardan los documentos que sobre nosotros construyeron los diplomáticos de Getúlio Vargas y de Juan Domingo Perón en Colombia. Eran las épocas cuando estos Estados se disputaban la influencia sobre nuestro país para ganarnos como aliados en sus propias disputas. Y viceversa: en ellos reposan documentos de gente nuestra que se expresaba sobre la naturaleza de esos regímenes. Pero quizá el acervo documental más atractivo lo constituye la National Archives and Records Administration de la ciudad de Washington. Al cumplir un documento la edad de treinta años es desclasificado,

liberado para la consulta pública. Compatriotas como Alberto Donadío y Silvia Galvis los expulgaron para varias de sus obras. David Fernando Varela los consultó por más de tres años y gracias a su dispendioso trabajo salió a la luz pública el libro *Documentos de la Embajada: 10 años de historia colombiana según diplomáticos norteamericanos 1943-1953*, publicado por Planeta en 1998. Ahora se puede consultar la década de 1960 y parte de la del setenta. Los documentos que aquí se reproducen fueron encontrados el pasado mes de agosto cuando me sumergí con ansiedad en los textos recién liberados por el Departamento de Estado sobre las mencionadas décadas. Los Estados Unidos veían comunismo en todo lado. El diplomático que redactaba el documento cumplía a cabalidad su función: descubrir comunistas o simples potenciales enemigos de ese país o de la democracia o de la civilización cristiana. En la mira de la sospecha estaba López Michelsen o Belisario Betancur, lo mismo que los propios comunistas; lo importante era denunciar, comprobar que el comunismo era el peligro; contribuir, en últimas, con los informes, al diseño de una política *coherente* anticomunista para Colombia, la *vitrina de la Alianza para el Progreso*. Colombia es un ejemplo, el que nos compete, pero una mirada de soslayo a los informes que se fabricaban en las otras embajadas norteamericanas del resto del continente, se advierte que el tono cambia. En el caso colombiano el fantasma del comunismo les aterraba, al punto de llegar a considerar a Juan de la Cruz Varela un posible segundo Fidel Castro en América Latina. En el universo de la identidad de los pueblos y a través de ella del reconocimiento de los otros, la intolerancia que emana de esta documentación invita a pensar en la fabricación del anticomunismo que ha caracterizado nuestra historia desde los tiempos de los radicales del siglo XIX como un fenómeno de intolerancia política que vale la pena estudiar, y para esto los contenidos de los documentos del Departamento de Estado norteamericano son claves.



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy,
Bogotá, Colombia,
August 17, 1960.

CONFIDENTIAL
OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Dear Al:

I was very much interested in your memoranda of conversation dated August 8 and August 9 on the subject of José María Chaves.

Chaves has been back in Bogotá for a couple of weeks now and I, for one, am not quite sure what he has up his sleeve. I bumped into him at a British Embassy reception last Saturday but did not have an opportunity to talk with him. Also, the Ambassador received an invitation from Martín del Corral (President of the Banco de Bogotá) for a luncheon "in honor of José María Chaves". Both the Ambassador and I were at a loss to explain why del Corral should be giving a luncheon in honor of Chaves. As it turned out, the Ambassador was unable to accept the invitation because of a previous engagement.

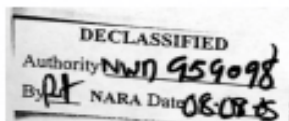
You will recall my memorandum of August 12 concerning a call on me by Mr. Elton T. Barrett, President of the Trak Electronics Company, on the same subject as your memorandum of August 8. In that conversation I had told Barrett that the best way of ascertaining Chaves' true association with Salcedo would be to go across the street and ask Father Salcedo himself. Barrett, while indicating that he would do so, said that he was a little surprised to have heard from me the statement that Salcedo and Chaves have severed relations, since he had been in Salcedo's office only the day before and Chaves was present there. Barrett did not return so I do not know what Father Salcedo told him in regard to Chaves. In any case, it seems that our friend Chaves is still active on many fronts and that we may not have heard the last of him.

Sincerely,


Milton A. Wells
Chargé d'Affaires, a. i.

Albert H. Gerberich, Esquire,
Office of West Coast Affairs,
Bureau of Inter-American Affairs,
Department of State,
Washington.

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THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy,
Bogotá, Colombia,
August 18, 1960.

CONFIDENTIAL
OFFICIAL-INFO

Dear Al:

Last evening I saw José María Chaves again at a German Embassy cocktail party and had about two minutes' private conversation with him. When I came in he was talking with the Chargé of the Holy Sec. After the Monseigneur left us, I was able to have a few words privately before the inevitable interruptions.

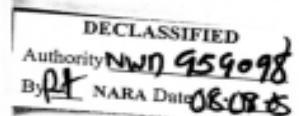
In answer to my query as to what he was doing in Bogotá Chaves said he was here to talk over some ideas of his (vague to me) with a number of people, and that he expected to return to the States toward the latter part of the month. He mentioned that he had paid a courtesy call on the Ambassador. One interest, he said, was in talking with Colombian Protestants (not Americans or other foreigners) about the Protestant situation. Specifically, he thought the time had come to test the constitutionality of some of the Rojas Pinilla regime decrees restricting Protestant worship. He thought it was ridiculous that whereas the communists were perfectly free to disseminate their doctrine, it is illegal under certain circumstances for Protestants to do so. He thought the time had come to seek the abrogation of some of these decrees and expressed the opinion, even, that Colombian Protestants should likewise be permitted to worship openly in mission territory. Unfortunately, the time and place did not permit drawing him out on the subject but I invited him to drop in at the Embassy to talk more about it. He promised to do so.

Sincerely,

Milton K. Wells
Chargé d'Affaires, a. i.

Albert H. Gerberich, Esquire,
Office of West Coast Affairs,
Bureau of Inter-American Affairs,
Department of State,
Washington.

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TELEPHONE

December 15, 1960

Juan de la Cruz VARELA

Alberto Samper)
Hernan Echavarría)--- of the Centro de Estudios Sociales.
Manuel Ulloa)
Albert H. Gerberich)

Embassy Bogota
BI
ARA - Mr. Devine ✓

After the meeting in Mr. Mann's office we talked at some length in the hall with the Colombians and I asked them if they thought Juan de la Cruz Varela, the head of the communistic groups in the Upper Sumapas region, is a Communist. They unanimously declared that he is definitely a Communist and at no great pains to conceal it. I asked how he could take his seat in the Colombian Congress as "suplante" to Alfonsito Lopez, head of the MRL group in the Liberal Party, if this is the case. They said this is nothing but a trick of Varela's, in which the Communist Party encourages him, and that Alfonsito unfortunately is helping him to carry out the deception.

Digressing to a discussion of Alfonsito and his plans, Samper said he is greatly disappointed with him. He said the Centro Group had gone to him and protested not only his support of Varela, but his intimate association with Communists and Castristas, and Alfonsito was obstinate and bitter. Alfonsito accused them of attempting to ruin his paper, La Calle. They admitted at once that they would do everything possible to hinder La Calle and prevent it from advancing the cause of the Soviet and Fidel Castro in Colombia. In the course of the conversation they asked Alfonsito point-blank if he was a Communist. He denied it emphatically and also said he was neither seeking nor accepting Communist support. They asked him to make a public statement to this effect, and he said he would do so. However, he has not fulfilled this promise. At this point Echavarría said he wouldn't trust Alfonsito under any circumstances, no matter what he said. He said it is well-known that since Alfonsito has been in the U.S. he has sought out Roa, Castro's emissary, and has had two conversations with him. Samper admitted that on the subject of Castro, Alfonsito had not given them much satisfaction. He stated that he himself has a feeling that there is something unstable mentally about Alfonsito; and that others have noted this.

Coming back to Varela, I asked them how he was able to establish himself back in the Andes, and they told me he has been working on this for many years--most of his /life

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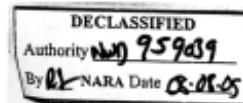
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life, in fact. He was in politics in that area as far back as the mid-thirties. Was mayor of the town of Icononso as far back as 1934, and actively organizing the peasants into a communist group. At this point one of the Centro representatives interjected that he had been to Icononso recently, and it was like going into a part of Russia. Varela has the people completely under his control and drilled and instructed like the members of a small Soviet. He did not think it was a safe place for anyone who does not sympathize with Marxist ideas.

Varela is so strongly entrenched in the Upper Sumapas that the Army and the Police do not dare to go into those fastnesses and "tangle" with him. On the rare occasions that they have tried to make arrests or send detectives in there they have been treated very roughly. Only a couple months ago the police arrested two of Varela's men and were set upon as they were taking them out of the area; the men were taken from them, and the police were badly mishandled, one or two of them critically. Varela has his own local organizations, schools, and churches. He even issued bonds of his own. His followers are well armed and not particularly worried about trouble from the Government at the moment. Sampedro said the Government is really worried about the Sumapas situation, but doesn't know how to solve it, and that is one of the most important matters on which it wants expert advice from the United States.

On returning to my office I found to my surprise that we have practically no biographic information on Varela. On calling BI I found that its records are as barren of facts on him as are ours in ARA. I have accordingly drafted a cable to Bogota asking the Embassy to send us urgently as much information as it can send immediately on Varela. The group tells me that he is about 55 years old. They estimate that he has better than 100 armed supporters in Sumapas.

I should add that the Centro group told me that the Viotá situation (the other Communist enclave in southern Cundinamarca) seems to be clearing up considerably, and the leader, Victor J. Merchán, a Communist, seems to be losing his grip there.

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