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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF TOASTS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
ALFONSO LOPEZ MICHELSON
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA

THE STATE FLOOR

10:25 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: In proposing a toast to you, Mr. President, and to the great Republic of Colombia, I think it is fitting to note that your State Visit to the United States coincides with the 150th Anniversary year of the first treaty between our two countries.

Soon after Colombia won its independence in 1819, the great liberator, Simon Bolivar, sent one of his first diplomatic representatives to this country -- Don Manuel Torres. As head of the Colombian mission, he became the first accredited envoy of Spanish-American power in the United States.

As early as 1820, Mr. President, Manuel Torres was instructed to negotiate a commercial treaty with the United States on the basis, and I quote, of "equality and reciprocity."

That treaty was proclaimed on May 31, 1825. Thus, Mr. President, the roots of our friendly relations are long and deep.

This relationship was furthered by an illustrious former President of Colombia, Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo, whose distinguished son honors us with his presence here tonight.

During his Inaugural Address in 1934, President Lopez Pumarejo said, and I quote, "Our foreign relations in the future must not be based on that formal reciprocity of soulless diplomatic notes that travel from chancery to chancery. We shall try to take advantage of every opportunity to invigorate the ties of cooperation and active friendship with all nations but, above all, with those of our hemisphere."

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How well this distinguished leader -- and permit me to add, Excellency, his distinguished son -- have succeeded in that very high purpose. Our mutual relations today are born of a very precious common heritage forged out of the travail of wars of independence. Both of our nations paid with the blood of patriots to achieve the dream of freedom, both in your country as well as in ours.

That common experience, I think, gives us common aspirations. Both of our nations desire to see the rule of law apply to our relations and to those among all nations. Both seek equality and reciprocity among nations. Both share the common knowledge that, in the complex world of today, nations bound in historic friendship and traditions must depend very directly upon one another.

Your country is renowned for its moral and intellectual leadership, for its moderation, for its keen sense of justice and for its dedication to greater progress and social justice for your people and the peoples of our hemisphere.

We of the United States admire these goals you have set not only for yourselves, but we appreciate them as great objectives for all of your people.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask that you join me in a toast to His Excellency, the President of Colombia, to Mrs. Lopez and to the people of Colombia. May our two countries always walk together in a mutual confidence and respect, and may our historic friendship contribute to the achievement of these noble goals of mankind -- justice, peace and freedom.

PRESIDENT LOPEZ: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, Mr. Vice President, Mrs. Rockefeller, Mr. Secretary of State, distinguished members of the Senate and the House, ladies and gentlemen:

Six years ago, a few hours before man first set foot on the moon, another President of Colombia, Dr. Carlos Lleras Restrepo, then the guest of President Richard Nixon, had the honor of speaking in this very room. The dream cherished for centuries by poets and fiction writers was brought to reality by American science and technology. We had evidently reached a landmark in the history of mankind.

Today, when the United States is preparing the Bicentennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence, it seems fitting to ask which of the two events constitutes a greater contribution to western civilization. The Declaration of Independence has a decisive influence on the process that led to the French revolution. It carried the seeds of the Constitution of Philadelphia, which has been so often imitated over the last two centuries.

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The space feat, repeated later by other nations, is a source of controversy surrounded by ever-diminishing admiration. Few would disagree, however, that the Constitution of Philadelphia has been one of the key elements in the spiritual and material progress of this great Nation.

In the view of the distinguished English historian, James Bryce, the two outstanding achievements of the human spirit in the field of political organization are the written Constitution of the United States and the unwritten set of rules known as the British Constitution. Both have withstood the test of time.

In an era when people's admiration tends to be easily captivated by material accomplishments and much emphasis given to the gap between the pace of technological progress and the slow pace of social and human science, it is worth noting the foresight of the Founding Fathers. With profound insight into the legal matters of their day, they created the framework for the development of a different world which could not have been foreseen.

Those of us who believe in freedom and equality will be with you in spirit during the commemoration of the Declaration of Independence. A rendezvous, to be present on that historical occasion, would be perhaps out of order. The opportunity given to us by the encounter should transcend the formalities of protocol.

We should reflect upon the achievements of the past and meditate upon freedom in general and the state of freedom in our continent, in particular.

The future of humanity is intimately linked to the question of freedom. The history of civilization, as we have known it, is one of continuous ascent toward attainment of that freedom. Religious freedom, freedom of dissent, freedom to assemble, freedom to claim for better working conditions and, in recent years, freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from unemployment.

These values, which have become commonplace, have ceased to be commonplace at a time when liberty suffers an eclipse within our own continent. But just listing them, we can see how difficult it is to disentangle the knot of very often contradictory rights, for economic freedom is not always compatible with the freedom from poverty or from unemployment and an unlimited freedom to employ will tend to hinder labor's conquests.

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Very often other economic systems led people, particularly the young, to believe that freedom, as a value, must give way to the demands of economic life. Without forgetting the obvious difficulties, we must double our efforts to see that the next generation will not have to barter freedom of spirit for shelter from economic hardship.

This is at least the case of my country. Although it is true that we don't cling to any specific form of social system and even less to any foreign model and that we are ready to seek a better redistribution of our income through the implementation of programs such as tax, agrarian and educational reforms, there is nonetheless something upon which we cannot compromise. That is the quality of our life and, therefore, the right to think our own thoughts and dream our own dreams.

I am confident, Mr. President, that this meeting will bring about a better understanding which I already anticipate between our two countries. Also, that we will find a sense of partnership within a legal system based on impersonal and abstract rules, within which there will always be the right to dissent.

I have spoken on other questions about our own joint duties and responsibilities in this hemisphere. Going further now, I bring to your attention something that has been outlined in the past but which has recently acquired growing importance. Namely, that the responsibility for maintaining a world of spiritual freedom is a task which demands economic sacrifices. The sacrifices concern everyone equally but mainly those who can make them.

Colombia has recognized this not only with words but with deeds. We have given, for example, preferential treatment to Bolivia and Ecuador, relatively less-developed countries within the Sub-regional Andean Pact. We have promptly approved the increase in our share of the capital subscriptions for the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. We have also made a contribution to the Caribbean Development Bank in order to provide financial support for the former European possessions in the area.

In every international forum we have sought an understanding between producers and consumers, trading off sometimes, as in the case of coffee and sugar, windfall gains for permanent stability.

As of the next United States fiscal year, we will forego any further loans from the Agency for International Development. Considering the fact that our export earnings are sufficient for our balance of payment requirements, we feel that the resources released thereby can be more useful to needier countries.

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This contribution, however modest, is in accordance with our means. It is, none-the-less, tangible evidence that Colombia is ready and willing to bear its share of its humanitarian obligations, following thus the example set by the United States in the post-war era when, for the first time in the history of mankind, massive resources from one nation were destined to benefit non-nationals.

The Marshall Plan turned the defeated into victors with the help of the country which, having suffered less material damages, was in a position, if so desired, to impose its will upon the rest of the world.

From a Latin American point of view, the new Trade Act of the United States is not without shortcomings, among other reasons, because of the discriminatory treatment given to Ecuador and Venezuela. Nevertheless, it contains positive provisions that favor a lowering of tariffs which should benefit the developing countries. Let's hope that it will be implemented in the spirit of liberalization of trade rather than that of narrow-minded protectionism.

Colombia has applied for membership to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and hopes, also, that these negotiations will provide a new scope for our foreign trade. Not in vain did we treble our sales of goods and services to the world in the last five years through the diversification of our own exports and the widening of markets for Colombian products in Latin America, Europe and the United States.

Although I am not here as a spokesman for other Latin American nations, this is an appropriate occasion to underline some of the conclusions which we have reached at so-called summit meetings among neighboring countries and add a few of my own vintage.

In the past, the relationship between our two sub-continent has tended to reflect an American campaign slogan, or a unilateral definition of policy, suitable perhaps for domestic political purposes but totally unrelated to Latin American aspirations.

Neither "the big stick," nor "the good neighbor," nor "the low profile," nor "the benign neglect" satisfy us because of their one-sided connotation. What is required is a new relationship between the United States and Latin America jointly formulated by both parties according to their needs and aspirations.

For this we already have a forum at the Organization of American States and an organization to present coherently our common points of view through the recently established Latin American economic system, SELA.

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We are convinced that a nation which, through the years, has been capable of organizing the American Union, starting with States so dissimilar in their origin as were the 13 colonies and latecomers such as Hawaii and Alaska, must have an equal capacity to conciliate with the interamerican system, a community of forces, without disregarding the particular features of each State and their freedom to select their own economic structure.

It would be a tragedy for our continent that while Europe is creating instruments of economic cooperation that don't imply political obligations, such as the LOME Convention, we should still stumble on the same difficulties, or perhaps more serious ones than those we encountered 40 or 60 years ago.

This is the reason why Colombia sponsored the lifting of the embargo against Cuba, regardless of our ideological differences. The record of failures of this type of measure is still fresh in our minds -- Ethiopia, Spain, Rhodesia and others -- while we cannot recall any example which has been successful.

In the case of Cuba, where the sanctions were not applied, neither by European nations nor by some countries of this hemisphere, we would have been fooling ourselves, if we pretended to continue believing in their effectiveness, when the United States itself was allowing its multinational corporations located in countries which were not pledged to sanctions to supply the Caribbean Island with the capital and the know-how for products which we ourselves were already producing.

It has been a realistic step on the part of President Ford's Administration to adopt its own line of conduct towards Cuba while abstaining from the attempt to influence the decision of others on this matter.

A treaty that binds Colombia and the United States guarantees free passage through the Panama Canal to the warships and supply vessels of our Navy. We don't overstep any boundaries when we raise the issue of the Isthmus here or elsewhere. Colombia has a vital interest in the area based on geographical as well as historical considerations which have been recognized both by the United States and by Panama.

Taking a long-time view, we consider the Canal question as something of continental and worldwide interest. The far-reaching policy of understanding at the hemispheric level cannot survive if permanently jeopardized by transit incidents, military maneuvers of one side or the other, student protests and symbolic gestures that could very well one day start a bonfire in the continent.

With due respect for the position of the United States, it is necessary to recognize realistically and impartially that the considerations that prevail at the beginning of this century are irrelevant in 1975.

The preservation of unjust situations can never be our ideal. We are conscious of the spirit which moves the American Government to remove causes of friction. In 1927 we reached an agreement concerning the Roncador and Quitasueno and Serrana outcroppings in the Caribbean, thus putting an end to the "modus vivendi" established between the United States and Colombia in 1928.

Recently Under-Secretary of State Rogers has insisted before the United States Senate on the ratification of this treat. If the intention is to terminate this "modus vivendi", admitting that reason assisted Colombia, owners of Spanish titles, before the argument of a so-called exploitation of guano invoked during the American Civil War, we cannot see the reason for consulting the International Court of Justice to determine if third party rights exist.

A transitory "modus vivendi" is ended by defining the claims of subscribing parts, not by having one of these become a spokesman for the interests of third parties which, not having been part of the initial pact, are not affected by the new one.

We have noted with satisfaction that the need for a consensus in international relations is now being discussed. This is also our policy. This consensus may seek to maintain the status quo or to help to bring about a new order. We don't believe that under the present circumstances the first of these alternatives could be conceded. At present countries which only five, ten, or fifteen years ago were politically dependent now have their own seats at the bargaining table. They come either on their own behalf or on behalf of other countries afflicted by similar problems.

Is there anything improper in the emergence of this new bargaining power? Colombia does not have atomic weapons, exportable fuel supplies, or large stockpiles of grain to enter national negotiations. Yet we are not surprised when nations that dispose of such assets such as these use them to increase their bargaining position.

Certain historical similarities exist between the post-war era in which we live and the period of reconstruction of Europe after the Napoleonic wars. The French Emperor had been at war with a coalition of powers dissimilar in their ideologies, populations, economic and military strength. Two European statesmen brought forth different view points in their attempt to build a lasting peace. Whereas Metternich endeavored to maintain the status quo through the Holy Alliance, Canning moved in the direction of change by recognizing the independence of the newly created Latin American Republics and their right to self-determination.

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Am I wrong in assuming that the great turn we are seeing in American foreign policy leans towards Canning's philosophy? His experience of liberalization didn't turn out to be so unfortunate. Its aftermath coincided with the Victorian Era which marked the epitome of the influence of the British Empire.

On the other hand, the Austrian Empire, soon after Metternich was gone, became the sick man of Europe and his policy of the spheres of influence and balance of power began to crack down, giving way to the coming crisis.

Mr. President, the whole world, and America in particular, is eager to see whether the great powers are willing to undertake or accept new initiatives without freezing past injustices under the name of peace.

Colombia, with its modest resources, is ready to support the United States in sponsoring changes and in acknowledging new realities. Let's preserve what is worth being preserved and let's recognize that obsolescence of what has to be replaced. For these we claim our rights but, at the same time, we are ready to undertake our responsibilities and our commitments.

A toast for the prosperity of the United States,
Mr. President and Mrs. Ford.

END (AT 11:00 P.M. EDT)