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Letter from Rafael Uribe Uribe to Theodore Roosevelt

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Confidential

[12-31-01]

Headquarters of the Army of Santander
December, 1901

His Excellency
President Theodore Roosevelt
~~United States of North America:~~

Most honoured Sir,

I take opportunity of the return to North America of Coronel Edwin Emerson, wounded in battle while commanding one of our battallons, to confide to him an informal letter to you. Having not had the honour of your ~~personal acquaintanceship I yet feel to know you from reading~~ your books "American Ideals" and "The Rough Riders", which are the only English books I carry in my saddle bags. Now we have seen with our own eyes how one of your rough riders can fight we see the veracity of your enthusiastic desreription. We revere you as a soldier. As a soldier, serving in the ~~field of South America as you did in Cuba, I dare address~~ of you my equal without detriment to my admiration for your exalted post as President of the greatest nation of the Americas.

You fought in Cuba to expell from America the ultimate remnants of Spanish power in the New World. I now stand fighting against clerical despotism in Colombia, ~~our heritage from the iniquitous Inquisition~~ of Spain. So great is this affinity of our adversaries with Spain that they now bring the disgraced Spanish monks from the American Philippines, and that Gral. Reyes, the spokesman of the Conservative Regime of Colombia, felt himself impelled to pronounce his discourse in favour of Spain, ~~a grave offense contrary to our best South American traditions no less~~ than international propriety.

In the intention to procure the intervention of European powers, regardless the Monroe Doctrine, the Conservative Regime of Colombia with its arbitrary extension of the Isthmus Canal concession leaves the canal ~~under the corrupt and impotent French concessionaires,~~ idle pest ~~pon~~ment of the hour when this world-work must fall to the only men, sufficiently honest and powerful to complete the stupendous work, the men of North America. The Colombian Liberals declare this extension of the French concession to be illegitimately granted, against the vote of our Parliament, ~~and must therefore expire on fixed limit in 1904.~~ Insisting on this even to to the point of civil war, we, the Liberal Party

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of Colombia, hope to push our people to negociate with the United States of North America, or if not this, to make the North American people understand how the Panama Canal shall be acquired without needless sacrifice of seventy millions dollars for the illegitimate concession, and so make gain of the same sum of money to apply to the completion itself of the Canal. In these circumstances we shrink with odium from the existing secret plot of the Conservative Régime in Bogotá with the French agents, equally repugnant to the best South American traditions as our adversaries's anti-American sympathies with Spain.

In my character as the only Liberal representative in our last Congress in Bogotá, I pleaded for Cuba's liberation opposed by the Colombian conservative régime always in favor to Spain. IN the same character in 1898 I pleaded against the extension of six years (until 1930) to the french concessionaires of the Panama Canal. Our Congress recorded its Veto. Over our Veto, a defiance of our Constitution, President Sanclemente, the Conservative leader, granted the extension of the French concession, accepting therefor one million fuertes paid into the war treasury. Yet now the French demand seventy times more. We, the Colombian Liberals, denounce this corrupt negociation as unbinding and null. We stand in arms defending our good right.

Let Your Excellency be assured our revolt is not one of those vulgar revolutions that so often disgraced South America for sole gratification of one man's ambicion or desire for anarchy, but this is a serious civil war for most cherished ideals. We drew no arms untill all peaceful redress was crushed to earth by tyrannous oppression of 15 years. Now we are exiles or rebels. Our families must suffer for us. Our property is confiscated. Our citizens must pay cruel taxes without parliamentary representation. Our peons are seized from the fields to serve as soldiers against us. Our sympathisers are punished without legal trial. Even the sacraments of the Holy Church are denied to those who do not curse us. In brief our civil war, in which I first drew sword since 15 years, is grown to a contest for such serious and vital issues it can be ended only by our victory or overwhelming disaster.

Shall we triumph we will form a enlightened government with a constitutional ministry of strong men, we will advance progress with ample securities for foreign immigration and cutivation. The State shall be divorced from the Church. An end shall be put to the iniquitous system of paper money debauching our national finances. First of all an entente cordiale shall be established between our people and that of the United States of North America, our most progressive and most powerful neighbour.

While we battle and press forward to these ends we plead of you and the great North American nation, without detriment to your consistent stand of neutrality, to preserve for us a feeling of warm sympathy,- as you have done in the past toward the rebels of Poland, Hungary and Cuba-, and that, opportunity offering, you may not deny an ear to the pleas of our unofficial diplomatic representative in your country, Doctor A.J.Restrepo. For decision of the Ishthmian Canal question we confide in the sound common sense of the American people.

In fine let me express to Your Excellency my gratification and that of my officers in the presence among our ranks of one of your own rough riders who by his distinguished bravery in battle and winning courtesy of conduct has confirmed in us the admiration excited in our hearts by the valiant deeds of your soldiers.

I embrace, Your Excellency, this occasion to beg of you to accept the assurance of my highest and most distinguished consideration.

Rafael Uribe Uribe

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