

Documenting inter-American cooperation: discovering the legacy of the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom

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Abstract

The Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom (IADF) existed from 1950 until 1983. By analyzing the documents of this organization, one can understand the state of inter-American cooperation in this time period. This interAmerican cooperation focused on two main areas, U.S.-Latin American cooperation and Latin American solidarity. Both of these areas can be studied by analyzing the role played by key figures, such as Frances R. Grant and Rómulo Betancourt, within the IADF. We conclude that although the IADF was not a large or powerful regional organization, it played an important role in maintaining active networks among key figures in Pan-American democracy. These networks promoted a higher degree of cooperation within Latin American democratic movements and with the United States.

Introduction

The mechanics of international cooperation and non-governmental organizations can be understood through analysis of historical records. An interesting case that portrays inter-American relations in the 20th century is the Frances R. Grant Papers, which contain the files of the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom. Throughout the Cold War, Latin America was a battleground for diverse ideologies. During the early 1950's, the struggle for establishing democracy gained more strength in a hemisphere plagued by military-oligarchic dictatorships, and the spread of both communism and imperialism. Activists from different parts of the region saw the necessity of uniting their efforts to promote democracy, not only on a national scale, but on a continental scale as well. They firmly believed that the development of Latin American societies, both economically and socially, would depend on their ability to install democratic regimes. At the same time, in the United States, there was growing concern on the part of members of the government and academia about the state of freedom and democracy in the Latin American region. As a result, Pan-American relations were encouraged and networks were created. The

history of the Inter-American Association for Democracy and Freedom (IADF) illustrates this process.

The IADF traces its origin to the First Inter-American Conference for Democracy and Freedom held in May of 1950 in Havana, Cuba. The Latin American section of the International League for the Rights of Man organized this conference, which called together delegates of different political backgrounds who had a desire to promote democracy, to discuss the menace against liberty and peace in the Americas. These delegates found it necessary to establish a permanent organization to create a network of Pan-American democratic movements that would protect the hemisphere from fascism, communism and caudillism. Throughout its life the purpose of the organization was to make sure that the global community, but more specifically, the United States community, became aware of the struggle for democracy in Latin America. Creating public awareness would in turn help activists gain support for their causes against dictatorship and communism (Havana Conference Report 1950).

To achieve its purposes, the IADF held conferences to discuss important issues with prominent figures from all over the hemisphere, sponsored student discussions and seminars, and published a bulletin called *Hemispherica* in both English and Spanish. It also recognized the achievements of its important members by conducting award ceremonies, dinners, and banquets, and lobbied the United States Congress in support of Latin American democratic movements.

Two key figures in the association were Frances R. Grant (1896-1993), who served as Secretary General throughout the life of the organization, and Rómulo Betancourt (1908-81), who at the time of the association's formation was an exile from Venezuela. Each played an important role in the life of the IADF. It is through their participation in the IADF that we can observe many aspects of inter-American cooperation.

Frances Grant and the IADF

Grant, practically alone, ran the association and consistently sought to keep a bridge open between Latin American democracies and the United States. She maintained the organization with the support of the members of the U.S. Committee and with funding from member states such as Costa Rica and Venezuela. In articles in *Hemispherica* and in newspapers, Grant publicized cases of political repression and human rights violations that were committed in Latin America, whether they came from right-wing dictatorships or left-wing guerrillas. She also defended democratic movements, whether they were clandestine struggles or democratic governments promoting the development of regional democracy.

Grant, therefore, represents a key aspect of inter-American relations: the United States-Latin America link. Frances Grant based her activities in New York City, where she was in constant contact, not only with the democratic leaders of Latin

America, but with important figures in American society. These figures were involved in academics, politics, civil rights activism, and many other activities in which they could exert pressure on the United States government in favor of their Latin American colleagues. The importance of Frances Grant should not be overlooked. She was a student of Latin American culture, history, politics, and society, and was able to relate to her American colleagues the context of Latin American reality in the Cold War era. By promoting mutual understanding between the United States and Latin America, Grant sought to change the trends of interAmerican relations at the time. She hoped that the United States government would develop a foreign policy that promoted the effective establishment of democracies in Latin America, instead of one that supported repressive dictatorships. It was difficult for her to promote such policies because at the time, the most important goal for the United States was halting the spread of communism, and an effective way of achieving that goal was to look the other way at repressive right-wing governments. As time progressed, it became more and more obvious that Grant's arguments were valid, leading to attempts to promote the stabilization of Latin American democracies with plans such as the Alliance for Progress.

Latin American figures: Rómulo Betancourt and the IADF

Latin American leaders were also a key factor in the IADF. Some notable members included: José Figueres (Costa Rica), Luis Muñoz Marín (Puerto Rico), Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela), Eduardo Frei (Chile), Salvador Allende (Chile), Juan Bosch (Dominican Republic), Germán Arciniegas (Colombia), and Rómulo Betancourt. They represented progressive democratic movements in their countries, and in many instances united to achieve the same goal, the spread of democracy in the region. In the Latin American context, this connection was a great asset for all activists, since they used the activities promoted by the IADF to share experiences that, although occurring in different locations, were similar. In addition the IADF represented a public display of solidarity between democracies in the hemisphere, and a meeting place to develop common strategies to combat dictatorship and communism and to obtain international recognition, especially from the United States. An important Latin American leader closely linked to the IADF was Rómulo Betancourt. Betancourt has been the most important figure in Venezuelan democracy. He was a political activist with a long history of struggling against dictatorships. He was also the founder of Acción Democrática (AD), a center-left democratic party that became the most influential in Venezuelan politics.

Betancourt made several attempts to establish a lasting democratic regime in Venezuela. His first major attempt failed in 1948 when his party, AD, was ousted from power by the military under Marcos Pérez Jiménez. However, while in exile, Betancourt played an important role in uniting the continental efforts against dictatorship. He became a founding member of the IADF because he believed that Venezuela could not be isolated from the rest of the region, and, that if it were to be a

successful democracy, it had to attain international respect and recognition. With respect and recognition, Venezuela, and the rest of Latin America, would be free from foreign influences that might threaten democracy, and would develop a sustainable economic system. The only way to achieve Betancourt's goals in Latin America was by strengthening the bonds between all of the Latin American democratic movements, and by gaining the support of the United States. In both cases the IADF was useful.

As a well-respected member, Betancourt stressed his foreign policy, which became known as the Betancourt Doctrine, within the IADF. The association sympathized with his ideals, illustrated by the fact that the IADF openly opposed and refused to recognize the dictatorial governments of Spain (Franco), the Dominican Republic (Trujillo), Nicaragua (Somoza), and was suspicious of the Argentine government (Perón) (Alexander 1982). The Betancourt Doctrine called for the breaking of diplomatic relations with non-democratic governments as a sign of protest and opposition. Thus, a prophylactic cordon was to be established to protect democratic regimes from the influence of dictatorial or communist governments. The carrying-out of this doctrine made Venezuela a moral authority in the continent, and gave it the support of the United States, which eventually recognized Venezuela as the archetype of democracy for Latin America. The Betancourt Doctrine stressed solidarity with all democratic struggles in the hemisphere, especially those in exile. It also stated the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations. The idea was to coerce de facto governments into turning democratic by applying economic and diplomatic sanctions, but not military intervention (Marcano Salazar 1998). The IADF applied these concepts by denouncing and breaking relations with dictatorial regimes, both from the left and the right. At the same time, the IADF lobbied both the United States Congress and the Organization of American States into recognizing the usefulness of these principles. The existence of the IADF provided Betancourt with a forum through which he could gain support for his doctrine.

The IADF in action

An interesting case in which we can see the lobbying of the IADF in action was that of Alberto Carnevali. Under the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela, many political leaders were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered. Alberto Carnevali, a member of Acción Democrática, was captured and became severely ill while in prison. The members of the U.S. Committee, the most active and important of the organization, united their efforts to persuade the U.S. State Department to take action and obtain his liberation, writing to the legislature and publicizing the incident (Grant 1953). Although they were ultimately unsuccessful in obtaining Carnevali's freedom, they brought attention to the terrible conditions in Venezuela. The IADF failed in its efforts because at this time the United States government was friendly towards Pérez Jiménez. As a matter of fact, the Eisenhower Administration gave him an award at the Tenth Inter-American Conference for Democracy held in Caracas in

1954. The IADF strongly criticized the United States government for these actions, and when Caracas was selected as host to the conference, the IADF protested. In a *Hemispherica* article titled "Venezuelans Still Martyrs," the IADF criticized the fact that the Conference for Democracy was going to be held in Caracas while the Pérez Jiménez regime still held about 5,000 political prisoners (*Hemispherica* 1-2/1954).

Another important case is perhaps the one in which the IADF showed most support for Betancourt, the extradition process of the Venezuelan dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez. When Pérez Jiménez fled from Venezuela in 1958, he took refuge in the Dominican Republic and later fled to Miami. Venezuela tried to have Pérez Jiménez extradited, but certain groups within the United States opposed his extradition. Among these groups, the most notable was the American Civil Liberties Union. Frances Grant wrote a letter to Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State from 1961-1963, urging him to uphold a court decision that allowed the extradition of Pérez Jiménez to Venezuela. Grant argued that Pérez Jiménez was a murderer and that justice had to be upheld. Grant believed that it should not be legal to grant political asylum to criminals (Grant 1963b). She also wrote Alan Reitman of the ACLU about its support for the Venezuelan dictator, complaining that she could not understand why the ACLU would take such a stand defending a dictator whose jails had been filled with thousands of political prisoners who did not enjoy freedom of speech, and were murdered and tortured (Grant 1963a). In addition, Grant wrote William P. Rogers, the Attorney General, asking for the extradition of Pérez Jiménez, whom she accused of having helped Trujillo plot against Betancourt's life. In the end, the pressure exerted on the United States by the members of the IADF was strong, and eventually Pérez Jiménez was extradited to Venezuela. This case was undoubtedly one of the greatest successes for the IADF (Grant ca.1963c)

Conclusion

In studying the documents of the IADF, one can discover the hidden history of inter-American cooperation during the Cold War. The IADF remains an interesting subject to be studied by Latin Americanists. Although it was not a large or powerful regional organization, it played an important role in maintaining active networks among key figures in Pan-American democracy. Its members were influential figures outside of their involvement in the IADF, and whenever they worked together, it was an excellent combination of Pan-American political talent. In addition, the relationship between Latin America and the United States changed over the years, thanks to the influence of IADF members, as well as others who realized that the most constructive policy the United States could apply in Latin America was promoting democracy rather than violence. Both Frances Grant and Rómulo Betancourt embody two key aspects of inter-American cooperation, Latin American union and United States-Latin America relations, as illustrated by the accomplishments of the IADF.

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