
Rafael Nuñez

Colombia looked to the American example

The following are excerpts from the writings of Rafael Nuñez, several times President of Colombia in the latter part of the 19th century, and author of that country's republican constitution, written in 1886. The Nuñez Constitution survived until this year, when it was "re-written" by a Constituent Assembly dominated by amnestied narco-terrorists and front-men for the cocaine cartels. Nuñez advocated a protectionist economic system modeled on that of the United States, and promoted the development of infrastructure. On April 8, 1880, during his first presidential inauguration, Nuñez proposed a program for achieving "National Union." He motivated his program thusly:

Our agriculture is barely in its infancy.

Our [industrial] arts are less than stagnant.

Our vast territory has but a few rail lines . . . and it is clear that national productive activity is in decay; the formidable calamity of public misery approaches our doorstep. . . . A vast plan of measures intended to promote the development of domestic industry should therefore be devised and immediately put into practice. An adequate system of education is indispensable as the departure point for such a plan. The customs system needs to be reformed to encourage the [industrial] arts. This point needs to be studied, such that only that which offers a certain hope of progress is protected. The great industries of Europe were not formed and improved, generally speaking, except by this method.

Nuñez observed that the United States had increased its savings deposits by the equivalent of 632 million Colombian pesos in the course of 22 years of a "strict protectionist regime," while Great Britain had only increased its savings by 350 million pesos during 34 years of free trade. He wrote:

This comparative figure demonstrates more than any other the singular growth of U.S. wealth. It is not possible to determine exactly how much influence the protectionist system has had on the economic development of that great republic, but it is clear that that system has been, to a greater or lesser extent, the nearly constant soul of American tariff legislation. One could further assert that among the reasons which inspired those colonies to free themselves from the

mother country, one of the most powerful was the desire and intention to create for itself a rich and varied industry under the shelter of a protective tariff.

Attacking British economic liberalism, Nuñez wrote:

If someone dare speak out against so-called "economic freedom," *anatema sit* [he will be anathema]. How does one argue, how does one proceed against principles so clearly defined and demonstrated by that science's great apostles such as Adam Smith, Federico Bastia, and others? Economic freedom was to have brought us everything, because the masters said so: banks, railroads, industry, agriculture. . . . All will appear and thrive in the country in due time.

But having waited long enough without any happy result, and at the same time noting the alarming fact that we find ourselves with more and more generals and doctors and fewer solid productive enterprises, for lack of the fundamental elements of useful labor. . . . Having also frequently heard the sinister bugle call of civil war, the legitimate fruit of growing misery, some thoughtful and patriotic men have concluded that a change of direction in economic and fiscal matters, as well as in political matters, is urgently required.

In 1882, upon leaving the presidency for the first time, Nuñez summarized some of the projects built by his government:

The national government that ended on March 31, 1882 found an anemic public treasury, as did its predecessors, with some new burdens stemming from the civil wars and from earlier penury. The government nonetheless built the first railroad of Girardot and all the other required materials (rails, locomotives, cars, etc.) are stockpiled; it built the railroad of La Dorada, which has just begun to operate between Caracoli and Noria; it provided funds for building the Soto railroad; it promoted one in Buenaventura, such that trade today is now free of the constant dangers of navigating the Dagua; it also promoted the railroad of Antioquia, whose first stretch has just gone into service. . . . It promoted the great iron-works of Samaca and La Pradera, in the states of Boyacá and Cundinamarca, which are preparing to produce rails and many of the numerous other implements that are derived from iron-making.

The railroad that began in the state of Magdalena and its extension to Salgar will be operating shortly, as will the postal navigation of Dique. To this gratifying list, one must also add the multiplication of telegraph lines, among them the ones between Bogotá and Caracas, and the increase and efficiency of the postal service. This efficiency is not the result of more rules, but of greater spending. And this is not even mentioning the Postal Union, nor the underground cable that has put us in direct communication with the rest of the planet, because these great improvements were not obtained through expenditures.