

San José, Costa Rica
September 1, 1971

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~~INFORMAL~~

② 9/1/71

Sam Joel
from -
Please
** Pol Costa Rica*
Pol Costa Rica - US

The Honorable
Charles A. Meyer
Assistant Secretary of State for
Inter-American Affairs
Department of State
Washington, D. C.

US Ambassador to Costa Rica

SUBJECT: Figueres-Ploeser Relationship

Dear Charlie:

President of Costa Rica

I want to give you a recent report of my relationship with President José Figueres.

During the inner-party turmoil and fighting and delivering of ultimatums, this staff was repeatedly cautioned not to be drawn into any discussions with anybody on the subject of Costa Rican politics, and I have every reason to believe that with one possible exception this was observed. I say possible exception because I am not sure that this was broken in the case of the Kreis-Rodrigo Madrigal conversation. I simply do not know what took place in that conversation. In reporting that to you, I mentioned that Kreis had come to me rather tense and excited, before the famous Figueres television speech, which seemed to disarm the whole situation, made just hours prior to his departure from the country. He (Kreis) told me that a close friend of the President's was very much upset over the deep political trouble the President was in and wasn't there some way in which we could help him. I sent word through Kreis to Madrigal and to whomever it was supposed to be delivered as follows only: "I consider myself to be a friend of President Figueres and he would know where to call me". I have heard no more on this particular point.

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(signed) Walter
Walter C. Ploeser
American Ambassador

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Figueres and his wife went to Jamaica, returned to the country, went off into the hinterland and didn't resume the Presidency until Saturday, August 14th. The following Wednesday evening, August 18, the President and Mrs. Figueres dined with Dorothy and me at the Residence. It was an extremely pleasant occasion. I offered no points for discussion that concerned politics relating to Costa Rica. The President seemed most anxious to talk about their exchange rate and what they hoped to gain by it. Altogether, it was a friendly evening. Again, on the following Monday, August 23, in honoring General Mather, who was here at my invitation and as a despedida gesture, I gave a luncheon. The President, the Foreign Minister, and the Ministers of Government and Public Security attended, and this was a very relaxed affair.

The President had said at the Wednesday evening dinner that his son was military-minded and he had an ambition to go to one of the United States military academies, and would it be possible for his son to meet the General when he was here. I told him the General wouldn't look much like a General in civilian dress, but the son would be invited to the luncheon too. So, young José, 16 years of age, came to the luncheon. The General was twenty feet tall and the President was a happy parent.

Normally, Mrs. Figueres (Doña Karen) reflects the attitudes of her husband. She has in recent months gotten herself involved in so very many civic things that she flits like a butterfly from one flower to another, and neither Dorothy nor I are sure that she is quite as accurate a reflection. If she is, it is on one minute and off the next which is not in any sense true of his attitude. There is rather good reason to believe José and Karen are going different directions, neither knows where the other is most of the time, and are headed for a split.

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In public places, the President goes out of his way to speak or recognize. It appears to be less feigned than some months back. On the Fourth of July he attended the American Businessmen's Council's midday picnic at the Embassy Residence at my invitation and acted and conducted himself like a good Midwestern clod-buster and made a rip-roaring typical corny Fourth of July Indiana speech. I, of course, get reports through sources I have previously reported that he would still like to hang my scalp, and this comes from the causes of too much bad talk by one of our own people months back.

Everything is going smoothly so far as all Ministries and government contacts are concerned. This is a definite friendliness on the part of the various Ministers. Some months back some of them had tightened up and had been a bit reserved. I find none of that now -- not even among the habitual grouches.

I am not naive enough to believe that you or I or any of us are forgiven, but I rather get the impression that Figueres thinks he is getting an honest deal, and he is. There are some very likeable things about this man. I cannot help but admire his political astuteness in fending off in adroit although uncertain public speeches some of the meanest jabs a party could give a man. A politician would say that "his foot work is good". I don't mean to say that he is not still operating in a worried fashion, for he is. He is deeply involved in the Russian deals and he needs money so badly that he is doing everything in his power to try to put together a deal with the Soviets which will be a great benefit commercially and will have some special personal returns.

Foreign Minister Facio is apparently, though reluctantly, going along more than I thought he might. He did express some concern to me about it one night recently, with a statement that: "I don't like it and I am not sure that I should go with the Costa Rican Commercial Mission to Russia or not". He is in a bad spot if the mission fails and he heads it. He could be the goat with those who are

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for its success, and I am not sure he could become a public hero as a result of his having been in the act. I think he will probably go, although I have been told by Leonidas Plaza, the Ecuadorean Ambassador, that he will not go. If the Russian thing is pushed too far, he will resign in order to save his political future. I asked Plaza how he knows this and he said: "Never mind, Walter, I know".

Yesterday at the reception of the President of El Salvador upon passing Dorothy and me in the line, the President's eyes lightened up. He shows an increased friendliness and seems to be more relaxed when in our presence.

I am reading it for what it is worth and trying to pass it on to you not to give you the impression that I have let my guard down because I believe this man could change to any direction that suited his personal and immediate advantage. The great liberal of twenty years ago "ain't no more". But the politician is still adroit.

I would appreciate your making the proper distribution.

Warm personal regards.

Sincerely,



Walter C. Ploeser,
American Ambassador

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