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ALBERT BACON FALL'S MEXICAN PAPERS:
A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

MICHAEL C. MEYER

FOR A GOOD NUMBER of years American diplomatic historians and historians of the Mexican Revolution have utilized the huge two-volume *Investigation of Mexican Affairs* prepared by a special sub-committee of the United States Foreign Relations Committee.¹ The report, generally cited as the *Fall Committee Hearings*, contains a wealth of information unavailable elsewhere. The hearings were conducted in Washington, D. C., New York City, and in various cities along the Mexican border between August 18, 1919 and May 28, 1920. Over 250 witnesses including government officials, private United States citizens residing in Mexico, writers, business men, clergymen, armed forces personnel, and other persons interested in Mexican affairs were summoned to appear before the committee to testify and venture personal opinions about the various revolutionary regimes which governed Mexico during the hectic decade beginning with the fight against the Díaz dictatorship in 1910.

The resolution which created the special sub-committee empowered it to "investigate the matter of damages and outrages suffered by citizens of the United States in the Republic of Mexico . . . and to report to the Senate what, if any, measures should be taken to prevent a recurrence of such outrages."² The information which can be gleaned from the hearings, however, is much more comprehensive than the enabling resolution itself might suggest.

Although Senator Albert Bacon Fall (Republican from New Mexico) was not a member of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee, he was chosen to preside over the special sub-committee. Soon after being elected to congress in 1912 as New Mexico's first senator, Fall began to demonstrate more than a casual interest in Mexican affairs. The fact that his home state had a contiguous boundary with the Mexican republic, together with the circumstances that he had lived in Mexico, invested in Mexico, and had made a conscientious effort to study Mexican history and politics, won for him the reputation of being extremely well versed on the nature of the revolutionary turmoil to the south. As his interest in Mexico continued to grow and began to manifest itself in speeches and policy recommendations, United States citizens residing in Mexico began to correspond with Fall and lay their problems before him. Consequently the senator tended to consider Americans residing in Mexico, no matter what their home state, as a type of special constituency. Because of his unusual interest in Mexican affairs, when the sub-committee was established in 1919, Fall was one of the few logical choices for presiding officer.

Senator Fall's position *vis-à-vis* the Mexican Revolution was well known by the time the sub-committee was created. Like so many United States citizens with financial interests in Mexico, he was enamored of the political stability and protection afforded foreigners during the Díaz regime. Soon after Francisco I. Madero came to the presidency late in 1911 and showed himself either unwilling or unable to grant the same privileges and concessions, Fall, as a freshman senator, began to press the advisability of United States intervention in Mexico. In February 1913, with the accession of Victoriano Huerta to the Mexican presidency, the Revolution gradually ground to a standstill and Fall's interventionist sentiment no longer found public support. At this time he began a series of vituperative attacks against President Woodrow Wilson's designs to undermine the Huerta regime. When Huerta finally succumbed to United States and Constitutionalist pressures in July 1914, and the Carrancistas consolidated their gains, the senator from New Mexico mounted his interventionist horse once again.

Senator Fall's position at various critical dates during the Revolution is just one of several important keys to proper use of the *Fall Committee Hearings*. The historian who attempts to extract and interpret data from them soon finds that innumerable questions arise for which there is no apparent answer, at least in the published report. What was the full extent of Fall's Mexican holdings? What was his exact relationship with Edward L. Doheny, the controversial president of the Mexican Petroleum Company? Why were certain witnesses served with subpoenas while other United States citizens, extremely conversant with Mexican affairs, were not? How did Fall acquire the detailed information about the background of his witnesses? The answers to these and many other equally important questions can be found in Senator Fall's private papers and correspondence.³

The main body of the Fall papers is grouped into eight categories: general correspondence; miscellaneous correspondence from Fall's senate office files, 1912-1923; miscellaneous correspondence from office file drawer labeled miscellaneous; Colombia papers relating to diplomatic relations of the United States with Colombia; papers, Department of Interior, 1921-1923; international oil files; papers, Mexican affairs from senate office files; and papers on Mexican affairs. Although some information pertaining to Mexico can be found in all of the files, the bulk of the Mexican material is contained in the last two categories. This investigator has found no cogent explanation for the Mexican material being contained in two separate files, because the nature of the subject matter in each is basically the same. This classification has been followed simply because the senator himself maintained two separate files. In addition to the two Mexican sections cited above, a Mexican file containing information of a more delicate nature was also maintained by the senator. This confidential file, held by the University of New Mexico, is found under the heading *Fall Papers, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923*.

The content of Senator Fall's Mexican papers is quite diverse. To be sure, the collection is spotted with the usual requests for political appointments, letters of introduction, money, special

favors, copies of speeches, and information concerning Mexico for high school debates. In addition to this type of information, however, the collection also contains plentiful information on the Revolution, and more important, information which enables the historian to utilize the published *Fall Committee Hearings* with a greater degree of historical sophistication.

On the Revolution itself the collection contains copies of publications and special studies prepared in limited editions which are now extremely rare. As one of many examples, the very interesting economic study of Professor E. W. Kemmerer of Princeton University can be cited.⁴ It also brings together perhaps the best array of contemporary newspaper clippings, from both the United States and Mexico, that can be found anywhere. The clippings include articles and editorials from *El Universal*, *El Nacional*, *El Popular*, *Omega*, *El Heraldo*, *Excelsior*, and *Le Courier de Mexique*, all of Mexico City, and from *El Siglo* (Nogales, Sonora), *La Voz de la Revolución* (Mérida, Yucatán), *El Matamorensense* (Matamoros, Tamaulipas), *El Correo del Norte* (Chihuahua City), and *El Informador* (Guadalajara, Jalisco). Copies of most of the dailies from the capital can still be examined in Mexico City's Hemeroteca Nacional but many of the state newspapers of the revolutionary period are exceedingly difficult to obtain anywhere. Among the United States newspapers represented are the *New York Times*, the *New York Tribune*, *The Sun* (New York), the *New York Evening Post*, *The World* (New York), the *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), the *Los Angeles Examiner*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *El Paso Morning Times*, the *El Paso Herald*, the *Arizona Gazette* (Phoenix), the *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix), and the *San Antonio Light*. All of Fall's speeches on the floor of the senate pertaining to Mexican affairs, as well as speeches to civic and business groups, also enhance the value of the collection. The senator maintained his own special investigator in Mexico, and the reports which he received from this individual are found in the confidential file.⁵ In addition, previously classified military intelligence reports from Ft. Sam Houston are in this file.⁶

The Fall papers help to dispel a good many commonplace misconceptions about the Revolution. For example, the student who picks up an average Mexican survey text, or even some of the more detailed studies on the Revolution, will usually be led to believe that the call for United States intervention in Mexico came almost exclusively from large investors in Mexican real estate. The manuscripts clearly reveal that the small United States investor was a much firmer advocate of intervention than those with million-dollar investments. The United States citizens with small investments in Mexico could be, and often were, wiped out by a single bandit raid while the million-dollar investor could fall back on his other Mexican holdings after being divested of 500 or even 1,000 head of cattle. A related factor, often overlooked but obvious in the senator's correspondence, is that many Mexican citizens, opposed to an incumbent regime for one reason or another, from time to time encouraged and abetted United States interventionism.⁷

In addition to information of this type, the Fall papers abound in supplementary data on the Revolution obtained from potential witnesses who were never served with subpoenas to appear before the sub-committee. Although over 250 witnesses were heard, many more were willing to testify but were not called. For the most part the exclusion of these witnesses was justifiable because the information which they had to offer was not directly relevant to the senate resolution establishing the sub-committee. If a portion of the information was relevant, it generally had been obtained from other witnesses. On the other hand, for the historian interested in the Mexican Revolution, and only secondarily interested in the "damages and outrages suffered by United States citizens," this information is sometimes refreshingly new.⁸

Although the Fall correspondence is obviously valuable for certain new insights into the Revolution itself, its primary value for the historian is that it complements the *Fall Committee Hearings*. The investigator who is attempting to assess the validity of any given testimony would like to have much more background information on the witnesses than the published report provides.

Without this information the testimony itself can often be misleading. The following are only a few examples of this.

One of the themes which runs throughout the entire hearings is that certain persons, almost exclusively those opposed to any form of intervention, being fully cognizant of Fall's pro-interventionist sentiment, attempted in various ways to discredit the committee. The testimony of William Horton is a case in point.⁹ Mr. Horton testified that he was refused an emergency passport by the American Consul in Tampico, Claude I. Dawson, after he had informed the consul that he wanted to testify before the Fall Committee. The very strong implication in this testimony is that this incident was one of many designed to discredit the work of the committee. When one reads the explanation of Claude I. Dawson in Fall's papers, however, he receives an entirely different impression. Consul Dawson stated that he did not refuse an emergency passport to Horton but only asked that he register, as prescribed by law, before being issued the passport. This Horton refused to do.¹⁰ It is impossible, without additional information, to ascertain who was telling the truth in this matter, but once the investigator is aware of the strong possibility that Mr. Horton misrepresented certain facts in his testimony, the entire testimony certainly must be viewed with a good deal of caution.

In the testimony of Wilbur Forrest the reader is informed that the witness was a journalist interested in Mexican affairs.¹¹ His position on various revolutionary issues is left to the imagination. The investigator who consults Senator Fall's papers, however, will find a number of Mr. Forrest's articles on Mexico, written for the *New York Tribune*, conveniently grouped together.¹² With this additional information the published testimony takes on new meaning.

In other cases the published testimony of witnesses gives rise to issues which are not treated satisfactorily. Emiliano López Figueroa, for example, was questioned at considerable length about the editorial policy of *El Magazine de la Raza*.¹³ It is doubtful that one in fifty persons who have used the *Fall Committee*

Hearings have ever seen a copy of the magazine in question and even less likely that they would be able to find a copy to examine even if they desired to do so. Yet, in order to evaluate the testimony, the magazine obviously must be consulted. Copies of *El Magazine de la Raza* are contained in Fall's private correspondence.¹⁴ In like manner Major R. C. Barnes was questioned about certain articles in *Gales Magazine*.¹⁵ Copies of controversial articles from this magazine may also be found in the Fall papers.¹⁶

Perhaps the most serious question which arises from an investigation of the Fall manuscripts is the accuracy, and thus the validity, of the testimony published in the hearings. Although it is immediately obvious that the published report contains many grammatical and typographical errors, it is not as clear that these seemingly insignificant oversights often result in errors of both a substantive and interpretive nature. On February 3, 1920 Nils Olaf Bagge, a consultant mining engineer in Chihuahua for some sixteen years, gave interesting testimony.¹⁷ Mr. Bagge was utterly dismayed, however, when he received the published copy of the testimony which he had ostensibly given. In a letter to Mr. Francis Kearful, the man who conducted his interrogation, Bagge included a copy of his twelve-page testimony in which he noted over ninety errors.¹⁸ Many of these concerned minor matters, but some were of considerable importance. To a person interested in the early career of General Pascual Orozco, Jr., for example, the fact that Bagge, the head of a very large enterprise in Chihuahua, considered Orozco one of his best employees is of more interest than that Bagge had only a few employees as the testimony incorrectly suggests.¹⁹ Other typographical errors in the Bagge testimony give the reader the impression that the witness either exaggerated shamelessly or was not in possession of all his faculties when he appeared before the committee. For example, in his discussion of an average family in rural Mexico, the published testimony reports that Bagge stated that such a family would generally consist of "one or two women, and a number of children, and all of the relatives, and a few hundred dogs."²⁰ When a statement such as this appears in the middle of any testimony it

is quite difficult to take the witness seriously. When one learns that the word "hundred" appeared erroneously in place of the word "hungry" much of the previously justifiable skepticism is removed.²¹ The Fall papers do not provide a neat list of corrections for each testimony rendered but careful use of the manuscripts does enable the investigator to spot many other inconsistencies and *non sequiturs*.

The Albert Bacon Fall Mexican papers constitute an extremely valuable primary source both for American diplomatic and Mexican revolutionary history. As yet, however, the collection has not been adequately tapped, except by a few persons interested in Fall himself. Let us hope that future investigators who rely heavily on the *Fall Committee Hearings* will recognize the necessity of complementing the published report with the manuscripts. Bibliographers could help by making reference to the Fall papers in their extensive lists of documentary collections.

NOTES

1. United States Senate, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Report and Hearing Before a Sub-Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Albert Bacon Fall, Presiding, Pursuant to Senate Resolution 106*, Senate Document No. 285 (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1919-1920).

2. *Ibid.* p. 3.

3. The original manuscripts of most of the Fall papers are now located in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California [hereinafter cited as *Fall Papers (HL)*]. The University of New Mexico has additional miscellaneous Fall correspondence [hereinafter cited as *Fall Papers (UNM)*] as well as microfilm copies of the Huntington collection. This film and its index can be obtained in the Coronado Library as can

the additional Fall material. The aforementioned index is an alphabetical listing of persons to whom correspondence was sent and from whom it was received. Documents are arranged chronologically within the alphabetical listing.

4. E. W. Kemmerer, *Monetary System of Mexico* (Mexico, 1917). This work is in *Fall Papers (HL)*, Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group M.

5. *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 2.

6. *Ibid.*, Folders 2 and 3.

7. *Fall Papers (HL)*, César Estrada to Albert Bacon Fall, Dec. 25, 1919, Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group E.

8. The reader can consult "Possible Testimony of Manuel Ruiz," Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group E. Ruiz was not called before the committee to testify and as a result this testimony was never published. Gus T. Jones was called to testify but the information which he provided is of marginal value. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, pp. 1622-1623. Jones was a secret agent of the Department of Justice and the most valuable testimony which he offered was never printed because it would have compromised his position. This information can be found in *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Testimony of Gus T. Jones, Personal and Strictly Confidential, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 3.

9. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, pp. 1707-1728.

10. *Fall Papers (HL)*, Statement of Claude I. Dawson, Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group D.

11. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 2, pp. 2046-2051.

12. *Fall Papers (HL)*, Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group N.

13. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, pp. 898-899.

14. *Fall Papers (HL)*, Mexican Affairs from Senate Office Files, Group D.

15. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, pp. 1236-1237.

16. *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 2.

17. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, pp. 1426-1428.

18. *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Nils Olaf Bagge to Francis Kearful, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 2. The letter and the copy of the corrected testimony were undoubtedly placed in the confidential file because Senator Fall did not desire to have the gross carelessness made public.

19. This is one of numerous instances in which a typographical error resulted in a serious error of fact. Orozco was a muleteer prior to the anti-Díaz revolt of November 20, 1910. Bagge's company employed a very large number of muleteers to drive over 3,000 mules. The uncorrected testimony published in the hearings states that the company utilized only 300 mules. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, p. 1429. *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Bagge to Kearful, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 2.

20. *Fall Committee Hearings*, vol. 1, p. 1437.

21. *Fall Papers (UNM)*, Bagge to Kearful, Conditions in Mexico, 1916-1923, Folder 2.