

The Files of the Secret War

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Manuel Gutiérrez Paredes' Archive, ccsj/unwv-Historic Archive

What does the opening of the files of the Federal Security Office, safeguarded by the Center for Intelligence and National Security (CISEN), mean?¹ As a result of my own experience, I think it is a political and historic event of the first magnitude. Contrary to what has been said and written to the effect that “there is nothing important in the files,” or that the files had already been cleaned up (opinions I shared before I had seen them myself), the truth is that they contain a series of pieces of information that make them a singular reference point and testimony about what happened in our country during what have been called “the dirty

years.” Of course, you have to know how to look.

The first indication I had of the value of the Federal Security Office (DFS) files was references by researchers like Sergio Aguayo who were the first to penetrate this *terra incognita*.² Later I had access to substantial parts of the investigation done by the National Human Rights Commission in the files due to the “Special Report on Forced Disappearances in the 1970s and Early 1980s,” which gave me a clear sign that the files were fundamentally intact, that is, that they had not been “cleaned up” or destroyed.

What is the main criterion that led me to think that the files had not been tampered with? First, in the prominent cases (Jesús Piedra Ibarra or Ignacio Salas Obregón, for example),³ the fun-

damental information was there: that they were detained; when they were detained and under what circumstances; who participated in the detentions; what police forces their captors belonged to; where they were interrogated; what they stated in the first interrogation session, etc. The fact that together with this basic information, eventually, other pieces of information aimed at countering the first reports (for example, denying the detentions altogether and attempting to make people believe the version that Piedra Ibarra and Salas Obregón died in “clashes”, etc.) does nothing but confirm the legitimacy of the first information, even if only because of the methodological fact that the first information is much more elaborate, with more references and precise details, than the second.

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Second, everything seems to indicate that when the profoundly degenerated DFS disappeared, there was no one to make the decisions about destroying the information. On the contrary, influential people inside the national security apparatus itself (see, for example, Jorge Carrillo Olea in his unrefuted public testimony) took energetic measures to ensure that the files continued to include that information and that “historic truth.”⁴

In the third place, it seems that neither those who wanted to doctor the files nor those who wanted to preserve them in their original state thought about the possibility of alternation in office for the presidency and therefore about the possibility that the files would fall into other hands. They (we) were all surprised by history.

Why would such compromising files be kept? For one basic reason: they were the record of the tasks that the head of the supreme power of the nation (the president) charged the national security apparatus with during a “particularly historic” period, and the fundamental proof of how that apparatus carried out those tasks. It could not simply burn “the historic record” of how these forces, civilian and military bosses, agents, soldiers, *madrinas*,⁵ etc., contributed to a job that, from their point of view, was not only necessary, but highly patriotic or even heroic. They broke some laws along the way and violated a few basic constitutional rights? As some of the persecutors of that time have said now, “You can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.” Or, as the “historic” chief of the political police, Miguel Nazar Haro, said in December 1973, “When national security is at stake, no Constitution or law matters a fucking good goddamn.”

What is special about the DFS files? From a certain point of view, they are bureaucratic, boring, probably repetitive, but extremely symptomatic. Behind the uniform police jargon that notes that “on the eighth of this month” so-and-so and so-and-so “of the September 23 Communist League were detained by this Federal Security Office,” is the historic drama of significant numbers of a young generation. This generation, blinded by the poverty and authoritarianism of Mexican political life and dazzled by the redemptionist dreams of a pure and intransigent Marxism (which was actually dogmatic, elementary and semi-illiterate), cracked its head against the wall of the well trained, tough polit-

The secret police files shed light on what really happened.

ical police and the fraction of the Mexican military that dedicated itself to anti-subversive activities, with their—we must recognize—high combat morale.

With regard to the disappeared, the files’ information is very important because they contain details (the complete original statements) about such well known figures of the armed struggle as Ignacio Salas Obregón (the historic leader of the September 23 Communist League), Jesús Piedra Ibarra, Alicia de los Ríos Merino, several members of the Tecla Parra family, etc.

I found clues to the extra-legal executions of Salvador Corral García and Ignacio Olivares Torres, both national leaders of the September 23 Com-

munist League. It is public knowledge that Salvador Corral’s body was found in mid-February 1974 in Monterrey, Nuevo León, near the residence of relatives of Eugenio Garza Sada. Ignacio Olivares Torres met the same fate, but his body was disposed of near the house of the Aranguren family in Guadalajara. They were both bloody tribute from the political police (that is, the presidency) to the families of the businessmen who had been murdered by league members.

However, at that time the DFS bluffed, saying it did not know the identity of the bodies and DFS agents even went to several prisons to ask imprisoned guerrillas “if they didn’t know who this person was.” Beyond these kinds of smoke screens, the files are very clear: the record states that on January 31, 1974, “In Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Salvador Corral García and José Ignacio Olivares Torres, both members of the Political Bureau of the leadership of this league [sic] were detained. They have been sent to the DFS for interrogation.” In the corresponding file, dated January 30, 1974, it says, “The Federal Judicial Police detained in the city of Mazatlán two men who identified themselves as Salvador Corral García and Raúl Gómez Armendáriz,” who turned out to be “José Ignacio Olivares Torres (a) ‘Sebas’, a prominent member of the Political Bureau of the leadership of the September 23 Communist League, who was in charge of the state of Jalisco.” The note is signed “very respectfully” by “Captain Luis de la Barreda Moreno, Director of the Federal Security Office.”

On February 11, 1974, the following brief notation is all that is included in the DFS file: “The body of José Ignacio Olivares appeared in Guada-

lajara, and the body of Salvador Corral García appeared in Monterrey.” As though they had not reported just ten days before that they, the Federal Security Office, had both detainees and were interrogating them! As though someone outside the DFS had committed the two murders!

Another piece of information interesting because it is symptomatic, is the DFS “analysis” of the death of Eugenio Garza Sada in mid-1975, which, at the end, includes a list of those implicated in the attack. Next to the name of Elías Orozco Salazar is the note, “subject to trial in the Nuevo León penitentiary.” Next to the name of Anselmo Herrera Chávez is the note, “killed in a kidnapping attempt.” But, next to the name Jesús Piedra Ibarra, there is no note. It does not say “detained” or “escaped” or

“killed”. This silence is understandable: they could not write down the words “disappeared” or “in custody.”

I am sure that, if we work rigorously, with perseverance, intuition and knowledge, many interesting things will come out of these ultra-secret files of the Mexican political police, which will undoubtedly contribute to what we need to know about our recent past. ■■■

NOTES

¹ The files contain information about government action against the 1968 student movement that concluded with the Tlatelolco massacre, as well as what has been called the “dirty war”, including torture and a significant number of forced disappearances, against the urban and rural guerrilla movements of the 1970s. [Editor’s Note.]

² The Federal Security Office (DFS), under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior, was the body responsible for planning and carrying out repression and the majority of the actions of the dirty war from 1960 to the beginning of the 1980s. [Editor’s Note.]

³ Both were victims of forced political disappearance as reprisals for the attack against Monterrey businessman Eugenio Garza Sada in the early 1970s. Since then, the mother of Piedra Ibarra, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, has demanded her son be returned alive and for three decades has been an undisputed, untiring political and moral leader in her fight for respect for human rights in Mexico. She founded and has led, among others, the Eureka Group, the Mexican version of Argentina’s Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. [Editor’s Note.]

⁴ Jorge Carrillo Olea had a high post in the Mexican state’s intelligence apparatus. He was the governor of the state of Morelos for the Institutional Revolutionary Party and resigned in the wake of accusations of corruption. [Editor’s Note.]

⁵ *Madrina* is a Mexican political slang word meaning “professional thugs.” [Editor’s Note.]