

## abstract

During the ongoing bicentennial celebrations of Independence, Colombians extol Casanare's role in Bolívar's Liberation Campaign of 1819, the march across the Andes that defeated the Spanish at the battles of Pantano de Vargas (July 25) and Boyacá (August 7), but they have paid scant attention to the region's twentieth century struggle to gain freedom from the rule of neighboring Boyacá. During the National Front Era (1958-1974), Casanare's sense of abandonment by Tunja evolved into a determined initiative to throw off the department's rule and regain its autonomy as a national intendency. This article reviews the complicated relationship between the highland and the plains regions; describes Casanare's struggle to recover its autonomy; and explains why in 1974, the people of Casanare rejoiced in the region's elevation to the status of national intendency while inhabitants of the other territories of the *Llanos* were actively lobbying to become departments.

**Key words:** Casanare, Boyacá, National Front, *Llanos Orientales*, regionalism, independence.

## resumen

**La segunda Campaña para la Independencia del Casanare. La lucha para ganar la libertad de Boyacá durante el Frente Nacional en Colombia (1958-1974).**

Durante las celebraciones del Bicentenario de la Independencia, los colombianos ensalzaron el rol de la Campaña Libertadora de Bolívar de 1819 en el Casanare, el recorrido a través de los Andes que derrotó a los españoles en la batalla del Pantano de Vargas (el 25 de julio) y de Boyacá (el 7 de agosto), pero prestando poca atención a la lucha de esa región en el siglo XX para obtener la libertad del vecino departamento de Boyacá. Durante la época del Frente Nacional (1958-1974), el sentido de abandono del Casanare por parte de Tunja se convirtió en una iniciativa decidida para deshacerse del gobierno del departamento y recuperar su autonomía como intendencia nacional. En este artículo se analiza la compleja relación entre la frontera de la sierra y la llanura; describe la lucha del Casanare por recuperar su autonomía, y explica por qué en 1974, los Casanareños exaltaron la altura de la región a la categoría de intendencia nacional mientras que los habitantes de los otros territorios de los Llanos Orientales fueron activamente presionados a convertirse en departamentos.

**Palabras clave:** Casanare, Boyacá, Frente Nacional, Llanos Orientales, el regionalismo, la independencia.

## resumo

**A segunda Campanha para a Independência de Casanare. A luta para ganhar a liberdade de Boyacá durante a Frente Nacional na Colômbia (1958-1974)**

Durante as celebrações do Bicentenário da Independência em curso, os colombianos exaltam o papel da Campanha Libertadora de Bolívar de 1819 em Casanare, o percorrido através dos Andes que derrotou os espanhóis na batalha do "Pantano de Vargas" (25 de julho) e de Boyacá (7 de agosto), mas prestam pouca atenção à luta da região do século XX para obter a liberdade do vizinho estado de Boyacá. Durante a época da Frente Nacional (1958-1974), o sentido de abandono de Casanare por parte de Tunja se converteu em uma iniciativa decidida para se desfazer do governo do Estado e recuperar sua autonomia como intendência Nacional. Neste artigo, analisa-se a complexa relação entre a fronteira da serra e planície; descreve a luta de Casanare por recuperar sua autonomia e explica por que, em 1974, os "casanarenhos" elevaram a altura da região à categoria de intendência nacional enquanto os habitantes dos outros territórios dos "Llanos Orientales" foram ativamente pressionados a se converterem em estados.

**Palavras chave:** Casanare, Boyacá, Frente Nacional, Llanos Orientales, o regionalismo, a independência.

Recibido: junio de 2012 / Aprobado: junio de 2012

CORREO IMPRESO: C/Siroco, 8 1-B - 28223, Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid, España.

Rausch, Jane M. 2012. "The Second Campaign for Liberation: Casanare's Struggle to Win Freedom from Boyacá during Colombia's National Front Era (1958-1974)". *Administración & Desarrollo* 40(55): 93-110.

## The Second Campaign for Liberation: Casanare's Struggle to Win Freedom from Boyacá during Colombia's National Front Era (1958-1974)

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The recent tendency to refer to the *Llanos Orientales* of Colombia as "Orinoquia" and consider it a single region has many merits, but it also tends to blur the differences between the four constituent departments of that part of the country: Meta, Arauca, Vichada and Casanare (Pérez Bareño 2002; Baquero Nariño 2004). While they each form part of the Orinoco River Basin and share a common economy - originally based on cattle ranching, but more recently on oil production - their individual histories are quite different. For example, throughout much of the twentieth century Meta, Arauca and Vichada enjoyed the status of national territories under direct rule of the government in Bogotá, while Casanare, despite having been an autonomous province in the nineteenth century, remained tied to the Department of Boyacá. This affiliation had the unfortunate consequence of delaying the region's development as compared to other sections of the *llanos*.

Colombians have long celebrated Casanare's role in Bolívar's Campaign for Liberation in 1819, the extraordinary march across the Andes that culminated in the defeat of the Spanish at the battles of Pantano de Vargas (July 25) and Boyacá (August 7), but they have paid little attention to the region's struggle to gain its freedom from rule by Boyacá in the twentieth century. During the National Front Era (1958-1974), Casanare's growing sense of abandonment by Tunja evolved into a determined campaign to throw off that department's control and regain its own autonomy as a national intendency. The object of this essay is to review the complicated relationship between the highland and plains regions of Boyacá. After briefly summarizing the interplay of the two regions from the sixteenth century to 1958, the analysis will trace

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Casanare's struggle to recover its autonomy from the department during the National Front Era in order to explain why in 1974, the people of Casanare rejoiced in their region's elevation to the status of national intendancy while other *llanos* territories were actively lobbying to become departments.

### Boyacá and Casanare before 1958

In 1958, the year in which Alberto Lleras Camargo, the first of the four National Front presidents took power, the Department of Boyacá encompassed 63,595 square kilometers. Since this figure included Casanare's 25,000 square kilometers, Boyacá was then Colombia's second largest department in terms of area, second only to Antioquia (Medina R. 1970-74, 18-19),<sup>1</sup> and with its 779,349 inhabitants (including 22,087 in Casanare), Boyacá ranked third in population after Cundinamarca and Antioquia. Nevertheless, from an economic standpoint it was far from the wealthiest (Colombia, 1951), as governors in Tunja had watched helplessly as the department's economy steadily declined from its position of prominence in the nineteenth century. Lacking a port on the Magdalena River and restricted by wholly inadequate roads, Boyacá depended on the production of food crops, the manufacture of woolen textiles, and the sale of cattle driven up from the *llanos*. The national government controlled two of its potential sources of income - the salt mine at Chita and the Muzo emerald mines - and the prevalence of *minifundios* (small farmsteads) and archaic labor forms prevented the department from participating in the process of capital accumulation occurring in other regions. The collapse of the tobacco market further depressed the rural economy in the northern districts of Norte and Gutiérrez. By the 1950's it was evident that the industrialization process that had transformed Antioquia and Cundinamarca had bypassed Boyacá (Guerrero Barón 1991, 78; Delpar 1981, 33).

Separated from Boyacá by the *Cordillera Oriental* (Eastern Mountain Range), the province of Casanare included a piedmont zone that dissolved into tropical plains extending to the Casanare River and the *Comisaría* of Arauca in the north, and to the Meta River, the Department of Meta and the *Comisaría* of Vichada to the south and east. It is

<sup>1</sup> Antioquia was the largest department in terms of territory with an area of 65,595 sq. kilometers.

difficult to imagine two more starkly contrasting environments joined together in one department - the cool, highland valleys of Boyacá and the hot, flat grasslands of Casanare alternately flooded by torrential rains and then transformed into desert by the tropical sun - yet the ties that connected them dated back to 1588. In that year Captain Pedro Daza had left Tunja and traveled down the Andes to found the first city in Casanare, Santiago de las Atalayas. The Spanish settlers and missionaries who followed Daza fought each other for control of the Achagua, Sáliva and Guahibo indigenous groups, and ranchers were soon rounding up the wild cattle that roamed over the plains and driving them up the rough mountain trails for sale in Sogamoso.

By the eighteenth century, Casanare had become an important sub-region of Tunja, with which it maintained a vigorous trade in textiles, pottery, wood and straw articles, in addition to cattle. During this same time, miscegenation among whites, Indians and Africans produced a cowboy subculture - the *llaneros* who worked as *vaqueros* (cowboys) on the *hatos* (cattle ranches) and gained fame as soldiers during the wars for independence. When the Spanish reconquered the highland regions in 1816, creole patriots took refuge in Casanare, where they joined with the *llaneros* to create a new army. Led by Bolívar and Santander, they marched back across the *cordillera* to decisively defeat the Spanish at the battles of Pantano de Vargas on July 25 and Boyacá on August 7, 1819 (Rausch 1999, 191).

This stunning victory, known as the Liberation Campaign, remains the most memorable event in the history of Casanare, for while the province continued to enjoy political autonomy within the Republic of New Granada (1831-1857), it was unable to recover from the economic and social disruption caused by the war. With the creation of the Grenadine Confederation in 1858, Casanare became part of the state of Boyacá. Between 1868 and 1886 the Radical Liberals ruled it as a national territory, as did the Conservatives between 1892 and 1905, but the experiment failed both times, and the province was eventually returned to Boyacá with which it had continued to maintain close ties.

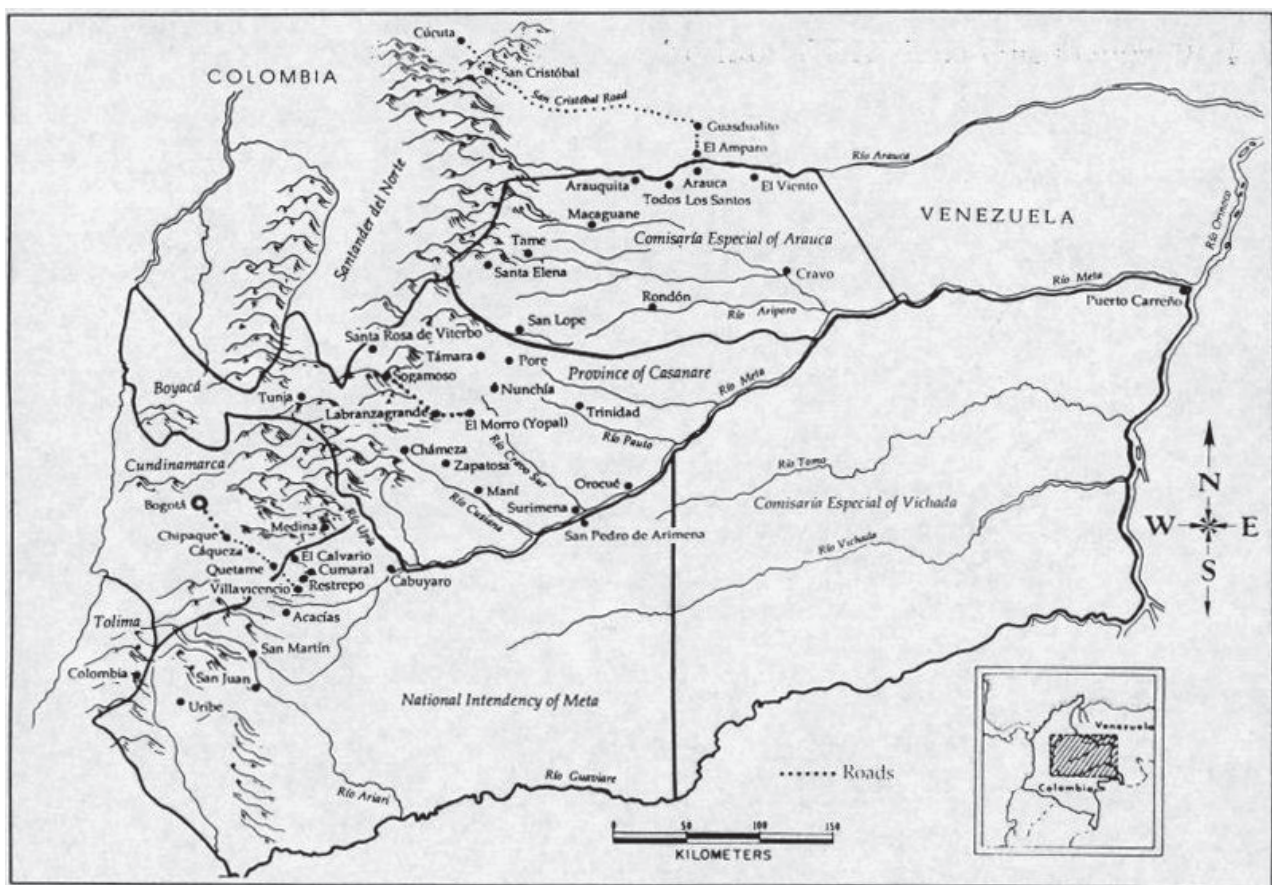
Casanare's economic stagnation mirrored its loss of political prestige. Throughout the nineteenth century it had shared in Boyacá's dramatic decline as modernization processes propelled by export booms in tobacco, quinine, and coffee transformed

western Colombia into the economic heartland of the nation. Even within the *llanos* region, Casanare remained a backwater as settlers from Cundinamarca moved into Meta and turned that intendency into a dynamic colonization zone based on the production of plantain, corn, yuca, rice and cattle for the large market in Bogotá (Rausch 1999, 192). According to the 1938 census, the population of Meta had increased from 19,320 in 1928 to 51,674 while the population of Casanare had actually declined over the same period from 25,481 to 23,290, which was approximately the same as when the Spanish had ruled the territory in 1810 (Colombia 1938; Medina R 1936, 147-78).

There is general agreement that during the first half of the twentieth century, Casanare, governed as a prefecture within the Department of Boyacá, showed

little growth. Despite sporadic in-migration of people from Boyacá, the economy continued to decline. Disease and lawlessness beset the inhabitants. The prefects were ineffective, the mayors and councils in the eleven municipalities scarcely functional, and the Recoleta missionaries surprisingly inept at expanding public education or winning native converts to Christianity (Rausch 1993, 237). Assessing Casanare's plight in his doctoral thesis, *Los territorios nacionales con una introducción al estudio de su geografía y de su historia* published in 1944, Humberto Plazas Olarte offered a sweeping indictment of Boyacá's rule and called on Congress to declare the province a national territory, a status already enjoyed by Meta, Arauca, and Vichada. Noting the lack of roads, health services and improved ranching techniques, Plazas Olarte suggested that Casanare easily met the requirements to be declared an intendency as established by the

### The Llanos Frontier in 1946



Recently passed Law 2 of 1943 which offered national supervision to regions covered by vast, unhealthy jungles populated by Indians and isolated from the “civilized” center of the country. Furthermore, he argued, it was unrealistic to expect Boyacá to be able to deal effectively with problems that were so different from those of the highland region surrounding Tunja.

To emphasize the need for action, Plazas Olarte pointed to the surging number of *cuatrerros* (cattle thieves) whose activities threatened to destroy down the ranching industry. The whole country, he continued, was aware of the magnitude of the problem, but Tunja had simply abandoned Casanare to its fate. Plazas Olarte believed that only the nation could control these bandits, through the mediation of the Ministry of Government and the national police. “Elevate Casanare to the status of a national territory,” he pleaded. “If the problem of public order in Casanare is not dealt with, there will be incalculably grave repercussions (Plazas Olarte 1944, 209-13).

#### La Violencia, 1948-1954

Plazas Olarte’s prediction soon came true during the era of the *Violencia* - the undeclared civil war that lasted from 1948-1954 and included that saw a major front of fighting in Casanare. In 1946 the Conservatives regained power nationally after a sixteen-year long hiatus. In Boyacá, the new leaders unleashed a *revancha* (revenge) against Liberals spurring the flow of politically committed guerrilla fighters into Casanare and Arauca. These included Franco Isaza, the Villamarín brothers of Cocuy, the Colmenares brothers of Paz de Río, and the Bautista brothers, all of whom joined the bands already forming there among defiant *llaneros*. The brutal invasion by so-called “*chulavitas*” (Conservative vigilantes from the town of that name in Boyacá) who attacked Liberal sympathizers in the piedmont cities of Casanare after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948. This was the final event that persuaded men such as Guadalupe Salcedo and Eliseo Velásquez to begin their insurgency against the national government headed first by Mariano Ospina Pérez (1946-1950) and afterwards by Laureano Gómez and Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez (1950-1953). By the end of 1949, officially sanctioned terror reigned throughout the province.

In the first phase of the *Violencia* (1949-1951), large landowners and the Liberal party supported the activities of guerrilla bands throughout the *llanos*. In response, Laureano Gómez strengthened the government offensive by creating the *Jefatura Civil y Militar de los Llanos* (Civil and Military Directorship of the *Llanos*) on April 1, 1950 with headquarters in Villavicencio, Meta. The following June, he separated the province of Casanare from Boyacá by Decree 1093, proclaiming it a special *comisaría* with the town of Trinidad as its capital (Villanueva Martínez 2010, 131). Despite the ongoing fighting, Horacio Rosero Caicedo, Chief of National Territories, asserted in 1951 that the new *comisaría* was making progress. Government offices were being constructed in Trinidad and work was proceeding on a road to connect the town with its airfield. Thirty schools were operating with an enrollment of 1,172 students, and there was regular contact between Tunja and Trinidad via air and radiotelephone (Colombia 1951, 382-383).<sup>2</sup>

While the government struggled to put a positive spin on developments in the *llanos*, the situation could hardly have been more catastrophic from the perspective of the people living there. As Martínez Delgado has written, “Casanare was a green hell splattered with the red of the blood of so many victims. There was no crime that was not committed. The list of towns erased from the map by fire included Moreno, Manare, Trinidad, Tauramena, Maní and Sabanalarga as well as many *caseríos* (hamlets) and other types of settlements in Arauca and Meta” (Martínez Delgado 1990, 96).

In the second phase of the conflict (1951-1953), large landholders of properties in Meta and Casanare abandoned the guerrilla groups made up largely of the *peones* (farm laborers) and *vaqueros* who worked on their land. In February 1951, fifty *ganaderos* (cattlemen) and businessmen met with the Civil and Military Chief of the *Llanos Orientales*, General Carlos Bejarano Muñoz, in Villavicencio. Concerned about the militancy of the guerrillas and fearing that the continued insurgency was harmful to their own interests, these men signed an agreement on February 17 that condemned the acts of banditry that had occurred during recent years and pledged their unconditional support for General Bejarano to restore normalcy in the *llanos* (Casas Aguilar 1988,

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Chief of National Territories, August 16, 1951.

409-410). A few days later in Sogamoso, eighty members of the *Sociedad de Ganaderos* signed a similar declaration. Thus, the Boyacá ranchers who had originally backed their *peones* in their struggle to defend their political and economic interests now supported the Conservative government and the army. They imposed the “imprimatur of bandits” on the insurgents and undertook a vast campaign of persecution and extermination of the guerrillas that only heightened the hostility felt by the people of Casanare against Boyacá (Oquist 1980, 209). Detachments of the Vargas Battalion set up posts on the *hatos*. Supplied by the ranchers with money and horses, they seized individuals suspected of aiding the guerrillas. Many *peones* were either shot down or thrown in prison. According to Franco Isaza, “The purge was rapid, effective and silent” (Franco Isaza 1959, 184-185).

To help quash the insurgency, the *ganaderos*, army, and police created a specialized body of counter-guerrillas known as “guerrillas of peace,” composed of military personnel disguised as civilians, ex-combatants who had deserted the rebels to join the government side, sons of the cattle-ranchers, and Conservative campesinos. Their objective was to stop cattle rustling, eliminate the *chusmas* (rabble), as they began to call the Liberal guerrillas, and to conduct “clean-up” operations to eliminate people suspected of collaborating with the guerrillas in urban sectors. Groups of these counter-revolutionaries operated in Villavicencio, Támara, Arauca and several other towns, and once they had joined the struggle, there were approximately 20,000 combatants fighting in the *llanos* (Giraldo Castaño 2006, 107). In June 1952, Gómez’s vice president, Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez launched the largest military operation conducted against the insurgents up to that time, but despite this effort the rebels controlled approximately 90 percent of the *llanos* and enjoyed the sympathy and complicity of a majority of the inhabitants of the region by the beginning of 1953 (Oquist 1980, 209).

The insurgents had achieved a military standoff with the Colombian army, but they were unable to agree on truly revolutionary goals or to inflict a final blow that would give them control of the country. Thus, when General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, supported by leaders of both the Conservative and the Liberal parties, overthrew the Gómez-Urdaneta government on June 15, 1953 he immediately set about bringing the fighting to a halt with the words: “No more

blood, no more depredations in the name of any political party” (Villar Borda 1953, 101). When Rojas offered amnesty to Liberal guerrilla groups in return for laying down their arms, many accepted his offer and peace had returned to most of the *llanos* by the end of 1953.

Considered from the standpoint of the relationship between Casanare and Boyacá, the Violencia period served to harden hatreds on both sides. Although the landowners - most of whom lived in the highland region - had sided with the guerrillas at first, they later turned against them in 1951, adopting the view that the revolutionaries were in fact bandits. In addition, the *chulavita* army that ravaged the *llanos* was clearly identified with Boyacá. Casanare’s existence as a national intendancy had been too brief to make any real change in its situation, a fact substantiated by the decline in its population between 1938 and 1951, while other *llanos* territories showed a net increase during this same period despite the violence (Colombia 1938, 1951).<sup>3</sup>

#### Rojas Pinilla

Historians disagree on the national impact of the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. On the one hand in the first six months, he was able to arrange for the surrender of most of the guerrilla fighters both in the *llanos* and in the rest of the country. Moreover, thanks to high prices for coffee on the international markets, his government began an extensive series of public works projects to assist recovery in areas devastated by the prolonged violence. On the other hand, as time passed his administration took on the characteristics of a classic military dictatorship, and the partisan elite became increasingly uneasy after the resurgence of violence in some parts of the country. By early 1957, the regime had alienated most organized groups in Colombia, including the Catholic Church, labor unions and both political parties. After a general strike on May 10, 1957, top military officers forced Rojas Pinilla to leave the country. With the dictator’s departure, those same leaders formed a caretaker military junta, which

<sup>3</sup> Casanare’s population declined from 23, 290 in 1938 to 22,087 in 1951, while Meta’s increased from 51,674 to 67,492 and Arauca’s grew from 11,156 to 13,221.

governed until civilians took over on August 7, 1958 (Bushnell 1993, 215-222).<sup>4</sup>

Rojas Pinilla was born in Tunja on March 12, 1900. As a native of Boyacá, he maintained his deep loyalty to the department. In a speech delivered in Sogamoso on August 8, 1953, he praised Boyacá as a major force in the national history of Colombia. Describing it as a land of promise, he pledged that his government would not rest until the political passions caused by the violence had abated and the cries for justice had been attended with positive measures steps such as the creation of the *Instituto de Colonización e Inmigración* (Rojas Pinilla 1954, 103-104).

As a native son of Boyacá, Rojas, perhaps more than previous Colombian presidents, was well-acquainted with the *llanos*. During his trial by the senate in 1959, he stated that before he came to power in 1953, "The *Llanos Orientales* were without a doubt the most convulsed area in the country." He continued:

I believe that in all departments, everyone as a child is taught that Colombia's independence is due in large part to the *llaneros*. When I was in school in Boyacá, they told us that *llaneros* conducted their business without the need of official documents because the word of a *llanero* was a public document. Personally, I have always had great respect, great admiration for those people of the plains and I wanted to bring peace there after June 13 (Rojas Pinilla 1959, 581).

Yet despite his awareness of the reality of the *llanos*, Rojas believed that Casanare could best be rehabilitated under the supervision of the department. By decree 2565 of October 1953, he ended its status as a national intendency and returned the region to be ruled as a province by Boyacá with financial support in the amount of one million pesos a month (*El Tiempo*, September 16, 1973). This decision worked against the reconstruction of Casanare. While Meta, Arauca and Vichada as territories benefited from national policies to build roads, improve health services and education, open branch offices of the *Caja de Crédito Agrario* (Agrarian Savings and Loan Association), build air fields and expand telecommunication services, Casanare - with the exception of one planned colonization effort, San Luis de Palenque, that was sponsored by the

national government - received little aid from Tunja (Ramírez A. 1954, 9-13). The monthly million-peso subsidy was cancelled during the first year and not reinstated until 1971. Moreover, in his report published in 1956, the governor of Boyacá, Alfredo Rivero Valderrama, made no reference to the reintegration of Casanare into his department and offered no information about its progress (Colombia 1956, 145-180).<sup>5</sup>

Whatever Rojas Pinilla's good intentions for the *llanos* might have been, the resurgence of violence there in 1954 forced him to order the army's VII Brigade in Villavicencio to resume fighting against guerrilla activities in Meta, Arauca and Casanare a year later. In August 1954, Jorge Bejarano, a well-known doctor and head of the Office of National Rehabilitation, expressed his reservations concerning government policies in an article entitled "*Futuro y destino de los Llanos Orientales.*" Observing that the National Territories had always suffered the misfortune of being an appendix to the Ministry of Government, an office subject to frequent turnover of ministers, Bejarano wrote, "This rich territory inhabited by Colombians who neither complain nor vote is easily ignored by the government and tragically forgotten" (Bejarano 1954, 15-17). The dictator's efforts to address the problems in the *llanos* did nothing to change the traditional economic and social structure that had existed there since colonial times. The large ranchers retained their position at the top of the social and economic scale while their workers were no better off than they had been before 1948. For the *campesinos* the peace of 1953 meant recognition of the fact that they were legitimate occupants of their land, but for the *terratienientes* (large landowners), it simply meant a return to the status quo in the region (Ramsey 2000, 252). In Casanare, which had received almost no aid from the departmental government, the gulf between the rural people and the landowners was especially great. Under the rule of the National Front, the resentment of the former would materialize in a determined campaign to rid themselves of rule by Boyacá.

<sup>4</sup> The standard defense of Rojas Pinilla in English is Fluharty 1957. For a critical view, see Galvis and Donadio 1988.

<sup>5</sup> "Speech of the Governor of the Department of de Boyacá, June 1955," 145-180.

### Casanare and Boyacá during the National Front

After the forced departure of Rojas Pinilla on May 10, 1957 and a year of rule by an interim military junta, a unique political arrangement known as the National Front went into effect when Alberto Lleras Camargo, a Liberal, won the first post-Rojas election and assumed the presidency on August 7, 1958. Under an agreement known as the Pact of Sitges signed in 1957, whatever the election results might be, Conservatives and Liberals were to share power equally for the next 12 years, with the presidency alternating every four years. Furthermore, all legislative bodies were to be divided equally, all congressional legislations would require a two-thirds majority to take effect, a minimum of ten percent of the national budget was to be assigned to education, and women were to enjoy equal political rights.

Numerous studies about this period have concluded that the policies adopted by the four presidents who governed during National Front met with only mixed success since despite satisfactory growth in the economy, improvement in public education, and gestures toward social reform, the overall patterns of inequality remained and none of the four administrations was able to suppress a growing leftist insurgency (Bushnell 1993, 223).<sup>6</sup> Governance of the national territories underwent a variety of reforms, mostly for the better, but Casanare, as a province of Boyacá, saw little change, despite an inflow of migrants that increased the population from 22,987 in 1951 to 85,184 in 1973 (Colombia 1951, 1973).

### Casanare in 1960

A comprehensive picture of conditions in Casanare in 1960 can be found in a report dated August 4 sent by special inspector Manuel Olivero Eslava to Rodrigo Noguera Laborde, the General *Procurador* of the Nation. Olivero's mission was to investigate the breakdown of public order in the province where *cuatrerismo* was increasing along with a corresponding number of murders and robberies. Two years before the national government had appointed retired Coronel Eduardo Román Bazurto to head the Civil and Military Directorship for the province of Casanare, which was located in

Yopal. Román Bazurto had organized a *Cuerpo de Carabineros* (Cavalry Corps) consisting of ninety of Casanare's native sons who were "risking their lives, recovering cattle, capturing outlaws and restoring peace." Unfortunately, by 1960 these men had not been paid for a year and refused to continue serving, which resulted in increased crime. Olivero made several recommendations regarding the need to support the corps and improve the judicial system. He absolved Col. Bazurto, now also ruling as prefect, of any wrongdoing, but Olivero was clearly shocked by Boyacá's misrule of the *llanos*.

Casanare was the only "province" from the viewpoint of political and administrative division that existed in Colombia at that time. Created on Dec. 29, 1948 by the Departmental Assembly with Yopal as its capital, the province covered an area of approximately 35,000 kilometers, which represented about one third of the department.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, according to the special inspector, the region lacked "all services that the state should provide." There were no aqueducts, sewers, or health services. Electricity was available in Yopal for only two-and-a-half hours a day, and for only two hours on five days a week in some other localities. Only five of the sixteen municipalities (Yopal, Orocué, San Luis de Palenque, Támara, and Nunchía) had telegraph service. AVIANCA provided air flights once a week to each municipality, except for Yopal and Paz de Aripuro, where flights were more frequent. The *Taxi-Aéreo* firm collected mail in towns with airfields every fifteen days and delivered it to the *Oficina de Reparto* (Delivery Office) in Villavicencio where it remained for another fifteen days. From there it was forwarded on to its destination, but if planes could not land because of bad weather, the mail was returned to Villavicencio to remain there for another fifteen days. As a result, to send correspondence and receive a reply would take approximately three months.

The state of education was abysmal. The province had forty functioning primary schools, but the situation of the teachers was alarming. Living in an exile-like atmosphere due to their isolation, they also face the risk of contracting malaria, yellow fever and tuberculosis. A teacher's salary was 230 pesos a month in 1959. Boyacá raised this stipend to 270

<sup>6</sup> For other studies of the National Front, see Berry, et.al.1980; Leal Buitrago 1984; and Hartly 1988.

<sup>7</sup> During the brief existence of Casanare as an intendency from 1951 to 1953, Trinidad was designated the capital, but the *Violencia* totally destroyed that city. Olivero is very clear that Yopal had become the capital of the province by 1960.

pesos in 1960, but no salaries had been paid at all as of August of that year. The prefect was responsible for paying the teachers, but since his entire budget for 1960 was only 700,000 pesos, he did not have sufficient funds to cover this expense. Unable to provide for their families, the teachers resorted to asking for monthly contributions of five pesos from each parent in order to continue working.<sup>8</sup>

On January 17, 1961 Guillermo Carreño published “*Casanare y Boyacá*,” an editorial in *El Tiempo* that underscored Olivera Eslava’s observations. Carreño wrote that nearly every town in the province lacked the most essential services: telegraph, telephones, roads, aqueducts, sewers, electricity, and sufficient schools. The Cusiana road connecting Sogamoso with Yopal was the only one that penetrated the *Llanos* from the highland region, but without reliable bridges, it was virtually impassable during the winter. Ranchers and merchants of Sogamoso had repeatedly pleaded with the Minister of Public Works and the Departmental Assembly to solve these problems. The Minister had stated that he would do what he could, but neither the governor nor the assembly had responded. Carreño predicted that the people of Casanare would petition for the region’s return to intendancy status, but he was doubtful that even this change would resolve the fundamental problems of the province (*El Tiempo*, January 17, 1961).

Two weeks later Liberal leader Carlos Lleras Restrepo toured seven towns in Casanare, where he learned of other major difficulties besetting the region: i.e., lack of adequate credit and the need for irrigation. Even more important was cattle rustling which continued to expand because of the absence of any force to combat the outlaws. The people of Casanare praised the work of the so-called “*Rurales del Llano*” (Rural Police of the *Llano*) commanded by Prefect Román Bazurto, but noted that there were not enough of them to patrol the enormous area of the province. What was needed was an expansion of

the DAS (Administrative Department of Security) with a force located in Yopal so that it could control problems in Monterrey, Maní, Aguazul, Tame and Trinidad.<sup>9</sup> Lleras Restrepo also discovered that the greatest desire of the people was separation from Boyacá and the creation of an intendancy. Everywhere he went, *llaneros* complained about their state of abandonment. They told him:

We are Colombians, but we do not have the benefits of civilization and culture. For this reason, we trust that you will be our voice before the central powers. And we trust that sooner or later, our troubles will be resolved (*El Tiempo*, January 30, 1961).

After listening to their grievances, Lleras discussed the ongoing agrarian reform and said that it would be one of the lifesavers for the *llanos*. But he also told the people that they must work together by forming syndicates and economic groups “to defend yourselves from misery and to demand what you have the right to receive.” Lleras continued:

Until you empower yourselves with the spirit of association, it will be very difficult to make people understand what is required to meet the needs of the *Llano*. I want to help you in any way I can. But you must help me by working foreconomic vindication (*El Tiempo*, January 30, 1961).

In 1962, two municipalities of Casanare sent letters to the Minister of Government in Bogotá to complain about Boyacá’s neglect of the region. On May 30, a petition signed by numerous citizens in Támara reported that twenty days earlier three members of the National Police had entered the town at 10:00 p.m. They attacked the Telecommunications Office and other private establishments, killing one man and spreading terror throughout the town. Although informed of these events, neither governor nor prefect responded, leaving the impression that they considered such acts of violence to be simply common occurrences that did not require further action. The petitioners asked the Minister of Government to intervene and to send a technician with spare parts to restore the telecommunications service as quickly as possible. Three months later a petition from Yopal dated August 22 and signed by 200 people urged the Minister to send a special investigator to look into the misdeeds of the town’s drunken mayor who, along with his secretary, had been threatening

<sup>8</sup> *Archivo General Nacional* (General National Archive, hereafter AGN), Box 14, Folder #118 Office of the Minister. Report of Manuel Olivero Eslava, visitor to Rodrigo Noguera Laborde, General *Procurador* of the Nation, August 4, 1960. There is further confusion here over the actual capital of Casanare. Ordinance #69 passed by the Departmental Assembly on November 23, 1960 stated that Trinidad was to be the capital of the Province of Casanare, but subsequent documents suggest that Yopal remained the capital, perhaps because of its closer vicinity to the proposed *Carretera Marginal de la Selva* highway and the problems involved in reconstructing Trinidad. See *El Boyacense*, August 26, 1961, No. 2810.

<sup>9</sup> Created in 1960, the DAS was in charge of handling matters of intelligence, security and constitutional enforcement.



citizens at gunpoint and putting them in jail (*El Tiempo*, January 30, 1961).

The minister's reply was not recorded, but the disconnection between Tunja and Casanare was even more dramatically revealed by a horrific accident that occurred on January 16, 1964. On January 15, the governor of Boyacá, Gustavo Romero Hernández, left Tunja to begin an eight-day tour of the *llanos*. His first public act was to inaugurate a recently completed bridge over the Cravo Sur River. The bridge, built by engineer Gustavo Patiño Roselli to connect two sections of the Yopal-Pore-Sogamoso highway, was financed by contributions from citizens of Yopal through *Acción Comunal* (Community Action), a forty-thousand peso subsidy from the department, and two million pesos from the national government.<sup>10</sup> Suspended by cables over the rocky riverbed, it was 30 meters long and designed to bear a weight of 1600 kilos. On January 16, Governor Romero Hernández, his entourage and a welcoming committee assembled in the middle of the bridge to begin the ceremony when one of the cables snapped, catapulting the dignitaries onto the rocks below. Of nearly fifty people who were on the bridge at the time, only six survived unharmed. The mayor of Sogamoso, a pilot and a manager of Avianca, as well as a worker were killed outright: others, including Governor Romero Hernández, Representative Luis Hernández Vargas, the prefect of Casanare and Patiño Roselli were gravely wounded (*El Tiempo*, January 16, 1964).

*El Tiempo* gave the accident extensive coverage including photos and a comment to the effect that a group of 140 soldiers had been scheduled to cross the bridge the following day (*El Tiempo*, January 17, 1964). An editorial written by César Castro Perdomo provided grim perspective by emphasizing the folly of building a bridge that was only capable of accommodating 1600 kilos - the equivalent of four persons on horseback or four head of cattle - when it would have to support the weight of herds of 200 or 300 heads of cattle at one time. Moreover, he noted that the engineers seemed to have forgotten that the bridge would also have to support the weight of tons of salt that ranchers would have to transport across it to supply their cattle. The tragic accident brought

into focus the plight of cattle ranchers in Casanare, who were forced to ship their cattle by airplane to Villavicencio or Sogamoso because of the lack of roads, an expensive alternative that contributed to the high cost of meat. Castro had high praise for the work of the *Caja de Crédito Agrario* in Casanare, but he suggested that it should have a branch in each municipality to enable ranchers to acquire the materials and vaccines they needed for their cattle. In addition, the Bank of the Republic (the nation's central bank) should open salt agencies in each town, since all salt had to be imported from Sogamoso at that time.

Castro was critical of the efforts of the government of Boyacá. He wrote, "It appears to me indispensable that the Government of Boyacá do a better job of maintaining the roads and occasionally using its public works equipment to make them viable as passageways to the municipalities." He noted that many towns were still waiting for access to telecommunications services and that health centers, which the national government was supposed to supply, still did not exist in five municipalities. In a novel suggestion, Castro recommended that the prefecture of Casanare be split in two, and that the towns of Orocué, Trinidad, San Luis de Palenque, Nunchía, Támara, Pore, Sacama and Hato Corozal be consolidated into a second prefecture known as Olmedilla (named after Francisco Olmedilla, one of the heroes of Independence) with its capital at Paz de Ariporo. With this division, he argued, the towns remaining under Yopal's control would receive better services.

Finally, Castro asserted that based on its past history Casanare should be elevated to the status of a department because it had been the cradle of liberty and the birthplace of one of the nation's presidents, Salvador Camacho Roldán, and the people of Casanare were true patriots, men of peace, tireless workers and creators of wealth. As such, they merited the kind of administration that would allow them to elect their own senators and representatives who might truly work to solve the region's problems. Castro concluded, "May the lamentable accident that occurred this week prompt the national and departmental governments to think more broadly about the type of public works that correspond to the needs of the *llanos* of Casanare which form a considerable part of the future of Colombia (*El Tiempo*, January 21, 1964). Congress did not

<sup>10</sup> *Acción Comunal* (Community Action) was a program of self-initiated social action established by law in 1958 and administered by the *Fondo de Desarrollo Comunal* (Community Development Fund).

seriously consider making Casanare a department in 1964 and *El Tiempo* reported on January 29, 1965 that conditions were getting worse. The national government had suppressed the annual subsidy to the prefecture, thus forcing it to rely solely on what the department might provide. Since the prefecture could no longer send subsidies to the various municipalities, twenty rural schoolteachers lost their jobs. Also suspended was a mobile health unit that used to travel between municipalities to provide medical services. Although the health centers promised by Governor Romero Hernández had been built and equipped in five towns, there were no doctors to man them. In fact, only two doctors were available in the entire prefecture, one in Yopal and the other in Aguazul. Work on the road between Aguazul and Maní had been suspended for lack of replacement parts for necessary machinery and the road between Pajarito and Aguazul was in terrible condition despite the summer weather that would normally permit repairs.

In May a newly appointed prefect, Alfonso Camargo Ch. accepted the position on the condition that the department would ensure the provision of money for schools, roads and health centers. The department apparently followed through on this commitment. Thirty-nine schools were again functioning and an engineer was assigned to supervise efforts to repair and maintain the roads. The government also gave money to underwrite completion of the government building in Yopal, maintenance of the prefecture airplane, and installation of radio telephones (*El Tiempo*, January 29, 1965).

The appointment of Antonio Bayona Ortiz as governor of Boyacá in 1967 brought renewed concern regarding the welfare of the region. In order to inform himself about the problems of Casanare, Bayona Ortiz, accompanied by his secretaries, the controller general, and the managers of the *Electrificadora* (Electric Power Company) of Boyacá and the *Sociedad de Acueducto y Alcantarillado* (Aqueduct and Sewerage Company) visited Aguazul, Paz de Ariporo, San Luis de Palenque, Trinidad, Orocué, Maní and Yopal between January 6-9, transported by an air force plane (*El Tiempo*, January 4, 1967). On his return to Tunja, Bayona reported that the trip had been very satisfactory and that he would work to integrate Casanare more completely into the rest of the department. Notwithstanding “the skepticism of many inhabitants of the region because of the

abandonment in which they found themselves,” his committee had been well-received. Bayona was visibly shocked by the slow progress in the towns he visited. Confessing to a reporter that “Casanare is undoubtedly a region forgotten by both the national and the departmental government,” he promised to begin a three-step program to benefit the region. First, to make departmental action more widely felt, he ordered the prefect of Casanare to participate in deliberations of the Council of Government in Tunja where he would have the opportunity to suggest solutions for the most pressing necessities. Second, a departmental secretary would exercise more effective control over the prefecture and all the municipalities of Casanare. Finally, drawing on the information they had obtained on their visit, his co-workers would devise the programs that were indispensable for incorporating the *llanos* into the department’s development goals. Bayona concluded, “In this way I hope to create an emergency plan that will favor such a rich Colombian region” (*El Tiempo*, January 13, 1967).

In his report of September 1967 to Minister of Government Misael Pastrana Borrero, Bayona reported that the sharp fiscal crisis and the lack of a planning committee had crippled action by his government. Nevertheless, he had been able to correct some administrative problems and make rational use of the limited funds still available. With regard to Casanare, he wrote that the prefecture had been given functions similar to those of an *alcaldía de circuito* (circuit mayor), with jurisdiction over all the municipalities in the province. “The present government,” he added, “has been manifestly concerned about this region, and despite scarce economic resources, much has been directed toward the economic and social development of Casanare.”<sup>11</sup>

### The Sesquicentennial of the Campaign of Liberation

In late 1968 Casanare came under renewed scrutiny as Boyacá prepared to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation Campaign of 1819. On November 22 the Departmental Assembly passed Ordinance No.4 1968 “to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the Campaign of Liberation of 1819 that achieved

<sup>11</sup> AGN, Ministry of the Interior, Governors’ Reports 1967, Box 83, Folder 626, Office of the Minister p. 271. Report of Antonio Bayona Ortiz, Sept. 1967 to Minister of Government Misael Pastrana Borrero.

national independence.” The ordinance listed the names of the towns in Casanare that had taken part in the campaign, including those that had already disappeared from the map or were in decay “for lack of official aid.” In reparation for its previous indifference, the department would immediately build a new road to be called the *Carretera de los Libertadores* (The Liberators’ Road). Said road was to branch off from the Socha-San Salvador highway and, leaving from Pore or Nunchía, follow the actual route of the patriot army across the Andes as closely as possible. To pay for building the road, the department pledged to appropriate 2,000,000 pesos in its annual budget starting in 1969, “but if for some reason the government fails to meet this obligation, the assembly authorizes the transfer of necessary funds from other accounts to cover this amount each year.” The proposed road was to be included in the department’s highway plan and would have preference in the allocation of common funds for highways. Finally, at least four deputies were to be present to represent the department at the various ceremonies planned to celebrate the event in the coming year, (Boyacá 1968, 6-8).

Ordinance 4 was followed by Ordinance No. 46 of December 6, 1968 which authorized the government to negotiate a new air service to facilitate territorial integration. To be specific, the department would hire an air transport company, preferably Satena, to make a weekly flight along the following itinerary: Puerto Boyacá, Paipa, Casanare, Cubará, and back. The agreement would also allow the Industrial Liquor-Producing Company of Boyacá to use the flight to distribute its products. Regretfully, Governor Ernesto Roa Gómez vetoed this measure on the grounds that if Satena had not already established itineraries to the cities mentioned, it was because the company did not consider them financially viable, and the department did not have the funds to subsidize such a venture (Boyacá 1968, 122-123).

Plans for the road, however, did receive support from President Lleras Restrepo. Referring to the improvement and paving of the Sisga-Guateque highway, he reiterated the importance of a road that would open a passageway down the *cordillera* to Casanare. It would thus offer an alternative to the present route leaving from Chocontá which he described as an “archaeological road constructed forty years ago with no technical resources.” Lleras also affirmed that the future of this important area

of Boyacá depended on viable roads connecting Casanare with the highlands (*El Tiempo*, January 8, 1969).

On February 25, 1969, Roa Gómez traveled to Casanare with department officials to inaugurate a new school in Aguaclara that had cost 250,000 pesos, money furnished in part by the Departmental Coffee Growers Committee. Work on the road between San Luis de Caceno and Aguaclara was underway and the governor delivered a check for 50,000 pesos to initiate construction of a suspension bridge over the Upía River at a place known as El Secreto (*El Tiempo*, February 25, 1969).

If the publicity evoked by the celebration of the Liberation Campaign stirred Roa Gómez and the Departmental Assembly to action, it likewise solidified the determination of Casanare’s municipalities to plead once again for separation from Boyacá. Their united effort began after Luis Hernández Vargas introduced a bill into the Chamber of Representatives in May 1969 calling for the elevation of Casanare to the status of a national intendency by January 1, 1970 (*El Tiempo*, August 21, 1969). On June 9, a petition addressed to President Lleras Restrepo and signed by many citizens firmly supported the new legislation. The document noted that the province had previously enjoyed an independence that had been suppressed by Rojas Pinilla when he attached it to Boyacá. If Casanare were dependent on the central government now, it would receive benefits that it had often been denied because it was not part of the national territories, and “the best homage that could possibly be paid to the cradle of liberty and the descendents of the heroes of the Liberation Campaign would be to make Casanare an intendency.” The statement went on to say that *llaneros* were confident that the national government would press for the bill’s passage. Since President Lleras himself had said that “Casanare does not have to thank the republic for anything but the republic has much to thank Casanare for,” the best way to thank Casanare would be to grant it administrative independence from Boyacá.<sup>12</sup>

After this first sally, a flurry of petitions and telegrams followed from the municipal councils of Hato Corozal (July 18), Trinidad (July 28), Támara

<sup>12</sup> AGN MinGob. Office of the Minister, Box #113, Folder 838, Department of Boyacá, 1969. This document does not mention the municipality from which it was sent.

(August 2,) Aguazul (August 9), and Orocué (August 21) in support of the bill. All of them used identical language to state that they were aware of Boyacá's good intentions, but Casanare had previously benefited very little from its rule because the department was very large and Tunja had no means of direct communication with the various municipalities either by road or air. Pointing out the geographical differences between the *llanos* and the rest of Boyacá, the petitions stressed that the creation of an intendancy would result immediately in administrative decentralization - "a situation favorable to our region since Casanare would be a part of the Division of National Territories of the Ministry of Government, but with an independent existence." Alejandro Reyes Posada, private secretary to the Minister of Government, responded to these appeals in writing, stating that the national government could not support the bill before Congress until the legislature had ruled on whether the National Constitution would permit such a change.<sup>13</sup>

Refusing to desist from the campaign, representatives of fourteen of the seventeen municipalities in the prefecture, along with four Chamber of Boyacá representatives, met in Yopal on August 26 to create the Pro-Intendancy Assembly of Casanare. The delegates voted to support the separatist movement and to create a public relations committee to function in Bogotá. Each municipality contributed \$5,000 pesos and the group elected Getulio Vargas to serve as coordinator among the municipal organization, the province and the capital of the republic (Públio Pérez 2011).

On September 10, twenty-six natives of Casanare departed from Aguazul determined to walk 385 kilometers to Bogotá in a well-publicized march in support of this legislation. When the participants reached the capital, the police met them at Calle 67 with Carrera 13 and ordered them to continue their journey by truck. At 8:00 that night, President Lleras Restrepo met with them for forty minutes at the Palacio San Carlos. He promised financial support to modernize Aguazul as well as the rest of the province and that he would also study the viability of creating an intendancy. The *llaneros* reiterated their demands: sewers, aqueducts, money to finish the fair grounds, classrooms, offices of Telecom and the *Caja Agraria*,

a health post, the creation of the intendancy, and a truck to transport them back to Aguazul. The president urged them to draw up a budget for the various projects and to present it before leaving Bogotá in order to expedite the issuance of a check for the amount needed to begin the work. Lleras promised to pay for their overnight lodgings and also to compose a letter in his own handwriting as proof of his support, which the marchers could show to the inhabitants of Aguazul (*El Tiempo*, September 24, 1969).

By 1970, when a second meeting of the Pro-Intendancy Assembly was held, the cause had won the support of various sectors of the national government, the Catholic Church as represented by Father Daniel Salas Baptista of the Apostolic Vicariate of Casanare, and most importantly, the Liberal newspaper *El Tiempo*, whose reporters frequently published articles accusing Boyacá of abandoning its prefecture (Públio Pérez 2012).

### The Final Struggle, 1972-1973

In November 1972, Cornelio Reyes introduced a new bill in the Chamber of Representatives calling for the separation of Casanare from Boyacá and its designation as a national intendancy. This step began the final stage of the struggle of *llaneros* to win their freedom from Boyacá. During the following year, representatives of Boyacá and Casanare took part in an intense debate that continued even after Casanare was declared an intendancy on November 28, 1973. In addition to the traditional arguments that had repeatedly been made by both sides, two new developments came into play - increased crime, especially cattle-rustling in the *llanos*, and the confirmed discovery of exploitable petroleum deposits.

On November 23, 1972, the Chamber of Representatives approved the Reyes Bill in its first debate with 70 votes for and 36 against it - the nays including a majority of the deputies from Boyacá. While delegations from Casanare received the news with great joy, Governor Eduardo Vega Franco reacted strongly against the measure. In a letter to *El Tiempo* published on November 29, he pointed out that Casanare had no need of "autonomy" since it was already the only Colombian province that enjoyed "administrative autonomy." As ruler of the "prefecture", the prefect, who was a native of Casanare,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

had nearly the same authority as the governor of a department. He was free to manage funds coming from both the nation and the department, to appoint and depose agents and collaborators, and to manage the income of Casanare at his discretion. Moreover, he had a good office, an excellent residence, an automobile, a radio-telephone, and a private airplane to allow him to attend meetings of the Departmental Assembly and government councils.

To refute the accusation that Boyacá had been a bad “parent” to Casanare, Vega Franco provided budget figures to show that Boyacá invested approximately 20 pesos for every peso it received from the prefecture, in spite of the demands of other departmental regions and the fact that Casanare contained only seven percent of the department’s population. INCORA, IDEREMA and ICA also provided funds for the prefecture.<sup>14</sup> Vega Franco argued that if Casanare became an intendancy, it would suffer because it would receive from the nation only about 60 percent of the income that was currently being invested (*El Tiempo*, November 29, 1972).

On December 2, Heracio Perdomo, president of the Pro-Independence of Casanare Committee, responded to the governor’s claims. He asserted that regarding Casanare’s so-called “autonomy”, until the last four years the prefect had ruled as a kind of viceroy who in 99 percent of all cases had not been born in Casanare. It was true that the prefect had a more or less adequate house that had been built many years ago but had not been completed until funds were received from Governor Bayona Ortiz in 1967. He did have a private plane, but the money used to keep it running might be better spent on schools or roads. Perdomo also asserted that the income generated in the prefecture did not stay in Casanare. The governor claimed that the department had invested 10,701,400 pesos in Casanare in 1971 when its income was only 1,925,912 pesos, but this figure was wrong. Casanare produced at least 20 times more money for Boyacá. The taxes collected on tobacco, cigarettes, beer and the slaughter of cattle went directly to Tunja and amounted to at least 15,000,000 pesos a year. From the governor’s letter, one could only conclude that Boyacá favored three or

four highland cities while Casanare remained in total abandonment. Therefore, “Boyacá has indeed been a bad father for Casanare” (*El Tiempo*, December 2, 1972).

An editorial by Rodrigo Palacios entitled “La Intendencia: ¿Utopía, engaño o necesidad?” published in *El Tiempo* on November 25 offered a dispassionate appraisal of the issue. While some in Casanare saw the proposed change of status as rectification of the state of abandonment in which the region had remained since independence, in reality it meant that Boyacá would lose nearly one half of its territory. The governor maintained that the separation would hurt Casanare more than Boyacá, which would be able to use funds not sent to the *llanos* to provide for other regions. While the inhabitants of Casanare argued that they had been promised much but had seen little accomplished, the governor asserted that the department had provided help in terms of health, education and roads, and if it had not done more, it was because of its lack of resources (*El Tiempo*, November 25, 1972).

On January 6, 1973, for Boyacá Liberal presidential candidate Alfonso López Michelsen visited Boyacá and Casanare to consult with the Director General of the Police, the Commanders of the First and Sixth Brigades of the Army, Boyacá Governor Eduardo Vega Franco, the head of the Federation of Cattle Ranchers, and other members of the military and business community of the region. The object of the meeting was to formulate plans to fight cattle rustling and land invasions, which according to the participants were “the most serious problems afflicting the *llaneros*.” *El Tiempo* reporter Enrique Santos Calderón, who accompanied López Michelsen, offered a grim description of the region in an editorial published on January 14. He wrote that the deplorable condition of the road from Sogamoso to Aguazul reflected Casanare’s isolation. It was obvious that the prefecture presented profound inequalities in land tenancy and standard of living. That one might travel for hours without seeing a single fence and still remain within the same *hato* confirmed the semi-feudal nature of Casanare. What might appear to be no one’s land actually belonged to great landowners. In addition, hundreds of dispossessed *campesino* families and poor *colonos* were coming from all over the country in search of a piece of land, while Casanare *vaqueros* worked all year for little pay and without any kind of job security.

<sup>14</sup> INCORA (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform), INDEREMA (Renewable Natural Resources Institute), ICA (Colombian Agricultural and Livestock-Raising Institute) were institutions created by the national government in the early 1960s to promote colonization and agricultural reform.

Santos observed that this situation necessarily generated tensions and conflicts. The cattle rustling and land invasions that the *terratenientes* complained about had a fundamental social explanation. They were the product of this extreme inequality and the basic need for land and food. Thus, it was important to distinguish between the *colono* or *vaquero* who stole a steer for food and the robberies committed by outlaw bands. For the *llaneros*, the most pressing problems were the excessive concentration of land in the hands of just a few, the total department's lack of interest in the welfare of the population, the lack of roads, schools, health services and public utilities. Santos Calderón concluded that Casanare needed not only its administrative liberty but social and economic liberty as well (*El Tiempo*, January 14, 1973).

On January 26, members of the Federation of Cattle Ranchers of the *Llanos Orientales* and the Association of Friends of the *llanos* met with Governor Vega Franco and published an eight-point rebuttal to the assertions made by Santos Calderón. First, they denied that there was a problem of excessive concentration of landholding in Casanare. The land subject to invasions was near roads, *hatos*, or establishments with fences around much of the property. The individuals squatting on this land had come from other regions of the country without any previous knowledge of the *llanos*. They did not know how to make their living in such an unfamiliar environment, so they soon exhausted their few resources and were reduced to stealing, unless they were "professional invaders" who made so-called "improvements" and then moved on from place to place.

Second, eighty percent of the land in Casanare was *baldía* (public land), meaning that it had not been legally assigned to owners. Nevertheless, there was a flourishing industry of two million heads of cattle owned by at least 2,000 families, some large and some small. To say that only fifty families exploited the land was false, and moreover, it was not true that there was institutionalized violence.

Third, the most absolute and complete harmony among the inhabitants of Casanare had existed throughout its history. Owners and workers lived together in the same kind of houses, wore the same kind of clothes and ate the same kind of food. Salaries paid to the *vaqueros* were without doubt the highest in the nation, and most of the *vaqueros* were also

small landowners who possessed sufficient means to maintain and raise their families.

Fourth, with the exception of the piedmont zone, the *llanos* were floodlands for six months a year and arid desert the rest of the year - an environment little suited for colonization.

Fifth, the *ganaderos* demanded state intervention to end the wave of insecurity manifested in cattle rustling and the lack of respect for human life. As *llaneros* clamoring for justice, they thanked the governor of Boyacá for his interest in solving the problems "in the richest and most extensive province of his department."

Sixth, they asked the national government to provide roads for the *Llanos*, and to build a modern highway between Sogamoso, Aguazul, Yopal, Nunchía, Pore, and Paz de Ariporo.

Seventh, if it turned out that great quantities of oil were located in the Casanare piedmont, the *ganaderos* believed it would be urgent to attend to this privileged region without delay.

Eighth and finally, the *ganaderos* invited Colombians to visit Casanare in all its different seasons to understand its possibilities and needs. They concluded: "We will not listen to the demagoguery of some resentful people and we will continue fighting for the good of the *llaneros* and the land of Casanare" (*El Tiempo*, January 30, 1973).

Six months later, the ranchers expressed their outrage about the continued lawlessness in Casanare. On August 19, 1973 they met in Yopal to issue an "ultimatum" to the national government pledging that if measures were not taken to stop cattle rustling, they would return to the days of 1957 when Col. Román Bazurto had organized a civil defense force to wipe it out. At that time, President Lleras Camargo had given his complete support to Bazurto and created a rural division of the DAS (Administrative Department of Security).<sup>15</sup> Relative peace had returned until 1965 when the directors of the DAS dismantled this rural force.

Román Bazurto, who was again the prefect of Casanare and attended the meeting, stated that since

<sup>15</sup> Rojas Pinilla created Colombia's intelligence service in 1953, but Lleras Camargo reorganized the department in 1960 and renamed it the DAS (Administrative Department of Security). The DAS was responsible for providing security to state institutions and persons.

1965 ranches like the *Hato Rancho Grande*, which once contained 3,500 head of cattle, had lost their entire herds for two reasons. First, INCORA had brought whole colonies of migrants into the savannas, and these people, without any resources, were killing the cattle for food. Second, gangs of rustlers were seizing cattle either to create new *fincas* (small farms) on public land or to ship the animals to Venezuela. According to Román Bazurto, INCORA had done nothing except relocate people from the interior “like chess pieces” who had nothing to live on and were forced to steal cattle to survive. He estimated that up to fifty percent of the *hatos* in Casanare had been invaded and that the DAS was unable to solve the problem. For the *ganaderos*, the answer was to revive the method authorized by Lleras Camargo, so they proposed the creation of a vigilante force made up of *baquianos* and a total reform of legislation regarding colonization in Casanare (*El Tiempo*, August 19, 1973).

The *ganaderos*’ January 1973 reference to the possibility of petroleum deposits was soon borne out. Intense exploration for oil had begun in March 1971 in Casanare, and Ecopetrol signed association contracts with fourteen foreign companies in the following months (*El Tiempo*, August 22, 1973). Anticipating a successful outcome, the Departmental Assembly passed Ordinance No. 3 on November 6, 1972, which stated that fifty percent of any oil royalties paid to Boyacá would be spent on infrastructure works in Casanare such as roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools while another 30 percent would be invested in the departmental education budget to support schools and other educational centers in the prefecture.<sup>16</sup> On May 23, 1973, *El Tiempo* reported that Intercol was drilling a promising well at Cupiagua. The well was estimated to be 12,500 feet deep, and at 11,000 feet the technicians had found indications that quantities of oil were certainly present (*El Tiempo*, May 23, 1973).

The chance of new wealth derived from oil exploitation upped the ante for control of Casanare and further hardened the determination of Boyacá officials to resist its separation from the department. After meeting with Governor Vega Franco on August 16, Boyacá’s senators declared, “Indissoluble ties unite Casanare with the Department of Boyacá,

and we do not support its independence” (*El Tiempo*, August 16, 1973).

In the meantime, the bill to make Casanare an intendency was moving along having passed debate in the Senate on September 16. Looking forward to its approval, Jesús Medina declared in *El Tiempo* that one hundred thousand inhabitants of Casanare had won the fight after struggling “against wind and tide” to recover the independence sought by their Liberator ancestors. The anticipated intendency would include eighteen municipalities. Yopal with a population of 15,000 would be its capital. For the administration of justice, the municipalities would form part of the Judicial District of Santa Rosa de Viterbo and Tunja. For elections, they would continue to be part of the *circumscripción* (electoral district) of the Department of Boyacá.

According to Medina, Casanare’s redemption would depend on being connected to the *Carretera Marginal de la Selva* (the Jungle’s Edge Road) that extended from Villavicencio to the Venezuelan border, but in the meantime, the condition of its other roads was deplorable. The only acceptable health center was the hospital located in Yopal. In accordance with the Convention on Missions, the Apostolic Vicariate was supporting a teachers’ school for women in Támara, a Minor Seminary in Pore, high schools in Pore, San Luis de Palenque and Orocué, and urban and rural primary schools as well. Insecurity caused by cattle rustling and contraband that was decimating the *hatos* remained the worst problem. Clearly a special armed force would be required to bring it under control (*El Tiempo*, September 16, 1973).

On November 28, President Misael Pastrana signed the bill that converted Casanare into an intendency, but the new regime did not take effect officially until May 15, 1974. An editorial in *El Tiempo* on May 17 celebrated the long-awaited event and called for quickly raising the standard of living throughout the Colombian *llanos* to match those of the rest of the country. Immigration, control of cattle rustling and an end to contraband cattle were among the most urgent needs. As a new intendency, Casanare required “*sui generis* treatment because it gives to the country what it can give, and its intrinsic value needs to be realized, since it had been abandoned for such a long time” (*El Tiempo*, May 17, 1974).

Having been liberated from rule by Boyacá, Casanare now came under direct control of the national

<sup>16</sup> Department of Boyacá: *Ordenanzas 1973* (1973 Ordinances), “Ordinance No. 3 of 1972,” p. 9.

government through the DGIC (General Direction of Intendancies and *Comisarias*). As such, it joined together two other intendancies - Caquetá and Putumayo, and four *comisarias*: Amazonas, Guainía, Vaupés and Vichada.<sup>17</sup> In his report published in July 1974, the director of the DGIC, Dr. Héctor Tamayo Betancur, assessed the new intendancy that had only recently come under his administration. His enumeration of its needs confirmed the demands that the inhabitants had made while languishing while ruled by Tunja: i.e. highways, electrification of 14 of the 18 municipios, aqueducts, sewers, health centers, and the expansion of schools. To attend these needs, Tamayo Betancur budgeted 30,979,000 pesos for 1975 and, although this amount fell far short of the financing required, Casanare had clearly entered a new stage in its development, one soon to be enhanced by royalties generated by vigorous exploitation of the petroleum deposits located in its piedmont region (Pérez Bareño 1986).

### Summary and Conclusion

Ever since Captain Daza traveled from Tunja in 1588 to found the first city in Casanare, the northwest portion of Orinoquia has had an enduring relationship with the highland Department of Boyacá. In colonial times the isolation of the plains by the Andes and the contrast between its tropical environment and the temperate climate of the highland region did not prevent vigorous trade between Casanare and Boyacá. After independence, however, the social and economic effects of the war in the *llanos* left the province too weak to stand on its own. Casanare officially became part of the department of Boyacá in 1858, and although there were periods when it achieved a separate existence as a national territory, the amalgamation of the two regions appeared to be a permanent arrangement after 1905. The inclusion of Casanare gave Boyacá added clout in the political maneuverings of national politics even though its failing economy in the highlands left it unable to attend to the needs of the *llaneros*.

Meanwhile south of Casanare, the road that connected Bogotá to the *llanos* of San Martín, later

known as the Intendancy of Meta, gave that portion of the *llanos* access to the huge market demands of the nation's capital. Villavicencio's position, a scant 120 kilometers from Bogotá, albeit over a very hazardous highway, enabled it to become the "gateway to the *llanos*." Continued economic and population growth and proximity to Bogotá allowed the Intendancy of Meta to attain departmental status in 1959. By contrast, Casanare languished in isolation, beset by problems that could not easily be resolved and which eventually contributed to the ferocious fighting that occurred there during the 1948-53 stage of the *Violencia*.

This review of Boyacá's rule over Casanare suggests that the animosity between the two sections of the department hardened during the National Front Era. Tunja's habitual neglect of the needs of the *llaneros* stimulated the resolve of the casanareños to regain their prized autonomy, and short of that, to accept overlordship by the national government, from which more financial, economic and social aid could be expected. The struggle picked up steam in 1968 with the celebration of the sesquicentennial of the Campaign for Liberation. Anticipating López Michelsen's advice, the municipalities organized to press for their release from rule by Boyacá. The very real possibility of finding oil in Casanare increased determination in Tunja to maintain control over what constituted more than half of its territory, but despite the official argument that Casanare already enjoyed ample autonomy, and the opposition of large landowners, *llanero* efforts won the sympathy of the Catholic Church and *El Tiempo* which unflinchingly emphasized the inadequacies of Boyacá's rule. In the end, Casanare's elevation to the status of an intendancy represented a hard won victory - a second liberation campaign - even as some of the other territories were already looking at the example of Meta and demanding elevation to departmental status.

Separation from Boyacá in 1974, however, did not end the department's influence on its former prefecture. Between 1964 and 1973, Casanare's population increased from 66,613 to 85,184, and by 1984 it was estimated at 146,263 (Colombia 1964, 1973, 1984). The vast majority of these newcomers were people from Boyacá seeking a new life on the plains. Although Casanare shipped much of its cattle to Villavicencio for marketing in Cundinamarca, its trade in cattle and foodstuffs continued to be carried out largely with Sogamoso. For electoral and judicial

<sup>17</sup> By the end of 1974, President López Michelsen replaced the DGIC with a new administrative agency, DAINCO (Administrative Department of Intendancies and *Comisarias*) that continued to rule the territories until their elevation to the category of departments by virtue of the Constitution of 1991.



matters, the intendency was still connected to Boyacá. The Apostolic Vicariate that controlled education in the prefecture and later in the intendency had its headquarters in Támara, just over the border, and attempts to eliminate banditry, contraband and guerrilla activity were often launched from Tunja. Nevertheless, the people of Casanare had won political independence from their highland rival,

and seventeen years later the Constitution of 1991 transformed their intendency into a department, thus bringing them even more complete autonomy.

Department of Intendencies and *Comisarias*) that continued to rule the territories until their elevation to the category of departments by virtue of the Constitution of 1991.

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para citar el presente artículo:

Estilo Chicago autor-fecha:	Estilo APA:	Estilo MLA:
Rausch, Jane M. 2012. "The Second Campaign for Liberation: Casanare's Struggle to Win Freedom from Boyacá during Colombia's National Front Era (1958-1974)". <i>Administración &amp; Desarrollo</i> 40(55): 93-110.	Rausch, J. M. 2012. The Second Campaign for Liberation: Casanare's Struggle to Win Freedom from Boyacá during Colombia's National Front Era (1958-1974). <i>Administración &amp; Desarrollo</i> , 40(55), 93-110.	Rausch, J. M. "The Second Campaign for Liberation: Casanare's Struggle to Win Freedom from Boyacá during Colombia's National Front Era (1958-1974)". <i>Administración &amp; Desarrollo</i> 40.55 (2012): 93-110.