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## The Colombian Treaty Should Be Ratified, October 28, 1914

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It is said that during the session to begin in December the American Senate will vote to give or to withhold its consent to the ratification of the treaty of April 6, 1914, between the United States and the Republic of Colombia. Therefore this particular question is urgent even among the many matters regarding American relations to the Caribbean and to Central and South America which are now brought vividly before us by the European war.

This treaty should be ratified on the broad ground that the United States and Colombia should be friends; that the time for pamphleteering and discussion has been long enough; and that, although the treaty has defects, still we can afford to overlook them for the general purpose in view.

The treaty itself states the purpose of the two countries to be "the settlement of their differences arising out of the events which took place on the Isthmus of Panama in November, 1903." To most Americans the situation is simply this: Incidentally to the preliminaries to the building of the Panama Canal, of which we are justly proud, our relations with Colombia got bungled into a mess and, quite contrary to our wishes, the Colombians were made very sore. This has gone on for eleven years and we should be glad to have it ended. In the category of "most Americans" I do not include those who indulge a "greenery gallery" sentimentality or a myopic hobby in their musings or lucubrations upon foreign policy. Nor do I include those who heed too credulously the songs of the dangerous sirens of peace, disarmament, arbitration, international law, altruistic idealism, and the millenium generally, in international concerns. These, like those who put partisanship before national solidarity, sometimes do us great harm. Perhaps the tragic lessons of Europe will sober them.

Well, representing most Americans, the last administration felt that, to use the language of Mr. Knox, "so far as consistent

principles of justice when applied to the true facts, no effort should be spared in seeking to restore American-Colombian relations to a footing of completely friendly feeling." Therefore, in spite of the unfavorable attitude created by loose and exaggerated partisan statements and attacks, informal negotiations were opened and the United States offered to pay to Colombia \$10,000,000. The United States was to acquire an exclusive option to build a canal by the Atrato route (which it is believed is impracticable and will never be used), as well as the lease of two islands (which we did not particularly need). The chief effect of inserting these stipulations was to give the convention the dignity of a bilateral aspect. This idea, however, was either ignored or misunderstood in Colombia, where these shadowy stipulations of quid pro quo were quite over-emphasized and treated as fresh concessions greedily sought. Bearing in mind the facts, it will be clear that there is no real difference in principle between the adjustment proposed by the Republican administration and the treaty now pending. The Republican administration opened the way for direct settlement on the basis of a payment. The Democratic administration took the way thus opened and increased by \$15,000,000. the payment offered. Whether the Republicans would have increased their financial offer cannot be known because the change of administration relieved them of further direct responsibility in the matter.

The pending treaty (Article 1) contains an expression of regret by the United States "that anything should have occurred to interrupt or to mar the relations of cordial friendship that had so long subsisted between the two nations". In the next paragraph, Colombia "accepts this declaration in the full assurance that every obstacle to the restoration of complete harmony between the two countries will thus disappear". There was nothing of this kind in the Knox draft conventions, but their very proposal as avertures constituted such an expression by our Government, for if we had not regretted the situation we should not have initiated

objection. At first sight the Colombian expression of acceptance seems to tinge the article with an apologetic color, at which the ~~very~~ sensitive might balk, but upon reflection it is seen that it, too, merely states the obvious. We all know that Colombia has felt offended, and with the very acceptance of the treaty goes without saying the honorable obligation that the former feeling shall cease with it, and shall give place to a quite opposite one.

An enlightened and sincere Colombian might well say, "For three-quarters of a century our attitude toward the Isthmus was usually very unfortunate. When it became clear that the United States, as the leading power of the Western Hemisphere and as trustee, in a sense, of the world's interest in this work, must build the canal, we were engrossed in our former malady of revolutions and the play of personal ambitions and rivalries blinded our sight. We forgot that the world would not wait upon our political intrigues at Bogotá. Then came rough urging which aroused our resentment, and we repudiated the Hay-Herran treaty after solemnly signing it. This is regrettable, because it was a pretty good treaty, and because Colombia's development has been immensely retarded by eleven years of disagreeable relations with the United States. In 1909 our government, desiring to clear up the situation, solemnly signed the Root-Cortés treaty. It did not mollify our feelings and we did not think it gave us enough money on account of our former interest in the Isthmus. We also made much of a provision by which we, as friendly neighbors, should accord certain use of our harbors, but most of all we then had a president we were trying to get rid of, and we seized the opportunity to bury him beneath that treaty. We are very sorry that from the first we allowed personal ambitions and domestic politics to make it so hard for the United States to deal with us, and we regret the important part we ourselves thus took in bringing about 'all controversies and differences....arising out of the events from which the present situation....resulted'."

I suppose the two questions are, (1) is Article 1 of the

As to the first, looking broadly at the whole stormy history of Panamanian affairs, it may justly be said that the article might have been drawn with more explicit mutuality. As to this, however, it should be remembered that the mass of the Colombian people have been taught for years to know only one side of this question; that, although this is no affair of ours, still, life is too short to undertake now to change their impression; and that in a transaction like this one, which is above all a friendly one, we can afford to take cognizance of conditions which, strictly speaking, we are under no obligation to heed.

He who was President at the time has said that he took Panama. For seventy-five years more or less interrupted attachment to Colombia had been the object of revolt attempted or threatened by the Panamanians, and very often in protest against the Colombian attitude toward this same question of a canal. The revolution was publicly foretold the moment the Hay-Herran treaty was rejected. Without attempting to guess whether Panama could have seceded if left quite alone, or to measure just how far the then President should have gone under our conventional duty to keep open Isthmian traffic, and without trying to appraise in degree the influence of the United States in the success of the secession, let us assume merely for the purpose of argument that that influence was decisive. Well, then, we have political action. The morality of political action is to be judged by the adequacy of the circumstances which cause it. It may be maintained that Colombian indifference to the urgent need that the United States construct the canal had reached a point justifying political action of the first magnitude. If so, a polite ultimatum delivered with courteous and sympathetic explanations, and not rough demands brusquely communicated, should have been our course. An intelligent regard for Colombian susceptibilities might well have saved the Hay-Herran treaty in spite of the unlucky domestic situation in which the Colombians then found themselves. If such correct diplomatic procedure had failed, then a frank act of war and a real taking of the Isthmus would have caused less ill-

present, and future. If war would have been morally justified, then likewise would have been political action short of war. Our action, whatever it was, was political. Hence the futility of the discussion of arbitration of any of the larger matters, which came to an end when the last administration initiated the negotiations which have led to the treaty now pending.

Adverting to the second question, - that of the propriety of a payment so large as \$25,000,000. - this will cost us \$15,000,000. more than the Hay-Herran treaty would have cost. If the American taxpayer will take this to heart as a lesson that impetuous and unskilful diplomacy is expensive, and that he must insist upon continuity, expert direction and trained and skilful representation in his diplomacy, it will be cheap at the price. The Hay-Herran treaty would have left the zone of the canal in the amorphous condition of a sort of dual extraterritoriality shared with Colombia. It failed to give us that right of eminent domain <sup>beyond the Canal Zone</sup> in relation to strategic considerations which we now have, and which is of great importance. Without further analysis, I believe to be conservative the statement that the existing situation on the Isthmus, in spite of its defects, is \$15,000,000. worth better than that contemplated by the Hay-Herran treaty. Although there be no legal necessity, the United States can well afford to spend this sum in order to terminate years of controversy and bad feeling by the satisfaction of the extremest equity that one friend could give another.

By the Root-Cortes treaty of January 9, 1909, we guaranteed Colombia national treatment as to the transport of products, mails, military force, etc., across the Isthmus, freedom from tolls in the Canal for <sup>its</sup> ~~their~~ warships, and exemption from duty and reduced rates for transshipment across the Isthmus of certain products. In connection with the simultaneous treaty with Panama, that Republic assigned to Colombia the annual payment of ten of the \$250,000. instalments, payments to begin at once instead of after nine years. Colombia, on the other hand, was to recognize the situation as it in fact exists today. The effect of the pending

\$22,500,000. more than it would have done under the root-cortex  
one.

As a coldblooded proposition, what do we get for \$25,000,000.,  
an appalling sum when one considers that it amounts to twenty-five  
cents per capita of the entire population of the United States?  
We paid Spain \$10,000,000. for the Philippines after we had got  
them by the right of political action. Now some people want to  
give away for nothing, without a majority vote of the people,  
what was there bought with some blood and with a bonus of the  
taxpayer's good money. But our most sentimental politicians are  
not likely to try to give away the Canal. Even today we may  
perhaps feel sure of this.

We may keep what we have with the ill-will of Colombia, or we  
may ratify the pending treaty and with it seal a pact of friendship.  
In an absolute study of the question, it is fair to look back to  
1903 and the Hay-Herran treaty. It would have been fair for us  
then to pay what we now propose to pay if we had then got what we  
now have. Moreover, now we shall gain the right to expect, to an  
even greater degree than we could then, the quite special friend-  
ship of the Colombian people. Thus from an absolute point of  
view practical people can be reconciled to the transaction. Still,  
they may ask what the friendship of Colombia is worth to us.

Let me follow that undue reputation for materialism which we  
enjoy abroad and state first the commercial figures. Colombia is  
among the half dozen largest of the twenty Latin-American republics  
Our exports to Colombia lead with about 30% <sup>of all Colombia's exports.</sup> This is only one-third  
of one per cent. of the total exports of the United States. Colom-  
bian exports to the United States constitute about 50% <sup>of all Colombia's exports</sup> and from  
some of the most important Colombian departments this runs as high  
as 70%. Colombia needs capital for railway construction, harbor  
improvements, mining, and many other developments. In view of  
the war this can hardly come <sup>otherwise</sup> ~~elsewhere~~ than from us. On the other  
hand, Colombia affords many opportunities, is near us, and is one  
of the most promising and appropriate fields for the enterprise  
of American citizens. In the second place, the Panama Canal makes

interests cannot exist with safety to us in that region. Our safety there must be assured, as the Chileans say in their excellent national motto, "Per la razon ó por la fuerza" (by reason or by force). Let us try always to assure it "por la razon"., But with this safety is bound up the safety of our immediate neighbors, among which Colombia, bordering upon both oceans, has a place of great importance; and strengthened by special relations with us, Colombia should always be freer from outside anxieties. Thus, with the balance of probable benefit proportionally so in favor of Colombia, we may feel agreeably free of any duress in the relations of the two countries. It is quite certain that until the two countries become friends, the door will remain closed as it now is to practically everything American which can possibly be supplied from any other source, and we shall meet obstructions where we should find sympathetic cooperation. Do we wish to remedy this situation? If so, half measures would defeat the ends in view. The remedy must be complete if it is to have the really important results it should have.

In the far-spread influence of the virile, industrious and enterprising Antioqueños, among the Bogotanos, and elsewhere, the Colombian population of between four and five millions shows, with all its faults, elements of energy and enlightenment which, with gradual emancipation from the old vices of Spanish-American civilization, give ~~good~~ hope for the future. Among the Spanish-speaking peoples of America, whose similarity and solidarity we are accustomed to exaggerate, Colombia is among those countries having the larger proportion of their people of a type and tendency likely to become more and more congenial to our own. However skeptical one may be of Pan-Americanism, here at least is a people geographically nearer and better adapted than many to mutual understanding and intercourse with ourselves.

With conviction that there is no material objection to Article 1, or to the payment contemplated, there remains in some minds the question of what assurance we have that the money to be



will act as a true friend to the United States in our vital political and strategic interests related to the Canal and the zone of the Caribbean, as well as in the financial, commercial, and industrial interests of our citizens in Colombia. In his last message to Congress, President Restrepo recorded the intention that the sum received, if the treaty were ratified, should be devoted to the improvement of means of communication. That it should be devoted to such enterprises as railways and harbor works, and under some wise general plan, and a part, perhaps, to certain educational work of more modern spirit, is undoubted. Also it would be but natural that American experience and advice should be availed of, and American experts and materials made use of in the resulting undertakings. Unfortunately, Spanish-Americans are not supposed to be noted for the qualities of appreciation and steadfastness, and there is room for some cynicism in this direction. Our dignity will not suffer if we refrain from quibbling over the form of this treaty or the sum involved. For the rest, let us make an experiment. Let us trust to the loyalty and chivalry of the Colombians and see what happens. Perhaps they will see that their future lies in friendly cooperation with us. As the Chilean motto intimates, where reason fails there is always force for the protection of vital interests, but with good feeling our vital interests will be Colombia's. As to other interests, such as commerce, with good feeling and with enterprise on the part of our citizens, whose opportunities are peculiar just now, those will take care of themselves. That there should be a flourishing commerce between the two countries is even far more important to the Colombians than to us.

The seal of Colombia bears a picture of the Isthmus of Panama with a ship on each ocean waiting to pass the canal so long dreamed of. For this reminder of a technical loss, the bitterness of which has obscured the vast gain, there should then be substituted the clasped hands of friendship between the two countries, which are natural allies in interest, and between which there should be a full cooperation.

For this the treaty should be ratified.