

## NOTES AND COMMENT

### LATIN-AMERICAN REACTIONS TO THE PANAMA REVOLUTION OF 1903

The part played by the government of the United States in the Panama Revolution of 1903 has received severe treatment at the hands of American critics. Denunciations of the interference attributed to President Theodore Roosevelt often have been abusive to an extreme degree. "Nefarious," "foul play," "shameful and sordid story," "territorial buccaneering," "sneak thief," "bullying"—these are a few examples.<sup>1</sup> Historians frequently have joined this hue and cry, but in more restrained language.

Critics of Roosevelt's "interference" in Panama generally have laid blame upon him for alienating Latin-American friendliness toward the United States. They have said that, as a result of his actions, resentment swept over the countries of Latin America, leaving in its wake permanent suspicion and mistrust. Undoubtedly this view has met with general credence. It is of more than passing interest, then, that the United States diplomats throughout Latin America failed to report to Washington this universal feeling of resentment. Their despatches did not show that the storm of protest raised in the United States found a counterpart in the countries to the south. On the contrary, their reports seemed to indicate clearly a division of opinion and, in some cases, efforts to condone or approve the actions of the United States.

It is true that the diplomatic despatches are far from being an accurate guide to the existing state of public opinion in Latin America. For one thing, the information contained therein is scattered and incomplete. Again, there are obvious reasons why their reports must be used with discretion. There are varying degrees of reportorial skill in diplomats; some are more acute than others in judging the trends of public opinion. There is another consideration which is especially pertinent here since the diplomatic service was more political and less professional in 1903 than today. One of the duties of the diplomat is to "further friendly understanding" of his government in the country to which he is accredited; he thus may have a tendency to minimize

<sup>1</sup> E. Taylor Parks, *Colombia and the United States 1765-1934* (Durham, N. C., 1935), p. 395.

expressions of ill-will which indicate that he is carrying out his functions imperfectly. He might also fear giving offence to the Washington administration by reporting that its policies were arousing antipathy abroad. However, to be aware of these considerations is to be on guard against them. In the absence of evidence of a higher critical value there is justification for an examination of the despatches.

The facts in the Panama case are too well known to require extensive narration. After the rejection of the canal treaty by Colombia in August, 1903, rumors of an impending revolution at the Isthmus of Panama were rife until they culminated in actuality on November 3. In this bloodless uprising an American warship at Colón on the eastern end of the Isthmus assisted materially by abetting a refusal of railroad authorities to transport a body of Colombian troops that had been sent to put down the revolt. Other United States war vessels also appeared on the scene and within three days the United States had extended *de facto* recognition to the new government, and after ten days President Roosevelt formally received the first minister of Panama to the United States, a recognition anything but cautious. The other circumstances which seemed to indicate the complicity of Washington in the affair need not be mentioned here.

Several steps followed on the heels of the revolution which evoked expressions of opinion in Latin America. The United States government, through its diplomatic representatives, notified the other American governments that recognition had been extended to the newly-created state of Panama. The latter country itself addressed communications to some of the governments requesting that they enter into formal relations with Panama. Meanwhile Colombia sent identical notes to her sister Latin-American republics, appealing for their support; the government of the United States was not mentioned in these communications but the appeal for a united stand against the "Yankee peril" was obvious.

The earliest information of Latin-American reactions came from Brazil. On November 20 the American minister there, David E. Thompson, informed the Department of State that the Brazilian government had told him it would be glad to recognize Panama and that it approved all that the United States had done.<sup>2</sup> Thompson next reported that the Brazilian press was apparently indifferent to the events in Panama.<sup>3</sup> Some criticism of the United States had been voiced, but it was not so emphatic as Thompson, presumably, had been

<sup>2</sup> Ms., The National Archives, Division of State Department Archives, Brazil, *Despatches*, Vol. 69, Thompson to Hay, No. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Thompson to Hay, November 21, 1903, No. 88.

led to expect. The *Jornal do Commercio*, Brazil's leading newspaper, commented ironically but not resentfully on the part of the United States in the revolution; in answer to a question put by the London *Times*, the *Jornal* characterized the general reaction of Latin America to the affair as a feeling of "disagreeable surprise."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterward Thompson sent to Washington a copy of Brazil's answer to Colombia's appeal for support, a communication which was so coldly formal as to be discouraging.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile an editorial had appeared in the *Correio da Manhã*, an anti-administration paper of Brazil, vigorously advocating the early recognition of Panama. It took a favorable tone toward the United States and censured Colombia severely for her stubbornness; the Panamanians, it held, had been fully justified in revolting.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence of the development of hostile opinion during the next three months, and early in March the Brazilian government officially recognized Panama. This met with the approval of part of the press; however, the *Jornal do Commercio* again manifested its displeasure by referring to the necessity of the Latin-American countries respecting the principle of territorial integrity.<sup>7</sup>

As 1904 slipped by the United States seems to have been a target of criticism with increasing frequency. This criticism came largely from the *Correio da Manhã* which had taken a favorable attitude toward the United States in the beginning.<sup>8</sup> In December, 1904, Roosevelt's annual message, in which was set forth his "international police power" doctrine, occasioned more references to the Panama affair. Those of *A Noticia* of Rio de Janeiro, while not approving, were not unsympathetic to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Opinion in Chile on the Panama revolution was far from united. The American minister, Henry L. Wilson, telegraphed Secretary Hay on November 21 that the press and the most influential public opinion in the country considered the recent events in Panama to be in the interests of civilization.<sup>10</sup> The proposed canal project was very popular in Chile, and the actions of the United States during and after the revolution seemed to meet with public approval, a feeling which Wil-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, inclosures.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Thompson to Hay, November 27, 1903, No. 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, December 4, 1903, No. 94.

<sup>7</sup> Louis E. Van Norman, "Latin American Views of Panama and the Canal," *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, XXIX, No. 3 (March, 1904), pp. 334-337.

<sup>8</sup> Brazil, *Despatches*, Vol. 70, Thompson to Hay, May 27, 1904, No. 157; June 14, 1904, No. 179, inclosures.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, December 30, 1904, No. 241, inclosure.

<sup>10</sup> Chile, *Despatches*, Vol. 50.

son found was shared by the Chilean government. On the same day he sent a despatch to Washington inclosing articles from the press.<sup>11</sup> The leading papers of Santiago, *El Ferrocarril* and *El Mercurio*, discussed the situation temperately and most of the other papers tended to follow their lead. The former paper expressed itself in a manner particularly friendly to the United States, criticizing Colombia sharply. *El Ferrocarril* argued that if the United States did not assume responsibility at the Isthmus, some European power would soon do so. The United States had acted in complete accordance with its rights under the New Granada treaty of 1846, it was said, and, of course, Chile would profit greatly by the building of the canal in any case. *El Mercurio* was not quite so partial to the United States. It recommended that a practical view of the situation be taken. Although it was pointed out that the building of the canal would be a wonderful blessing, a note of apprehension was apparent in the somewhat tortuous comments of *El Mercurio*.

Other Chilean papers rejoiced at the revolution of Panama and denied that the United States had been at fault. Among these were *Diario Ilustrado* of Santiago and *Porvenir* of Valparaiso.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, *El Ley* of Santiago warned that if there had actually been interference by the United States<sup>13</sup> the situation was serious.

In his despatch of November 21 Henry Lane Wilson commented on the absence of denunciations of the United States, remarking that there had been only a few mild expressions of disapproval. He said that government officials had declared their approval of the course taken by the United States and that only the clerical element in Chile was inclined to censure. He pointed out that Chile was under obligations to Colombia for moral support lent during recent controversies with Peru and Argentina, and consequently felt it necessary to make a show of friendliness to Colombia in her present difficulties. Indeed, after Chile's cold reply to Colombia's circular appeal, the government was questioned in the Chilean Congress on this very point.

It is to be observed that some evidence of Chilean apprehensions came from Brazil, which, however, found no corroboration in Wilson's despatches to Washington. The *Jornal do Commercio* of Rio de Janeiro early in November declared that Chile had manifested vehement disapproval of the actions of the United States in Panama and that the *Imparcial* of Santiago had advocated a joint declaration of Latin-American opposition to the United States. The *Jornal* spoke of

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Wilson to Hay, No. 341.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 50, Wilson to Hay, November 21, 1903, No. 341; Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>13</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 336.

agitation in the streets of Chilean cities.<sup>14</sup> While the extent of the disapproval cited by the *Jornal* may be questioned,<sup>15</sup> the strong antagonism of *Inparcial* to the United States is confirmed elsewhere.

Chile extended recognition to Panama early in March, 1904, along with Brazil and Argentina. Evidence of the subsequent development of Chilean opinion is not available in the Department of State. It may be noted, however, that Roosevelt's December message to Congress found favorable comment in part of the Santiago press despite its remarkable statement of the Latin-American problem.<sup>16</sup>

The despatches from Peru, except for a few unsupported generalities, reveal little of the state of opinion in that country. Quite early, on November 12, the American chargé d'affaires, Richard R. Neill, reported that the news of the Panama revolt had been received with much joy. According to him, there was no dissent at all to this feeling; the leading papers of the country heartily applauded the severance of Panama from Colombia.<sup>17</sup> Peru, like Chile, felt that she would benefit from the building of the canal. Recognition was not to be long in forthcoming; as early as November 14 Neill reported that Peru even then was willing and merely disliked being the first Latin-American country to do so. Peru's reply to Colombia's appeal for support was hardly sympathetic<sup>18</sup> and on December 19 Neill announced that Peru had recognized Panama.

Some time elapsed before the despatches brought any information of the reactions in Argentina. On December 24, six weeks after the United States had formally recognized Panama, the American minister, John Barrett, cabled that the Argentine government had received a request for recognition from the Panama government and was favorably disposed. But an agreement on joint action had been made with several other South American governments and consequently Argentina delayed action. Barrett said that the Argentine foreign minister had expressed the most kindly feelings for the United States; furthermore, he had heard no expressions of sympathy for Colombia and none of suspicion of the United States "beyond a few conventional terms of protestation in one anti-Government paper."<sup>19</sup> However, according to a Brazilian report, apprehension had arisen in Argentina,

<sup>14</sup> Brazil, *Despatches*, Vol. 69, Thompson to Hay, November 21, 1903, No. 88, inclosures.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>16</sup> Chile, *Despatches*, Vol. 51, Ames to Hay, December 14, 1904, No. 403.

<sup>17</sup> Peru, *Despatches*, Vol. 64, Neill to Hay, November 12, 1903, No. 813.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, November 23, 1903, No. 819.

<sup>19</sup> Argentina, *Despatches*, Vol. 42, Barrett to Hay, December 25, 1903, No. 14.

particularly with respect to the apparent haste of the United States in recognizing Panama.<sup>20</sup>

The reports furnished by Barrett did not support the belief that Argentine apprehension was widespread. The American minister found no disagreement in the Argentine press as to the wisdom of accepting gracefully the newest recruit to the Latin-American family; there was dispute only as to the expediency of immediate and independent action in regard to recognition by Argentina. Barrett found little talk of the "Yankee peril" in Argentina.<sup>21</sup>

In support of his analysis Barrett forwarded with his despatch of December 29 notices from several of the more important Argentine journals. The administration organ, *Tribuna*, on December 17 vigorously advocated an early and cordial recognition of Panama by the countries of Latin America. *La Nación*, a conservative paper, on December 18 could see no reason to delay recognition. Two days later, however, the same paper counseled delay. The suggestions of American complicity in the revolution necessitated a little more deliberation, it was said; but *La Nación* carefully avoided anything more than this vague insinuation. *La Prensa* expressed itself in much the same way on December 22. On the same day *El Diario* argued in favor of immediate recognition and against depending on the coöperation of other Latin-American countries.

Early in January the Argentine government was challenged in Congress on its policy toward Panama. A motion was made looking to the postponement of recognition on the ground that the whole business was a dangerous precedent in respect to the future territorial integrity of Argentina, rather than as a gesture meant as a reprimand to the United States.<sup>22</sup> *Tribuna* actively combated the motion, while *La Prensa* supported it, though disclaiming the intention of sitting in judgment on the United States. Barrett remarked that "none incontinently supports or condemns what it chooses to consider the paternal attitude of the United States toward Panama."<sup>23</sup>

In March, 1904, Argentina recognized Panama and Barrett remarked the friendly attitude of the government toward the United States.<sup>24</sup> By this time an American observer had commented on the amiable attitude of the Argentine press. *La Nación* was quoted as failing to see any evidence of guilt on the part of the United States, while

<sup>20</sup> Brazil, *Despatches*, Vol. 69, Thompson to Hay, November 21, 1903, No. 88, inclosure.

<sup>21</sup> Argentina, *Despatches*, Vol. 42, Barrett to Hay, December 29, 1903, No. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Argentina, *Despatches*, Vol. 42, Barrett to Hay, January 14, 1904, No. 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem to idem*, March 3, 1904, No. 41.

*La Prensa* had remarked mildly that apprehension had arisen among those who feared the "Yankee peril."<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, a few months later, *El Diario*, in commenting on a speech by a German on "Yankee Imperialism," applauded warmly and made special mention of the Panama affair.<sup>26</sup>

The American minister to Paraguay and Uruguay, William R. Finch, had little to report on reactions within these countries. On December 23 he sent word to Washington that the Uruguayan government had manifested its readiness to leave the South American concert and recognize Panama independently.<sup>27</sup> Finch said nothing about press comment. Despite his statement, Uruguay's recognition was delayed several months, as was the case with Paraguay. Meanwhile it was reported elsewhere that some of the Uruguayan press had been outspoken in its criticism of the United States, namely, *La Prensa* and *Nacional*.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, *Día* of Montevideo warned against hasty conclusions.<sup>29</sup> Reference to Panama was made in a decidedly hostile article which appeared in the *Montevideo Daily Tribune* in August, 1904.<sup>30</sup>

The American minister to Ecuador, Archibald J. Sampson, reported on December 15 that the government was favorably disposed to Panama but was hesitant because of fear of offending Colombia.<sup>31</sup> Sampson gave no hint in his despatches of the criticism which the conduct of the United States was receiving from the press in Ecuador. An American observer found this criticism to be especially severe.<sup>32</sup> According to this source, *Tiempo* and *Derecho* at Quito, and *Tiempo*, *Nación*, *Telégrafo*, and *Grito del Pueblo* at Guayaquil were unanimous in condemning the United States. *Grito del Pueblo* charged that the United States not only had encouraged, but had forced Panama to secede from Colombia.<sup>33</sup>

From Venezuela the American chargé d'affaires reported on November 22 that he had not yet ascertained the reaction of the government.<sup>34</sup> *El Pregonero* of Caracas already had spoken its mind, however. It assumed an extremely ironic tone toward the United States

<sup>25</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>26</sup> Paraguay and Uruguay, *Despatches*, Vol. 17, Finch to Hay, October 28, 1904, No. 789.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, Finch to Hay, No. 702.

<sup>28</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Paraguay and Uruguay, *Despatches*, Vol. 17, Finch to Hay, August 15, 1904, No. 769.

<sup>31</sup> Ecuador, *Despatches*, Vol. 18, Sampson to Hay, No. 371.

<sup>32</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Venezuela, *Despatches*, Vol. 56, Russell to Hay, No. 223.

and published a cartoon depicting Uncle Sam as a whale, already gorged with Cuba and Puerto Rico, about to gulp down Colombia.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile the President of Venezuela declared that he would not even reply to Colombia's appeal for support. Venezuela, it seemed, had its own grievances against Colombia.<sup>36</sup> Recognition by Venezuela took place early in February, a full month before that of the ABC powers.

In March the favorable attitude of the Venezuelan press was commented upon. *Colaborado Andino* of Mérida and *Combate* of Caracas were both described as strongly supporting the actions of the United States, while the bitterness of *El Pregonero*, as reported in the despatches, was confirmed.<sup>37</sup>

In the middle of November the American Ambassador to Mexico, Powell Clayton, was unable to report any particular reactions within that country.<sup>38</sup> An interesting observation was made elsewhere, however. At Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the ubiquitously observing *Jornal do Commercio* remarked that the Mexican press was blaming Colombia for her stubbornness in the canal negotiations and rejoicing in the prospect of the early construction of the canal. The *Jornal* sourly expressed its doubts that the Mexicans could really approve the actions of the United States with any degree of warmth.<sup>39</sup>

Clayton's despatches in January indicated some misgivings at the Mexican capital. The Department had inquired if he knew whether Mexico was cooperating with any other nation in the matter of recognition. Clayton found no evidence of cooperation, but he did think that the government was regarding the matter unfavorably.<sup>40</sup> Shortly afterward this impression was strengthened. Clayton learned that the government was shying away from recognition and that the whole business was a distasteful precedent in the eyes of the Mexican officials.<sup>41</sup>

Recognition was extended to Panama by Mexico early in March, at the same time as that of the ABC powers. Meanwhile there were reports of divided sentiment in the Mexican press.<sup>42</sup> The "liberal" press was said to be inclined to blame the government of Colombia for the separation of Panama. Included in this category were the

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Russell to Hay, November 25, 1903, telegram.

<sup>37</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, pp. 336 f.

<sup>38</sup> Mexico, *Despatches*, Vol. 165, Clayton to Hay, November 16, 1903.

<sup>39</sup> Brazil, *Despatches*, Vol. 69, Thompson to Hay, November 21, 1903, No. 88, inclosure.

<sup>40</sup> Mexico, *Despatches*, Vol. 167, Clayton to Hay, January 15, 1904, telegram.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, January 18, 1904.

<sup>42</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 337.



semi-official *Imparcial* and *Patria* of Mexico City, *Libertad* of Guadalajara City, and *Correo de la Tarde* of Mazatlán. Some of these considered the "intervention" of the United States necessary although regrettable. On the other hand, the United States was severely indicted by such Catholic newspapers as *Tiempo*, *País*, and *Voz de México*.<sup>43</sup>

In the five republics of Central America the news of the separation of Panama awakened a variety of expressions, ranging from extreme abuse of the United States to amiable condonement. From the meager evidence at hand, Guatemala and Nicaragua seem to have regarded the affair at least with complacency, while, of the others, El Salvador appears to have harbored the most resentment.

Leslie Combs, the United States minister to Guatemala and Honduras, reported on November 24 that the President of Guatemala had expressed his satisfaction with the recent events and his hope that Panama would be annexed to the United States.<sup>44</sup> Early in January Combs disclosed that Guatemala had been negotiating with the governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador for simultaneous recognition.<sup>45</sup> This plan apparently encountered snags, for Guatemala recognized Panama independently on January 14. Honduras, however, seems to have preferred to wait for the action of the large South American powers early in March.<sup>46</sup>

At this time the United States government sent a minister jointly to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. On November 8 this representative, William L. Merry, reported that the revolution at Panama had been quite "unexpected" in these countries. The Costa Rican press, particularly *El Centinela*, had expressed itself in extremely critical terms concerning the part played by the United States. Merry thought that recognition would not be readily forthcoming.<sup>47</sup> Three weeks later he found what he considered a distinct change in opinion. The severe criticism of the United States had abated and the large South American nations were waited upon to set an example in recognizing Panama. The initial outbreak of indignation had been replaced by indifference and occasionally by expressions of sympathy for the Panamanians who were said to have been badly treated by Colombia.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Central America, Guatemala and Honduras, *Despatches*, Vol. 50, Combs to Hay, confidential.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, January 4, 1904, telegram.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, March 5, 1904, telegram.

<sup>47</sup> Central America, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, *Despatches*, Vol. 72, Merry to Hay, No. 885.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem* to *idem*, November 28, 1903, No. 893.

Early in December Costa Rica manifested a willingness to recognize Panama, but evidently disliked being the first to do so. This scruple had no weight for Nicaragua, whose recognition was granted by December 15. On December 18 Merry reported that El Salvador was stubbornly unwilling, while Costa Rica was still waiting for a general movement toward recognition among the other Latin-American republics.<sup>49</sup> The delay was not for long, however, as Merry cabled on December 30 that Costa Rica had granted recognition. It should not be forgotten that Costa Rica had something to gain in the settlement of a boundary dispute with Panama. Indeed the latter seems to have promised a *quid pro quo* in exchange for recognition.<sup>50</sup>

The attitude of El Salvador remained unfavorable. Not until the middle of March, 1904, was recognition forthcoming, after nearly all of South America had acted, and three months after the other Central American states, with the exception of Honduras, which had extended recognition several weeks before. Among the Central American papers most bitter against the United States were *Diario del Salvador*, *Latino Americano*, and *Comercio* of Managua, and *República* of San José. It was admitted generally that the construction of the canal was a necessity, but the United States should have used fairer tactics, it was said.<sup>51</sup>

It is obvious that the material here used does not afford a certain estimate of the state of mind in Latin America. Apart from the hazards inherent in this type of evidence, its scantiness probably reflects the inadequacy of the political reports sent in to the Department of State during this period.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, using all proper caution in its evaluation, it appears clear that Latin America received the news of the Panama revolution with no universal burst of indignation. Whatever the share of the United States in its successful issue, there was not only lack of unanimity, but even sharp dissent from the criticism subsequently directed against the United States.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem to idem*, No. 900.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, *idem to idem*, January 7, 1904, No. 904.

<sup>51</sup> Van Norman, *loc. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>52</sup> For example, there was no indication as to how the Bolivians felt about the affair beyond the report on January 7, 1904, that the government was quite sympathetic toward Panama and was ready to accord recognition at any time. Bolivia, *Despatches*, Vol. 21, Sorsby to Hay, No. 112. In spite of this, recognition was not extended until April.