

William Jennings Bryan and the United States-Colombia Impasse, 1903-1921

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WILLIAM Jennings Bryan was at different times an anti-imperialist and a neo-imperialist. In the role of anti-imperialist are included his relationship to the war with Spain, the Treaty of Paris, and subsequent attempts to obtain freedom for the Philippines and home rule for Puerto Rico.¹ Second, as Secretary of State, the erstwhile anti-expansionist used methods which he had earlier criticized in order to extend American power south of the border. As a result, he continued to support the Platt Amendment in Cuba, and within several months of his resignation as secretary on June 8, 1915, the United States undertook military intervention in the republics of Santo Domingo and Haiti.² His handling of United States relations with Colombia, however, is an illuminating exception which demonstrates his friendship for Latin America and provides an excellent example of his taking a conciliatory attitude toward an aggrieved small power.

Although one cannot prove political motivation in his actions, Bryan may have relished the fact that he was smoothing diplomatic waters roiled by his earlier rival, Theodore Roosevelt. Yet it is true that Bryan's predecessor, Philander C. Knox, failed to comprehend Latin American psychology and had disregarded the sovereign rights of some of the states to the south. His actions created prejudice against him, retarded the very opportunities for American foreign commerce which he sought, and inspired the diplomatic representatives from Latin America to characterize him as the model of all that a Secretary of State should not be.³ If Bryan

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¹ Paolo E. Coletta, "Bryan, Anti-Imperialism, and Missionary Diplomacy," *Nebraska History*, XLIV (September 1963), 167-187; and *William Jennings Bryan. I: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln, 1964), 213-237, 247, 304.

² Selig Adler, "Bryan and the Wilsonian Caribbean Penetration," *HAHB*, XX (May 1940), 198-226. For a critique of the Wilson-Bryan appointments to diplomatic posts in Latin America, see the writer's "William Jennings Bryan and 'Deserving Democrats,'" *Mid-America*, XLVIII (April 1966), 75-98.

³ Sumner Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844-1924* (2 vols., New York, 1928), II, 692.

was a less capable lawyer than Knox and lacked administrative experience, he was nevertheless more of a statesman, for he tried to deal with the Latin American republics as equals and avoid injuring their susceptibilities or their national pride. Above all, like President Woodrow Wilson, he was motivated by a missionary zeal to render disinterested service to less privileged people. Rather than seeking merely the southward expansion of American business, he would increase American influence by identifying the national interests of the Latin republics with the United States. During his first week in office in March 1913 he advised Wilson that the cultivation of Latin American friendship should be placed high on the administration's agenda. Disputes should be settled peacefully; constitutional, economic, and social reform in Latin America was imperative; and morality rather than expediency should be the guide to United States foreign policy.⁴ Nowhere better than in the handling of the Panama-Colombia impasse did he succeed in translating these idealistic principles into reality.

While the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and of William Howard Taft had rejected Bogotá's invitations to arbitrate the differences arising out of the Panama Revolution of 1903, they had sought to effect a just and practical settlement with Colombia and Panama in which Colombia would be recompensed for her "appreciable loss" of the canal site.⁵ In January 1909 the so-called Root-Cortés-Arosemena treaties were written, one between the United States and Colombia, another between the United States and Panama, and the third between Colombia and Panama. All three were interdependent, intended to stand or fall together. Without much ado, the United States Senate approved of the Colombia and Panama treaties, and Panama approved of her treaties with Colombia and the United States.

Colombia, however, was slow to act, for she bitterly resented the events of 1903 which had resulted in the loss of her province, Panama. In the first place, she felt that the United States had exerted undue

⁴ On the original draft of Wilson's "Declaration of Policy with Regard to Latin America," issued March 11, 1913, Bryan wrote: "The reference to government by the consent of the governed was put in at my suggestion." Copy, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. The statement is found in the National Archives, State Department Papers, Decimal File 710.11/102a. Hereafter cited by number only.

⁵ See the correspondence of Secretary of State John Hay in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1903*, 284, 294, 306 (Hereafter cited as *Foreign Relations*, with year); C. L. Jones, *The Caribbean Since 1900* (New York, 1936), 314-326; Graham H. Stuart, *Latin America and the United States* (3rd ed., New York, 1938), 113-114.

pressure on Tomás Herrán, her chargé d'affaires in Washington, and she regarded as somewhat extortionate the terms of the resulting Hay-Herrán Treaty, which granted the United States a canal zone in Panama. Objecting to these terms and to the impingement on her sovereignty, her Senate had unanimously rejected approval, while favoring more negotiation with the United States. Instead of re-opening negotiations, however, Theodore Roosevelt "took Panama" (to use his own later words)—whether by covertly encouraging a rebellion in the province or at least by promptly recognizing the new-born nation and negotiating a canal treaty with it. The government of Colombia was so bitter that it rejected as "inopportune" a proposed visit by Knox, who was making an official tour of Latin America.⁶

During the next year Colombia renewed her call for the arbitration of differences. Favorable reports from United States Minister James T. Dubois convinced Knox that "steps can be taken to reach an understanding," as he told Taft. Consequently he wrote Dubois in December 1912 that "whilst arbitration was before expected, direct negotiations upon some reasonable basis would now be welcome."⁷ Dubois reported that although Colombia was determined to wait in order to deal with the incoming Democratic administration, he wished to drive on to a settlement. He even proposed terms. Knox told him to drop the matter, however, for he believed Dubois' terms (described below) to be "not only exceedingly generous," but "the maximum to which any American administration ought to go in this matter." The Secretary of State also considered asking Taft to transmit to Congress all the correspondence with Colombia.⁸

While a Colombian agent visited other South American countries to secure diplomatic support against the United States, Dubois had his first and last conference with the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Francisco José Urrutia. He offered him \$10,000,000 for Colombia's approval of the tripartite treaties, an option on a canal via the Atrato route, and coaling stations on two islands. In addition he

⁶ A. A. Adeo, Memorandum, March 1912, 711.21/125; George T. Weitzel to P. C. Knox, telegram, March 5, 1912, P. C. Knox Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. See also Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921* (Princeton, 1964), 44-49; and Charles D. Ameringer, "Philippe Bunau-Varilla: New Light on the Panama Canal Treaty," *HAHR*, XLVI (February 1966), 28-52.

⁷ Dubois to Knox, November 25, 1911, 711.21/64 and September 30, 1912, Knox Papers; Knox to Taft, November 29, 1912; Knox to Dubois, December 6, 1912, *ibid.*

⁸ Dubois to Knox, January 31, 1913, 711.21/132, and February 5, 1913, 711.21/139; Knox to Dubois, February 7, 1913, 711.21/133.

proposed the good offices of the United States in settling Colombia's disputes with Panama; arbitration of the reversionary rights in the Panama Railroad (which might cause the United States to pay Colombia some \$50,000,000); and preferential rights for Colombia in using the Panama Canal. As salve for bruised feelings he prefaced the whole with the expression that the United States "honestly regrets anything should have occurred" to interrupt international friendship.

Urrutia rejected the terms, saying that a revolution would occur if he accepted them. Asked what he would accept, he replied: "The arbitration of the whole Panama question, or a direct proposition from the United States to compensate Colombia for all of the moral, physical, and financial losses sustained by her because of the separation of Panama." When Dubois inquired if that were the last word of the Colombia Government in the matter, Urrutia replied simply: "Yes."⁹ Two days later, Dubois raised the financial offer to \$25,000,000 and dropped the request for options and privileges, but again Urrutia refused.¹⁰ Knox thanked Dubois for his efforts and reported to Taft, who replied: "I greatly regret that you have not been able to bring about an agreement which will satisfy Colombia, and that she is in the unreasonable state of mind which your report discloses. . . ." Next day, February 28, Julio Betancourt, the Colombian minister to the United States, told Knox that since "perfect justice" was not available to his country, "there will remain no other recourse but to arbitrate."¹¹ This was the situation which Bryan faced when he took office five days later.

The publication of Knox's report on Colombia in one of Taft's last messages to Congress, on March 1, 1913, had raised many hackles in the American press.¹² It was rumored that Germany opposed a United States settlement with Colombia so that it could obtain a canal site along the Atrato route and other concessions. Accordingly Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock of Nebraska introduced a resolution on April 15 asking President Wilson for all correspondence

⁹ Dubois to Knox, February 17, 1913, 711.21/136; J. Fred Rippey, *The Capitalists and Colombia* (New York, 1931), 105.

¹⁰ Dubois to Knox, February 19, 1913, 711.21/137.

¹¹ Knox to Dubois, February 20, 1913, 711.21/137; Taft to Knox, February 27, 1913, 711.21/142; Julio Betancourt to Knox, February 28, 1913, 711.21/137. Dubois' report is in *Foreign Relations, 1913*, 297-308; an excellent summary of the diplomatic relations of the United States and Colombia to 1914 is in *Diplomatic History of the Panama Canal*, U.S., Senate, 63 Cong., 2 sess., Document No. 474.

¹² Taft's message is printed in *Foreign Relations, 1913*, 296-308. See also Chargé Harrison to Bryan, April 30, 1913, 711.21/166.

on the conference held by Dubois and Urrutia and a copy of Dubois' terms.¹³ Bryan may also have been spurred by news that the British firm of Pearson and Sons, Limited, had obtained oil concessions in Colombia. He promised that he would make a "full study" of the matter and embarked upon an extremely difficult crusade to convince the American people to support a settlement which he considered to be "right." He had Betancourt present Colombia's side of the case and obtained full details from Dubois upon his return from Colombia.¹⁴ On July 18 Bryan told Betancourt that "our nation has its own honor at stake in all matters which involve fair dealing toward other nations" and proposed that the pending questions be adjusted through direct negotiations.¹⁵ He also notified Wilson and suggested an offer of \$25,000,000. Betancourt agreed to direct negotiations, and on September 5 Bryan sent instructions to the new American minister, Thaddeus A. Thomson. Instead of offering the \$25,000,000 which he had mentioned to Wilson, he authorized Thomson to ask whether the Colombian government would accept \$15,000,000 in settlement of claims and differences with both the United States and Panama.¹⁶

Thomson, who arrived in Bogotá on August 10, received special instructions from Bryan and Wilson. First he was to make a formal offer of \$15,000,000, prefaced with the expression of regret "that anything should have occurred to mar in any way whatsoever the close and traditional friendship which has so long existed. . . ." Such words, Bryan told Wilson, "could not be construed as an attempt to apologize for the action of a former administration or to disapprove it," and he asked Wilson if he would accept the statement. Wilson revised the wording but not the intent of regret.¹⁷ However, since Betancourt had said he would refuse \$15,000,000 when Bryan had made the offer informally, Bryan wished to raise the formal offer to \$20,000,000.¹⁸

¹³ American Consul Barranquilla to Bryan, March 19, 1913, 711.21/140. Bryan advised Wilson that submission of the correspondence "would not be compatible with the nation's interest," and Wilson refused to furnish it. *Omaha World-Herald*, December 7, 1913.

¹⁴ Betancourt to Bryan, May 3, 1913, 711.21/169; Bryan to Betancourt, April 15, 1913, 711.21/142; Dubois to Bryan, June 14, 1913; Bryan to Dubois, June 14, 1913, 711.21/167; *Omaha World-Herald*, April 19, 1913; Rippey, *The Capitalists and Colombia*, 106-107.

¹⁵ Bryan to Betancourt, July 18, 1913, 711.21/169.

¹⁶ Betancourt to Bryan, August 19, 1913, 711.21/183; Bryan to Thomson, September 5, 1913, 711.21/183.

¹⁷ Bryan to Thomson, September 29, 1913, 711.21/191.

¹⁸ Bryan to Wilson, September 26, 1913, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

When Thomson carried out his initial instructions, Foreign Minister Urrutia declined to consider \$15,000,000 in full settlement. So did the president of Colombia, who pointed out that the United States had paid Panama \$10,000,000 for a canal zone, but that the zone and Panama itself had been taken from Colombia by the United States. Thomson then suggested that Bryan authorize him to offer a "formal written proposition without any request for coaling stations or canal concessions" and "the most magnanimous [financial] terms possible."¹⁹ Bryan replied: "You can say to the government unofficially that the offer of \$15,000,000 should not be regarded as the limit, but we think it would be better to have Colombia make a counter proposition so that the Government there will get the credit of securing an increase."²⁰

Thus encouraged, Colombia countered with a four-part program: an indemnity to satisfy claims in the matters of the canal and railroad; certain preferential privileges in the use of the canal; a definition of the boundary line with Panama; and an expression of regret for the occurrence of 1903. If these terms were not acceptable, Urrutia would make a counter reply, for he intimated that some of them were put forward "for political reasons, to please politicians who demanded them."²¹ Bryan said that he could not make a proposal on the preferential privileges without knowing what these were or suggest a new boundary line without consulting Panama. Could not Thomson obtain a settlement for fifteen or twenty millions without mention of special privileges or change of boundary?²² Thomson believed that Colombia would settle for \$15,000,000 and an expression of sincere regret for the occurrences of 1903.²³ At Wilson's direction Bryan reworded his offer by dropping the regret but increasing the amount to \$20,000,000, and Colombia happily agreed to undertake direct negotiations on a draft treaty and abandon efforts toward arbitration.²⁴

Meanwhile Bryan told Wilson that he considered some of Colombia's terms unacceptable. Changing the boundary line to suit her would give her nearly a third of Panama. The monetary demand,

¹⁹ Thomson to Bryan, September 12, 1913, 711.21/187.

²⁰ Bryan to Thomson, September 12, 1913, 711.21/187.

²¹ Thomson to Bryan, September 17, 1913, 711.21/189, and September 24, 1913, 711.21/197.

²² Bryan to Thomson, September 19, 1913, 711.21/189.

²³ Bryan to Thomson, September 29, 1913, 711.21/191.

²⁴ Thomson to Bryan, October 6, 1913, 711.21/191. Because of the illness of his wife, Thomson left Bogotá on November 11, 1913 for the United States, and for six weeks the negotiations were conducted by Leland Harrison, the *chargé d'affaires ad interim* in Colombia.

which now stood at fifty millions, he thought fanciful, and he suspected that Colombia would take \$25,000,000. As for the expiatory statement, the United States would express "sincere regret" that an untoward incident had occurred but would not apologize to Colombia. On November 13 Bryan offered for Wilson's approval a dispatch containing a draft treaty which contained the word "regret" in the first article and offered Colombia \$25,000,000, a definition of the boundary with Panama, and preferential rates on canal shipping. Eight days later he reminded Wilson that the Colombian Congress would soon adjourn. On December 17 Wilson finally gave his approval, and on December 19 Bryan forwarded a draft treaty in which, however, he had reduced the monetary indemnity to \$20,000,000.²⁵ Meanwhile, Colombia had placed on reserve oil resources beneath her public lands and, because of American pressure, had caused Lord Cowdrey to withdraw his concession rights.²⁶

Upon receipt of an advance copy of the draft treaty, Urrutia had "asked rather significantly if there were not a mistake due to faulty cable transmission, in the amount of the indemnity."²⁷ The Colombian government assured Bryan that the indemnity would be used for improvements in public works and public health, and that American firms would be invited to bid for the work involved on equal terms with those of other nations. However, Americans in Colombia and in Venezuela warned the Secretary of State that Colombia would use part of it to acquire arms with which to attack Peru and possibly Venezuela, since she had boundary controversies with both nations.²⁸

Perhaps even more important, Colombia began to demand changes in the treaty that tested Bryan's patience for several months.²⁹ When Colombia asked to substitute an apology for mere regrets, Bryan and Wilson stood firm, and on January 14, 1914, Bryan explained: "Aside from the President's unwillingness to use his position to criticize a former President he could not . . . [apologize] without jeopardizing the ratification of the treaty which requires the approval of two-thirds of the Senate. We very much hope that the

²⁵ Bryan to Wilson, November 13, 1913, 711.21/201, and November 21, 1913, 711.21/217a; Wilson to Bryan, December 17, 1913, 711.21/219; Bryan to Harrison, December 19, 1913, 711.21/199.

²⁶ Rippey, *The Capitalists and Colombia*, 109-110.

²⁷ Harrison to Bryan, December 28, 1913, 711.21/222.

²⁸ Harrison to Bryan, January 25, 1914, 711.21/310, and February 16, 1914, 711.23115/2; Thomson to Bryan, June 17, 1914, 711.21/271; Preston M. Goodwin to Bryan, July 6, 1914, 711.21/285.

²⁹ See the correspondence in *Foreign Relations, 1914*, 146-154.

first article will be satisfactory and that the treaty can be completed soon.'³⁰

The passage of time did not change Bryan's stand. On March 9 he told Thomson that \$25,000,000 would be as high as he would go. He would not grant Colombia's demand for an annuity of \$250,000. He said firmly: "There is nothing more to say therefore in regard to that part of the treaty. . . ." He would not renew the offer until Colombia assured him of acceptance. Nor would he intervene in Colombia's boundary dispute with Panama, he said, lest he become involved in negotiations with Panama. And he deemed "impossible" Colombia's demand that her warships and merchant ships be exempted from canal tolls.³¹ When Betancourt called upon him on three different occasions to try to get him to offer thirty millions, saying that this amount would "cinch" the negotiations, Bryan remained adamant and told him to stop haggling and to sign the treaty. This Colombia finally did on April 6,³² and it also called an extra session of its Senate on May 1 to consider ratification.

On April 12 Thomson advised Bryan that Bogotá had capitulated and would publish the treaty on the 15th but warned him not to submit the treaty to the American Senate until it had been approved by the Colombian Congress.³³ On June 6 after much delay the Colombian Senate agreed to it by three to one and the House by five to one.³⁴ A happy Bryan congratulated Thomson and prepared to submit the treaty to the American Senate as soon as the Panama tolls repeal act passed Congress.³⁵ In the meantime he wrote to Wilson:³⁶

An examination of the record in regard to the Colombian treaty, abundantly justifies us in the offer of twenty-five millions. We could not have reasonably offered less, in view of the expectations that were aroused. While this sum was not offered by the Taft administration, it was so nearly offered that it amounts to the same thing, and the regular Republicans ought to assist us in ratifying the treaty. The only people who can oppose it for

³⁰ Bryan to Harrison, January 14, 1914, 711.21/220.

³¹ Bryan to Thomson, March 9, 1914, 711.21/234, and March 14, 1914, copy in Wilson Papers.

³² Bryan to Thomson, March 13, 1914, 711.21/234, and April 3, 1914, 711.21/204a; Thomson to Bryan, April 6, 1914, 711.21/242.

³³ Thomson to Bryan, April 12, 1914, Wilson Papers.

³⁴ Thomson to Bryan, May 2, 1914, 711.21/253, and May 26, 1914, 711.21/267, May 29, 1914, 711.21/270, June 7, 1914, 711.21/274, and June 8, 1914, 711.21/275; Omaha *World-Herald*, April 8, 1914.

³⁵ Bryan to Wilson, May 14, 1914, Wilson Papers.

³⁶ Bryan to Wilson, June 12, 1914, *ibid.* Bryan also meant to submit to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a treaty with Nicaragua and a statement of the Japanese regarding their California land problem.

party reasons are the Progressives, and I hope that we may have the support of some of them.

Though Bryan and Wilson had given concrete evidence of their pledge to deal honorably in their relations even with a minor power, Democrats as well as Republicans objected to the treaty. George L. Record wrote to Wilson:³⁷

The campaign this fall will turn upon a general attack on your policies. . . . I have not found anybody who approves of the proposition to either apologize or pay money to Colombia on account of the Canal matter. . . . I wish to drive home merely the political point . . . that five out of six men disapprove of this treaty. . . . The Canal has been such a tremendous achievement that the public are in no mood to criticize Roosevelt for any short-cut methods that he chose to adopt in getting the Canal started. . . . The difficulty you will have will be that a lot of people will, rightly or wrongly, assume that the Colombian treaty arises out of a mean and small desire on the part of Bryan to slap at Roosevelt.

Ambassadors Walter Hines Page and James Gerard wrote to Bryan that Britain was unhappy at the prospect that the Colombian merchant marine might receive special privileges in the canal and was further upset upon hearing that American corporations were seeking oil concessions in Colombia.³⁸ At home, the New York *World* supported the treaty, but the Washington *Post* led other anti-Bryan newspapers in opposing it.³⁹

Wilson submitted the treaty to the Senate on June 16, and two days later Bryan made its terms public. A week later he defended the treaty before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a manner that Wilson judged to be "thoroughly sound throughout."⁴⁰ Meantime the indefatigable Betancourt called on Taft to ask him to put in "una palabra"—a confidential word—with the senators with whom he had influence to favor the treaty. On May 15 Taft wrote to Knox:⁴¹

As there are no Senators with whom I have influence, I think his visit to me was a very profitless one. I would like to know what you think of the treaty which Bryan has prepared and the form of the apology or expression of regret which we make in the treaty. Don't you think \$25,000,000 is a good deal of money to give? It seems to me Dubois has been making an ass

³⁷ Record to Wilson, May 9, 1914, Wilson Papers.

³⁸ Page to Bryan, May 18, 1914, 711.21/272; Gerard to Bryan, May 19, 1914, 711.21/271.

³⁹ See, for example, Washington *Post*, June 19, 1914; New York *World*, July 5-12, 1914; Betancourt to Bryan, June 29, 1914, 711.21/282.

⁴⁰ Omaha *World-Herald*, June 19 and 23, 1914; Wilson to Bryan, July 1, 1914, Wilson Papers.

⁴¹ Taft to Knox, May 16, 1914, Knox Papers.

of himself talking too much. When the Colonel [Roosevelt] gets through running his river up hill, I am sure he will have something to say about this Colombian Treaty. I wonder where Root stands in regard to it.

Knox replied: "I agree with you that I do not think Colombia's good will is worth \$25,000,000."⁴²

When he was President, Roosevelt had offered to pay Colombia \$2,500,000. Now on the verge of apoplexy, he issued a press release of two thousand words, dated June 25 and declaring: "The payment of belated blackmail and the mere proposal to make it is an outrage on the honor and a blow to the interests of the American people. . . . An administration that will conclude such a treaty as this treaty for the payment of blackmail to Colombia has forfeited all right to the respect of the people of the United States."⁴³ He also asked Chairman William J. Stone of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for an immediate hearing "because I regard the proposed Treaty as a crime against the United States, an attack upon the honor of the United States, which, if true, would convict the United States of infamy, and a serious menace to the future well-being of our people."⁴⁴

After furnishing Stone the voluminous correspondence on the treaty, Bryan appeared before his committee on June 17 and told its members that the United States would merely pay Colombia for having exercised the right of international eminent domain since 1903. He then defended the treaty in two letters to the committee, pointing out that its language was almost identical with that of the Dubois memorandum drafted in Taft's time.⁴⁵ Since he felt that the American people tended to support Roosevelt rather than the administration, he got Wilson to approve a note for public consumption suggesting that the United States should be generous rather than merely just in settling disputes. He believed that the United States would gain the friendship of Latin America and raise its prestige in that area.⁴⁶ On June 30 Stone told Bryan that the committee had not yet determined whether to take up the treaty or whether to hold hearings if it were taken up. He thought that a majority "rather

⁴² Knox to Taft, May 25, 1914, *ibid.*

⁴³ *New York Times*, June 25 and July 3, 1914; Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York, 1916), 305-342; *Commoner*, XIV (July 1914), 9; editorial, "Roosevelt and Wilson," *The Nation*, XCIX, (July 9, 1914), 35, and "The Week," *ibid.*, XCVIII (May 14, 1914), 558.

⁴⁴ Roosevelt to Stone, July 11, 1914; Elting E. Morrison, *et al.* (eds.), *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (8 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1951-1954), VII, 777-779.

⁴⁵ Bryan to Stone, June 17, 1914, Bryan Papers; Bryan to Stone, June 22, 1914, 711.21/290a, and June 29, 1914, 711.21/305a.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, July 13, 1914.

objects to taking up the treaty at this session” and refuted a report by the *Washington Post* that the committee had invited Roosevelt to appear before it. In reality he had written the former president that he would be notified if the committee took up the treaty and that he could express his views on it if he wished, in person or by letter. “I will go over this matter with you in more details when I see you,” Stone closed.⁴⁷

On August 13 Betancourt pleaded with Bryan to hasten approval of the treaty “in the name of justice,” and Thomson indicated that financial conditions in Colombia were so bad that the treaty should be amended to provide for the payment of the indemnity in installments if this would speed its passage.⁴⁸ On September 5, however, Bryan unhappily wrote Thomson:⁴⁹

So many domestic matters of great importance have occupied the Senate continuously and there has been no opportunity to secure consideration for a treaty if there is serious opposition. The committee has referred the treaty to a subcommittee, but ex-President Roosevelt asks to be heard, and that may open up a discussion of the events of 1903 which, in our judgment, are not material to the present settlement. The President is anxious to have the treaty ratified at this session and I fully share this desire with him but the chances are against it. . . . If I find that any votes can be gained by making the payment in installments, I will let you know. . . .

This much of the letter is printed in the *Foreign Relations* papers. The published version, however, omits two significant passages. One discussed the prospects for approval:

I believe a majority of the Senators would favor the treaty if we could get it to a vote, but we have no satisfactory poll upon which to predicate an opinion. The principal objections urged are, first, the expression of regret which is denounced as an apology, and second, the amount of the money payment. Some have suggested that the regret should be mutual. I think a number of votes could be secured by an amendment expressing regret on the part of both that anything should have occurred, etc., the language expressing regret being the same on both sides. I do not think that any great advantage could be gained by reducing the amount. Those who oppose the treaty oppose it on the ground that Colombia was to blame and that there should be no payment at all. This, of course, is unreasonable, and I am hopeful that few should so express themselves on final vote.

The other suggested an important alteration: “Suppose you discreetly inquire whether a mutual expression of regret would be ob-

⁴⁷ Stone to Bryan, July 30, 1914, 711.21/298.

⁴⁸ Betancourt to Bryan, August 3, 1914, 711.21/326; Thomson to Bryan, August 29, 1914, 711.21/299.

⁴⁹ *Foreign Relations*, 1914, 168.

jectionable if we found that such an amendment would materially aid its ratification.’⁵⁰

When Thomson asked Bryan to “force the issue,” Bryan replied: “I am convinced, after consultation with the Committee on Foreign Relations, that it will be impossible to secure a report on the Colombian treaty at this session, and have so informed the Colombian Minister today. . . . Important questions, both domestic and foreign, have occupied the attention of the Senators to the exclusion of all matters not absolutely necessary.” In addition to paraphrasing the original slightly, the published *Foreign Relations* papers omit Bryan’s comment that he needed thirteen Republican votes to approve the treaty, and that the prolonged session had wearied the senators to the point where a quorum could not be maintained.⁵¹ Even Wilson’s anxious plea for ratification of all pending treaties was disregarded.⁵²

Betancourt wrote to Bryan on February 20, 1915, that, in light of problems aroused by the war in Europe, many Republicans considered it advisable to endorse the administration’s policy in Latin America and settle pending questions in that area.⁵³ Late in February, however, with a bare quorum present, Chairman Stone was blocked when he suggested taking up both the Colombian and Nicaraguan treaties. Several of the committee members opposed reporting the Colombian treaty at the current session or at least until the committee could act upon some proposed amendments. Stone sought a way out of the impasse by asking Wilson to talk to the Democratic members of the committee with Bryan present.⁵⁴ Wilson said that he would raise the “important matter” at the cabinet meeting of February 26 and let Stone know as soon as possible.⁵⁵ Evidently Wilson too failed to impress the committee, for on March 4 Bryan expressed “deep regret” to Betancourt about the delay on the treaty. While he felt that most senators favored it, a “strong and persistent opposition” had made rapid action impossible. However, he was convinced that the new Senate would be much more favorable than the one that had just adjourned. Wilson had considered summoning a special session, then thought it unwise to call back men who had sat in continuous session since March 4, 1913, longer than

⁵⁰ Bryan to Thomson, September 5, 1914, 711.21/299a.

⁵¹ Thomson to Bryan, September 11, 1914, 711.21/302; Bryan to Thomson, September 24, 1914, 711.21/302; *Foreign Relations, 1914*, 169.

⁵² Omaha *World-Herald*, December 16, 1914.

⁵³ Bryan Papers.

⁵⁴ Stone to Wilson, February 24, 1915, Wilson Papers.

⁵⁵ Wilson to Stone, February 25, 1915, *ibid.*

any other in history. Bryan reassured Betancourt that Wilson had lost none of his interest in the treaty, would press its consideration at the next regular session, and appreciated the patience of the Colombians.⁵⁶

Betancourt thanked the secretary, and the publication of Bryan's letter in Colombia restored hope there.⁵⁷ Still, opposition to the treaty in the United States would not down. Albert Shaw, for one, called the indemnity "canalimony" and a confession of guilt for having alienated Panama from Colombia. He objected to "any expression that would reflect upon the good faith and honest dealing of President Roosevelt's administration." To him the treaty seemed "amazing," "meretricious," "vulnerable," and "dangerous," for it gave Colombia \$25,000,000 "for no express reason of any kind" and granted her special rights not accorded to other countries, not even to the citizens of the United States; and he demanded that it be flatly rejected.⁵⁸ Betancourt complained to Bryan about "all sorts of falsehoods and calumnies," particularly about rumors that "political persons and lawyers" had "intrigued" in the writing of the treaty in the United States and that as "associates" of Colombia they would share in the indemnity.⁵⁹ Bryan agreed that these rumors were false, but he could not deny that Betancourt was conducting a very busy lobby on Capitol Hill and a public propaganda crusade. Wilson reinforced Bryan's support by writing: "My personal interest in that treaty has been of the deepest and most sincere sort."⁶⁰

Bryan and Wilson were well aware that the animosity of Colombia—indeed of all Latin America—was directed at Taft and Knox, not at them,⁶¹ and that they were expected to reverse the policies of the Big Stick and Dollar Diplomacy and to give Colombia full redress

⁵⁶ Bryan to Betancourt, March 4, 1915, 711.21/314a.

⁵⁷ Betancourt to Bryan, March 2, 1915, 711.21/318; Harrison to Bryan, March 19, 1915, 711.21/315.

⁵⁸ *American Review of Reviews*, XLIX (May 1914), 528-529; L (July 1914), 10-12; L (August 1914), 148.

⁵⁹ Betancourt to Bryan, April 17, 1915, 711.21/316. Involved in the accusation was Hannis Taylor, an international lawyer and onetime American minister to Spain (1893-1897), who had acted as counsel for Colombia and was credited with "arranging" for the treaty.

⁶⁰ Wilson to Bryan, May 20, 1915, enclosing Wilson to Thomson, February 16, 1915 and Thomson to Wilson, April 16, 1915, 711.21/340; Bryan to Betancourt, April 23, 1915, 711.21/316. See Francisco Escobar (Colombia's consul general in the United States), "Why the Colombian Treaty Should Be Ratified," *The Independent*, LXXXII (July 13, 1914), 60-61.

⁶¹ See "Central American Press Opinion on the New Democratic Administration," in Leland Harrison to Bryan, March 20, 1913, 711.21/155.

for "the piratical and imperialistic ambitions of [their] predecessors."⁶² Indeed, Chargé Harrison told Bryan that while Colombia desired an indemnity, many "Quixotic" Colombians were less interested in money than in making the "moral reparations a *sine qua non* of settlement."⁶³ Nevertheless, with Europe at war and the United States the only source of capital investment, Colombia became more friendly toward the United States and sought ratification of the treaty in order to be able to welcome American industrial and financial enterprise.

No further progress was made on the treaty by the time Bryan left office. It had taken eleven years, from November 1903 to April 1914, to reach agreement. Colombia had approved the Thomson-Urrutia treaty on August 6, 1914, after some six months of diplomatic parry and thrust with Bryan, but the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had not reported on it by July 1915. Some of the opposition in the American press had centered upon the size of the indemnity and the rumor that American politicians and lawyers would receive a considerable share of it. Despite assurances from two Colombian administrations that the indemnity would be used for public works, many Americans believed that they would spend it for arms.⁶⁴ Moreover, William Nelson Cromwell, whose connections with the Panama Revolution were notorious,⁶⁵ was allegedly furnishing money for a campaign to drive Bryan out of the Department of State and so protect himself and Roosevelt.⁶⁶

The principal focus of opposition, however, was Article I, which was made to appear an "apology." Roosevelt thundered about having to "eat crow," and he found ample support in the Senate, particularly in H. C. Lodge, William Borah, Albert Fall, Frank Brandegee, and Porter McCumber, all members of the Foreign Relations Committee. While Lodge naturally denied that he opposed the treaty on partisan grounds, he would not accept it with Article I, no matter whether the expression of regret was made mutual or not. In taking this position he conveniently forgot the Dubois proposal of February 15, 1913, which had stated that the United States

⁶² Harrison to Bryan, April 23, 1913, 711.21/164, and April 30, 1913, 711.21/166.

⁶³ Harrison to Bryan, January 29, 1915, Bryan Papers.

⁶⁴ Latin American Division Memorandum to the Secretary of State, July 27, 1915, 711.21/531.

⁶⁵ Charles D. Ameringer, "The Panama Canal Lobby of Philippe Bunau-Varilla and William Nelson Cromwell," *American Historical Review*, LXVIII (January 1963), 346-363.

⁶⁶ American Legation, Bogotá, received by Index Bureau, Department of State, September 17, 1915, State Department Papers.

“honestly regretted that anything should ever have occurred” to interrupt international friendship and also mentioned the sum of \$25,000,000. Lodge believed that an indemnity of \$25,000,000 was “out of the question” and would approve the treaty only if Article I were omitted and the indemnity dropped to \$10,000,000.⁶⁷ Some of his colleagues called the \$25,000,000 a “hold up”; others, like Borah, would not pay Colombia \$25,000,000 “or anything like it” and refused “to apologize for Panama’s rebellion.”⁶⁸

These opposition views were a serious obstacle to the treaty, for Wilson needed thirteen Republican votes to pass it by a two-thirds majority. The senators, tired by the prolonged session and preoccupied with domestic matters and the European war, were in no mood to reopen an old argument over the events of 1903 which might cast a shadow on Roosevelt. Under the circumstances, it is not at all surprising that discussion of the treaty was based more upon partisanship than upon consideration of facts.

Bryan had shown friendship for Colombia and was moved in part by a desire to obtain justice for her. At least he had gotten Colombia to accept a treaty and also brought her and Panama together for the first time since 1903. He was realistic enough to understand that the indemnity provided by his treaty would quiet anti-Americanism in Colombia and enable that nation to undertake badly needed internal improvements. These, in turn, would enhance her economic status, increase her political stability, and gain the friendship of Latin America while he handled the more important problems emanating from Europe. Last but not least, such a policy would win commercial and financial advantages for the United States. Wilson, busy with the anti-trust law, the tolls question, and Mexico, gave Bryan the lead, heartily approved of his proposals, and backed him all the way.⁶⁹ By so doing he helped Bryan to raise the moral prestige of the United States in Latin America higher than it had ever been since 1903.⁷⁰

For the next six years Bryan, though out of office, continued to advocate approval of the Colombia treaty. But Robert Lansing, his successor, had no more luck than he in getting a busy Senate to take

⁶⁷ Latin American Division Memorandum to the Secretary of State, January 31, 1916, 711.21/715.

⁶⁸ Claudius O. Johnson, *Borah of Idaho* (New York, 1936), 191.

⁶⁹ Josephus Daniels to Henry S. Commager, April 1, 1936, Henry S. Commager Papers.

⁷⁰ Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York, 1954), 104. See also Link, *Wilson, II: The New Freedom* (Princeton, 1956), 320-324.

it up, so that final action was delayed until 1921. By then Roosevelt had been dead for two years, and passions had somewhat subsided. Furthermore, President Marco Fidel Suárez of Colombia, more friendly to the United States than his predecessors, had agreed to eliminate from the treaty any expression of regret, and in addition had greased the way by rescinding a decree for nationalization of oil resources which might have stunted American interests in Colombia. Until that time the British had almost monopolized oil investments in that country; now there seemed to be an opening for the Americans as well.

Whether the hope of oil concessions in Colombia softened the scruples of the Harding administration, the fact remains that in 1921 the Senate approved an amended version of Bryan's treaty which granted the \$25,000,000 but deleted the statement of regret. By paying Colombia so large a sum in "reparations"—or "conscience money"—the senators thus tacitly acknowledged Roosevelt's wrongdoing in 1903.⁷¹ In the years between 1913 and 1915 Bryan would have made the same admission more explicitly if he had succeeded in carrying the Senate with him.

⁷¹ *Foreign Relations, 1919*, I, 763-795; *Foreign Relations, 1920*, I, 823-827; and *Foreign Relations, 1921*, I, 638-645; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (5th ed., New York, 1965), 518; Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present* (2nd ed., New York, 1961), 513; David R. Moore, *A History of Latin America* (New York, 1938), 551; Dana Gardner Munro, *The Latin American Republics: A History* (New York, 1942), 390-391; Rippey, *The Capitalists and Colombia*, 115-122. American investments of about \$4,000,000 in 1913 increased to \$260,000,000 in 1929, of which \$45,000,000 came from American oil companies; Watt Stewart, "The Ratification of the Thomson-Urrutia Treaty," *The Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly*, X (March 1930), 416-428.