

One of the first duties that Congress should undertake, when it reassembles, is to adopt a policy with regard to this great Canal that

will have as its ultimate ideal the creation of what would amount to a natural Strait of Panama.

## HOW THE UNITED STATES ACQUIRED THE RIGHT TO DIG THE PANAMA CANAL

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**N**O other great work now being carried on throughout the world is of such far-reaching and lasting importance as the Panama Canal. Never before has a work of this kind on so colossal a scale been attempted. Never has any work of the kind, of anything approaching the size, been done with such efficiency, with such serious devotion to the well-being of the innumerable workmen, and with a purpose at once so lofty and so practical. No three men in the service of any government anywhere represent a higher, more disinterested, and more efficient type than the three men now at the head of this work—the Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson; Colonel Goethals, the man who is actually doing the digging; and Dr. Gorgas, who has turned one of the festering pest-holes of the world into what is almost a health resort. In eighteen months or so the Canal will probably be in a shape that will warrant sending small vessels through it to test its actual working. Under these circumstances, it is worth while to remember just how it was that America won for itself and the world the right to do a world-job which had to be done by some one, and the doing of which by any one else would have been not merely a bitter mortification but a genuine calamity to our people.

On December 7, 1903, and again on January 4, 1904, as President of the United States, in Messages to the two houses of Congress, I set forth in full, and in detail every essential fact connected with the recognition of the Republic of Panama, the negotiation of a treaty with that Republic for building the Panama Canal, and the actions which led up to that negotiation—actions without which the Canal could not have been built, and would not now have been even begun. Not one important fact was omitted, and no fact of any importance bearing upon the actions or negotiations of the representatives of the United States not there set forth has been, or ever will be, discovered, simply because there is none to discover. It must be a matter of pride to every honest Ameri-

can, proud of the good name of his country, that the acquisition of the Canal and the building of the Canal, in all their details, were as free from scandal as the public acts of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

The facts were set forth in full at the time in the two Messages to which I have referred. I can only recapitulate them briefly, and in condensed form. Of course there was at the time, and has been since, much repetition of statements that I acted in an "unconstitutional" manner, that I "usurped authority" which was not mine. These were the statements that were made again and again in reference to almost all I did as President that was most beneficial and most important to the people of this country, to whom I was responsible, and of whose interests I was the steward. The simple fact was, as I have elsewhere said, that when the interest of the American people imperatively demanded that a certain act should be done, and I had the power to do it, I did it unless it was specifically prohibited by law, instead of timidly refusing to do it unless I could find some provision of law which rendered it imperative that I should do it. In other words, I gave the benefit of the doubt to the people of the United States, and not to any group of bandits, foreign or domestic, whose interests happened to be adverse to those of the people of the United States. In my judgment, history had taught the lesson that the President has very great powers if he chooses to exercise those powers; but that, if he is a timid or selfish man, afraid of responsibility and afraid of risks, he can of course manufacture ingenious excuses for failure to exercise them. At a great crisis in American history Mr. Buchanan had shown himself to belong to the latter type of President; Mr. Lincoln had represented the other type, the type which gave the people the benefit of the doubt, which was not afraid to take responsibility, which used in large fashion for the good of the people the great powers of a great office. I very strongly believed that Abraham Lincoln had set the example which

it was healthy for the people of the United States that other Presidents should follow.

For many years prior to 1903 our Government had been negotiating with foreign Powers to provide for the building of a Panama Canal. By 1902, on the conclusion of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, we had cleared the way sufficiently to enable Congress to pass an Act actually providing for the construction of a Canal across the Isthmus. By this Act the President was authorized to secure for the United States the property of the French Panama Canal Company and the perpetual control of a strip of territory across the Isthmus of Panama from the Republic of Colombia within a reasonable time and at a reasonable price, and, if the endeavor failed, the adoption of the Nicaragua route was authorized.

In October and November, 1903, events occurred on the Isthmus of Panama which enabled me, and which made it my highest duty to the people of the United States, to carry out the provisions of the law of Congress. I did carry them out, and the Canal is now being built because of what I thus did. It is also perfectly true that, if I had wished to shirk my responsibility, if I had been afraid of doing my duty, I could have pursued a course which would have been technically defensible, which would have prevented criticism of the kind that has been made, and which would have left the United States no nearer building the Canal at this moment than it had been for the preceding half-century. If I had observed a judicial inactivity about what was going on at the Isthmus, had let things take their course, and had then submitted an elaborate report thereon to Congress, I would have furnished the opportunity for much masterly debate in Congress, which would now be going on—and the Canal would still be fifty years in the future.

The interests of the American people demanded that I should act just exactly as I did act; and I would have taken the action I actually did take even though I had been certain that to do so meant my prompt retirement from public life at the next election; for the only thing which makes it worth while to hold a big office is taking advantage of the opportunities the office offers to do some big thing that ought to be done and is worth doing.

Under the terms of the Act the Government finally concluded a very advantageous agreement with the French Canal Company. The French Company had spent enormous

sums on the Isthmus. We felt justified in paying the Company only a very small fraction of what it had thus spent. The treaty we made was advantageous to us in a very high degree, and we got what in value was much more than what we paid for it; but the French Company did get something, and if we had not stepped in it would have gotten absolutely nothing. Every step taken by the Government in connection with its negotiations with the French Company and the payment to its official representatives in accordance with the agreement entered into was taken with the utmost care, and every detail has been made public. Every action taken was not merely proper, but was carried out in accordance with the highest, finest, and nicest standards of public and governmental ethics. Doubtless in Paris, and perhaps to a lesser extent in New York, there were speculators who bought and sold in the stock market with a view to the varying conditions apparent from time to time in the course of the negotiations, and with a view to the probable outcome of the negotiations. This was precisely what speculators did in England in connection with the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo, and in our own country in connection with Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and other acts during the Civil War. The rights of the French Company having been acquired, and the difficulties caused by our previous treaties having been removed by the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, there remained only the negotiations with the Republic of Colombia, then in possession of the Isthmus of Panama. Under the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty it had been explicitly provided that the United States should build, control, police, and "protect" (which incidentally means to fortify) the Canal. The United States thus assumed complete responsibility for, and guaranteed the building of, the Canal. Nearly fifty years before, our Government had announced that it would not permit the country in possession of the Isthmus "to close the gates or interfere" with opening one of the "great highways of the world," or to justify such an act by the pretension that this avenue of trade and travel belonged to that country and that it chose to shut it. We had always insisted upon the doctrine thus declared, and at last the time had come when I could reduce it to action. We negotiated with the representatives of Colombia a treaty for building the Canal, a treaty which granted to Colombia even greater advantages than were subse-

quently granted to the Republic of Panama, a treaty so good that after it had been rejected by Colombia, and after we had recognized Panama, Colombia clamored for leave to undo the past and enter into the treaty. But the Colombian Government, for reasons which, I regret to say, were apparently very bad indeed, declined to consummate the treaty to which their representatives had agreed. The Isthmus of Panama was then a part of the Colombian Republic, and the representatives of Panama in the Colombian Legislature at once warned Colombia that the people of Panama would not submit quietly to what they regarded as an utter ignoring of their vital interests. We also, courteously and diplomatically, but emphatically, called the attention of the Colombia representatives to the very serious trouble they were certain to bring upon themselves if they persisted in their action. I felt very strongly that the position that the one-time Secretary of State, Cass, had taken nearly fifty years before was the proper position, and that the United States would be derelict to its duty if it permitted Colombia to prevent the building of the Panama Canal. I was prepared, if necessary, to submit to Congress a recommendation that we should proceed with the work in spite of Colombia's opposition, and indeed had prepared a rough draft of a Message to that effect, when events on the Isthmus took such shape as to change the problem.

The Isthmus was seething with revolutionary spirit. The Central Government of the Republic of Colombia was inefficient and corrupt. Lawlessness had long been dominant in every branch. During a period of something like seventy years there had been only one or two instances in which a President had served out his term. The Republic had repeatedly undergone internal convulsions which completely changed its aspect. Our Government first entered into a treaty with the possessors of the Isthmus of Panama in 1846. At that time the nation with which we treated was known as New Granada. After a while New Granada split up and the Republic of Colombia, another confederation, took its place; and Panama was at one time a sovereign state and at another time a mere department of the consecutive confederations known as Colombia and New Granada. In addition to scores of revolutions which affected successively New Granada and Colombia as a whole, the Isthmus

of Panama during fifty-seven years saw fifty-three revolutions, rebellions, insurrections, civil wars, and other outbreaks; some of the revolutions being successful, some unsuccessful; one civil war lasting nearly three years, and another nearly a year. Twice there had been attempted secessions of Panama, and on six different occasions the marines and sailors from United States war-ships were forced to land on the Isthmus in order to protect property and to see that transit across the Isthmus was kept clear, a duty we were by treaty required to perform, for by treaty we already possessed and exercised on the Isthmus certain proprietary rights and sovereign powers which no other nation possessed. On four different occasions the Government of Colombia itself requested the landing of troops to protect its interests and to maintain order on the Isthmus—the order which it was itself incompetent to maintain. On several different occasions only the attitude of the United States prevented European Powers from interfering on the Isthmus. In short, Colombia had shown itself utterly incompetent to perform the ordinary governmental duties expected of a civilized state; and yet it refused to permit the building of the Canal under conditions which would have perpetuated its control of the Isthmus, and which would at the same time have put a stop to what can legitimately be called government by a succession of banditti. The United States would have shown itself criminal, as well as impotent, if it had longer tolerated this condition of things.

I was prepared to advocate our openly avowing that the position had become intolerable, and that, in pursuance of our duty to ourselves as well as to the world, we should begin the building of the Canal. But my knowledge—a knowledge which, as regards most of the essential points, was shared by all intelligent and informed people—of the feeling on the Isthmus was such that I was quite prepared to see the people of the Isthmus themselves act in such a way as to make our task easier. They felt that it was of vital importance to them to have the Canal built, for they would be its greatest beneficiaries; and therefore they felt such bitter indignation at Colombia's indifference to their interests and refusal to permit the fruition of their hopes that among them there was a literally unanimous desire for independence. Not only was there not a single man on the Isthmus who wished to perpetuate Colombian

control, but all Colombians sent hither, even the soldiers, after a very short residence grew to share the desire of all Panamans for the establishment\* of a separate republic. Hitherto the knowledge that the United States would interfere to stop all disturbances on the Isthmus that interrupted traffic across it had resulted to the benefit of Colombia; and it was this knowledge that had been the chief preventive of revolutionary outbreak. The people of Panama now found themselves in a position in which their interests were identical with the interests of the United States; for the Government of Colombia, with elaborate care, and with a shortsightedness equal to its iniquity, had followed out to its end the exact policy which rendered it morally impossible as well as morally improper for the United States to continue to exercise its power in the interest of Colombia, and against its own interest and the interest of Panama. There was no need for any outsider to excite revolution in Panama. There were dozens of leaders on the Isthmus already doing their best to excite revolution. It was not a case of lighting a fuse that would fire a mine—there were dozens of such fuses being lit all the time; it was simply a case of its ceasing to be the duty of the United States to stamp on these fuses, or longer to act in the interest of those who had become the open and malignant foes of the United States—and of civilization and of the world at large.

Every man who read the newspapers knew that with the failure of Colombia to ratify the Hay-Herran Treaty revolutionary attempts became imminent on the Isthmus. The papers published on the Isthmus themselves contained statements that these revolutions were about to occur, and these statements were published in the Washington and New York and New Orleans papers. From these published statements it appeared that, if the Canal treaty fell through, a revolution would in all probability follow, that hundreds of stacks of arms were being imported, that the Government forces in Panama and Colon were themselves friendly to the revolution, and that there were several distinct and independent centers of revolutionary activity on the Isthmus. It was also announced that the Government at Colombia was hurrying preparations to send troops to Panama to put down the revolution. Of course I did not have to rely merely upon what I saw in the newspapers. From various sources I had

gathered enough to satisfy me that the situation was at least as bad as the papers depicted it. Through two army officers who had visited the Isthmus in September I gained concrete and definite information. They informed me that, owing to the dissatisfaction because of the failure of Colombia to ratify the Hay-Herran Treaty, a revolution was certain to break out on the Isthmus, and that the people were in favor of it, and that it might be expected immediately on the adjournment of the Colombian Congress without ratification of the treaty. In response to my questioning, they said they were certain that a revolution—several different revolutionary movements were being planned independently of one another—would occur immediately after the adjournment of the Colombian Congress in October; while on the Isthmus they had calculated that it would not occur until after October 20, because not until then would a sufficient quantity of arms and munitions have been landed to supply the revolutionaries. Acting in view of all these facts, I sent various naval vessels to the Isthmus. The orders to the American naval officers were to maintain free and uninterrupted transit across the Isthmus, and, with that purpose, to prevent the landing of armed forces with hostile intent at any point within fifty miles of Panama. These orders were precisely such as had been issued again and again in preceding years—1900, 1901, and 1902, for instance. They were carried out. Their necessity was conclusively shown by the fact that a body of Colombian troops had landed at Colon and threatened a reign of terror, announcing their intention of killing all the American citizens in Colon. The prompt action of Captain Hubbard, of the gunboat Nashville, prevented this threat from being put into effect; he rescued the imperiled Americans, and finally persuaded the Colombian troops to re-embark and peacefully return to Colombia.

With absolute unanimity the people of the Isthmus declared themselves an independent republic, and offered immediately to conclude with our Government the treaty which Colombia had rejected, and to make its terms somewhat more favorable to the United States. No bloodshed whatever had occurred, and it could not occur unless we permitted Colombian troops to land. The Republic of Panama was the *de facto* Government, and there was no other on the Isthmus. There were therefore two courses open to us.



One was to turn against the people who were our friends, to abandon them, and permit the people who were our foes to reconquer Panama with frightful bloodshed and destruction of property, and thereby to re-establish and perpetuate the anarchic despotism of the preceding fifty years—inefficient, bloody, and corrupt. The other course was to let our foes pay the penalty of their own folly and iniquity and to stand by our friends, and, as an incident, to prevent all bloodshed and disturbance on the Isthmus by simply notifying Colombia that it would not be permitted to land troops on Panama. Of course we adopted the latter alternative. To have adopted any other course would have been an act not merely of unspeakable folly but of unspeakable baseness; it would have been even more ridiculous than infamous. We recognized the Republic of Panama. Without firing a shot we prevented a civil war. We promptly negotiated a treaty under which the Canal is now being dug. In consequence Panama has for eight years enjoyed a degree of peace and prosperity which it had never before enjoyed during its four centuries of troubled existence. Be it remembered that unless I had acted exactly as I did act there would now be no Panama Canal. It is folly to assert devotion to an end, and at the same time to condemn the only means by which the end can be achieved. Every man who at any stage has opposed or condemned the action actually taken in acquiring the right to dig the Canal has really been the opponent of any and every effort that could ever have been made to dig the Canal. Such critics are not straightforward or sincere unless they announce frankly that their criticism of methods is merely a mask, and that at bottom what they are really criticising is having the Canal dug at all.

The United States has done very much more than its duty to Colombia. Although Colombia had not the slightest claim to consideration of any kind, yet, in the interests of Panama, and so as to close all possible grounds of dispute between Panama and Colombia, the United States some time ago agreed to a tri-party treaty between herself, Colombia, and Panama, by which, as a simple matter of grace and not of right, adequate and generous compensation would have been given Colombia for whatever damage she had suffered; but Colombia refused to agree to the treaty. On this occasion, in my judgment, the United States went to the very

verge of right and propriety in the effort to safeguard Panama's interests by making Colombia feel satisfied. There was not the slightest moral obligation on the United States to go as far as she went; and at the time it seemed to me a grave question whether it was not putting a premium upon international blackmail to go so far. Certainly nothing more should be done. There is no more reason for giving Colombia money to soothe her feelings for the loss of what she forfeited by her misconduct in Panama in 1903 than for giving Great Britain money for what she lost in 1776. Moreover, there is always danger that in such cases an act of mere grace and generosity may be misinterpreted by the very people on whose behalf it is performed, and treated as a confession of wrong-doing. We are now so far away from 1776 that this objection does not apply in that case, and there would be no particular reason why any sentimental persons who feel so inclined should not agitate to have Great Britain paid for the nervous strain and loss of property consequent upon our action in that year and the immediately subsequent years. But we are still too near the Panama incident to be entirely certain that base people would not misunderstand our taking such action in her case; and as there was literally and precisely as much moral justification for what we did in Panama in 1903 as for what we did in our own country in 1776—and indeed even more justification—it is as foolish now to claim that Colombia is entitled, or ever has been entitled, to one dollar because of that transaction as to claim that Great Britain is entitled to be compensated because of the Declaration of Independence.

Not only was the course followed as regards Panama right in every detail and at every point, but there could have been no variation from this course except for the worse. We not only did what was technically justifiable, but we did what was demanded by every ethical consideration, National and international. We did our duty by the world, we did our duty by the people of Panama, we did our duty by ourselves. We did harm to no one save as harm is done to a bandit by a policeman who deprives him of his chance for blackmail. The United States has many honorable chapters in its history, but no more honorable chapter than that which tells of the way in which our right to dig the Panama Canal was secured and of the manner in which the work itself has been carried out.

# AN AMERICAN POLITICIAN IN AN ENGLISH ELECTION

BY EVERETT COLBY<sup>1</sup>

WHEN the news that Parliament was to be dissolved reached me in Switzerland, I packed up and started for England, arriving on the evening of November 29. It didn't take me long to find out what was going on, nor was I long in discovering that I had become a Liberal sympathizer. One good talk with a Conservative has that effect, just as it has at home to talk to a Regular, and I had been thrown almost constantly with Conservatives during the summer in France. I believe they are the same the world over. "Of course all the Liberals were office-seekers." Did you ever hear that argument before? Sounds natural, doesn't it? "They were going to ruin the country." "They were Socialists." "They were Anarchists." "They would drive capital out of England." "They were going to take the bread out of the poor man's mouth." "They were fakers." And then, of course, to finish off strong, they advanced that novel criticism that they were not sincere.

Let me give you an example of a British standpatter. A retired army officer, a cultivated gentleman, a splendid sportsman and a plenty good enough golfer for me, but a rare old mossback just the same, gave me this one day between putts: "Think of it! Men like Lloyd-George and Churchill making their foolish little talks to working people and posing as British statesmen, when only a few years ago our great statesmen made long speeches and quoted Latin." Don't you see how like they all are, clinging to their dead language! Yet, in spite of all the opposition and ridicule, the Progressives in England, like the Progressives at home, are putting legislation on the statute-books, and forcing the Tory party to accept one reform after the other; and so willingly even does the House of Lords now promise to reform itself that one can almost hear the Duke of Beaufort's wail—"I have voted for every crazy thing the Conservative whips have asked me to vote for during the past five years, but I'll be—blanked—if I'll vote to make myself a figurehead."

<sup>1</sup>Special interest attaches to this article because of the prominent part taken by Mr. Colby when he was a State Senator in New Jersey and later in the advancement of progressive political ideas and methods.—THE EDITORS.

It is the old story of forcing the reactionaries out of one ditch into another, and I suppose it will be so until the end of time.

The evening I arrived in London I bought a Liberal paper, and saw a notice to the effect that the Liberal campaign managers, called whips, were in great need of volunteer automobiles to work at the polls, as the law prohibits the hiring of rigs of any description to get out the vote. Thinking it would be a good way to get a glimpse of the workings of their party machinery, I wrote a note offering the service of my car, and, somewhat to my surprise, received, not a letter in reply, but a telegram telling me just where to go on the following day. So there I appeared at the appointed time.

The committee-room of the Master of Elibank, the Liberal candidate, at which I reported, was an empty store in one of the densely populated districts of London. The outside was decorated with Liberal colors, and the windows were plastered with Liberal cartoons. Inside it was as bare as a barn, the only furniture being a long table, upon which were laid a plan of the district and a copy of the registry list. Behind the table the local committeemen were as busy as bees. As I entered, a vender of party ribbons, buttons, and flags offered them for sale, but one of the committee instantly stepped up and notified me that a purchase within the headquarters might invalidate the entire election. That was my first eye-opener to the severity of the Corrupt Practices Act. Having shaken off the vender of ribbons, I introduced myself, and, to avoid any legal complications and in order that I might not get them into any difficulty, told them that I was an American. They replied that they already knew that from the way I talked.

The first thing they did before sending me for voters was to decorate my car with their party colors, a picture of the candidate, and the mystic figures "181" on a huge piece of cardboard. When I inquired what the number was for, it was explained that in theory every car was numbered to prevent confusion, but in fact, on this occasion, the object was to "throw a scare" into their opponents