

ANOMALOUS PANAMA.

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A new treaty between the United States and Panama, signed but not yet ratified, has raised a storm of disapproval in Europe and Latin America. The treaty provides that Panama shall consider itself at war whenever the United States is at war, and that military operations throughout the Republic of Panama shall be under the control of the United States. Even in time of peace American troops shall have access to any part of the nation, and the United States shall have jurisdiction over radio stations and aviation routes.

These provisions have been construed as an extension of American control beyond the Canal Zone to include the whole Republic of Panama. Europe and Latin America have been aroused at this as an encroachment on an independent member of the League of Nations.

Surprise and disappointment over the treaty would be justified if it marked a real American advance from the Canal Zone to the Republic of Panama and if the significance of the advance could be measured in square miles, from the little Canal Zone, 10 miles wide, to the Republic, 70 times as large.

But nations are not to be judged by square miles of land marked off by boundary lines any more than men are to be judged by their shadows on the wall. We have been under the spell of common maps. From maps we imagine that Brazil is a huge nation occupying the heart of South America and that Chile is a narrow strip of country along the Pacific coast, when as a matter of fact these two nations are quite similar in form from the viewpoint of their national structure. The Amazon lowlands and the interior savannahs are merely appendages, and the real Brazil is in the highlands along the Atlantic Coast, as Chile is along the Pacific.

Many nations, particularly new and underdeveloped nations in Latin America, are not understandable as homogeneous areas but rather as active organism, each consisting of a relatively populous and productive nucleus extending its influence over relatively weak, unattractive, and sparsely populated outlying

districts. At the outset boundaries are unimportant, lying somewhere in the unoccupied territory between two nuclei, reached by an equally tenuous influence on either side. It is the heart of the nation that is significant and not the fringes.

It is of little significance that the Republic of Panama has an area of 32,000 square miles extending from the territory of Colombia on the one hand to that of Costa Rica on the other. The boundaries are in districts practically uninhabited and inaccessible and so remote from the centers of the nations concerned that they have not yet been exactly fixed. Most of the area of the country is unoccupied, unproductive, and almost valueless at the present time. Parts of it are held by intractable Indian tribes in complete independence. Only a few communities of secondary importance occupy moderately favorable districts. The country is not remarkable either for production or for natural resources.

The heart of the nation is not a productive district; it is the crossing place of the Isthmus. This crossing place became a center of activity in the early days of the Spanish colonial empire. In the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries a large proportion of the trade of Spain's chief mining districts in the Andes passed across the Isthmus. Pack animals were succeeded by the railway in the 19th century, and activity was renewed with the passage of Californian traffic during the gold rush. The 20th century sees the trade of the Pacific with the North Atlantic passing through the canal.

The only important district in Panama is that near the canal. The Canal Zone is not merely 436 square miles in a nation of 32,000; it is the heart of the country, the one great asset. The two chief cities of the country are at the two ends of the crossing, so close to the canal that they are excluded from the Canal Zone by explicit agreement and form enclaves within it. It is natural that they should be excluded, since they are the only real cities Panama has and one of them is the capital. It is also natural that they should be included under the potential control of the canal authorities, in view of their relation to the canal, which is their source of life.

That the United States controls the greatest asset of the nation is not a cause for resentment by the people of Panama. Unlike some natural resources, this asset cannot be removed. The economic results would not be more satisfactory for Panama

if the canal were controlled locally. The inhabitants of the country have been unable to develop their asset, and are glad to have someone else do it. Whatever truth there may be in the charge that President Roosevelt fomented revolt in Panama against Colombia, there is no doubt that the Panamanians were ready for revolt, or anything, to bring about the one event that would save them from oblivion.

This exposes the fact that the Isthmian crossing place is not merely the nucleus of the Republic of Panama. It has become an outlying district of the great nucleus or cluster of nuclei in the United States. Unlike other cases where two nations are interested in the same territory, there is no conflict here. The interests are different and supplementary. Panama has very little use for the canal but has great interest in its construction, maintenance, and use by others. The United States has more use for it than any other nation. The canal carries more traffic between eastern and western United States than between any other regions of the world.

It is evident that the United States has a natural if not pardonable interest in the canal and adjacent land. It is also evident that the extension of the American control to include not only the Canal Zone and the neighboring cities but the whole republic is a less significant change than the ordinary map would indicate. Much more significant is the fact that the United States has from the outset controlled the very heart of the country under circumstances which preclude real independence for Panama.

The new treaty makes Panama a manifest anomaly as a member of the League of Nations. But in the light of fundamental facts, Panama in the League has always been an anomaly and could not be anything else. The treaty does not produce but reveals the anomaly.

The senate of Panama has failed to ratify the treaty and is said to desire better terms. Perhaps the failure to ratify is due to the disapproval of other nations. But it is significant that the changes desired by Panama are not in the terms which called forth foreign disapproval. Panama is not concerned with American military occupation now any more than formerly. On the contrary what it desires is more participation by the United States in the building of roads and other public improve-

ments, subjects touched upon in the treaty but passed over as unimportant by foreign critics.

What has this analysis to do with diplomacy or with international rights and wrongs? Should the new treaty have been signed? Should it be modified? Should the United States have dug the canal? What should be the policy of the United States with respect to Latin American sensibilities, the Monroe Doctrine, and the League of Nations? Perhaps these are not questions for geographers to answer. Geography may reveal only some of the roots from which the answers spring.