

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CANAL

Not only Congress but the American people should at once be awakened to the vital necessity involved in the problem of the management of the Panama Canal after it is built, and for this reason I wish that the article on another page by Mr. Talbot, setting forth the views of Colonel Goethals, could be distributed as a tract everywhere. The building of the Panama Canal is one of the really great feats (not too numerous) with which mankind can be credited during its history, and second only in importance to its construction will come the question of its proper management. Hitherto everything done in connection with the Canal has reflected the very highest credit upon the people of the United States. The whole history of the undertaking, from the acquisition of the Panama strip to the extraordinarily successful initial and preliminary feat of Colonel Gorgas in perfecting sanitary conditions—a feat without which no further work on the Isthmus could have been attempted—and then to the extraordinarily successful management of Colonel Goethals, has been the history of a monumental achievement in which the highest efficiency has been combined with the highest and most sensitive integrity and disinterestedness. Not one touch of scandal has been connected with the work at any stage, and the only people who have ever been discredited in connection with it are the very few who have attempted to start slanderous stories about some feature of it. The Bishop of British Honduras, Bishop Bury, in an English magazine, the "Treasury," for January last, gave a very interesting account, not only of the titanic work of building the Panama Canal itself, but of the extraordinary success of the Government in caring for the moral and physical welfare of the army of employees who are doing the work. Bishop Bury has had large experience with what has been done by civilized nations in tropical countries. His concluding paragraphs are as follows:

There can be few places where more is done for those engaged in a great undertaking than on the Canal Zone, and I have never yet seen a work where, as far as one

can judge, it has been more the wish and intention of those responsible to "do the thing thoroughly."

The utmost care is taken to keep the place morally wholesome and clean, and, as the Governor appears to be clothed with really absolute and despotic authority, he takes care to keep all the "undesirables" at a distance. This, of course, is not easy, but I am assured that there are a number of officials always on the lookout, and that bad characters, as soon as known, are at once "fired"—a very expressive term for being effectually got rid of and sent off.

It was a great pleasure to me to meet Colonel Gorgas, the medical member of the Canal Commission, under whose superintendence the work of "cleaning up" has been so effectually done, and yellow fever completely banished, and malarial fever brought down to a very low margin, compared with other days.

Colon and Panama have both been rejuvenated, from a sanitary point of view, and altogether I can imagine Panama becoming just the place for a rest cure, and taking its place as one of the health resorts of the world.

This enterprise—and I know of no other of anything like the same magnitude of which it can be said—has aimed from the first at promoting (1) the efficiency of those engaged in it, (2) their physical well-being, and (3) their moral and spiritual good. No one ought to deteriorate there! On the contrary, I can imagine a young man going there, and perhaps being a little bit "slack" in character, but returning to the United States, when his work is done, more efficient, better in health, and braced up in his moral tone; and this, I know I am right in saying, was President Roosevelt's aim when he determined that the Canal should be acquired.

It is most interesting to go and see how, as it has been said, the Americans are "making the dirt fly" at Panama, but to me it has been of the very greatest interest to see how that is being done, and done very thoroughly and encouragingly in a sense of which the inventor of that phrase probably never dreamed.

Mr. Talbot's article incidentally furnishes a fresh illustration of what was really done by myself as President on the occasions when I was denounced as acting "unconstitutionally." After Mr. Stevens's resignation (as to the details of which, by the way, Mr. Talbot is in error), I became convinced that it was imperative that there should be a single head on the Isthmus. Congress clung to the plan of a seven-headed commission. But the President had very great power, implied in the mere fact of being President, which he could use with the utmost advantage if he were willing to take the responsibility and to

look at the matter in the proper way. For two years Congress actually failed to make any provision for running the Panama strip at all, and if the then President had at that time acted in accordance with the views of his critics, the whole work would have stopped—just exactly as it would never have been begun if at that time he had acted in accordance with the views of those same critics. So, when Congress adhered to its seven-headed commission, I solved the difficulty by simply announcing that every recommendation made by Colonel Goethals would be acted upon exactly as if he were the single Commissioner; that he was to be given the entire responsibility and therefore the entire power—and any other Commissioner who did not accept this view or act upon it would have been promptly replaced. Mr. Talbot does not state the case quite accurately when he says that “a continuation of a seven-headed commission can be had only at great cost,” but also that “a one-man control is in spite of law.” This implies that what has been done was contrary to the law, which is not the fact. All that I did was to do what was absolutely necessary so long as the law did not forbid it, instead of leaving undone what was absolutely necessary because the law did not explicitly provide for it—this instance affording a true explanation of many other acts which were denounced as unconstitutional during my administration of the Presidency.

The views of Colonel Goethals as set forth by Mr. Talbot are not merely unquestionably sound, but must be translated into action by Congress under penalty of seeing trouble and even disaster when the attempt to operate the Canal has begun. Half of the present force of employees will be needed for the successful operation of the Canal. The whole work should be put under one man, and, in my judgment, that one man should unquestionably be Colonel Goethals, who knows all the conditions and is infinitely better fit than any one else to make, with least dislocation and most success, the change from the construction of the Canal to its administration. Within a year the work of providing and training the future operative force should be begun. Tolls should be charged exactly as Colonel

Goethals proposes, and without any reference to the protests of the transcontinental railways. The question in connection with our coast trade it is not necessary at the moment to discuss. The policy of the Government in administering the Canal should be announced at once, so that the other great commercial nations of the world may know what they can expect, and shape their policy accordingly. I entirely agree that the United States Government should itself equip and run the plants for fuel, food, laundrying on a gigantic scale, and the like, as advocated by Colonel Goethals. The three hundred and seventy-five million dollars put into the “ditch” will thereby come back to the American people, and the work will be done to far greater public advantage than it could be done by any private firm. It is true also that the Panama Railroad should be run by the same man who runs the Panama Canal, and he should also dominate every other form of activity within the limits of the Canal Zone.

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