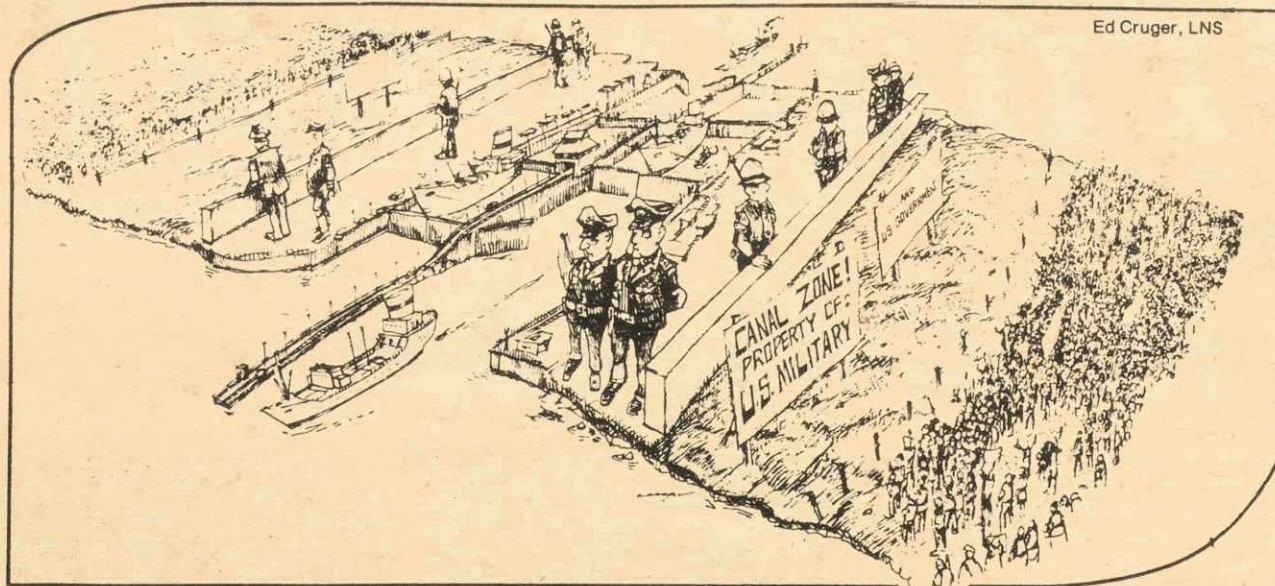


Who will control Panama?



by Don Kinseley

The emergence of Panama as a nation in 1903 was closely related to construction of the canal. After the French had tried unsuccessfully to build a canal, the U.S. negotiated a treaty with Colombia -- of which Panama was a province -- to continue the project. The Hay-Herrán Treaty gave the U.S. one hundred years of administrative control over the land required for construction and operation. When the Colombian Senate hesitated to ratify the treaty, a plot to secede was formulated and carried out by a group of Panamanians who feared to lose the canal to Nicaragua. Panama then hurriedly signed an inequitable canal treaty in exchange for U.S. military protection from Colombia.

The treaty was written by neither Americans nor Panamanians. It was a Frenchman who managed to secure the appointment of Panamanian Minister in Washington and who railroaded the treaty through both governments in an incredible display of political maneuvering. The U.S. Secretary of State, John Hay, readily admitted that the terms of the treaty were, "not so advantageous to Panama."

The main issue of contention in the treaty is that it gives the U.S. control in perpetuity over a fifty by ten mile strip of land, "as if it were the sovereign." In effect then, the Canal Zone became a U.S. colony bisecting Panama. This problematic situation has been worsened by the relative opulence which U.S. Zionians enjoy within a small, developing country.

However, it is more than the physical presence that disturbs the Panamanians. At present the U.S. pays a paltry 2.3 million per year in Canal Zone annuities to Panama. Given that Great Britain receives 35 million per year for the U.S. military base in Malta, it is surely an in-

justice to pay one-seventeenth that amount for 550 square miles containing the canal and 14 military bases. Though the U.S. State Department maintains that a substantial proportion of Panama's G.N.P. is derived directly or indirectly from the Canal Zone, it is also true that low tolls have meant that Panama in effect subsidizes world shipping. Moreover, the chief benefactor of these low rates has been the U.S., for nearly 70 percent of the traffic passing through the canal is bound for or coming from that country.

Panamanian resentment of the massive military installations within the Zone is particularly strong. There are some 12,000 U.S. troops currently stationed in the area. There seems to be no justification for this level of military occupation, as virtually all observers agree that defence of the canal is nearly impossible whatever the troop size. One can only conclude that this force serves as a symbol and reminder of overt action such as that taken in the Dominican Republic in 1965.

The most hated of these military bases is that euphemistically called the School of the Americas. It has been the training ground for a number of repressive Latin American regimes and its existence violates the 1903 treaty which authorized only those bases needed for canal defence.

The Present Era

The January, 1964, antipathy toward the U.S. over the canal resulted in riots in Panama City which left twenty-four dead including twenty-one Panamanians. Diplomatic relations were cut, only to be quickly re-established by President Johnson. By 1967 both administrations had agreed on the terms of a new treaty, which were prematurely made

public, creating a furore in both countries. As a result, the proposed treaty was shelved until General Omar Torrijos came to power following a military coup later in the same year. Torrijos found the document totally unacceptable and proceeded to make the acquisitions of Panamanian control over the canal his political *raison d'être*.

Little progress toward a new agreement was made until 1973, when an incident in the U.N. Security Council recharged the issue. A motion which would have promptly restored sovereignty to Panama was defeated by a U.S. veto. The victory was clearly Panama's however, as the incident attracted much international attention and caused great embarrassment to the U.S. State Department.

The appointment of Ellsworth Bunker as chief negotiator shortly thereafter indicated that the U.S. was serious in working toward a new treaty. Bunker, an experienced elder statesman, is highly respected in diplomatic circles. This appointment set the stage for Henry Kissinger's visit to Panama in February, 1974, when he and Panamanian Foreign Minister Juan Tack signed an eight point statement to serve as a beginning point in any new negotiations. In essence the statement concedes the use of land necessary for canal operations to the U.S. and returns the rest of the Canal Zone to Panama. It also calls for elimination of the perpetuity phrase and provides for modernization of the canal. While many specifics have already been agreed upon, there remains several areas of contention: the duration of the new treaty, the share of economic benefits to each country, the actual amount of land required for canal operation, and an acceptable policy respecting non-discriminatory use of the canal by other nations.

New and Emerging Developments

Some observers have speculated that Torrijos may not be as ready to gain control of the canal as he says. The Zone issue may be the one that has most solidified his support, but Panama has many pressing problems. As long as the canal remains a national cause, attention is somewhat diverted from deficiencies of Torrijos' rule.

The emergence of the canal as a U.S. political issue will probably delay agreement on outstanding problems. A sizeable group of congressmen have seized the issue as one in which the U.S. is about to give away sovereign territory, said to have been "bought and paid for." Their arguments are largely false as the Zone was never purchased, nor is it sovereign. Such rhetorical campaign proclamations serve only to appeal to the American voters sense of nostalgia. Any new treaty will ultimately require congressional approval, and the outcome of the November elections will give an indication of whether or not that approval is forthcoming.

On the other hand, the U.S. State Department (supported by a portion of Congress and more recently by the business sector) has urged that negotiations proceed toward giving Panama a major responsibility in, if not outright control of the canal. In addition to pointing out that the current treaty is unfair and outdated, the State Department maintains that the canal is of decreasing importance to the U.S. and to the world. Today's sophisticated weaponry has to a large extent negated the strategic significance of a waterway between the Atlantic and Pacific. Most American carriers are too large to even pass through the canal. Changing world shipping routes also make the canal less necessary.

It must be concluded that the conciliatory stance adopted by Kissinger is not the product of altruism, a sense of justice, or realization of the declining significance of the canal. It is based rather on hard economic and political realities. Latin America is united behind Torrijos in the canal dispute. There are a number of possible ways of putting economic pressure on the U.S. to give up the canal. Latin America is an area of extensive U.S. foreign investment, and threats to nationalize industries are likely to have a substantial effect. Panama also has a new economic carrot to dangle before the U.S., with the discovery of what has been referred to as the world's richest copper deposit. An assured supply of copper might figure prominently in a new canal treaty.

In view of this situation it should come as no surprise that U.S. business is allied with the State Department in the effort to negotiate a new and more equitable treaty.

The real aim is not "to demonstrate the qualities of justice, reason and vision that have made and kept our country great," but rather to sacrifice one form of imperialism for the sake of another.

The staff and contributors for this issue included:

- Keiji Skijama is a Japanese graduate student at Dalhousie
- Mike Clow, author of a book on education, is a Dalhousie political science student.
- Liz Crocker currently works at the Children Hospital; she visited China last summer.
- Lal Singh, is an Indian student presently studying at Dalhousie
- Mike Lynk, a former Dalhousie student, is at McGill this year for graduate work in political science.
- Harvey MacKinnon is a graduate student in sociology at Dalhousie.
- Elanor MacLean is an area representative for OXFAM-CANADA.
- Jim Robson, a Dalhousie student writing his thesis on Tanzania, was in Southern Africa this summer.
- Don Kinseley is an American student in the School of Social Work.
- Lynn Stow, is a student in the Maritime School of Social Work.
- Chai-Chu Thompon, chairperson of the metro Chinese Cultural centre, was in Peking during the recent earthquakes.
- Dave Wegenast, a Dalhousie student, was in South Africa during the past summer.
- Eric Wood, a NSCAD student, was in Africa this past summer on the Crossroads program.

Editor - Harvey MacKinnon
Associate Editor - Lynn Stow
Contributing Editor - Jim Robson

Production John Dorsey
Val Mansour
Donna Treen
Brad Warner
Allan Zdunich

Judith Marshal
Dave Wegenast
Eric Wood

Letters

To the Gazette:

I was under the impression that the anti-Zionist hysteria which evolved as a result of the infamous United Nations resolution had died down somewhat, but it seems that I was mistaken (your article "A Jewish Alternative to Zionism," September 16, 1976). It was small comfort to note that the article did not originate in Nova Scotia, but was an "import" from the student newspaper at York University in Ontario.

The article, written by a group calling itself "An Alliance of Non-Zionist Jews," exemplifies not only unbelievable ignorance in all matters concerned with Jewish and Israeli history, but, even worse, is based on an international misrepresentation of facts and flimsy statements which are adapted to fit the thesis presented by the authors. There are also photographs of "Israeli brutality" which, even without going into the matter of their authenticity, I would question on their relevance to this seemingly scholarly debate on Judaism and Zionism.

It would not be difficult to disprove all the statements put forth in the article by counter-facts, figures and photographs, but rather than tax the readers' patience, I wish this time, only to comment briefly on the distorted concept of Zionism as expressed by the "learned" writers.

There is no doubt that Zionism evolved, among other things, in order to find a solution to the problem of anti-Semitism. According to the authors of the article the solution should have rather been a "fight against anti-Semitism". However, is it not true to say that this struggle did, in fact, exist for hundreds of years while Jews were in the Diaspora and long before the birth of Zionism? The Zionist movement was born, to a large extent, as a result of the failure of such struggles against anti-Semitism. This failure, as the authors are no doubt aware, was exemplified in no uncertain terms in the Dreyfus and Bailis trials, the pogroms in Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and only a little over a generation ago, by the Holocaust in Europe during which six million Jews were slaughtered. History apart, did the