

PANAMA'S

"FREEDOM"

IS A MYTH

Bayonets Rip Veil of "Independence"

By **MANUEL GOMEZ, Sec'y,**

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ARTICLE I.

It there was ever an act of international politics that tore the cover from a carefully nurtured fiction of international relationships, it is the incursion of American troops into the "Republic of Panama." Panama is supposed to be a free country. Actually, its only freedom consists in that its minister plenipotentiary at Washington has the privilege of importing all the brandy, wine and beer that he wants. The real status of Panama, and of the other little "republics" of Central America and the Caribbean, has now been exposed so plainly that even the readers of capitalist newspapers can see it.

Coolie Conditions in Panama

The workers of Panama labor under conditions which approach in wretchedness those of the oppressed colonial countries of Asia. Wages are pitifully low, while living costs have been mounting steadily. The great majority live in little one-room hovels, for which the landlords have been charging more and more extortionate rents. Rent profiteering became so flagrant that a month ago the worker-tenants in the city of Panama went on strike, refusing to pay rent until an agreement should be reached limiting the earnings of landlords to 12 per cent annually. The strike spread rapidly; it became a mass movement of aroused worker-tenants. Whereupon, General Lassiter, in command of the Canal Zone department of the United States army, sent three battalions of the 33rd infantry into the city "to put down the rioting."

Appropriate Time Picked

The moment selected for the invasion was a fitting one. It was in the midst of a funeral procession which the strikers had arranged for two of their comrades who had been brutally murdered by the police. The American soldiers broke up the demonstration, occupied the strikers headquarters and proceeded to restore "law and order" for the Panamanian landlords. It was a nice, quiet "domestic" affair. Senor Rodolfo Chiari, the dummy president of the republic, called for and obtained the service of U. S. government troops, just as a governor of the state of Pennsylvania or Kansas might request and receive federal troops to put down a strike there. It is a recognized business of the U. S. army to break strikes. American trade unionists know this from bitter experience.

Panamanian workers know it too. This is not the first time that American soldiers have invaded their territory. It has happened time and again. The United States government has intervened in the affairs of every country in Central America, and never once on the side of the workers.

A Spanish Proverb

It was "como Pedro por su casa," as the Spanish say, that the infantrymen of the 33rd regiment entered the city of Panama ("like Pedro going into his home").

And this is the country that boasts itself the defender of the rights of small nations and talks about "moral claims!"

Ah, but there is a treaty giving us the right to intervene! say the resourceful apologists of American imperialism. Article 7 of the treaty provides that the military forces of the United States may take over the

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police power in any portion of the republic of Panama whenever public order is endangered. But how did such a treaty come about? Out of the pure generosity of the Panaman people? Do nations make such treaties of their own free will? No. There is more than a treaty behind United States intervention in Panama.

Look at the supplementary volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica issued in 1924 and you will find the following:

Panama, the youngest of the Latin-American republics, is in reality a protectorate of the United States. Its constitution, which dates from February, 1904, states that in return for the guarantee of Panama's sovereignty and independence the United States shall have power to intervene "to re-establish public peace and constitutional order." A close fiscal supervision is at the present time being maintained, and more than once, when domestic disturbances began to threaten, the United States has landed marines, has supervised elections, and has assumed police power in the cities of Panama and Colon.

Thus, not only a special treaty, but the very constitution of the "Republic of Panama," puts it directly under foreign imperialist rule. Panama is a protectorate of the United States, just as Egypt is a protectorate of Great Britain. But ninety-nine out of a hundred Americans are ignorant of this fact. They have been led to believe that Panama, Costa Rica and the other little nations to the south of us are free countries, living symbols, in fact, of American magnanimity and forbearance. They have been taught in school that the United States has no protectorates, that American capitalism is innocent and virtuous and quite different from its wicked cousins in Europe. The United States has not one protectorate but many of them. The example of Panama is illustrative of the whole method of American imperialism in Latin-American.