

The Mexican Problem

For nearly seven years Mexico has been in the throes of successive revolutions. Near the end of February 1913, just before President Wilson was inaugurated, General Huerta, by an act of treachery, captured President Madero and shortly afterward permitted—if he did not cause—him to be put to death. Huerta represented the Diaz element against whom Madero had led a successful revolution.

When President Wilson took the reins of government, Americans who had large investments in Mexico at once urged him to recognize Huerta (nearly all the European governments having already done so) but he steadfastly refused, basing his refusal, first, on the manner in which Huerta obtained power—treason supported by assassination—and, second, on the ground that recognition would put this government back of a despotic group of men who promised nothing in the way of reform but merely sought to crush complaint without any effort to remove the cause of complaint.

It was not long before Carranza and Villa organized a revolution against Huerta and finally overthrew him, the influence of the United States being cast against Huerta. But unfortunately, Carranza and Villa fell out and the recognition of Carranza has failed to do what it was hoped it would do; namely, strengthen him sufficiently to enable him to restore order. Murder and outrages have followed one another, each one explained by those in authority on the ground of their inability to protect American interests at that particular place.

It is not the purpose of this article to enumerate the offenses that have been committed against citizens of the United States or to attempt any defense of them, but rather to call attention to the remedies which are proposed. Intervention has been demanded ever since Huerta was driven from power, the demand coming mainly from two sources: first, from those who have property interests in Mexico, and, second, from those who, disinterested so far as monetary investments are concerned, contend that we owe it to Mexico and the world to enter the country, forcibly take possession of the government and administer it until order is restored. Let us deal with these demands in the order named.

Intervention in behalf of financial interests, followed by the assumption of all governmental authority, is an old policy. Most of the territory taken from so-called "inferior nations" has been acquired in that way. A commercial nation encourages its citizens to invest in development work and then, when an investor seems in danger of losing his money, the foreign government enters the country on the plea that protection to its "Nationals" is necessary. Of course, intervention is objected to by the country invaded, but, as it is usually helpless against such superior force, the result is defeat and indemnity in land or money or both. Intervention was one of the issues in the campaign of 1916, the President's policy of "Watchful Waiting" being denounced and ridiculed by those who claimed to have a superior quality of red in their blood and prided themselves upon a higher percentage of Americanism than their fellows.

This demand brings us face to face with a very important proposition, viz., is it proper business for a government like ours to guarantee investments made by American citizens in other lands? The country answered "No" in 1916, but, as the proposition is again presented, let us consider the question raised.

(A.) Are the property rights of speculators in foreign countries superior to the rights of those whose blood would be shed to make those investments good?

(B.) Is the government justified in putting a tax upon ALL the American people in order to make good to these speculators their hope of gain?

(C.) In this particular case, can we afford to forfeit our influence with all Latin-America in order to guarantee the increased profits, the hope of which led the speculators to make the investments?

A and B can be answered together. The theory upon which the speculators are favored as against the soldiers and taxpayers is the theory of empire and exploitation—the theory which has exalted the dollar and debased the man. Usually it has been the favorites of a throne who have been able to use the army and

the navy for their enrichment, but a republic may be turned from its legitimate course when the financial influence is strong enough. Only a few years ago France, for the purpose of advancing the interests of French investors in Africa, risked a world war to increase her possession in that latitude.

The large influence exerted by exploiters is explained by the fact that the few, having a great deal at stake, are able to attract attention while most of the men who die in battle are obscure and the average taxpayer is unknown.

In the campaign of 1916 I used a story told on John Allen (of Mississippi) in his first congressional race. He was running against a general who had won prominence in the Confederate army while Allen was only a private. His answer to his opponent's appeal for support was that all the generals should vote for General ———, and all the privates for Private Allen. I suggested an easy way of settling the question of intervention; viz., that all who had pecuniary investments in Mexico and wanted to shed other people's blood to enrich themselves might vote for the party which favored intervention and that all the rest of the voters should support the President in his policy of non-intervention.

Argument is not necessary to silence the demands of interested parties when their interest is understood, and this fact suggests a remedy. Publicity will usually rout the advocates of a bad policy because error shuns the light and does its planning under cover.

We should, therefore, require every person who invests in a foreign country to report his investment to the Department of Commerce, with a detailed statement of the amount actually invested and with an accurate statement of the land or concession purchased. This record should be open at all times to public inspection. And we should have a law prohibiting any senator or member from taking official action in any matter in which he has a pecuniary interest. It is widely charged and generally believed, that some senators and members have pecuniary interests in Mexico. It is surely not unreasonable to require an official record of their investments, and their own sense of propriety ought to lead them to withhold their votes upon measures, the decision of which may affect them in a pecuniary way. The effect of intervention on Latin-America will be discussed in connection with the next proposition.

Those who insist upon intervention on the ground that we owe it to Mexico and the world to restore order are in an entirely different class from the ones of whom we have been speaking and must therefore be dealt with in a different way. A pecuniary interest is not dangerous when it is known, but a difference as to the government's duty is more important and is due partly to different points of view and partly to failure to take into consideration all the factors that enter into the problem. Intervention in Mexico would violate the precedents which have given our nation its unique position among nations. Recently the world has been brought to recognize the right of "self-determination" as an international doctrine, but for a hundred years before it was announced by President Wilson, it had been recognized by our country. The Latin-American republics, especially Mexico, have had revolutions innumerable and we have not only refused to consider these periods of disturbance as an excuse for intervention by the United States, but we have warned the nations of Europe that they cannot be made a pretext for European intervention. If intervention is proposed on the theory that the people of Mexico are incapable of self-government, the answer is that our nation is the exponent of the doctrine that all people are capable of self-government, any more than all people are equal in self-restraint, which is the basis of self-government, but capable of devising and conducting a government suited to their needs. Henry Clay, nearly a century ago, condemned the false doctrine taught by those who seek to justify the throwing of a foreign government over helpless people as a hunter throws a net over a bird. He said that it would be a reflection upon the Almighty to assume that He would make people incapable of self-government and leave them to become the victims of kings and emperors. Can we have less faith today than

Clay had then? Those who forcibly set themselves up as instructors in the art of government are quite sure to charge well for the instruction given and the result, without exception until our nation adopted a different policy, has been that the instructor has gradually become the master of the pupil. A NATION WHICH IS SELFISH ENOUGH TO DESIRE TO GOVERN ANOTHER NATION WITHOUT ITS CONSENT IS NEVER WISE ENOUGH TO DO IT WELL. Our own experience with Carpet-Baggers ought to warn us against the fallacies upon which "benevolent intervention" rests. If, after the war between the states, American officials could not be trusted to administer with justice and equity an alien government over people of their own blood, language and religion, how can we hope to do better in governing a subject people in Mexico?

The same influence that would lead us to intervene in Mexico would keep us there permanently. Every American with a property interest there would clamor for a continuation of American rule and the animosity which would be excited by invasion and occupancy would insure enough acts of resentment to keep us busy putting down insurrections. And how could the difference between our capacity for government and the capacity of the Mexicans decrease, unless they developed more rapidly than we?

But in addition to the ordinary difficulties we would have to encounter in extending our government over unwilling subjects, we would have the very weighty objection to be found in the fact that intervention in Mexico would array against us all Latin-America. Our policy of disinterested guardianship, known as the Monroe Doctrine, is so unprecedented that our good faith has sometimes been questioned, although we have asked no favors or concessions in return. In the case of Venezuela we were even willing to go to war with Great Britain to protect the former's boundary line, and yet, notwithstanding the testimony that has been accumulating for a century to prove the benevolence of our motives, we find our neighbors distrustful. One reason is that a few jingoes have excited fears by thoughtlessly suggesting extension of territory. After Cuba had gained independence by our aid, we had a faction in this country that strenuously demanded annexation, in spite of our pledge not to annex, and it took nearly twenty years to secure an act of congress promising independence to the Filipinos. Occasionally some prominent American has expressed himself in favor of an extension of territory by conquest. Most of these have had Mexico in mind—one said that we ought to own everything between the Rio Grande and Panama. While these expressions do not reflect the sentiment of a majority of our people, they find more ready currency abroad than language that expresses our nation's opposition to conquest.

If the United States invaded Mexico for the purpose of pacifying the country, the whole of Latin-America would be suspicious; we would be accused of hypocrisy and our action would be attributed to selfishness and ambition rather than to humanitarianism. We cannot afford to forfeit the friendship of the South American republics which we have gained during the last fifty years. Duties never conflict; and it is not our duty to exchange the possibility of helping all the Spanish-speaking republics for the pleasure of forcing our authority upon one of these republics.

But what should be done? Our government is doing every thing now that can be done, except to intervene by force. American rights can be protected without such intervention as is desired by the concessionaires and by some who misconceive our national duty.

American citizens can be called out of Mexico as they were early in the President's first term. In 1913 our nationals were not only urged to come out of Mexico, but those who were not able to pay their way were aided out of the treasury. If Americans can be brought out of Mexico, further loss of life can be prevented. This remedy will not, of course, satisfy those who contend that it is the business of the government to send an army to protect any man who finds it more profitable to do business in Mexico rather than to employ himself under the American flag. But calling the Americans out of Mexico was approved by a considerable plurality at the last presidential election.

Second, it would be cheaper for our government to assume the payment of all pecuniary losses already suffered, or that may be suffered