

# Panama's President Tells of Country's Hopes



Dr. Pablo Arosemena, Pres. of Panama Republic



Rubber Plantation Owned by Americans

**P**ANAMA CITY, Panama.—I have just had an interview with the president of the republic of Panama. His name is Pablo Arosemena, and he has now been in office almost four years. According to the Panama constitution the president serves for only four years, and he is not eligible to succeed himself, the constitution providing that no man can be a candidate for the presidency who has been president within six months of the presidential election. Dr. Arosemena tried to avoid this provision by taking a six months' leave of absence last spring and allowing his henchmen to run the administration in his stead. However, after Secretary Knox's visit this was found not popular with the United States, and the president gave up the hope of a second term and came back into office. The country is now in the throes of a presidential campaign, although the new president will not be elected or inaugurated for some time to come.

**A Talk with Arosemena.**  
I met President Arosemena in the Isthmian White House, or, as it is known here, the Government Palace. This is a big, white, two-story building of Spanish architecture. It surrounds a patio filled with palm trees, in the center of which is a pond where huge turtles roll over and over and splash about in the water. I found soldiers on guard as I entered the palace with the American minister, Mr. H. Percival Dodge, and we saw more soldiers at the wide stone stairway to the second floor. At the top of the stairway we waited until our cards were sent in, and a moment later we were ushered into the long narrow parlor which forms the audience room of the mansion. This parlor is furnished strangely for this land of the tropics. The floor is covered with a warm velvet carpet, the windows are veiled in hot-looking curtains, and the gold plated furniture is upholstered and not. At each end of the room is a great mirror in a frame of gold and over the windows hang lambrquins from gold frames.

We waited but a few minutes, when the president entered. He is a lean, dark-faced, black-eyed man of medium height, and he weighs, I should judge, about 150 pounds. He is seventy-four years old, but is still in his prime. When the minister introduced me I was surprised to hear the president address me in English. He speaks that tongue fluently and it was in English that our conversation was held. The first part of it related to the political situation, and I asked as to whether there was any danger of a revolution in case the administration candidate should be defeated.

**No Revolutions for Latin America.**  
"There will be no revolution here," said President Arosemena, "and the day of revolution is fast passing away as far as the whole of Latin America is concerned. As for we Panamanians, we have given up such foolishness, and we expect to have no revolutions for all time to come. I think the same will be the case at no distant date throughout South America. It is already so with Peru and Chile. We have now no revolutions in Argentina and Brazil, and it will soon be so in Colombia and Venezuela."

"How about Central America?" I asked.  
"That eventually will be the case with Central America, although I cannot say when. The people of some of those countries have had so many revolutions that they may be said to have acquired the revolution habit, and it will be some time before a condition of permanent peace can be established there. Nevertheless, Central America is improving, although the several republics composing it are not so free as ours. We Panamanians have more liberty of speech. For instance, my enemies call me a tyrant and I make no reply. If one should denounce certain of the presidents of the republic north of us, he might hear from his denunciation in no favorable way."

**The Panama of the Future.**  
The conversation here turned to the Panama republic and its prospects, and President Arosemena said:  
"I am enthusiastic over the future of Panama. It is the baby of the nations, the youngest of all of the republics. It is still in its swaddling clothes, and is just beginning to grow. Look at what we are doing! Take the city of Panama. It had only 12,000 people nine years ago, and it has now 35,000. It will have 50,000 as soon as the canal is completed. Colon, at the other side of the isthmus, had 5,000 population when you make your deal with the French. It has 17,000 now, and we have other towns which have greatly increased."  
"But will not this population drop when we stop our work on the canal?" I asked.  
"I think not," replied the president.

"Colonel Goethals says the United States may have to keep soldiers here to the number of 10,000, and also that it will take 2,500 additional employes to run the canal. These people will spend a great deal. Then we shall have the tourist travel, which is already coming by thousands. That will steadily increase. It will give us a stream of travelers passing through and dropping dollars into Panama and Colon. Why, take your own people! All of you Americans will certainly want to come to see the canal. There are ninety millions of you, and even at as low as a dollar apiece, that would give us \$90,000,000 to start with. If you should spend \$10 apiece the amount would soon reach a billion."

**Big Hotels to Be Built.**  
"But can you accommodate the crowd?"  
"Yes. We shall have big hotels for the tourists," said Dr. Arosemena, "and the tourist travel will bring in a great deal. Paris gets a thousand million francs every year out of tourists, and Switzerland feeds fat upon them. There is no reason why we should not do likewise."  
"Do you not think that the Americans will have cities of their own here?"  
"Very likely so. There will probably be a great business city at Balboa, but that will be in the swamps, and while it will contain the warehouses and great stores, it will hardly be fit for the hotels and the residences. Panama will be the Brooklyn, the residence quarter, and we shall have street cars which will go back and forth in five minutes. The people of Balboa will do their business there and come to Panama for the night."

**Chances for Money Making.**  
"But has Panama nothing else but hotels to offer to the world?"  
"It has a great deal more," said the president. "The Panama republic is one of the richest countries in the tropics, and by modern sanitation the most of it can be made one of the most healthy. It is now open to settlement, and we will do what we can to encourage the establishment of small farms and farmers. We are offering land in tracts of fifty hectares, or about 247 acres, at a little over 20 cents an acre, and 200 hectares at a still less price per acre. As the amount of land goes up, the price goes down, and we are doing everything we can to encourage development. We have been building roads in many of the provinces, and we now have in the neighborhood of 500 miles of roads and over sixty-one new bridges."

"But tell me something about your lands, Mr. President," said I. "What can you raise on them?"  
"We can raise all sorts of tropical fruits. We have good lands for coffee and cacao. Coffee plantations are being set out in some places, and cacao land is in demand in the country about Bocas del Toro. There are immense banana estates there. The United Fruit company owns thousands of acres, and it ships millions of bunches of bananas a year. The most of that fruit goes to the United States. We have also good soil for rubber, and rubber plantations are being set out by Americans and others. Some of the ex-employees of the canal have rubber estates which are already in bearing."

**A Stock Country.**  
"We have also large areas of fine grazing land," continued President Arosemena. "The climate is such that the cattle can feed out-of-doors all the year round, and we have three varieties of rich grasses to fatten them. Take the province of Chiriqui in the northern part of the republic. There is a region there known as the Divisa country, which has many square miles of plains covered with grass which is dotted here and there with groves."  
"The country is well watered, but there are no swamps, although it rains almost daily for about eight months of the year. Still the rains are short and for the most of the time the weather is clear. That land is splendid for cattle and it has more stock than all the rest of the republic. It has already a number of large ranches and there is room for many more. I doubt whether we have more than 50,000 or 100,000 head of stock in Panama now, whereas I have seen it estimated that our lands would sustain 5,000,000 head. When the canal is completed there will be a great demand for meat from the ships passing through, and it ought to be supplied by the isthmus. It seems to me there should be a great deal of money in cattle raising. As it is now lean cattle may be purchased at from \$15 to \$20 a head. After they have been grazed for six months they will bring \$30 and upward."

**Real Estates at Panama.**  
"What opportunities have you outside of farming?"  
"There is a great deal of money to be made in real estate," said the president. "With the completion of the canal there is sure to be a demand for farm lands

and plantations of various kinds. There is a steady rise of real estate values also both at Panama and Colon. I have property here which is worth ten times what I paid for it a few years ago, and I have put up a building at Colon which cost me only \$7,000 and which has been netting me \$700 per month in rents. That property is now paying for the building every year. I know of buildings here in Panama which are doing as well. Rents are exceedingly high and we have a number of men who have grown rich out of their real estate deals. We have several millionaires and some of them have incomes of over \$50,000 a year. The Panamanian minister at Washington receives something like \$5,000 per month from his real estate investments, and I venture that Mr. Espinosa of this city does equally well."

**Banks Which Pay Dividends.**  
"And then there is a great deal of money in banking," continued the president. "You can loan here all the money you have on good security, at 8 or 9 per cent. The old rate of interest used to be 24 per cent, but we have cut that down by establishing our national bank, which makes loans on real estate at 7 per cent, and on jewelry and other collateral at 9 per cent. That bank has a million and a half capital, and its net profits last year were \$30,000. The other banks make more."

"What is Panama doing to open up the interior of the country?"  
"Not as much as we could wish," replied the president. "We have some roads and we expect to build more. We have had plans for railroads, but the time is not yet ripe to build them. All that will come, and in the end we shall be a thickly populated land."

**Gold and Pearls.**  
"How about your mines?"  
"We have some gold mines working right here in the central part of the isthmus, and there are others at Darien. We know that we have copper and other minerals, but the country has not been thoroughly prospected."

"How about your pearl fisheries?"  
"They have produced a great deal in the past, but we have not been taking care of them and they do not yield what they did. I have been interested in pearls myself, and my father sold one pearl for \$4,500. It weighed twenty-three carats, and was of a beautiful shape and fine color. That pearl would bring \$10,000 today. I think if we should let the pearl fisheries lie still for a while and keep a closed season for fishing that we might make that a profitable industry."

"How about the hidden gold of Panama?" It is said that you have islands near your coasts where the treasures of the Incas are buried and also that there is gold under Old Panama."  
"That is the stuff that dreams are made of," replied the president. "Many have hunted for those treasures, and have never found them. We have now made a road to Old Panama, and it is probable that something may be discovered there."

**Panama and American Trade.**  
"Tell me something about your trade with the United States."  
"We are buying more of you than of any other nation, and the trade steadily increases. It might pay your merchants to establish a great warehouse here for the display of American goods. There will be a continuous stream of merchants passing through the canal, and that house could take orders for both North and South America. As it is now, our foreign commerce amounts to \$11,000,000 per year, and of that about \$5,750,000 goes to the United States. Next to you, our chief consumer is Great Britain, and

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Belisario Porras

after that come Germany, France and Italy. As to our exports the most of them go to the United States. Indeed, you buy nearly all that we sell."

**Education and Sanitation.**  
"Are you doing much in education?"  
"We are preparing the way. We have established some schools, and have a large number of students abroad to be prepared for teachers. We have some girls studying for that purpose in Belgium, and we have also scholarships in Chile, which I arranged for during my trip there last year. We have also built a national educational institute here at a cost of about \$80,000."

"How about the health of the isthmus?"  
"Do you think that the sanitation methods which we are using here at Panama

could be extended to the whole country?"  
"Not as an entirety," said the president. "It would be too expensive. Nevertheless, you have done a great deal for the cities of Panama and Colon. Indeed the sanitary commission is the most absolute ruler we have. Every one has to obey it, no matter whether they be presidents of other countries, American ministers or our own officials. are kept in quarantine for three days if they come from any port that is even suspected of fever or contagious disease. We did not like the sanitation methods at first, and many of the people objected to having their houses inspected. That has all passed away now and we are congratulating ourselves on our new streets with good water and freedom from disease."

**Panama Will Stay Independent.**  
"What are to be the future relations of Panama and the United States?"  
"I hope they will, always remain two sister republics."  
"Is there any chance that Panama will be annexed to the United States?"  
"I do not see any possibility of that at present," said Dr. Arosemena. "We are glad to have you as our great and good friend, and we want to work along with you as far as we can. I believe that our people would prefer to be independent."

At this point I rose to go, but the president asked me to wait a moment and have some refreshments. A moment later a servant brought in a tray of champagne and we drank to the health of our respective countries as we said goodbye.

**The Next President of Panama.**  
As to who the next president of Panama will be, this is not sure. The election will take place about a week after this letter is published. Such elections are held upon Sunday, and this one is set for the second Sunday in July. There are two candidates, one of whom might be called the administration candidate. This is Pedro Diaz, formerly governor of Panama and quite recently treasurer-general. He is an able man and a popular one. The other candidate might be called the Theodore Roosevelt of the republic. It is Dr. Belisario Porras, the former minister to the United States and a man well known in Washington. Dr. Porras belongs to the people and he flirts with the masses. He has had a lot of trouble during his candidacy, and his enemies have resorted to all sorts of tricks to prevent his nomination and election. Among these was the theft of some notes and official papers from the Panama Legation at Washington. The notes contained the rough draft of the policies he expected to follow out as president, which included a reorganization of the police, with an American at the head. They were published and it was thought that it would injure the Porras party in the campaign. In addition to this the men who stole his papers planned to bring suit against Porras for allowing his papers to be stolen. It was claimed that they were a part of the public records, and that no officer of the republic should allow the records to be taken away.

**Taking to the Toll Timber.**  
"Sisters and brethren," exhorted Uncle Abraham, a recent promotion from the plow to the pulpit, "on do one side or dis here meetin' house is a road leading to destruction, on do udder is a road gwine to hell and damnation. Which you gwine pursoo? Dar is de internal question: Which is you gwine pursoo?"  
"Law, Brer Aberham," spoke Sister Eliza from the back pew, "I speck I'm er gwine home thoo de woods!"—Lippincott's Magazine.

## WARNING TO USERS OF SO-CALLED SUPERFLUOUS HAIR "CURES"

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