

Uncle Sam in the Caribbean
15--How We Rule Santo Domingo
By Frederic J. Haskin

Santo Domingo City, Santo Domingo, March 21—The political situation in this would-be republic is both complicated and peculiar. No less than four distinct agencies of the United States government are here represented and co-operating toward some end which is neither stated nor apparent. The chief executive and the cabinet members are officers of the United States navy; the finances of the republic are being administered by our customs receivership; the country is being policed and subdued by the United States marine corps, and public improvements are being supervised by a director of public works appointed by our State department.

These varied civil and military ministrations the Dominican people are receiving with patience and even grace. Nearly all of them admit that it was necessary for the United States government to intervene here. Some of them say that if we had not intervened, certain other powers would soon have done so. A few of them are beginning to ask what we are going to do now that we are here, and when we are going to do it.

Our situation in Santo Domingo is so typical of the whole Caribbean problem that it seems worth while to describe it in detail. It is safe to say that no one in the United States, outside of official circles, really understands it and only a few people down here do.

Our relations with this republic began in 1907, when by request we attempted to straighten out its tangled finances through the appointment of a customs receivership. This commendable institution has been functioning ever since, systematically and efficiently, despite revolution and political turmoil. The republic has changed governments, fought civil wars and gotten into debt, but through it all the receivership has gone on patiently collecting the extortionate customs duties and paying the long and mysterious salary list of the Dominican government.

Until last spring, another revolution came off. Our official patience was exhausted. Admiral Caperton and General Pendleton broke up the rebel force, and reinstated President Jimenez and his cabinet. Likewise our government made certain demands upon the Jimenez administration. One of them was that the United States government be allowed to organize and officer a constabulary so that it could keep order in the republic. This the president of the Dominican republic patriotically refused to countenance. That another nation should have to administer the finances of his country was bad enough, but that Santo Domingo should be policed permanently by the armed force of another power was intolerable. Furthermore it was unconstitutional. President Jimenez was firm. So was the United States government. Likewise, it had all the money. Heroic measures were now applied to the patriotic

officials of Santo Domingo—their salaries were cut off.

Home without mother is happy and complete compared to a political job in Latin America without a salary. There had been many political salaries in Santo Domingo without jobs, but never before a political job without a salary. In this land of sensational politics, the United States government had sprung a new political sensation, and withal a most painful one. The newspaper dispatches report that this amputation of the salary list has caused much hard feeling than anything else the United States has done in and to Santo Domingo. It is indubitably true.

Just exactly what happened to the Jimenez government after this is hard to state in official language, but is sufficiently clear. Its political jugular vein has been severed, its golden life blood drained. It did not resign, it did not revolt; simply faded and died. To the cabinet officers was tendered the high and chaste honor of serving on without pay, but they unaccountably failed to respond. President Jimenez sent a messenger to Admiral Knapp to explain that his excellency was in a state of financial need and to request that his salary for one month be paid. This was refused. President Jimenez then sailed away and is said to have taken the lecture platform in other Latin American countries and devoted his abilities to an exposition of the greedy and underhand methods by which the eagle of the north is sinking the talons of despotism into the vitals of free and democratic government in Santo Domingo.

The present government in Santo Domingo is based upon a proclamation issued by Admiral (then Captain) Knapp at that time. The essential statements of this document were that the United States navy had assumed governmental power in the republic for the good thereof, and, as a temporary expedient, with an accent on the temporary; that neither municipal nor provincial governments would be interfered with; and that the Dominican judiciary would continue to function. The naval government also decreed a censorship of the press, certain portions of which were entertaining the populace with blood-thirsty tirades against American high-handedness. Several little newspapers were put out of business, and several others compelled to adopt a more moderate policy.

The naval government has in fact had to go somewhat beyond its stated purposes. Troops of marines have been stationed in the more important provinces, and, although the native governors remain as figureheads, the commanding officers of these detachments are the real authorities. It becomes increasingly evident that the naval government will also have a hand in the government of the principal cities before the country can be made truly orderly. Already one city

council has been placed under arrest. Meanwhile the customs receivership, the one stable institution in Santo Domingo, continues to function and will continue till about 1938, at least. It is at present administered by Clarence H. Baxter, a New Jersey newspaper man. Mr. Baxter and his assistants are about the only Americans in the island, with the exception of a few business men, who have an extensive knowledge of local conditions, but their activities are limited to the collection and disbursal of money.

A few harbor and road improvements are going forward under Austin Collett, the director of public works. This official was appointed by the secretary of state to supervise the expenditure of appropriations made by the Dominican congress. The congress being no more, he can do nothing but carry out projects already provided for, although there are \$4,000,000 of Dominican funds available for public improvements.

The future of Santo Domingo is largely dependent upon the use of this \$4,000,000. If properly administered this fund can provide the Dominicans with those fundamentals of a civilized state, such as roads, schools and an orderly system of land tenure, which they at present lack. Santo Domingo is a land with a future of splendid possibilities, and this future is now largely within our control.

Descending to statistics, Santo Domingo is about as large as Massachusetts and contains about as many people as Boston. The natural wealth and productive power of this bit of soil have evoked superlatives from all observers, interested and disinterested, expert and amateur. The

sugar fields of Santo Domingo, for example, produce a great deal more to the acre than those of Porto Rico, and some of them have been cut several times a year for thirty years, without ever being replanted and without suffering the slightest diminution of their productivity. Tobacco, coffee and cacao grow in similar abundance. The soil of the two principal valleys seems to be almost inexhaustible, for it must be remembered that some of this land has been under cultivation for over three centuries.

But only a relatively small part of the republic is cultivated. There are extensive forests of native hardwoods that sell by the pound, the great uplands wooded with a sort of native pine. There is gold in many of the streams, iron, silver and oil in known quantities. It is an island of the very richest endowment.

For three centuries a great part of this endowment has lain untouched. The mines have never been worked nor the forests cut because there is no highway more than a few miles from the coast, and because whatever one might produce in this land would almost certainly be appropriated by some revolutionary army or bandit chieftain.

Now the people of Santo Domingo have been generally blamed for this unfortunate condition of affairs, which has made it impossible for Americans and Europeans successfully to come and carry away this wealth. But upon acquaintance the Dominican people are found to be on the whole a very docile people and of good natural intelligence. They are already making friends with the Americans who were engaged only a short time ago in shooting them. The common people

openly rejoice that they are able to plant and reap a crop with some certainty that the harvest will not be taken to feed a revolutionary army and the farmer impressed into the ranks. These people are just as appreciative of the benefits of peace as any other people.

Why, then, have they spent the last four centuries in revolutions which have left them beggars in a rich land? For the reason that they have no conception of orderly government and no chance to acquire one. Without roads or other means of communication, without schools, without some civilized system of land tenure, you cannot have a civilization; and Santo Domingo has none of these things except in a few towns scattered along the seaboard.

A benevolent despotism might have brought order to Santo Domingo. But having democratic ideals of government, the few educated people living down by the sea tried to set up a republic in this land which had none of the fundamentals of a civilized state. The result was continuous and unending chaos.

Individuals of a higher sort cannot possibly lift the government any higher than the intelligence of the electorate. If these individuals enter politics at all, they must become demagogues and grafters to compete with demagogues and grafters.

All of which goes to prove that you can no more raise up a stable and orderly government in Santo Domingo as it is today than you can raise wheat on a tin roof. And you cannot maintain a really democratic government by placing troops here to suppress disorder any more than you can make wheat grow on the

tin roof by erecting thereon a scarecrow.

These facts are fully appreciated by all intelligent observers in Santo Domingo, whether American or Dominican. All of the Dominicans are tired of revolution except the professional revolutionists. And these adventurous gentlemen can keep the game going just as long as the people are kept in their present state of barbaric ignorance. But give these people roads so that they may travel and trade, give them schools so that they may learn to read, give them a system of land tenure so that they may own property securely and acquire conservatism and self-respect, and you have abolished the material of which revolutions are made.

Already the revolutionary spirit is showing a tendency to weaken; already these people are beginning to comprehend the methods by which men may secure the right to live in peace. There is no doubt but what if this naturally intelligent people were given a chance to learn, they would become orderly and civilized.

The question discussed here by educated Dominicans and American residents is how these tools of civilization are to be given the Dominican people. They hope that the American government will lend its aid; they hope that is what it is here for.

The American government has followed a somewhat different policy in Haiti, where it has reinstated the Haitian government with a constabulary to keep order. Already both of the principal Dominican factions are making overtures in the expectation that a similar course will be followed here. Either faction will allow the United States to officer a constabulary and establish a naval base,

provided that faction is placed in power.

But many, even of the Dominican politicians, admit that this would not be for the best. It might keep order, but it would leave the constructive problem untouched, and the Dominican government has shown itself incapable of handling the constructive problem.

It is well known that our policy in the Caribbean is molded with a view to our future relations with all Latin America. We are the defenders and preservers of small sovereignties. That is why we emphasize the temporary character of our occupation, and get out as soon as we can assist the tottering and breathless little sovereignty back upon its somewhat unsteady pine. But surely a civil government would have less of the atmosphere of conquest about it than a military one, and a government set up for a stated term of years would cause less questioning than one with no purpose, stated or apparent, except to keep order for the moment.

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Over the War Balloons

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