THE PANAMA CANAL IN HISTORY, POLICY, AND CARICATURE

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SURRENDER IN PANAMA: THE CASE AGAINST THE TREATY. By PHILIP M. CRANE. (New York: Dale Books, 1978. Pp. 258. Paper, $1.50.)
PANAMA: SOVEREIGNTY FOR A LAND DIVIDED. By EPICA TASK FORCE. (Washington, D.C.: EPICA Task Force, 1976. Pp. 127. Paper, $2.50.)
THE PANAMA CANAL: THE CRISIS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. By WALLACE LAFEBER. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, Pp. 248. $10.95.)
HANDS OFF THE PANAMA CANAL. By ISAAC DON LEVINE. (Washington, D.C.: Monticello Books, 1976. Pp. 98. Paper, $2.95.)
THE PATH BETWEEN THE SEAS: THE CREATION OF THE PANAMA CANAL, 1870–1914. By DAVID MCCULLOUGH. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977. Pp. 698. $14.95.)
THE PANAMA CANAL CONTROVERSY: U.S. DIPLOMACY AND DEFENSE INTERESTS. By PAUL B. RYAN. (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1977. Pp. 198. Paper, $5.95.)

Traversing the Panama Canal is a magical voyage. The great locks—Gatun on the Caribbean side, Pedro Miguel and Miraflores on the Pacific—lift a ship as quietly and effortlessly today as they did when they were first filled two-thirds of a century ago. The ship enters man-made Gatun Lake, stretching across the isthmus like a water bridge, eighty-five feet above sea level. It seems, says McCullough in *Path Between the Seas*, like "sailing a magnificent lake in undiscovered country," passing "flaming green islands, the tops of hills that protruded still above the surface." It is so quiet that "the sight of another ship appearing suddenly from around a bend ahead [is] startling . . ." (p. 614). In twelve hours one passes from sea to sea and breaches the land wall dividing the world from the Arctic to the Antarctic.

The same air of unreality pervades literature on the Panama Canal. The writing is rarely Panama-sized. Nothing is muted or understated as befits a mini-state; the tones are as vibrant and intense as the tropical colors of Gatun Lake. To be sure, the story lends itself to exaggeration. Panama pivots on its canal and both are especially sensitive to the great political and economic forces at work in the world. Even so, what is

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distinctive about the canal and its host nation tends to get lost in symbolism and hyperbole. Panama always appears larger than life: it was the scene of epic achievement; it signals grand shifts of policy and power; it is a microcosm of world and hemispheric politics; it is a test, a measure. Vast changes, even the movement of history, seem to depend on what occurs there.

The drama of location goes far to explain this inflated symbolism. Through the length of Panama, and only there, the American continents reduce to the slenderest of connections, like the neck of an hourglass. The isthmus of Panama has always seemed a geographical aberration, a cruel practical joke played on civilization that requires a traveller to choose between a pestilential journey across or a prolonged journey around. Since discoverers first determined the shape of the Americas, Panama has seemed at once tantalizingly thin and agonizingly thick, but always a thoroughfare, not a goal in itself. Indeed, Panama has little to offer—bananas, a new copper find—besides its role as passageway. Otherwise it is mostly torrid, soaking jungle. Most Panamanians live near the termini of the canal and cling to it as their nation's principal if not sole asset and attraction.

All but one of these books falls victim to the temptation to fit Panama and its canal into an external and distorting framework. The theme of McCullough's exhaustive and fascinating narrative of the building of the canal is man's victory over nature. For him the canal was a triumph of science, technology, and entrepreneurship, a symbol of progress as the nineteenth century defined it. It represented the age. The books by Crane, Ryan, and Levine are all more or less political tracts arguing the case against ratification of the recent canal treaties. In these polemical writings Panama is a Cold War focal point; the treaties will merely pave the way for Communist takeover of a waterway vital to United States national security. EPICA's political primer, *Panama: Sovereignty for a Land Divided*, goes to the opposite extreme, depicting Panama as a Third World victim of Yankee imperialism. The only one of the six books to deal with the Panama question on its own terms and in the light of its own distinctive experience—and with illuminating results—is LaFeber's study, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective*.

McCullough has written well about epic events (*The Johnstown Flood*) and engineering feats (*The Great Bridge*). *Path Between the Seas* is an absorbing and colorful account of the building of the canal, from the first surveys to the first ship transit, including the spectacular French failure. McCullough is authoritative and detailed about the obstacles that had to be overcome: the everlasting mud slides into the cut, the torrential rains and oppressive humidity, the insects and reptiles, the yellow fever and malaria-carrying mosquitoes. He writes dramatically of the vast slice taken out of the Cordilleras at Culebra, of the ninety-five-ton Bucyrus

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shovels and the ant-like dirt trains that hauled away millions of cubic yards of fill. He is evenhanded in his treatment of the West Indian black laborers—of their greater liability to disease and death and their miserable pay and quarters, yet their access to hospitals and commissaries and the improvement they experienced over conditions back home. He notes the cavalier attitude of North Americans toward Panamanians and the bitter resentment this aroused. McCullough is judicious and industrious and he is a good story teller.

Yet the romance carries him away. He bubbles with enthusiasm over the gigantism of the task. The Americans saved $50,000 merely by requiring workmen to shake out each sack of cement after emptying it! They used more dynamite "than had been expended in all the nation's wars until that time" (p. 545)! They removed in one year nearly half as much cubic yardage as the French had in seventeen! The locks with gate leaves weighing up to 745 tons were (and still are) marvels of massiveness, simplicity, and precision. An empty lock chamber, viewed from the floor, he notes, conveyed the feeling of a great cathedral. It was hard to avoid "drifting into the superlative mood" (p. 591).

The Panama Canal was of course an enterprise of vast proportions even by today's standards. The difficulty in dealing with material accomplishments in a "superlative mood" lies in matching men to what they construct. Only heroic men, it would seem, can perform such herculean tasks and McCullough's men are formed in the heroic mold. Such was Ferdinand de Lesseps.

The life of de Lesseps, we are told, was "one of the most extraordinary of the nineteenth century" (p. 49), a tall order. He was the *entrepreneur extraordinaire,* with dazzling charm, nerve, and the showmanship of a P. T. Barnum. The hero of Suez embodied the spirit of his age, faith in science and technology. A layman in these matters himself, he believed "the machines, the medicines, whatever it took, would be ready in time" (p. 239) to construct a sea-level canal, but he was slightly premature. Thus the tragedy of de Lesseps and France. But, according to McCullough, the French company and the more than twenty thousand who perished in its attempt accomplished a great deal of value, in surveys, infrastructure, and digging, that benefited the United States.

This sympathetic portrait is not the only one that could be drawn from the evidence. Surely one salient fact is that de Lesseps was seventy-five years old at the start of the enterprise. McCullough argues that hardening of the arteries was not his undoing, that what so impressed everyone in the beginning was his vigor and youthfulness. His problem was lack of prudence and realism, the virtues of age; "his curse was the *failure* to decline" (p. 237). This is dubious. The myopia of de Lesseps that his own conception of the canal was the only feasible one suggests the very opposite, the onset of senility. Quite possibly de Lesseps suc-

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cumbed to the chimera of recouping his vitality through achieving a second Suez; Panama may have seemed his fountain of youth. That so magnificent an enterprise was led by an aging, deluded man fits the story badly, and so de Lesseps emerges as flawed and tragic, but also as a man of vision and a trailblazer for the successful Yankees. Drama develops themes, coherence, and unity. History, however, as often as not deals with incongruities, discontinuities, and dead ends.

The circumstances of the acquisition of the Panama route by the United States are well known, and McCullough tells the story with his customary flair. The Hay-Pauncefote treaties, the Spooner amendment, the Walker commission's reversal, the clever use of Nicaragua's volcano stamps, the Hay-Herrán Treaty, the dispatch of the *Nashville*, the *opera buffe* revolution, the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty: events seem to lead inexorably toward creation of the Canal Zone, like the tumblers in some gigantic combination lock falling in place. McCullough is correct in saying that too many unknowns existed, too much depended on chance, and too little evidence is available to prove a cast-iron conspiracy. But the determination of the American leadership to have their canal one way or another is perfectly clear. They expected to gain it in proper imperialist fashion from Colombia, with a hundred-year lease and extraterritoriality, the form in use by Western powers to secure strategic ports on the China coast. Instead Philippe Bunau-Varilla practically gave Panama to the United States on a silver platter.

The central actor in McCullough's story, perhaps because he was the only one to leave a full account, is Bunau-Varilla. The little French engineer-promoter with spiky, waxed moustache is another McCullough hero. Historians, he contends, see Bunau-Varilla "as an almost comic figure, a sort of road-show French schemer" (p. 277). That image comes naturally from the man's posturing and overblown writing, McCullough concedes, but behind this was a "practical, personable, exceptionally intelligent" individual who made a powerful impression on everyone he met, one "they would remember all their days" (p. 278). McCullough doubts that Bunau-Varilla simply sought to make money, or prevent its loss, for he was a wealthy man with an enormous *hôtel particulaire* on the Avenue d'Iena. Rather he was consumed by the "Panama idea," as de Lesseps had been, and thereby he serves McCullough as a dramatic link between the French and American efforts, this "Frenchman who is like an American."

Others less concerned with dramatic unity might take a more skeptical view. LaFeber, for example, notes that the canal rights Bunau-Varilla's company enjoyed from Colombia would expire in 1904, and sees him racing against time to sell them to the Russians and British as well as the Americans. He further notes that earlier the French promoter had built railroads in the Congo and flood controls in Rumania. He was

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a skilled promoter and engineer who liked making money and disliked losing it. Panama was no ordinary venture for him, but neither was it a crusade.

LaFeber makes a further point respecting the events of 1903 which he considers of fundamental importance in understanding the long course of United States-Panamanian relations. Panama was not an artificial creation of the United States, called into being to legitimize an American canal in the face of Colombian recalcitrance. The isthmus had been a fractious province of Colombia, attempting revolution over fifty times before 1903. It had a free-wheeling entrepreneurial leadership quite different in outlook from the mother country. Citing Panamanian historian Ricuarte Soler, LaFeber argues that a Panamanian national consciousness, formed of Benthamite liberalism, anti-imperialism, and a sense of being "predestined to control the crossroads of the world" (p. 25), was well established by 1903. The point is well taken, though how general such sentiments were remains a question. The governing elite of Panama was a tiny oligarchy; the population as a whole was poverty stricken, ignorant, and indifferent.

On this point, the authenticity of the revolution, both supporters and opponents of the recent treaties agree. After all, as Crane points out in *Surrender in Panama*, American rights depend on Panama's "just claim to existence" and "legitimate authority to negotiate" (p. 5). If Panama is an artifice, how can the United States keep or retrocede anything? We may accept that the revolution was genuine and indigenous, however, without going further and arguing as Crane does that the American role was merely supportive, after the fact, and perfectly legal. It is one thing bravely to proclaim independence, as the junta did in Panama City, and quite another to secure it. As McCullough shows, without the connivance and help of the American-owned Panama Railroad, the landing of American marines at Colon, which led to the removal of the Colombian contingent, and the expectation (fulfilled) of the arrival of much more American strength, the revolution would have quickly wilted, and in all probability would never have begun. The United States was inextricably involved in the founding of Panama.

Crane goes even further to argue that American intervention was justifiable under the Bidlack Treaty of 1846. His fellow treaty critic, Ryan, in *The Panama Canal Controversy*, is more cautious: the intervention was "technically consonant" with the treaty but violated its intent (p. 10). That the United States could fulfill its obligation to Colombia of maintaining the neutrality of the isthmus by depriving Colombia of the isthmus indeed stretches the mind. Treaty critics should adhere to the advice Philander Knox gave Roosevelt "not to let so great an achievement suffer from any taint of legality."

The most troublesome legacy of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty

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was the ambiguous phrasing by which Panama conveyed canal rights to the United States. During the recent debate over retrocession, a heated question was precisely what title the United States received and enjoyed in the Canal Zone. Did it own the Canal Zone? Was it sovereign there? Treaty critics vehemently contended that this nation was indeed sovereign owner, just as if the Canal Zone were Texas or Alaska, bought and paid for. "U.S. agencies were not guests," avers Captain Ryan, "but occupants of purchased territory wherein by treaty they exercised sovereignty rights" (p. 44). Crane grants that the United States allowed Panama titular sovereignty but this was a barren, face-saving gesture, he insists, in no way diminishing permanent American sovereign rights in the Canal Zone.

In fact, although the United States enjoyed all the attributes of sovereignty in the Canal Zone forever, it was not fully sovereign. However empty "titular sovereignty" was, the residue was sufficient to deny full title to the United States. Indeed the annual fee paid Panama was proof of lease. Further, LaFeber makes a persuasive case that the United States did not treat the Canal Zone either as its territory (like Alaska) or as a state. Undoubtedly a lease rather than a purchase was Roosevelt's preference. In the wake of the Boer War and the Philippine Insurrection, colonialism was in bad odor. Acquisition of the Canal Zone as a colony might have found difficulty in Congress. Far better to secure the necessary rights and powers without title.

The fact that the United States fell short of sovereign status in the Canal Zone does not mean that its rights were limited to construction, maintenance, and operation of the canal, as Panama has claimed. No such limitation existed in the wording of the treaty nor in the intent of Bunau-Varilla who wished to convey everything but sovereignty. Indeed the broad nature of the rights conveyed is best represented in those portions dealing with Panama itself, outside the Canal Zone. Here, as LaFeber makes clear, the treaty gave the United States powers "breathtaking in their sweep" (p. 45). Outside the Canal Zone but incident to canal uses, it could acquire any land or control any water. The United States controlled Panama's immigration and communications. It could intervene in Panama City and Colon, where most Panamanians lived, to enforce order, acquire buildings, and run sanitation. With such powers outside the Canal Zone it is hard to imagine any within it which the United States could not exercise.

During the following half-century the formalities of Panamanian-American relations changed from time to time but Panama remained essentially colonial. Indeed, over time North American influence became more pervasive. The United States retained the right of intervention in Panama until 1939 and exercised it on several occasions. Concession of the right was part of Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. Even

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so, Senate approval required three more years and the pressure for hemispheric cooperation occasioned by the European war. This right of intervention implicitly defined the political system of Panama. The oligarchy which had mediated the revolution in 1903 became firmly entrenched in power. To United States authorities it represented stability and order, a succession of cooperative and compliant regimes. To the oligarchy, the threat of intervention meant that radical (and necessarily violent) change was impossible, thereby preserving its power. The result, as so often elsewhere in Latin America where the United States intervened, was stagnation of politics, corruption, immiseration of the lower classes, and long-term revolutionary potential. The United States and Panama were locked in pernicious embrace long before the recent crises.

Critics of the 1977 treaties are bewildered at the anger and violence directed against the United States by Panamanians. They find it impossible to understand why a country with so little to offer aside from the canal route, and which has received so much, should complain. Panama's very existence and viability today, Crane claims, stem from the generosity of a "strong America, which could have taken what it wanted without giving anything in return . . ." (p. 41). Instead, according to Thomas Bailey in his forward to the Ryan volume, Uncle Sam provided "sovereignty, status, stability, sanitation, protection, and prosperity to the Panamanians" (p. ix). The United States may have acted in orthodox imperialist style in acquiring the Canal Zone, Ryan admits, but thereafter Americans found it impossible to throw off their characteristic "altruistic benevolence" (p. 17). Not that Panamanians were grateful. The "certainty that the United States will act with fairness, compassion, and restraint, even when provoked," complains Crane, encouraged them to "bite America's hand while simultaneously demanding bigger and bigger handouts" (pp. 41–42).

The great value of LaFeber's fine little book is that it moves beyond such sentimentalism to deal with the deep factors—cultural, socioeconomic, and political—that have affected the relationship and to show how these have combined and evolved over time.

The heart of the problem was that Panama offered practically no economic resources, aside from the canal, for use in promoting growth and general prosperity. The canal was a mixed blessing. In wartime, spending and employment in the Canal Zone increased, with permanent effect on the surrounding country in urbanization and rising expectations. Peace brought drastic curtailment of spending and a slump in the Panamanian economy. Teeming, fetid slums spread around Colon and Panama City. Panama had virtually no control over its economic fortunes. Income received from raw material exports lagged behind payments for manufactured imports. United States investment fluctuated

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widely. Economic assistance, in the aftermath of World War II, went to Europe rather than Latin America. The classical weaknesses of a dependent and essentially colonial economy were intensified by the special position of the United States in the Canal Zone.

The effect of worsening economic and social conditions was greater political instability. The power of the oligarchy declined and the National Guard emerged as a political force in its own right. Class and color tensions among Panamanians increased. Government became more transitory, personal, and corrupt. Roused by Panama's troubles, internal and foreign, middle-class students began organizing and agitating.

More and more the Canal Zone became the focus of Panamanian unhappiness. During World War II the United States secured parcels of land within Panama for radar sites and a large air base. Panama bitterly resisted retention of these properties after the war, and with some success, but the United States yielded slowly and grudgingly. Although the Eisenhower administration increased the annual payment to Panama for the canal, in real dollars the fee was less. In spite of understandings reached in 1957 to purchase food for Canal Zone consumption from Panama, the United States authorities continued to secure it elsewhere. Furthermore, they continued discriminatory practices in wages and jobs within the Canal Zone. The sight of white North Americans, coddled with pay and perquisites in their colonialist enclave next door, more and more embittered Panamanian sensibilities. Washington, preoccupied with Cold War fronts elsewhere, was inclined to take Panama for granted. Powerful interests—the Pentagon, labor, the Canal Zonians themselves—moved to defend the status quo. Only marginal changes in the relationship occurred.

Panama would have been a problem for the United States regardless of Fidel Castro and communism. Unquestionably communism added cogency, inspiration, and example to the Panamanian movement to recover sovereign rights and control over the canal. Equally, Cuba roused the American government as never before to reassert its leadership and influence in the Western Hemisphere, with large effects in Panama. As LaFeber points out, toward the end of the nineteen fifties the Cold War dipped into the Third World and Panama was bound to become a tension point. Nevertheless, the basic elements of confrontation were already in place, a fact which treaty critics seem unable to grasp. Whatever advantages accrued to Panama from the canal, benefits to the United States seemed greater. Increasingly the canal seemed Panama's only hope for economic and political viability. Increasingly United States rights in Panama seemed anachronistic, a lingering vestige of imperialism after Tsingtao, Singapore, Aden, Suez, and the rest were gone.

The more inflamed the situation became, the more the disputants

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operated at the symbolic level. The flag issue, culminating in the bloody rioting of January 1964, was pure symbolism. To Panamanian students, display of their flag in the Canal Zone meant full sovereignty and nationhood; to Americans it meant surrender. News of the pitched battle between United States troops and Panamanians reverberated through the Western Hemisphere. How the United States reacted to the challenge came to be seen as a test. To Kennedy and Nixon officials, in different ways, Panama was a microcosm of the Third and Latin worlds. If they could not deal adequately with this Lilliputian country on their doorstep, what hope had they of winning in the arena beyond? Latin Americans, especially Castroites, drew the reverse picture, of Panama as David confronting the imperialist Goliath.

President Kennedy's program for encouraging and moderating change, the Alliance for Progress, targetted Panama for special attention. Along with investment in the agricultural sector to ease the urban crisis came harsher Cold War tactics: in the Canal Zone his administration founded the School of the Americas, a counterinsurgency warfare training center. Panamanians wondered what the school had to do with operation of the canal. Panama swallowed up Alliance funds with little visible result other than further division and weakening of the tottering oligarchy, while Washington became more and more disillusioned, impatient, and preoccupied by the Vietnam War. In the nineteen seventies, the United States was less able to dictate solutions in the increasingly complex Third World. The Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations witnessed a steady increase in the willingness of the United States to consider fundamental change in its relationship with Panama.

Enter Colonel, soon to be Brigadier General Omar Torrijos Herrera, complete with crimped cowboy hat, combat fatigues, web belt slung with canteen and pistol, and polished jungle boots. Both Torrijos and Fidel Castro could give the impression of just having led troops in battle, but Torrijos was beardless, more soigné, and sported a hat lacking in proletarian feeling. These differences are perhaps significant. Torrijos was a graduate of the School of the Americas, where he learned, says LaFeber, "to check both the greed of the right and the revolutionary ardor of the left so the state could benefit" (p. 169). He described himself as one of those professionals "that speak, think, and live the language of development" (p. 170). Just where the maximum chief's middle way lay is hard to discern; his programs seemed more like a combination of opposites, ranging from collectivizing agriculture to pampering the multinationals. In any case he showed great skill in employing canal imagery, playing to the anti-imperialist camp as a means of enhancing his power and extracting concessions from the United States in canal treaty negotiations.

All the political cunning in the world, however, could not prevent

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what appears to LaFeber as a gringo victory in the treaty negotiations of 1977. Panama's diplomatic leverage eroded during the seventies, mostly on account of economic difficulties: worldwide inflation, worsening unemployment, slumping exports and investment, and a zero growth rate. The worse the situation became, the more desperately Torrijos looked to canal and zone revenues. The Carter administration sweetened the money terms and met Panama's demands respecting sovereignty and ultimate ownership of the canal. In return it held more tightly—and successfully—to its demands for control and defense of the canal until the year 2000 and for the exclusive right, with Panama, to maintain its neutrality thereafter. LaFeber sees this provision to mean that United States troops "can be used to enforce Panama's guarantee that the United States will have—forever—nondiscriminatory access to the Canal for its merchant vessels and warships . . . [and] can protect North American interests against either an outside or a Panamanian threat" (p. 205).

The far left would go further and condemn the treaties as a perpetuation of United States colonialist control over Panama. This can be inferred from *Panama: Sovereignty For A Land Divided*, which appeared in 1976, before completion of the treaties but after the rough shape of agreement was apparent. Designed as a primer for mobilizing North American support for Panama, it was produced by EPICA (Ecumenical Program for Interamerican Cooperation and Action). The book is a collection of some thirty short articles, excerpts in translation, fact sheets, statements, and documents on various aspects of the canal question, mingled with photographs, cartoons, and poems. These last convey some idea of the bitterness of Panamanians, or at least of Panamanian intellectuals, toward Tio Sam ("Water passes through you like a knife . . .").

What EPICA presents is an unrelieved indictment of the United States. Yankee imperialism manifests itself not only in the Canal Zone but in enclaves within Panama itself, such as the United Fruit empire. International banking forms a financiai enclave, clearing vast amounts of money through Panama and spending little of it there. The United States uses only 3 percent of the land in the Canal Zone for the canal; 68 percent is taken up by military reservations and bases which go far beyond needs of defense and therefore, in EPICA's view, must have an offensive purpose. Zonal boundaries have distorted the growth of Colon and Panama City. Canal tolls have been used in part to support a high life style for North American employees in the Canal Zone, including housing rentals averaging only $122 a month (with utilities), no state or local taxes, and forty-five work days of vacation a year, all in addition to a generous salary scale.

While little benefit beyond the small annual payment has accrued to Panama, the United States has enjoyed vast maritime and naval sav-

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ings on account of the canal. Incursions and firing into Panamanian territory by United States troops and Canal Zone police during the 1964 flag riots, it is alleged, were the result of "conscious and deliberate counteraction" seeking to "terrorize and intimidate the Panamanians" (p. 52). A monster spreading syphilis, a beast feeding other beasts, a land of "arrogant and deformed culture," a satan: such is the United States in the feverish imagination represented here.

Lurid imagery mingles with pale Marxist prose in the EPICA primer, with "dialectical" reactions and "imperialist contradictions," "urban masses" and "upper classes." Language fashioned for the industrial West seems entirely out of place applied to this small, jungle-covered, fragmented nation. Marxist analysis of American behavior is a caricature. It grossly exaggerates the aggressive and selfish intent of American policymakers. It allows no room for sheer indifference and apathy, for bureaucratic inertia, or for the play of special-interest groups for as well as against retrocession. And it ignores the influence of enlightened self-interest.

It is precisely here that the far left perspective may be weakest. Marxist-Leninist analysis insists that capitalist, imperialist nations will perpetuate their power externally until overcome by rivalries in their own camp or by the world's revolutionary forces. EPICA, which published before the negotiations were complete, predicted that the outcome would be neocolonialist on many points, outright colonialist on others. The 1977 treaties suggest rather the opposite. The United States transfers all control over the Canal Zone and canal to Panama within twenty years, a not entirely unreasonable period. Afterwards it retains the right to intervene for protection of the canal's neutrality.

This impairs Panamanian sovereignty, to be sure, yet it is more a theoretical than actual impairment, for how likely would the United States be to send in troops? Presumably aggression against Panama by a third power would make Panama welcome American assistance. In other cases, such as would be presented by a Communist takeover from within, for example, the long-term acceptability of American intervention would depend less on the letter of the treaty than on the state of relations between the United States and Latin America generally. Thus a case can be made, contrary to Marxist prediction, that the United States is in fact dismantling its imperialist position in Panama and resting its security in this regard on the general approbation of its neighbors. That is an example of enlightened self-interest.

In spite of analytical shortcomings, EPICA's pamphlet is useful in uncovering the extent of the United States impact on Panama and its damaging effects. Equally useful is its powerful dose of anti-Americanism. The anger and revulsion felt by Latin Americans toward North Americans is palpable in the poems, cartoons, and writings of this vol-

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ume and these feelings form a hard political fact which Americans, as the examples of Ryan and Crane make clear, find difficult to accept.

EPICA's version of the Panama crisis is the exact opposite of that presented in right-wing pamphlets stirred up by Ronald Reagan in his 1976 candidacy for the Republican nomination. In his forward to the Crane book under review, the current president states his case succinctly. The American people, he says, cannot understand why the government is negotiating this "giveaway under threat of blackmail by a military dictator and under a drumbeat of international propaganda by the far left designed to make us feel guilty and to retreat still further from a role of international leadership" (p. ix). Philip Crane billed as "the leading conservative intellectual in Congress," titled his book *Surrender in Panama: The Case Against the Treaty*. More balanced and measured, but tipping consistently toward Crane's conclusions is Ryan's *The Panama Canal Controversy*, a Hoover Institution publication.

Crane and Ryan differ about the value of the canal to United States commerce. Shifts in trade patterns make estimation difficult. The locks are too small for large oil and bulk carriers. Costs and tolls have risen, further reducing transits. The reopening and enlargement of the Suez Canal drains away traffic. Ryan accepts that the canal is marginal for many shippers and that its closure would not be devastating to the United States economy, but he points out that an estimated loss of one percent of GNP would still be painful. Crane is more optimistic about traffic, noting the trend toward smaller, more efficient, and specialized ships. His forecast, however, of a rise in transits from 12,200 in 1977 to 17,000 in 2000, belies the trend: transits in 1970 were 15,500. Crane stresses the vast amount of American exports and imports that move through the canal, including the expectation of Alaskan crude oil for "energy-hungry East Coast ports" (p. 48). The commercial argument is weakened, of course, by the fact that Panama as owner would have every interest in enlarging canal traffic.

Transits and tonnages are dry stuff compared to naval deployments. The intensity and drama of treaty-critic arguments rises when they turn to the strategic importance of the canal. Its chief value in this respect is the capability it provides of switching vessels rapidly between the Atlantic and Pacific. Granting that carriers are too large for the locks, they contend that these can be carefully prepositioned, that far more important is the switching of escort vessels and fleet trains, the vast majority of the ships in the navy. In each major war and crisis, they and their cohort of retired admirals argue, the canal has been vital in supplying American forces overseas. The canal, it is argued, is of such vital strategic importance that the United States cannot afford to risk its control by others.

Treaty critics argue that this precious asset is especially in jeop-

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ardy because of the current Soviet drive for naval hegemony. They point out that the USSR has been engaged in a vast naval construction program leading to the deployment of naval forces around the world, particularly in narrow seas and straits that channel world trade. These "maritime choke points," (p. 135) as Ryan calls them, are prime targets of Soviet planners. Soviet strategy, he argues, is to avoid nuclear war and instead nibble away at free-world ramparts through "limited 'wars of liberation' fought by proxies and . . . by mounting political operations" (p. 146). Control of the world's sea lanes is the essential precondition of waging limited war, in Ryan's navalist point of view, and the Soviets are well on their way to achieving that capability.

Especially valuable and vulnerable is Panama. Already, in this direful view, the Soviets, through their catspaw Fidel Castro, control several gateways into the strategic area formed by the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. In this context expressions of friendship between Castro and Torrijos seemed particularly ominous. Early Communist links of Torrijos and current links of his family, Soviet planes spotted on a runway in Panama, Communist complicity in the flag riots, and Panamanian student sojourns in Havana and Moscow are offered as evidence of the advanced state of Soviet penetration.

The most flamboyant statement of the threat is *Hands Off the Panama Canal* by Levine. Title and thesis derive in perverse ways from Dexter Perkins' classic study of the Monroe Doctrine. Levine, a refugee from Czarist Russia and career anti-Communist, makes no bones about the enemy: "Out of the East the dark forces of Communist imperialism have been advancing upon the West with crafty but sure steps . . . to enhance the hegemony of tyrranical rule over the globe" (p. 90). Proof of Cuban participation in the Kremlin's plan is the Angolan venture. Cuba is a Soviet military bastion in the Caribbean, a "dagger threatening the Panama Canal" (p. 90). Torrijos was Castro's "virtual vassal" (p. 9). Before long the Hammer and Sickle may replace the Stars and Stripes in the Canal Zone.

To avert this catastrophe, Levine believes, the United States must sever the military connection between Cuba and the USSR. This can be done, he argues, by forcing the Soviet Union to fulfill its promise at the time of the Cuban missile crisis to provide on-site inspection of offensive weapon installations in Cuba. With exposure, or under threat of it, the whole Soviet conspiracy—African expeditions, Caribbean bases, and all —would collapse. The principle foundation for this demand would be a reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine. Levine goes to great lengths to show that the doctrine has been an effective shield for the republic since 1823 and that it now provides on the Cuban issue ample justification for any United States action against Soviet penetration.

That is nonsense. The Monroe Doctrine has no such consistency

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or solidity. It originated primarily in concern for Spain's recovery of her New World empire, not, as Levine would have it, from Russian expansion on the northwest coast. In the nineteenth century New World isolation was maintained by British not American power. The doctrine has been ignored and forgotten more than it has been invoked and enforced. Twentieth-century American policymakers found it either too menacing to others (as expanded in the Roosevelt Corollary for example) or too limiting to the United States. It was never invoked by President Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis, as Levine seems to suggest. On the contrary, Kennedy said, "Monroe Doctrine? What the hell is that?" In any case the doctrine has no higher legitimacy or standing in international law than self-declared policy. It is dismal to see such perpetuation of historical myths in public discourse.

The Communist threat, in the right-wing perspective, is intensified by the instability of Panama. This is founded on the inherent instability of Latin American governments with their tendency toward "political excess" (p. 21) and personal, authoritarian rule. Crane quotes Bolívar's last, disillusioned comment that Latin America is "ungovernable" (p. 22). That instability is intensified in the Panamanian case by lack of a distinct culture, language, or tradition. From this background Torrijos emerged, at least for right-wingers, with all the faults of a Latin caudillo and more: he was corrupt (heroin connections); he was a dictator who stifled human rights; he was a spendthrift who was bankrupting his country and wasting the money gullible Wall Street bankers had lent him. With Populist passion, Crane argues that the treaties are a means of bailing out these banks and corporations.

Above all, treaty critics see the future of the canal as a test of will. Crane quotes with approval Admiral John McCain's testimony that "in Latin America [read Asia or the Middle East], the national qualities that win respect are strength and decisiveness" (p. 51). However, because of "Castro, Vietnam, and Angola the credibility of the United States has been severely impaired." Retreat on Panama would be interpreted around the world as "scuttle-and-run" (p. 102). Panama is a "showcase of American vitality and know-how" (p. 16) and a "symbol of U.S. resolution" (p. 102).

Panama seems to beg symbolic argumentation. Both left and right see it as a seat of conflict far greater than its geographic, economic or even strategic circumstances would suggest, but they invest it with opposite values. McCullough's, a narrative entirely lacking in policy orientation, succumbs as well to this temptation to write Panama larger than life. The result in unfortunate.

Surely the first step to wisdom in dealing with a host of small countries such as the Caribbean and Central American regions present is to understand the unique circumstances of each. It is true that general-

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izations can be made about overpopulation, modernization, impact of oil prices, the military in politics, *caudillismo*, *dorados*, and so forth. But such problems take a different course in each country according to its particular history, culture, and endowments, and it is these differences more than the likenesses that shape politics in any given country. To deal primarily in abstractions is not only lazy and parochial but dangerous. The Vietnam disaster was in no small part the result of this very tendency to read the local situation deductively in terms of axioms and generalizations developed in broad regional or global contexts. What the United States requires in respect to Panama is sensitivity to the feelings and needs of the people whom the waterway divides. The treaties of 1977 began to reflect that sort of sensitivity.

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