

The Colonial Policy of the United States

*An Address Delivered at Christiania, Norway,
on the Evening of May 5, 1910*

WHEN I first heard that I was to speak again this evening, my heart failed me. But directly after hearing Mr. Bratlie¹ I feel that it is a pleasure to say one or two things; and before saying them, let me express my profound acknowledgment for your words. You have been not only more than just but more than generous. Because I have been so kindly treated, I am going to trespass on your kindness still further, and say a word or two about my own actions while I was President. I do not speak of them, my friends, save to illustrate the thesis that I especially uphold, that the man who has the power to act is to be judged not by his words but by his acts—by his words in so far as they agree with his acts. All that I say about peace I wish to have

¹ See the Introduction.—L. F. A.

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judged and measured by what I actually did as President.

I was particularly pleased by what you said about our course, the course of the American people, in connection with the Philippines and Cuba. I believe that we have the Cuban Minister here with us to-night? [A voice: "Yes."] Well, then, we have a friend who can check off what I am going to say. At the close of the war of '98 we found our army in possession of Cuba, and man after man among the European diplomats of the old school said to me: "Oh, you will never go out of Cuba. You said you would, of course, but that is quite understood; nations don't expect promises like that to be kept." As soon as I became President, I said, "Now you will see that the promise will be kept." We appointed a day when we would leave Cuba. On that day Cuba began its existence as an independent republic. Later there came a disaster, there came a revolution, and we were obliged to land troops again, while I was President, and then the same gentlemen with whom I had conversed before said: "Now you are relieved from your promise; your promise has been kept, and now you will stay in Cuba." I answered: "No, we shall not. We will keep the promise not

only in the letter but in the spirit. We will stay in Cuba to help it on its feet, and then we will leave the island in better shape to maintain its permanent independent existence." And before I left the Presidency Cuba resumed its career as a separate republic, holding its head erect as a sovereign state among the other nations of the earth. All that our people want is just exactly what the Cuban people themselves want—that is, a continuance of order within the island, and peace and prosperity, so that there shall be no shadow of an excuse for any outside intervention.

We acted along the same general lines in the case of San Domingo. We intervened only so far as to prevent the need of taking possession of the island. None of you will know of this, so I will just tell you briefly what it was that we did. The Republic of San Domingo, in the West Indies, had suffered from a good many revolutions. In one particular period when I had to deal with the island, while I was President, it was a little difficult to know what to do, because there were two separate governments in the island, and a revolution going on against each. A number of dictators, under the title of President, had seized power at different times, had

borrowed money at exorbitant rates of interest from Europeans and Americans, and had pledged the custom-houses of the different towns to different countries; and the chief object of each revolutionary was to get hold of the custom-houses. Things got to such a pass that it became evident that certain European Powers would land and take possession of parts of the island. We then began negotiations with the Government of the island. We sent down ships to keep within limits various preposterous little manifestations of the revolutionary habit, and, after some negotiations, we concluded an agreement. It was agreed that we should put a man in as head of the custom-houses, that the collection of customs should be entirely under the management of that man, and that no one should be allowed to interfere with the custom-houses. Revolutions could go on outside them without interference from us; but the custom-houses were not to be touched. We agreed to turn over to the San Domingo Government forty-five per cent. of the revenue, keeping fifty-five per cent. as a fund to be applied to a settlement with the creditors. The creditors also acquiesced in what we had done, and we started the new arrangement. I found con-

siderable difficulty in getting the United States Senate to ratify the treaty, but I went ahead anyhow and executed it until it was ratified. Finally it was ratified, for the opposition was a purely factious opposition, representing the smallest kind of politics with a leaven of even baser motive. Under the treaty we have turned over to the San Domingo Government forty-five per cent. of the revenues collected, and yet we have turned over nearly double as much as they ever got when they collected it *all* themselves. In addition, we have collected sufficient to make it certain that the creditors will receive every cent to which they are entitled. It is self-evident, therefore, that in this affair we gave a proof of our good faith. We might have taken possession of San Domingo. Instead of thus taking possession, we put into the custom-houses one head man and half a dozen assistants, to see that the revenues were honestly collected, and at the same time served notice that they should not be forcibly taken away; and the result has been an extraordinary growth of the tranquillity and prosperity of the islands, while at the same time the creditors are equally satisfied, and all danger of outside interference has ceased.

That incident illustrates two things: First, if a nation acts in good faith, it can often bring about peace without abridging the liberties of another nation. Second, our experience emphasizes the fact (which every Peace Association should remember) that the hysterical sentimentalist for peace is a mighty poor person to follow. I was actually assailed, right and left, by the more extreme members of the peace propaganda in the United States for what I did in San Domingo; most of the other professional peace advocates took no interest in the matter, or were tepidly hostile; however, I went straight ahead and did the job. The ultra-peace people attacked me on the ground that I had "declared war" against San Domingo, the "war" taking the shape of the one man put in charge of the custom-houses! This will seem to you incredible, but I am giving you an absolutely accurate account of what occurred. I disregarded those foolish people, as I shall always disregard sentimentalists of that type when they are guilty of folly. At the present we have comparative peace and prosperity in the island, in consequence of my action, and of my disregard of these self-styled advocates of peace.

The same reasoning applies in connection

with what we did at the Isthmus of Panama, and what we are doing in the Philippines. Our colonial problems in the Philippines are not the same as the colonial problems of other Powers. We have in the Philippines a people mainly Asiatic in blood, but with a streak of European blood and with the traditions of European culture, so that their ideals are largely the ideals of Europe. At the moment when we entered the islands the people were hopelessly unable to stand alone. If we had abandoned the islands, we should have left them a prey to anarchy for some months, and then they would have been seized by some other Power ready to perform the task that we had not been able to perform. Now I hold that it is not worth while being a big nation if you cannot do a big task; I care not whether that task is digging the Panama Canal or handling the Philippines. In the Philippines I feel that the day will ultimately come when the Philippine people must settle for themselves whether they wish to be entirely independent, or in some shape to keep up a connection with us. The day has not yet come; it may not come for a generation or two. One of the greatest friends that liberty has ever had, the great British statesman Burke, said

on one occasion that there must always be government, and that if there is not government from within, then it must be supplied from without. A child has to be governed from without, because it has not yet grown to a point when it can govern itself from within; and a people that shows itself totally unable to govern itself from within must expect to submit to more or less of government from without, because it cannot continue to exist on other terms—indeed, it cannot be permitted permanently to exist as a source of danger to other nations. Our aim in the Philippines is to train the people so that they may govern themselves from within. Until they have reached this point they cannot have self-government. I will never advocate self-government for a people so long as their self-government means crime, violence, and extortion, corruption within, lawlessness among themselves and towards others. If that is what self-government means to any people then they ought to be governed by others until they can do better.

What I have related represents a measure of practical achievement in the way of helping forward the cause of peace and justice, and of giving to different peoples freedom of ac-

tion according to the capacities of each. It is not possible, as the world is now constituted, to treat every nation as one private individual can treat all other private individuals, because as yet there is no way of enforcing obedience to law among nations as there is among private individuals. If in the streets of this city a man walks about with the intent to kill somebody, if he manages his house so that it becomes a source of infection to the neighborhood, the community, with its law officers, deals with him forthwith. That is just what happened at Panama, and, as nobody else was able to deal with the matter, I dealt with it myself, on behalf of the United States Government, and now the Canal is being dug, and the people of Panama have their independence and a prosperity hitherto unknown in that country.

In the end, I firmly believe that some method will be devised by which the people of the world, as a whole, will be able to insure peace, as it cannot now be insured. How soon that end will come I do not know; it may be far distant; and until it does come I think that, while we should give all the support that we can to any possible feasible scheme for quickly bringing about such a state of affairs, yet we

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should meanwhile do the more practicable, though less sensational, things. Let us advance step by step; let us, for example, endeavor to increase the number of arbitration treaties and enlarge the methods for obtaining peaceful settlements. Above all, let us strive to awaken the public international conscience, so that it shall be expected, and expected efficiently, of the public men responsible for the management of any nation's affairs that those affairs shall be conducted with all proper regard for the interests and well-being of other Powers, great or small.

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By
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With an Introduction presenting a Description of the
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