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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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RELATIONS BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND PANAMA

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on January 15 I directed certain remarks to the issues dividing the United States and the Republic of Panama over the canal. Irritants in our relations with that country have existed for many years. And easy solutions can hardly be expected. But the recent efforts to relieve even the pressure of these issues have not been very successful. The Inter-American Peace Committee of the Organization of American States has not been able to break through the impasse.

At present diplomatic relations between Panama and the United States remain suspended. It is to be hoped that Panamanians will consider the implications of continued suspension, to themselves as well as to us. It is to be hoped that they will come to understand that any eventual solution must be at least reasonably palatable to both sides.

The United States has expressed willingness to consider all matters at issue with Panama. But we can hardly be expected to agree to make prior commitment on what may result from a confrontation yet to be held. Our position finds a legal basis in the accepted practices of international law. And it also finds, I believe, a sound basis in equity and good sense. We do not ask the Panamanians to agree in advance to this outcome or that. We do not ask them to humiliate themselves as a precondition of the confrontation. It is wrong for large nations to make tyrannical demands of this nature on small nations. And it is equally wrong for the small to tyrannize the large in the same fashion.

It is proper that any nation—large or small—decline to negotiate under pressure. That is not to say that it is proper to fail to recognize that a real pressure for discussions does exist in the canal situation. It is compounded of such factors as the conspicuous privilege of zone residents in the midst of a largely poverty-stricken but intensely nationalistic people. And somehow, Mr. President, the privilege of the alien seems always to be more conspicuous than that which is found among one’s own countrymen—and it does exist among Panamanians themselves.

The pressure is compounded, too, Mr. President, of the fact that the rental fees, the toll fees, personnel, and other management practices of the Canal Company have not changed very much in the half century of operations. Such has been the case although vast changes have occurred in the world’s commerce, in the utility of the canal and in the nation which the canal bisects. All of these matters and others are, appropriately, subject to discussion, consideration, or whatever. Most important, they are subject to new understanding and mutual agreement on adjustments of relationships, as between the two countries.

But the Panamanian Government surely recognizes that the reestablish-
ment of diplomatic relations must pre
ceed such understanding and adjustment.
Surely it must recognize that unfounded charges of aggression lead, not
ward but away from understanding
and agreement. Surely it must recogni
ze, as do we, that those who counsel violence, ill will, and disorder have noth
ing to offer to the solution of the diffi
culty.
There are those who play all sorts of
variations on the theme of a hysterical
self-righteousness, who in a situation
such as this always seek to exacerbate
differences and prevent solutions by stir-
r ing mud in the waters of volatile na
tionalism.
There are also those who seek solution
by reason and reasonable adjustment,
who realize that extreme statements and
calls to violence can only undermine ef
forts for a just and equitable agreement.
We—and I believe I speak now of the
great preponderance of Americans—have
no desire to accord the secondary matters
which threaten the canal. The conf
flicts over the canal and the zone per
tend to be more a matter of the inter
national problems upon which the two
countries have seen and can continue to
to see eye to eye. Insofar as the dif
culties over the canal and the zone per
sist, the chief obstacle is the lack of a
relationship and a note of uncertainty
into the whole of hemispheric relations.
As for the Panama Canal itself, it is
clear that its usefulness requires addi
tional water passage somewhere
through the Americas. The dis
that distinguished chairman of
the Commerce Committee (Mr. Mag
nuson) has made it clear that the search
for an appropriate second route—a route
in addition to Panama Canal—should begin now in earnest. The Pan
amanian Government has asked that we
consider building a new canal within its
borders. But I cannot see that another
U.S.-built canal through Panama will do
anything but double the existing prob
lem. Certainly it would be unthinkable,
in the absence of a solution of the pres
ent difficulty, a solution which is clearly
acceptable to the people of both sides. A
solution with built-in mechanisms for
adjustments to meet changing needs in
the years ahead. But as circumstances
are now, I have no hesitancy in saying
that Panama decidedly is not the place
and that one headache of this kind is
enough for this or any nation.
Another possibility, as I have sug
gested, is a canal across the Isthmus of
Tehuantepec to be constructed and op
erated by the Government of Mexico. If
it is feasible, financial and technical aid
might be forthcoming from international
lending agencies and from other poten
tial heavy users, including the United
States. But I want to stress that any
such project should be carried out under
Mexican control and the resultant canal
should be operated by Mexico. What
the rest of the world has a right to expect in
return for such aid that it may provide
is a mutually acceptable juridical sys
ystem which will guarantee fair rates for
the canal and open and equal access to
its facilities to all nations.
The technical feasibility of such an un
dertaking in Tehuantepec was estab
lished several years ago by a series of
studies commissioned by Pemex, the
Mexican oil company. Mexico is a
stable, democratic nation whose credit
worthiness and well-developed sense of
international responsibility are in them
selves important guarantors of effective
management of a canal of this kind.
While a new canal in Mexico or else
where may offer a long-range alleviation
of the problem, it is not a substitute for
facing the immediate and urgent dif
culties of the present canal. The con
struction of a new canal, necessary and
desirable as it is, is not an alternative. If
for no other reason than that it would
take several years to build.
For the present, either under the aegis
of the OAS or in direct confrontation,
the United States and Panama must be
prepared to set aside charge and coun
tercharge, to resume diplomatic relations,
and to get on with discussion, confer
ence, or whatever, with a view to mu
tually acceptable agreement on the spe
cific questions and irritants involving the
zone and the canal. Once the passions
and the irritants have been put aside, on
both sides, it is not at all impossible that
both sides will see that there is an over
riding common interest in the trouble
free operation of the waterway and will
make those sensible adjustments in the
existing situation which are necessary to
secure it.
I suggest the absence of a quorum.
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tem
pore. The clerk will call the roll.
The legislative clerk proceeded to call
the roll
Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I
ask unanimous consent that the order
for the quorum call be rescinded.
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tem
pore. Without objection, it is so ordered.