

INTERVENTION IN MEXICO

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649146901

Intervention in Mexico by Samuel Guy Inman

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Foreword by Professor William R. Shepherd



ASSOCIATION PRESS

NEW YORK: 347 MADISON AVENUE

1919

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FOREWORD

A professor is sometimes defined as a person who thinks otherwise. Not many years ago an eminent American statesman who was once a professor bade the people of Mexico Godspeed in gaining for and by themselves true political freedom, and pledged himself that, so far as he could prevent it, no one should interfere with them. Has the situation of our southern neighbor changed so materially since then, or are we thinking otherwise?

There was a time in our history when civil war nearly rent the nation asunder. Luckily, we had all of our political troubles that had to be settled by fighting packed into four years. In this respect the only difference between Mexico and ourselves is that the fighting has been spread over most of a century. When the struggle was on in our own case we called it a war and made it conform somewhat to the Sherman definition. So have the Mexicans, only more so.

Happily for us, in our great civil convulsion the foreigners who lost their lives or property because of the destruction that accompanies warfare were few. Unhappily for Mexico, the number of such foreigners is considerable. For European states whose citizens had suffered in our conflict through no fault of their own, indemnity could be secured

by peaceful processes. None of them ever thought of declaring war upon us as a means of gaining redress. For one thing, the United States was strong enough to resist. For another thing, it was and is a country different from Mexico.

In the world at large, Mexico is recognized as an independent sovereign nation. Whatever the complaints raised up against it because of the misconduct or misfortune of its rulers and people, the fact remains that it is not a colonial region inhabited by an altogether backward folk in sore need of correction. That may be the popular view taken by the outsider, but it is not the official one. It is quite true, however, that the attitude of our Government toward Mexico during the last eight years of disorder and turmoil would seem to indicate that the country is neither an independent sovereign nation nor yet—on the order of certain of its smaller sisters in and around the Caribbean Sea—a ward of the United States. No, it is some anomalous thing that lies in between.

Does Mexico belong in the category of a real foreign nation, and is it to be treated as such, or does it in fact come within the "domestic policy" of the United States and hence form part of our Caribbean household? To interfere or not to interfere, that has been the question—answered usually in the affirmative! Is it to be succeeded by "to intervene or not to intervene?"

Now, if Mexico is an independent sovereign state, it has an absolute right to adopt a constitution whenever it pleases, and to do so in its own way. That its way is not ours does not alter the right in the matter. Even if the new constitution does set aside laws, statutory or constitutional, and replace them by others that may violate privileges of private ownership conferred by such pre-existent laws, even if the procedure under them is held to be confiscatory by the persons and governments adversely affected, the Mexican people, nevertheless, are quite at liberty, should they so choose, and in their own fashion, to incur all the international risks that action of the sort may bring forth; but they can not be denied the right to change their laws as they see fit. War may be made upon them in consequence; they may be conquered and their country may be annexed or converted into a protectorate. In that case they would suffer the fate that many a weak nation has undergone at the hands of a strong one. But if Mexico has lost the quality and distinction of being an independent sovereign nation, or perhaps in reality has never had them, and all along has been subject to the operation of our "domestic policy," "intervention" doubtless is technically more or less of a suitable expression to use, though conquest is what would take place.

And why should we "intervene"? Chiefly because certain vested interests, American and European, do not wish to obey the existing Mexican constitution, which apparently seeks to nationalize the properties concerned. Formerly the holders of those interests paid taxes; now they are asked to pay royalties or rentals. The one means that they were the owners of the property; the other, that the state owns it. Admitting that, if actually carried into effect, a procedure of that kind on the part of the Mexican Government would amount to confiscation, does that justify us in conquering Mexico, with all the expenditure of blood and treasure which war involves?

The cry is raised that hundreds of American and European men, women, and children have been murdered or outraged by Mexicans in a country that is slowly recovering from the disasters of a terrible civil war. Will the loss of thousands of lives of American soldiers atone for them?

With a fine disregard for the plea that Mexico may cherish grievances against the United States on its own account for a variety of acts of interference in recent years, and with no effort to ascertain what the real sentiments of the Mexican leaders and people have been toward the war in Europe, it is asserted that Mexico has been "pro-German," and hence must be punished. Is there not just a possibility that the Mexicans and