

Mann's Latin Fumbles Hurt LBJ

By Drew Pearson

President Johnson was well known in Mexico long before he became President, for standing up for the rights of Mexican-American citizens and for helping elect the first Congressman of that race, Henry Gonzales of Texas. It was Johnson, who with Cantinflas, stood on the rear of a truck making speeches for Gonzalez all over San Antonio.



Pearson

Therefore, Lyndon Johnson, not only as President but as an individual, was most welcome in Mexico.

However, some of his policies and one of his top advisers have not been welcome, and it would require several goodwill trips to several different countries to undo their mistakes.

No. 1 mistake-maker is Tom Mann of Laredo, Tex., former ambassador to Mexico, former Assistant Secretary for the American Republics, and now an Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs.

Tom is a charming "old school" diplomat who was brought to Washington by the late Congressman Maury Maverick in the Roosevelt Administration, and in some respects grew up in government with

Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon is noted for loyalty to his friends. On one occasion he even brought a group of Latin American ambassadors into the White House and tried to persuade them, with typical Johnsonian eloquence, what a great diplomat Tom Mann was. The ambassadors went away unconvinced.

They gave Mann credit—or discredit—for the shoot-first-look-later decision to land U.S. troops in the Dominican Republic, a decision which aroused hostile, anti-American sentiment all over the hemisphere. At that time it looked as if U.S.-Latin American relations had hit an all-time low.

A Bust in Panama

The latest Pan American meeting, in Panama, probably has not sent them any lower; for they couldn't have gone much lower. But neither did it raise them. And this was one reason State Department officials were so delighted when President Johnson made his last-minute decision to go to Mexico.

What happened in Panama was that diplomats representing the Organization of American States tried to accomplish two main objectives:

1. Establish a permanent peace-keeping force to prevent war in the Western Hemisphere.
2. Organize moves to effect closer economic cooperation.

Neither got very far. The majority of Latin American diplomats gave solid kick in the pants to Washington's pet scheme of an OAS peace-keeping force. The project was pigeonholed. The only major country backing us was the military government of Brazil.

But when it came to economic cooperation, the Latin American nations were genuinely enthusiastic. There has long been talk of a Pan American common market to take advantage of the lessons learned from the European Common Market and rival it. Already there are two modest attempts at common markets in the Western Hemisphere, one by the five Central American nations, the other by the nine members of the Free Trade Association — Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Mexico, Colombia and Ecuador.

To further hemisphere economic cooperation, the Panama conference came up with the following recommendations:

- A. The gradual reduction of U.S. tariffs on the importation of basic Latin American commodities.
- B. The elimination of bilateral most-favored-nation agreements between the U.S. and Latin American countries in favor of regional agreements.
- C. Stabilization of prices for the chief products of the hem-

isphere, coffee, cocoa, sugar, copper and tin.

Veto by Tom Mann

When these proposals went to Washington, however, they ran up against what is now called "Mann-erism."

Tom Mann's opposition was announced in Panama two days later. But instead of dressing up the veto with explanatory detail, there was only a flat, blunt negative.

The response from Latin American diplomats was immediate.

Mexican Foreign Minister Antonio Carrillo Flores is an old friend of the United States. He was raised in Brooklyn, where his father was a hard-working, poverty-stricken musician; later spent four years in Washington as ambassador. He knows and likes the United States. But he described the veto as "seriously undermining the accomplishments of the Panama Conference."

Rafael de la Colina, Mexico's ambassador to the United States, was less diplomatic. He called the veto "inexcusably negative and stupid."

Even faithful supporters of the United States joined in the critical chorus. For a long time Paraguay and Nicaragua, the former under military dictatorship, have supported us on almost everything. But not on this.